

Supporting People Inspection Report

May 2007



Supporting People Inspection

Barnet London Borough Council

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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.

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)¹ 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.

¹ Now the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Summary

- 1 We have judged that the Supporting People partnership is providing a good 'two-star' service and has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 Governance of the programme is strong; the commissioning body provides effective leadership to guide the development of the programme with a clear focus on value for money, sound financial control and strategic development. Supporting People is effectively linked to a wide range of related commissioning strategies in social services, health and probation to focus on delivering services to vulnerable people most in need in the borough. There is good performance and project management and as a result, positive outcomes are being achieved. New services have been commissioned and following reviews, improvements have been made to existing schemes, ensuring better quality support for service users.
- 3 There is effective partnership working with providers and the voluntary sector. The Supporting People team supports both internal and external providers to ensure that their performance consistently improves and the services they provide are meeting the needs of service users. In addition, Barnet is actively involved in cross-authority work, particularly with other north London boroughs.
- 4 The Supporting People team has been given additional resources to address areas that the Council wants to improve, including access to services, public information and service user involvement. The team now has the capacity and skills to address all the current priorities within its work programme. The five-year strategy, is being updated and will inform the future commissioning of services.
- 5 Service reviews were carried out well and the Council has made a good start on understanding and determining value for money in the services that are provided. This has resulted in savings and additional capacity to meet identified needs.
- 6 Diversity issues are addressed in the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme; the needs of BME groups have been considered within the five year strategy; information for users is available in key community languages, and some culturally specific services are in place.
- 7 However, there are a number of areas that require improvement.
 - The Council has acknowledged that it needs to increase the engagement and involvement of service users in all aspects of the programme and to provide them with feedback on the outcomes of the reviews of their service. This is an area for development in the action plan for this year.
 - Communication with providers is improving but further work is required to ensure providers are involved in the development of policies and strategies at an earlier stage, so that they have time to respond and to feed in the views of their service users.
 - The Council purchases services from a very high number of small providers and has yet to ascertain whether this represents value for money.

8 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement.

- There is a strong track record in implementing the programme and in addressing weaknesses. Governance arrangements were reviewed in 2005 and resulted in considerable improvements, arrangements were strengthened, key targets were met and new services were introduced.
- There is commitment and effective leadership and ownership of the programme by lead councillors, senior executives and managers. Performance is managed rigorously and effective project management ensures plans are delivered on time.
- The Supporting People team has the capacity, skills and experience to address identified weaknesses and deliver further improvements.
- The five-year strategy is being revised to take account of a recent needs analysis that builds on a previous analysis; it will set a clear commissioning strategy for the future.
- The Council works well with others and is open to constructive criticism and to learning opportunities. There is very strong partnership working with other agencies, with partners and with other north London boroughs.

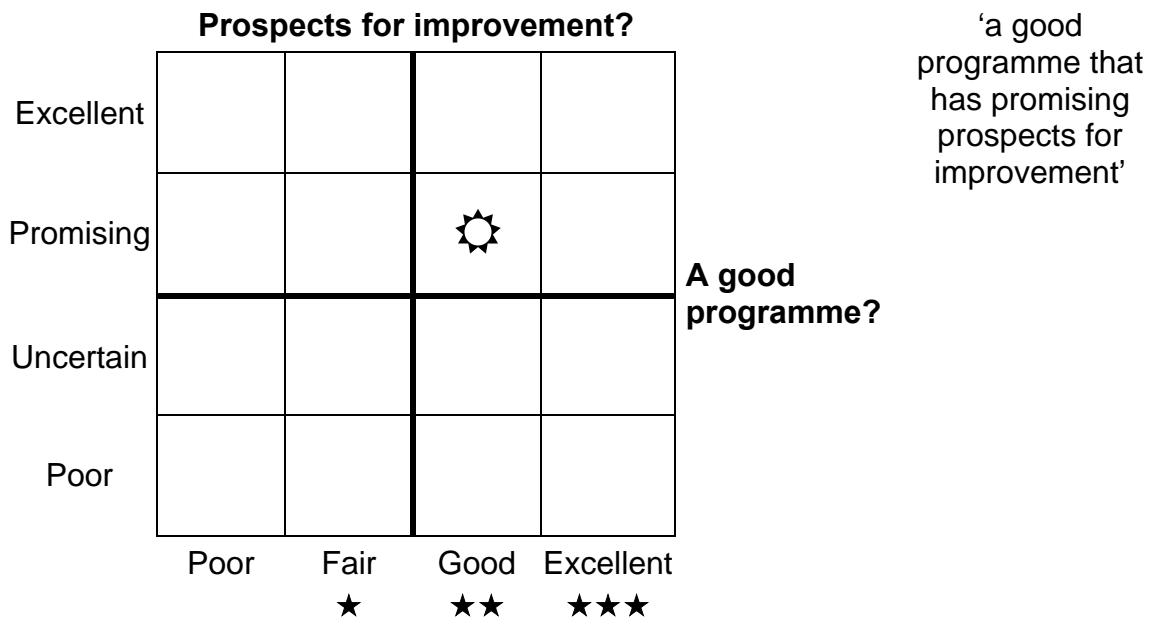
9 However, there are barriers to improvement. These include:

- reporting to the Council's executive bodies has not been agreed, although informal reporting is good;
- the five-year strategy is being revised and until it is completed some dates in improvement plans are unconfirmed; and
- the action plans following service reviews are not robustly monitored and reported to the Commissioning Board and core strategy group to ensure that improvements are implemented.

Scoring the Supporting People programme

- 10 We have assessed Barnet London Borough Council as providing a ‘good’, two-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 chart²



Source: Audit Commission

² 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.

11 We found the programme to be good because it has a range of strengths including the following.

- Governance of the programme is strong; the commissioning body provides effective leadership to guide the development of the programme with a clear focus on value for money, sound financial control and strategic development. Supporting People is effectively linked to a wide range of related commissioning strategies in social services, health and probation to focus on delivering services to vulnerable people most in need in the Borough. There is good performance and project management and as a result, positive outcomes are being achieved. New services have been commissioned and following reviews, improvements have been made to existing schemes, ensuring better quality support for service users.
- There is effective partnership working with providers and the voluntary sector. The Supporting People team supports both internal and external providers to ensure that their performance consistently improves and the services they provide are meeting the needs of service users. In addition, Barnet is actively involved in cross-authority work, particularly with other north London boroughs.
- The Supporting People team has been given additional resources to address areas that the Council wants to improve including access, public information and service user involvement and the team now has the capacity and skills to address all the current priorities within its work programme. The five-year strategy is being updated and will inform the future commissioning of services.
- Service reviews were carried out well and the Council has made a good start on understanding and determining value for money in the services that are provided. This has resulted in savings and additional capacity to meet identified needs.
- Diversity issues are addressed in the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme; the needs of BME groups have been considered within the five year strategy; information for users is available in key community languages, and some culturally specific services are in place.

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

- The Council has acknowledged that it needs to increase the engagement and involvement of service users in all aspects of the programme and to provide them with feedback on the outcomes of the reviews of their service. This is an area for development in the action plan for this year.
- Communication with providers is being improved but does not yet fully involve them in the development of policies and strategies at an earlier stage, so that they have time to respond and to feed in the views of their service users.

- The responsibilities of the provider representatives on the core strategy group, in terms of communicating with the Practitioners Group and the wider network of providers, are unclear and do not work consistently well.
 - No steady state contracts have been issued which affects the ability of providers to plan their business developments effectively.
 - The Council purchases services from a large number of small providers and has yet to ascertain the benefits or otherwise of this approach in terms of value for money.
 - There are no contingency plans established with partners where there are service users funded from both agencies.
 - The Youth Offending Service has not been formally consulted on whether it wishes to be represented on the core strategy group in its own right.
- 13** The programme has promising prospects for improvement due to the following reasons.
- There is a strong track record in implementing the programme and in addressing weaknesses. Governance arrangements were reviewed in 2005 and resulted in considerable improvements, arrangements were strengthened, key targets were met and new services were introduced.
 - There is commitment and effective leadership and ownership of the programme by lead councillors, senior executives and managers. Performance is managed rigorously and effective project management ensures plans are delivered on time.
 - The Supporting People team has the capacity, skills and experience to address identified weaknesses and deliver further improvements.
 - The five-year strategy is being revised to take account of a recent needs analysis that builds on a previous analysis; it will set a clear commissioning strategy for the future.
 - The Council works well with others and is open to constructive criticism and to learning opportunities. There is very strong partnership working with other agencies, with partners and with other north London boroughs.
- 14** However, there are some barriers to improvement. These include the following.
- Reporting to the Council's executive bodies has not been agreed, although informal reporting is good.
 - The five year strategy is being revised and until it is completed some dates in improvement plans are unconfirmed.
 - The action plans following service reviews are not reported regularly to the Commissioning Board or the core strategy group to ensure improvements are monitored.

Recommendations

- 15 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 costs³ 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 Improve Supporting People performance reporting to members and senior executive bodies within the Council by:

- *agreeing to which senior officer and member bodies the performance of the Supporting People programme will be reported.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- members and senior officers will have current information on the performance and effectiveness of the Supporting People programme.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2007.

Recommendation

R2 Improve communication between the bodies that make up the governance and delivery of the Supporting People programme by:

- *consulting with service providers, service users and other stakeholders to agree an effective communication strategy;*
- *clarifying the responsibilities of the provider representatives to cascade information to other providers and service users and deliver this through an agreed protocol; and*
- *ensuring that providers are informed about the development of new strategies and processes at a sufficiently early stage so that they can contribute both their views and those of their service users.*

³ 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.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- providers will have greater assurance on the future arrangements of the contract arrangements in relation to their service;
- providers will be plan for the future activities of their organisations in terms of human resource management and future commissioning plans; and
- relationships with the Supporting People team will continue to be positive.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by June 2007.

Recommendation

R3 Ensure that the action plans following service reviews are regularly monitored and reported by:

- *discussing in detail with the Commissioning Board and the providers forum, how this should be undertaken.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- governance of the programme will be improved;
- any problems in delivering improvements will be identified in a timely way; and
- the continuous improvement of services will be enhanced.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by June 2007.

Recommendation

R4 Increase the understanding of the needs of young people who offend by:

- *discussing with the Youth Offending Service the need for them to be represented in their own right or whether this could be effectively undertaken by Probation; and*
- *if the preferred arrangement is that Probation should represent the views of the Youth Offending Service, agree how this will be undertaken and how communication between the two services will take place.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the breadth of understanding of the needs of all vulnerable people who could be supported by the programme will be increased;
- the need for services for young people who offend or are risk of offending will be identified; and
- services that are developed for this group will be informed by professionals and potential service users.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2007.

Recommendation

R5 Review the value for money provided by commissioning services from a large number of providers by:

- *evaluating both the cost and quality of current providers; and*
- *considering the benefits of commissioning in alternative ways.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- quality and specialist services will be protected; and
- economies of scale will deliver long term value for money.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

Recommendation

R6 Ensure that progress is made on the issuing of steady state contracts by:

- *discussing in detail with the practitioner group and the providers forum the time-table for when steady state contracts will be issued; and*
- *confirming with providers the requirements that they are expected to achieve before steady state contracts will be issued.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- providers will have certainty about the Council's future requirement for their services; and
- stability of provision for service users will be improved.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 2007.

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

Dates of inspection: 15 to 19 January 2007

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Report

Context

The locality

- 17 Barnet council is a north London Borough with major areas of population in Edgware, Barnet, Finchley and Hendon. It is an area of mainly suburban development and is the second largest borough in London by population, 326,700 and the fourth largest by size, 86.7 square kilometres. The population, which is younger than the national profile, is growing in all age groups and is predicted to rise by 33,000 during the next ten years; in particular, the school age population and the number of elderly people are increasing. The borough is very diverse. Its ethnic minority population of 26 per cent includes new Somali and Afghan communities and the largest number of Chinese residents in an English district. It is the second most religiously diverse borough in the country. There is a well established Jewish population who represent almost 15 per cent of the total.
- 18 The borough is generally prosperous but there are pockets of deprivation particularly in the west. At 2.6 per cent, unemployment is at the same level as the average for England but lower than the London average at 3.6 per cent. The borough is ranked 193 out of 354 districts in the national index of deprivation; 12 areas are within the 20 per cent most deprived nationally and include some significant aspects of deprivation.
- 19 People in Barnet are relatively healthy, on average, life expectancy is higher and deaths from cancer and circulatory diseases are lower than the national averages, but in the more deprived areas people have poorer health and lower life expectancy. Crime levels are lower than the London averages but fear of crime is relatively high.

The Council

- 20 Barnet Council has 63 councillors. The Conservative party currently has a majority of 11, with 37 seats; Labour holds 20 seats and the Liberal Democrats hold 6 seats. A new Leader was elected in May 2006.
- 21 The Cabinet has ten members, all of the majority party and the Leader takes responsibility for communications, financial planning, risk and asset management and resources. There are six overview and scrutiny committees, all chaired by members of the majority party.
- 22 The Council has approximately 9,000 employees, including teachers. Its net revenue budget for 2006/07 is £390 million, with a capital budget, including housing, of £75.5 million. The Social Care budget for 2006/07 is £108.320 million and it has a housing general fund revenue budget of £7.839 million.

- 23** The Council receives proportionately less Supporting People funding than comparable authorities. In 2006/07 the Council received a Supporting People Grant of £7.118.20 million and a grant of £180,502 to assist with the administration of the programme, To this the Council added £110,000. In 2007/08 the Council will increase the amount it adds to the administration grant to £200,000.
- 24** Over two thirds of Barnet homes are owner occupied. Homelessness is lower than the London average and close to the England average. There is a shortfall of approximately 4,500 affordable housing units and 35 per cent of the Council's housing stock does not meet the Decent Homes Standard.
- 25** The Council's housing service is managed by an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO), Barnet Homes. The ALMO inspection of November 2004 judged the service to be providing a two-star service with excellent prospects for improvement. Almost all of the Council's adult social care is provided by the private and voluntary sectors and most residential care for children is provided by the Council.
- 26** In 2006 the Audit Commission rated the Council as three star overall and 'improving well' following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment inspection. The October 2006 ROPA judged Adults Services as serving 'some' people well with 'promising' prospects. The May 2006 JAR judged Children's Social Care, Children's Services and Children's Services capacity for improvement as serving all children well that is a three-star, 'good' service. The Council's Housing Strategy was rated as fit for purpose by the Audit Commission and in November 2005 a follow-up inspection of the repairs and maintenance service was judged to be one-star with promising prospects for improvement.
- 27** The Council's vision is 'To be a successful suburb in a successful London.' This is supported by four themes:
- investing in children and young people;
 - a safer, stronger, cleaner Barnet;
 - growing successfully; and
 - a healthier Barnet-including older people.

The Supporting People programme

- 28** The Council acts as the Administering Local Authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in its area. It is revising its five-year strategy for the delivery of the programme and at the time of our inspection had agreed an interim vision. This states that 'Barnet's Supporting People programme will enable vulnerable people, irrespective of their tenure and client group, to improve the quality of their lives. It will enable service users to achieve increased stability, independence and choice, thereby contributing to better health, community cohesion and safety'.

- 29 The over-arching plan for the Borough is the Sustainable Community Strategy 'Barnet: A First Class Suburb', which sets out the shared vision for Barnet for 2016. The delivery is the responsibility of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and provides the framework for the Local Area Agreement (LAA) being developed for 2007-2010. Supporting The Vulnerable is one of Barnet's six key priorities, monitored through the Corporate Plan and highlights objectives and priorities shared across Barnet's Housing Service and Adult Social Services. It is within this framework that the Supporting People programme is delivered.
- 30 The Council faces challenges in delivering its objectives for vulnerable people. It has a small Supporting People grant and at the inception of the programme faced a number of challenges; a limited range of services; a historically weak commissioning culture within the sector; uncertainty about the role and purpose of support services and many providers under resourced for performance-based contractual relationships.
- 31 The total budget for the 2006/07 Supporting People programme is £7.1 million and the Council receives an administration grant of £180,000 to deliver the programme. The total has reduced from £7,210,584 in 2005/06. The range of needs that Supporting People seeks to address includes housing related support for young people leaving the care of the borough, people who have offended, people who have drug alcohol and mental health problems, those with learning disabilities and frail older people requiring additional support to remain independently in their own homes.
- 32 The Supporting People programme also contributes to timely hospital discharge relying on the strong relationship between the Mental Health Trust and Housing, to link the need for prompt supply of appropriate accommodation with a support service that aims to resettle the service user, maximise independence and prevent re-admission through crisis avoidance. Preventing re-admissions and shortening length of in-patient stays are key indicators and the minimal number of delayed discharges from acute hospital trusts demonstrates good performance.
- 33 The Council's Care and Repair Service covers a number of functions and provides services to 610 older people to assist them in remaining in their own homes. As part of this the Home from Hospital service is a well-established part of the collaborative arrangements for hospital discharge and, although not funded by Supporting People, it uses the same standards and quality assurance arrangements agreed for Supporting People services. Contributions to prompt hospital discharge are also made by Care and Repair (HIA) and the use of technology to support older people at home is being piloted through the Telecare project via the Supporting People funded Lifeline service.

How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 34 Our assessment was based on an evaluation of the Council's performance in the following areas:
- governance and partnerships;
 - grant compliance, strategy and needs;
 - delivery arrangement;
 - commissioning and performance;
 - value for money;
 - service user involvement;
 - access to services and information;
 - diversity; and
 - outcomes for service users.

What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 35 The aims and objectives of the programme are set out in the five-year strategy, which describes how the Supporting People programme will contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Community Strategy. The objectives of the strategy support the key objectives in the Council's Key Priority Plan for Supporting the Vulnerable.
- 36 The key objectives of the programme are:
- providing homes and successful communities;
 - making Barnet the safest borough in London; and
 - ensuring accessible and responsive health and social care services in all our communities.
- 37 The key priorities for the programme are:
- working with Health and Social Services to provide safe supported housing alternatives to hospital and residential care;
 - working with Housing and Homelessness Services to tackle repeat homelessness and provide sustainable housing solutions; and
 - working with Probation and community safety agencies to reduce re-offending, drugs misuse and anti-social behaviour.

- 38 The Supporting People programme is strategically aligned to support the needs of a wide range of social care, criminal justice and health care user groups. including, The Children and Young People Plan; the joint work plan for older people and carers; Living Longer, Living Better in Barnet; for people with learning disabilities, the 'Small Plan to Make a Big Difference' and the Housing Options and Support Strategy. Commissioning strategies for people with mental health problems were agreed by Cabinet during our inspection. The programme also effectively supports the key objectives within the London Probation Housing Strategy 2005-2008, and has seen the extension of existing services and the development of new services for offenders, those at risk of offending, and people with substance misuse issues within the borough.
- 39 Achieving the priorities of the programme is being accomplished through strong commitment at every level of the Council and through the outputs of the Supporting People team. There are very effective partnerships with other statutory agencies including the Primary Care Trusts, the probation service and the voluntary sector; as a result the programme clearly meets its key priorities, as outlined in the five year strategy, of working with partners from Health, Social Services, Housing and Probation to achieve its objectives.
- 40 The annual plan 2006/07 sets out the implementation of the five-year Supporting People strategy during 2006/07 and contains a shared focus on improving access to services and increasing user and carer involvement in the strategic development of services.

Is the programme meeting the needs of the local community and users?

- 41 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

- 42 The DCLG has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
 - Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
 - Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
 - Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
 - Councillors: approve key decisions of the Commissioning Body.
 - Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 43 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The Council in its role as administering local authority (ALA) provides effective leadership to partner agencies and the voluntary sector in jointly developing the programme. There is evidence of robust and effective collaboration across agencies on a number of cross-cutting agendas. The work of the Supporting People team is well planned and managed and is of a high standard, making good use of its grant. However, the involvement of providers is still developing and is not currently as strong as it could be.
- 44 There is good political and corporate support for the programme. The Council has established all the key strategic planning and management groups required by the CLG to support the delivery of the Supporting People programme. A memorandum of understanding and terms of reference are in place and govern the work of the programme by setting out how matters of conflict of interest should be addressed. There is sound corporate oversight of financial matters which enables senior finance and internal audit staff to ensure the proper administration of all corporate, finance including the Supporting People grant.
- 45 The Council has demonstrated its financial commitment to the Supporting People programme by supplementing the administration grant of £180,000 with an additional £110,000 and committing a further £200,000 in 2007/08.
- 46 Elected members are able to demonstrate that they have a focus on the needs of vulnerable people and an understanding of the contribution that the Supporting People programme makes in addressing their housing related support needs. The portfolio holder for Supporting People is regularly briefed on the delivery of the programme, resource implications and changes, however, reporting formally to executive bodies has not yet been agreed.

- 47 The Supporting People Commissioning Board is the Commissioning Body and drives the development and implementation of the five-year strategy by commissioning work from the core strategy group and monitoring the delivery of the annual plan. The board is made up of senior managers from key strategic partnerships including the Council, Probation and the PCT. The board is chaired by the Director for Adult Social Care and includes a senior manager from Housing and the Accountable Officer.
- 48 The Board meets monthly and has an appropriate agenda that covers a range of detailed issues. The memorandum of understanding covers the quorum, decision making and voting rights, the latter being held equally by the Council, probation and health. Attendance at the board is good with 100 per cent attendance by the Council and approximately 88 per cent by probation and the representative from the PCT. Probation identify no areas for improvement within the programme and are of the opinion that management of the programme is pro-active, forward looking, and draws on expertise and learning to add value. The operation of the programme has been very inclusive with flexibility to accommodate probation's diary when needed. However representatives from the PCT think there is further work to be undertaken to raise awareness of the role and potential of using Supporting People funding to assist them in delivering their objectives.
- 49 The chair meets the Accountable Officer in advance of the meeting to discuss the agenda. Papers and reports are sent out in sufficient time for members of the board to consider them in detail. We observed the meeting and noted that the chair ensured time for detailed discussion and an effective contribution from each member.
- 50 The board has taken some difficult decisions in de-commissioning services following reviews. At the meeting we attended it demonstrated that it took very seriously the impact of de-commissioning services on vulnerable residents and ensured there were effective and safe plans for their move to alternative accommodation, by working closely with the Housing department through the representative on the board.
- 51 The Council has established an effective core strategy group. The group has 18 members, covering 12 organisations including three provider organisations and 4 council services; Barnet Voluntary Services Council (BVSC) has attended since May 2006 to represent the voluntary sector. The core strategy group also has links to user and carer groups, including Partnership Boards, and is able to contribute the perspectives of users and carers. Overall, attendance by the Council's members is good with Adult Services and Housing representatives having attended every meeting and the Children/Youth Services representative having attended 89 per cent of meetings. Attendance by the three provider representatives has also been good with representatives attending every meeting.

20 Supporting People Inspection | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 52 Attendance by health and probation has been poor with attendance at just over half the meetings this means that senior managers from partner agencies have not contributed to the discussions or been part of the decisions made at meetings. Although attendance by health and probation has been inconsistent it is improving and senior managers of the respective organisations believe that the various mechanisms in place allow for continuous debate and discussion outside the meetings. They consider that the views of their organisations are taken into account and that much of the work is undertaken on the ground outside the core strategy group. They also work closely with their senior representatives on the Commissioning Board to ensure they make an effective contribution overall.
- 53 The group meets monthly, immediately following the Commissioning Board and undertakes work commissioned by the Board. It acts as the steering group for the development of the five-year strategy and all its members have been actively involved in updating the needs assessment and gap analysis undertaken in 2004. The work of the group also includes overseeing service reviews; ensuring the service programme achieves the strategic aims and objectives of the five-year strategy and ensuring continuous quality improvement, efficiency and value for money of the programme. The group's key tasks are specified in the Supporting People programme action plan and its performance against those targets is reported to the Commissioning Body quarterly. Some members of the group commented to us that the volume and content of reports is excessively demanding to read and they would appreciate executive summaries to assist them in digesting the material.
- 54 The Accountable Officer is also the lead officer on the corporately shared priority for health and older people and is the Supporting People lead officer on the group that is developing the Local Area Agreement. The Accountable Officer has regular meetings with the Supporting People manager who she supervises and is a member of the senior management team for Adult Social Services, enabling a wider view of joint commissioning opportunities for example in the development of extra care services for vulnerable older people. The Accountable Officer attends the Commissioning Body meetings to report from the core strategy group and to ensure that issues for the Council are identified. The meeting we observed supports the view of the core strategy group that she contributes significantly to the development and cohesion of the group, and leads the meeting, rather than dictates to it. The Accountable Officer is not responsible for any services funded through Supporting People which prevents any conflict of interests.

- 55 Overall, the diverse membership of the core strategy group ensures that wider partnership issues are picked up and strategic links made with the Supporting People programme including the following initiatives.
- Support for ex-offenders was discussed as a result of needs identified in the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). This is initially being addressed through a pilot service working with referrals via Probation's Housing Advice Worker. An example of the multi-agency response concerning an individual offender was the securing of safe re-housing for a threatened family with linked support to help them through a difficult situation. Barnet is an active partner in the London Resettlement Strategy, which includes a pilot project for pre-release prisoners and has hosted a multi agency event to complete a process map for the eight resettlement pathways.
 - The Council's strong relationship with health services has delivered real benefits through Supporting People. Links to the multi-agency Partnership Boards for the different care groups, which include BVCS, users and carers are made through core strategy group members. Contributions to timely hospital discharge rely on the strong relationship between the Mental Health Trust and Housing, linking the need for prompt supply of appropriate accommodation with a support service that aims to resettle the service user, maximise independence and prevent re-admission through crisis avoidance. Preventing re-admissions and shortening length of in-patient stays are joint performance indicators for the mental health service and Supporting People. The minimal number of delayed discharges from acute hospital trusts demonstrates good performance. The Home from Hospital service is well-established as part of the collaborative arrangements for hospital discharge and, although not Supporting People funded, it is now applying the same high standards and quality assurance agreed for Supporting People services. Contributions to prompt hospital discharge are also made by Care and Repair (HIA). Telecare is currently being piloted through the Supporting People funded Lifeline service.
 - The interests of vulnerable children and young people are also clearly represented in the governance of the programme. The Housing representative on the Commissioning Board is also a member of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Commissioning Board has agreed a new QAF core objective for child protection, which will be required of providers from 1 April 2007. Provider's child protection policies are checked through reviews and their absence in a specialist service was picked up and addressed. A programme of child protection training for providers is being rolled out and 18+ care leavers are supported to sustain their tenancies through floating support.

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- 56 The Council recently improved the inclusion of providers and funded an external consultancy to build provider capacity and take ownership of the Provider Forum. In July 2006 the Practitioners Group, the steering group for the Providers Forum, was established and now leads their work and has been instrumental in facilitating liaison between providers and the governance of the Supporting People programme. Providers are elected onto the Practitioners Group and representatives attend the core strategy group which has benefited from strong influences of providers. The chair of the Practitioners Group also attends the Commissioning Board meetings.
- 57 However, providers are not used effectively in the decision-making process and some providers feel that they are not involved in the development of strategies at a sufficiently early stage, which affects their ability to capture the views of their fellow providers. In addition, the responsibilities of the provider representatives on the core strategy group, in terms of communicating with the Practitioners Group and the wider network of providers, are unclear and do not work consistently well.
- 58 The Council provides an effective range of support for providers. The Supporting People team sends monthly newsletters to all providers to keep them updated on developments. A variety of support for providers has been made available for example surgeries to help providers complete the QAF completion. Sheltered housing providers asked for particular input early in the programme and a separate forum was established in April 2005, partly to support small organisations who would otherwise struggle with the administration of the programme. Barnet has a higher number of small providers than comparable authorities and understands the particular demands they face in administering their services and completing the QAF. To address this, a support group for sole traders and small providers has been established and there are subjected to proportionately light touch PIs.
- 59 Barnet has an extensive level of service provision from the voluntary sector and values the contribution they make. The BVSC joined the core strategy group in May 2005 and is now the key link between Supporting People and the voluntary sector. Six network groups, set up by the BVSC, each representing specific user groups, were involved in the development of the Council's Supporting People website and BVSC members are key contacts for service users and carers as part of the Modernising Access to Services project. Barnet's Compact between the Council and the voluntary sector guides the work of the voluntary sector and the relationship has been further enhanced as a result of the recent Best Value review of the council's relationship with the BVCS.

- 60 The partnership arrangements with probation work well in the management of high-risk offenders and those that present a danger to children. MAPPA arrangements are linked to the Supporting People programme through the London Probation Policy Statement entitled, 'Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements and the 'Supporting People' Programme' (December 2006). This policy statement aims to ensure that local Supporting People programmes prioritise the development of services to address unmet need for dangerous/high risk offenders, raise awareness of MAPPA with all providers in a planned and managed framework and work in a joined-up way to meet the needs of dangerous/high risk offenders being temporarily housed within the Approved Premises estate.
- 61 Through the commissioning of the MAPPA pilot service to provide housing related support to dangerous and high risk of harm offenders, probation with its partners will be able to effectively contribute to the support of these offenders and help to reduce unnecessary tenancy breakdown which can lead to an increase risk of re-offending and of harm.
- 62 Although links between the Supporting People programme, children's services and the criminal justice services are good, the Youth Offending Service (YOS) is not represented in its own right on the core strategy group. The question of whether the YOS should have more direct involvement was raised on the Supporting People away day. Although probation consider they are able to influence the strategy appropriately on their behalf and have some success such as remodelling the Step Forward project for young people this issue has not been considered directly with the YOS.
- 63 Barnet Voice, a service user-led advocacy group for people with mental ill health, was commissioned to engage service users as part of reviews; getting service user feedback about the performance of and outcomes from the services. The Council also used the specialist skills of the voluntary sector when it commissioned Pensioner's Voice to carry out a specific piece of work with service users of sheltered housing to establish how they would prefer to be involved in the Supporting People programme and service improvement. The Accountable Officer has led a commissioning and procurement session with the older people's network as part of the joint approach to voluntary sector development.

Grant compliance, strategy and needs

- 64 This is an area of strength in the Council's administration of the programme. Grant compliance has been achieved and implemented. Barnet's eligibility criteria were agreed in June 2005 following service reviews that showed providers needed more clarity about the eligibility of service, there is now a clear eligibility policy that sets out the housing related support services that are eligible and can be funded by the Supporting People grant. The policy was agreed with providers and is fully understood by all stakeholders and differentiates support, housing management and care. The Council uses quarterly service monitoring meetings to check compliance with the Barnet criteria and where ineligible services were identified as being provided, the service has either been varied as part of the review outcomes or funding transferred to other budgets. There was no ineligible funding identified as part of the CLG retraction exercise.
- 65 There is a robust and comprehensive five-year strategy which was based on an independent survey carried out by consultants in March 2005 and covered almost 2,700 vulnerable people. The survey showed substantial unmet needs including almost 40 per cent of older people in need but receiving no support; only half of those with learning disabilities in touch with services; and almost one quarter of women in domestic violence situations being repeatedly victimised. The updating of the original needs analysis complements the findings of the 2006 Housing Needs Assessment which provided an overview of housing need, supply and affordability in the borough and contains specific sections on the needs of households with support needs, older person households and ethnic minority households. Services providing support but not funded by Supporting People are also being identified, so that opportunities for added value, rather than necessarily commissioning new services, can be taken. Barnet has established joint commissioning arrangements with health for mental health and learning disabilities, and the Kings Fund project for older people is a precursor to further developments in joint commissioning.
- 66 The five-year strategy has a clear vision and is accompanied by an annual plan with clear targets, identified resources and completion dates. The strategy is strategically linked to relevant areas of social care, health, social inclusion, criminal justice and community safety policies. Providers we spoke to, and those who replied to our survey, indicated that they were clear about the criteria and the majority were very positive 'the services we offer in Barnet have been identified as strategically relevant, the specific needs of this group are not recognised in all boroughs. We have not had any problems or restrictions from overly tight definitions but are very clear what services need to be funded from other sources'.

- 67 The strategy focuses on the key strategic objectives of the Council and its partners and include homelessness prevention, ill-health and social exclusion. Through the delivery of the strategy the Council has been successful in addressing the areas identified as being the most in need. Seventeen services have been newly funded since 2003. Six services have been expanded, including three new services following satisfactory piloting. The new investment had a full year value of £1.9 million and represents 22 per cent of projected expenditure in 2006/07.
- 68 There has also been a change in the balance of floating and accommodation based support in line with the Council's priorities. Almost one third of funding is now allocated to floating support, nearly double the 2003 position and representing a net increase of over £800,000 in annual value. In contrast, funding for accommodation based support has fallen by £1.5 million, a reduction of 15 per cent in the share of total funding. Accommodation based units, as a proportion of all units, fell by a lesser proportion, reflecting the loss of services with higher unit costs.
- 69 The Council recognise the importance of providing sufficient move-on accommodation to ensure services do not become blocked which result in service users having no access to services, or continuing to live in those that do not meet their increasing needs for independence. They also recognise that supply problems have led to low expectations and aspirations amongst some providers and service users. Barnet was a member of the MAP2 project group, which agreed a strategy and action plan in the summer of 2005 to address move-on issues. To compliment this plan at a local level the core strategy group produced a plan for the development of move on accommodation. The plan includes a number of key tasks including measuring demand and performance, setting performance targets amending contract specifications, all leading to an increased in the supply. The plan contains several options including private sector leasing; increasing social housing and the amount of temporary accommodation for homeless people and setting targets for moving service users on to more appropriate housing. The plan also includes clear reporting and monitoring arrangements and timescales.

Delivery arrangements

- 70 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the delivery of the programme. The Supporting People team is experienced, well respected, well managed and fully incorporated into Social Services and the Housing Needs service. We found that the programme is recognised as having identified the needs of vulnerable people, adapted existing services, commissioned new services and changed the type of provision to increase less accommodation based support. It has also provided services to meet gaps in provision. Communication with providers and between providers has improved but remains an area of weakness.

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- 71 The Council has supplemented the administration grant allocated by CLG by £110,000 since the inception of the programme and has committed an additional £90,000 for the year 2007/08. The Supporting People administration expenditure exceeded the grant allocation for 2005/06, and the deficit for 2006/07 will be higher as a result of the increase in the Supporting People team establishment. Contributions from the Council, currently a full year effect of approximately £200,000 supplement the administration costs of the programme and are found from the Housing and Adult Social Services budgets.
- 72 The Supporting People team is motivated, committed and stable. Staff have deployed a number of skills to cover all aspects of the programme. The Supporting Team has a positive profile in and beyond the Council and by being represented at strategic internal groups, joint management boards and external partnerships it has raised the understanding of professionals as to the contribution housing relate support and Supporting People can make.
- 73 In September 2006 three additional full time posts were appointed to the team:
- a Consultation and Participation Officer;
 - a Supporting People Projects Officer; and
 - a Supporting People Programme Administrator.
- 74 The contribution these new posts have made in terms of overall capacity and in addressing weaknesses in performance is good and has been recognised by providers and members of the core strategy group, however consultation, access and communication remain areas to be improved.
- 75 Access to corporate support is easily obtained and the team has benefited from expertise in other Council departments including:
- the assistance of Housing Benefits in checking eligibility for Supporting People subsidy;
 - the corporate and adult social care communications teams worked on the Supporting People website development project as well as providing practical help with design of public information leaflets; and
 - the SWIFT social care information system support team also supports the SPLS with advice and assistance as needed.
- 76 Not all the additional input has come from the Council for example, probation reviewed one service jointly with the Supporting People team and specialists were engaged to carry out the first mental health service reviews. During 2006, the team has carried out annual contract reviews of mental health, learning disability and physical/sensory impairment provision, jointly with social care managers for these service areas.

- 77 In terms of the relationship with providers, strengths outweigh weaknesses. Providers we met spoke positively about the team. They found them approachable, helpful and well informed. They have been particularly supportive of small providers and recognise the challenges they face. They were said to have been helpful about the application of eligibility criteria and to follow up queries and sensitive and inclusive in relation to service users during reviews. The team have considerable respect for providers but put the needs of service users first and do not shy away from challenging providers in the best interests of service users.
- 78 Some providers that we met told us that they did not think they were involved in service developments at a sufficiently early stage. The Supporting People team hold the view that a key part of their role is to work on behalf of the core strategy group and of providers. However, on occasions this has resulted in them developing work to a too advanced stage and then presenting it for consultation and comment. This has made some providers feel that they have insufficient time to comment. During our inspection we raised this with the team manager and the Accountable Officer and found them receptive to this comment and a willing to discuss it further with providers.
- 79 The team is well managed, staff are appointed to appropriate person specification and job descriptions. The frequency of team meetings has been increased to assist with the familiarisation of the newly appointed staff and the current workload and currently take place fortnightly. All team members have annual appraisals and access to both induction and follow on training. However, the annual appraisals have not been passed to the Accountable Officer in accordance with the Council's procedures which means she is reliant on the team manager's effectiveness in overseeing the development and performance management of the team.
- 80 The work of the team is governed by an over-arching Supporting People Action Plan. Drawn from the Supporting People health-check carried out in early 2006 by an independent consultant, targets are monitored quarterly. Team members discuss their individual targets in supervision and progress is reported to the core strategy group and the Commissioning Board. Specific work streams, for example the service review programme, are reported in more detail. Higher level targets are included in the corporate Key Priority Plan for the 'Supporting the Vulnerable' theme, for example, developing floating support to become cross-tenure. There are specific local targets for some processes for example, target times for Housing Benefit passporting and payments to providers.

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- 81 The Council has effective budget monitoring systems in place. These systems are also used in delivering the Supporting People programme. Budget reports are clear and informative and cover current and future spend. The newly introduced SAP finance system enables 'live' monitoring on-line of Supporting People expenditure, breaking activity down by primary needs sectors as well as by service. The Supporting People grant spend is monitored within the Adult Social Services budget and therefore reported corporately and to cabinet. A significant programme grant surplus occurred in 2005/06 leading to substantial under-spend in 2006/07 but this is expected to reduce sharply in 2007/08 and 2008/09 when the full-year effects of current service expansions and pipeline projects will be incurred.
- 82 Fairer charging is being implemented well, when it was clear that awareness amongst subsidy providers was insufficient to ensure that service users were getting access to fairer charging assessments. The financial assessment team give the Supporting Team information about applications and their outcome. A further publicity campaign to address continuing low take up has been undertaken and information is on the Supporting People website.
- 83 Payments to Supporting People providers are accurate and paid on time. There are also effective procedures in place to ensure that all service providers are able to complete and submit the workbook information on time. The Supporting People team offers training and support for any provider who requires additional assistance.
- 84 Corporate performance management and performance management of Supporting People is good and to strengthen this further additional performance indicators have been agreed for future implementation. The Supporting People team provide detailed information for the Commissioning Board which has enabled it to take informed decisions. The QAF Performance Indicators are the basis for monitoring performance and local performance indicators have been developed for Barnet providers. These include Additional Service Performance Measures which include access to employment; reducing health inequalities; reducing crime and anti-social behaviour; reducing substance misuse and service user participation all of which address particular areas of performance that need to be improved. Several of these additional measures do not yet have targets set, the intention being to review performance following an assessment of performance at the end of 2006/07.

- 85 Evidence from reviews shows that providers have taken up opportunities for continuous improvement by learning from the practice of others; resulting in significantly better QAF gradings in the final year of the review programme. The 2006/07 self assessments were received in October 2006 and show major improvements that will be subject to sample validation to check their accuracy. Those services reviewed under only four QAFs are also returning data for validation against the additional QAFs introduced in September 2004, to ensure consistent measurement of all services. Services, as seen and experienced by service users, have improved overall through improvement plan actions to tackle specific issues raised by service users in reviews. A standard for annual contract review meetings has been agreed and is now in progress; with high value contractors being prioritised.
- 86 The Supporting People Team have identified a number of key actions that they will undertake to improve performance these include:
- working with the boroughs in the north London sub-region to bench-mark PI data, and establish appropriate performance targets for each type of service;
 - working with individual providers to improve data quality and completeness;
 - undertaking targeted audits of high-value services to validate data returns; and
 - implementing the local outcome measures to augment the national Key Performance Indicators.
- 87 In November 2006 the Supporting People team produced a high level risk register management plan to draw together the full complement of plans for different aspects of the programme. These include the corporate IT contingency plan that covers the SPLS for back-up and disaster recovery and specific contingency plans for disasters affecting properties and for sudden business failure. Provider risks have been identified and managed through a cross-authority accreditation process that covers north London boroughs. This focuses on the key aspects of financial viability, effective employment policies and practices and strong management processes.
- 88 The high level register includes 18 items with varying levels of risk and likelihood of risk. Of these, six are deemed to be effective and the remainder require action to reduce risk. Of those that require further action, three relate to risks to service users in the event of service failure. The actions required to improve performance are stated and some risk is reduced as there are corporate procedures already in existence. The key actions highlight the need for providers to put in place business continuity plans with particular attention to high risk providers and joint de-commissioning protocols between Supporting People and other funding partners.

Commissioning and performance

- 89 On balance, there are more strengths than weaknesses in commissioning and performance. Providers reported that they are clear on contracting arrangements however; no steady state contracts have been issued. The Council has comprehensive service review procedures in place and with the exception of four all service reviews were completed on time. Action plans have been reported to the Commissioning Board and are focussed on improving quality and outcomes. Opportunities for cross-authority working have been used to improve processes and practice. However, the follow up of action plans following reviews is poor. There are effective complaints and review procedures although the outcome from complaints is not reported to providers or used as effectively as they could be.
- 90 The Council did not complete all service reviews on time. The Commissioning Board agreed that the completion date for four services could be deferred. Providers were informed about the review process at an early stage and were included in pre-validation work. Providers reported that the Supporting People team allowed extensive time for pre-review meetings and met with them to make them aware what was needed from them. The review officers were seen as giving good, flexible support to assist providers through the process. Key stakeholders have participated in review activities such as in-depth scrutiny of service casework, joint overview meetings with providers, and the design of review questionnaires.
- 91 The service reviews were undertaken well by a small team and to add capacity and specialist knowledge a number were undertaken with colleagues from within the Council and external partners. The officers undertaking the reviews used the value for money framework to ascertain cost and quality. Eligibility was assessed during the reviews in accordance with CLG grant conditions. The reviews indicated that providers needed greater clarity about eligibility and local criteria were agreed in 2005. The Council subsequently used quarterly service monitoring meetings to check compliance with the Barnet criteria. Where ineligible services were being provided, the service was either varied as part of the review outcomes, or funding was transferred to other budgets, for example expenditure on building security staff in a major in-house supported housing project and social care provision by a high-cost mental health service.
- 92 There has been a good approach to services provided across other boroughs. In these cases the reviewing officer contacted other Supporting People teams; this uncovered some misreporting, for example the QAF levels awarded and this was addressed. The Supporting People team also shared findings on common providers and services, for example in a floating support service which operates across three boroughs in North London. Led by Barnet Council the North London sub-region jointly accredited providers and also worked together on the MAP2 and MAP3 projects. It also jointly commissioned training for providers, for example on tendering and protection from abuse

- 93** Providers who responded to our survey commented how sensitively the Supporting People team dealt with service users. All providers have now assessed themselves against the core and supplementary objectives set out in the Supporting People QAF and have action plans for service improvements.
- 94** There has been good strategic overview of the review process and the outcome of the reviews. The reports of all the service reviews and the action plans were reported to the Commissioning Board for approval. The monitoring of the implementation of action plans is recognised by the Council as a weak area of performance. In only one file could we see evidence of this being undertaken consistently.
- 95** The Supporting People QAF framework is recognised by providers as an effective audit tool and has been used by service providers for other groups and has been used by the Council to review the sheltered housing scheme.
- 96** Evidence from reviews shows that providers have taken up opportunities for continuous improvement by learning from the practice of others; resulting in significantly better QAF gradings in the final year of the review programme. Sheltered providers are now benchmarking to push up quality. The 2006/07 self-assessments were received in October 2006 and show major improvements and will be subjected to sample validation to check their accuracy. Those services reviewed under only four QAFs are also returning data for validation against the additional QAFs introduced in September 2004, thus ensuring consistent measurement of all services. Services, as seen and experienced by service users, have improved overall through improvement plan actions to tackle specific issues raised by service users in reviews. A standard of annual contract review meetings has been agreed and is now in progress; with high value contractors being prioritised.
- 97** The team continues to pursue wider contracting issues; the 2006 contract review programme has particularly addressed the need for mental health and learning disability accommodation-based services to demonstrate more clearly that users are being supported to become more independent.
- 98** The Council continues to improve the review process. Since the first round of reviews, new procedures have been approved for future reviews, these include a revised review procedure, an annual plan, revised QAF procedures and new service standards. In reviewing the processes the Supporting People team identified that the original appeals procedure included a final appeal to the Commissioning Board and that this was an insufficiently independent process. They therefore re-drafted the appeals process to enhance independence in decision-making by using core strategy group members, including provider members, as a hearing panel. A number of appeals were heard under the previous procedure, the most recent over 18 months ago, but none as yet under the new procedure.

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- 99** The Council is undertaking work on commissioning and procurement to maximise the value of Supporting People investment for each user group. The Commissioning Board has reviewed progress in realigning the programme towards local strategic and shared priorities since 2003. During the inspection we saw examples of service remodelling, expansions and creations and specific examples to meet identified priority needs include ex-offender services, support for people with drug misuse difficulties support for families in need, and floating services for the local Chinese community. The Partnership provides good support for those at risk of domestic violence and the reduction in the number of families fleeing domestic violence and subsequently being placed in temporary accommodation has improved stability for young people.
- 100** Complaint handling is satisfactory. The Council's corporate complaints procedure was originally used for complaints about the Supporting People programme, with complaints about individual services being picked up with providers as they occurred. As part of the review of the Supporting People team procedures and encouraging access and involvement, a new complaints, compliments and comments procedure has been agreed and is advertised on the website and on schemes. We looked at the log of complaints held by the Supporting People team and saw that most complaints, which may be presented as enquiries, have been about support charges and there was evidence that these had been handled well with good responses to service users.
- 101** Complaints from service users have led directly to a new contract condition in the 2006/07 contracts requiring providers to set charges at the same level as unit subsidy rates. The 2006/07 Performance Framework and the 2007/08 contract extensions includes a requirement that providers report complaints data annually and include access to the Supporting People team in their own complaints procedure as part of escalation. Some complaints have necessitated a corporate approach involving other services such as Adult Social services for example a serious complaint about adult protection, was reported and addressed by the corporate adult protection officer with the provider and complainant. However, there is no analysis of complaint trends and they are not routinely reported to the Commissioning Board or core strategy group.

Value for money

How do costs compare?

- 102** Value for money is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Barnet have developed a clear approach to identifying VFM in their Supporting People programme. They have used a set of themes that cover all the key areas that need to be addressed under VFM. The weightings they attach to each theme are appropriate. Their analysis of resources shows that most services in Barnet cost less than average. This does not necessarily mean that they get better VFM as almost all of Barnet's services offer lower-level support that cost less to provide however, this is not driven by the size of their grant but by the needs of service users.

- 103** Some services have high unit costs, including supported housing services for women at risk of violence, for people with mental illness leaving hospital or residential care, and for young troubled people. For these groups Barnet's unit costs are much closer to or even higher than the London and national average.
- 104** The Council purchases services from a large number of small providers and has yet to ascertain the benefits or otherwise of this approach in terms of value for money. Whilst services provided by small providers and the voluntary sector are valued contract management and commissioning from such a large number places demands on the resources of the team and the Council cannot yet demonstrate that alternatives have been considered or value for money in terms of both cost and quality are being secured.
- 105** The Council intends working with sub-regional partners to keep up-to-date information about current cost comparators in London, agree ceilings where appropriate, seek economies of scale, and use market testing and procurement to ensure optimum VFM.

How is value for money managed?

- 106** Budget management and value for money are well developed and effective in their outcomes. The Supporting People team understands what VFM means in relation to cost, quality and outcome issues. They have evidenced a detailed analysis of key VFM principles and the benefits, or otherwise, of different VFM methodologies that relate to cost and price parameters. In the past there was a focus on cost and price issues to the exclusion of quality but further work was undertaken to broaden the scope of the VFM approach and has led to significant advances in this area. Robust decisions were made to de-commission several services that were not strategically relevant and the savings of £1.5 million, amounting to almost 18 per cent of the total value of the programme, has enabled Barnet to meet CLG's savings targets and expand the range of new and innovative services, including:
- support for homeless families involved with statutory child protection services;
 - outreach support for the borough's Chinese community, London's largest;
 - new cross-tenure floating support for older people; and
 - crisis house support for mentally ill people at risk of breakdown in the community;

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- 107** There is a well thought out cross-authority approach to benchmarking and procurement in relation to the development of a steady state contract for future use across the sub region. This work should also result in clearer signposting across the sub region to more effective VFM outcomes as well as cost comparisons. Current examples being developed concern cross-authority floating support and accreditation and evidence developing good practice in the approach to cross-regional procurement. Working with five North London borough partners, Barnet plans to participate in a jointly commissioned floating support service to operate across the sub region. It intends to use the specification and procurement process as a template for further cross-borough provision, producing economies of scale and a model for outcome-based service delivery. Barnet, along with the rest of the north London sub region, have a three-year action plan to agree benchmark costs and hourly rates across the region. Barnet has a well developed understanding of VFM in terms of its floating support services. It is able to benchmark costs with other councils in the North London sub-region and evidence that it administers mostly low value, low support contracts.
- 108** In addition to the above, discussions are starting with provider groups and a presentation was recently given at a providers' forum to explain Barnet's VFM plans. Procurement is also beginning to take shape with major decisions just taken around re-shaping one large service. Savings here will be used to procure other identified services. Sub region procurement work for a high risk offender service is also planned.
- 109** The administration grant is also being used in ways which demonstrate VFM with a clear direction for its utilisation in 2007/08 to deliver key parts of the Supporting People programme.
- 110** VFM principles are thus developing to ensure that effective use of the grant is occurring to produce effective outcomes for the programme and high quality relevant service.
- 111** However the understanding of quality alongside unit costs is not fully understood and is an area for development. There has been no identification of best practice outside London which limits the range of information and external experience available to the team.

Service user involvement

- 112** Service user involvement is a combination of strengths and weaknesses. The Council recognises that although it has some areas of good practice, for example the Joint Area Review of 2006 stated that 'Children and young people are encouraged to participate in making decisions on issues that affect their own lives. An active Youth Board represents a diverse range of vulnerable and other young people and makes a very sound contribution to the work of the Children and Young people Strategic Partnership Board, it is an area that needs to be addressed across the Council. In the delivery of the Supporting People programme there are some areas that demonstrate the inclusion of service users, particularly in commenting on the services they receive and there has been some progress since the appointment of a Supporting People consultation and participation officer. The team are taking an effective approach to consultation by using existing service user groups rather than creating new groups specifically for Supporting People and, in April 2006, introduced performance indicators on service user involvement and satisfaction.
- 113** Service provider participation on the Commissioning Board and core strategy group has been established with representatives elected from the Provider Forum. The Council has decided to ensure providers take responsibility for capturing the views of service users and the Supporting People team have assessed the readiness of providers to deliver the data on satisfaction and participation levels, that will be required as part of the 2006/07 local performance framework.
- 114** The Supporting People team have used existing consultation events run by members of the core strategy group to reach a wide range of service users. These have included:
- the 'Have Your Say' day for people with learning disabilities, reflected in the Housing Options and Support Strategy which was highlighted in the feedback from providers as a very successful day;
 - six monthly reviews of care leavers' pathway plans include discussion about the support service;
 - the Mental Health Strategy included consultation with Barnet Voice and carer representatives;
 - BVSC reports service user issues to the core strategy group from network meetings, for example the Mental Health Network; and
 - Barnet Pensioners Voice hosted a consultation event for service users of sheltered housing.

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- 115** They have also identified a wide range of panels, forums, surgeries and surveys used by Barnet Homes, Barnet's ALMO. Some of which work well, for example, the Barnet Service User Group which has meetings and a newsletter and worked well for one particularly chaotic person who became involved in the consultation on aftercare, and was able to give feedback to improve the service. Some provider service leaders cited an inclusive and accessible user involvement forum which Supporting People fed into. The Barnet Voluntary Service Council representative on the core strategy group has set up mechanisms to involve the six networks with sessions on Supporting People awareness and opportunities to feed in issues. In addition, there have been discussions with groups of service users as to the best way of consulting them. Discussions with service users in sheltered housing identified their concerns about impersonal consultation that use a written questionnaire approach, the risks of excluding less confident service users and the difficulties in distinguishing Supporting People support from housing services.
- 116** Barnet Voice, a service user-led advocacy group for people with mental ill health, was commissioned to engage service users as part of reviews; getting service user feedback about the performance of and outcomes from the services. The Council also used the specialist skills of the voluntary sector when it commissioned Pensioner's Voice to carry out a specific piece of work with service users of sheltered housing to establish how they would prefer to be involved in the Supporting People programme and service improvement. The Accountable Officer has led a commissioning and procurement session with the older people's network as part of the joint approach to voluntary sector development.
- 117** The Council has increased resources to facilitate the inclusion of service users with funds for a consultation and participation officer who was appointed in September 2006. This work is at an early stage. It has enabled the mapping and appraisal of existing arrangements to inform a Supporting People consultation strategy that includes targets for participation levels, and options for the introduction of standardised satisfaction measures to enable comparisons across the programme over time.
- 118** The implementation of the action plan to improve service user involvement is being well managed by the team and monitored by the Commissioning Board. In December 2006 the board approved the action plan drawn up to ensure customer involvement at all levels including both service users and potential service users and carers; the process for implementing 2006/7 local PIs on service user satisfaction with services and opportunities for introducing provider's service standards for service user involvement in the management of the services.

- 119** Service users and carers have been involved in the reviews of the services they receive. The team's methods included survey questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews. The team varied their approach to meet the needs of the service users by using interpreters for example in the review of the Chinese support service, which was set up in part to address exclusion issues for people with poor English language skills. Having identified that mental health service users responded better to a less 'official' request for information the team used Barnet Voice, an advocacy service that is led by mental health users to involve service users during the review of their specialist services. The reviewing officers also asked for the provider's most recent service user survey reports. However, there is no systematic approach to giving feedback to service users on the outcome of the reviews. Feedback by a variety of methods can provide useful information to service users on the planned improvements to their service and demonstrate how their views have been taken into account.
- 120** Some aspects of service user involvement are still weak. Providers who responded to our survey stated that they had been visited to gain an understanding of what arrangements are already in place and what methods would work best for their service user group. Other providers we met were less positive and said that the Supporting People team needs to develop service user representation. Some schemes said they had a visit recently though this was not a regular or structured feature for service users and that the provider was used as the disseminator of information and to collate responses, but this did not involve service users. Some residents we met, though aware of forums for involvement with their service provider were unaware of ways to affect the Supporting People service they received and were unaware of the Older People's Housing and Support Strategy Group. Residents also said they were unaware of how they could get involved and although they had asked queries these were not responded to.
- 121** Support planning is good. All Supporting People funded services complete support plans and providers are required to return completion figures as part of the local Performance Framework. During service reviews, support plans are examined and are expected to be outcome-focused and contain evidence of key actions, resources and timescales. To develop skills in this area good practice has been shared between providers and examples provided to services having difficulty with this, particularly some sheltered housing services. In addition the sheltered housing forum also promoted good support planning by sharing a number of support plan formats. The Supporting People team has also worked with providers to enhance the links between support plans, care plans and person-centred planning and, with other commissioners, are developing an increasingly holistic approach to the needs of individuals.
- 122** During our inspection we found that support plans are consistently in place for service users and are of a good quality. They capture the main concerns of service users and carers and the agreed actions are outcome focussed which ensures that improvement or lack of improvement can be monitored.

Access to services and information

- 123** Strengths and weaknesses are balanced in this area as improvements have only recently been implemented. The website is good and provides easy access to information on services funded by Supporting People. Staff are able to direct people to appropriate services. However, there is as yet no communication strategy that ensures effective communication across all stakeholders.
- 124** Access and referral arrangements are improving and are reasonable. The Council identified the need to improve publicity about Supporting People services and to increase access arrangements in order to create user-friendly pathways to support. It has increased the level of resources to the Supporting People team and this has enabled the team to establish and staff a Modernising Access Project.
- 125** Some aspects of access have already improved. The Supporting People website is good. It is easy to use and provides clear information for the public, service users and providers. The information provided includes the standards that service users have a right to expect and a directory of services. Information for providers includes the service review processes and examples of good practice. Web-based information on all the Council's service is available in different languages via the borough's libraries, and staff we met were helpful in assisting us with our enquiries.
- 126** The quality of public information is good; leaflets are easy to read and jargon free. The Council provides a range of information to existing and potential service users for example, although very short, the leaflet on charging explains to leaseholders where they can get further information and help with Supporting People service charges. However, although many of the leaflets appear to have been recently produced and only three of the nine mentioned are available in other formats.
- 127** There is consistency in what information is provided for the public. The Supporting People team have a list of documents that they expect to be displayed and where. A variety of information is becoming available to service users in a widening variety of formats, posters, leaflets, the website and electronic information boards outside the Council's public offices. We saw a wide range of literature on specialist support services for service users within the setting in which they lived. There was also a range of information on specialist services such as domestic violence, harassment, education, and drug and alcohol addiction services. Most of the projects we visited had information and leaflets on Supporting People as well details on other related support services in communal areas and notice boards.
- 128** The Council communicates well with residents in the borough. The Council's newsletter is delivered to all residents and includes a feature about the remit of Supporting People and information on how to access the team by telephone, in person and online. Supporting People also feature on the regeneration initiative for the borough, setting out the vision, milestones and targets for work on improving community facilities, including housing over the next 20 years.

- 129** Improvement plans following reviews included actions wherever obstacles to fair access were identified and this has had a positive impact in some specific cases. Sheltered housing providers were particularly challenged on their exclusions of people with additional needs. The provider's response to these discussions was constructive and revised contract specifications included the removal of exclusions to service access, for example tenure-specific requirements in floating support.
- 130** Barnet fully backs the removal of 'Local connection' policies and has discussed this with providers who have confirmed that these exclusions are no longer in place. The Supporting People team is continuing to monitor this through the new contact points.
- 131** The 2006/07 contract conditions absolutely prohibit top-up charges over and above contracted unit costs. Having previously had an example raised via a complaint, the Council carried out a thorough audit of all the services funded by the Supporting People grant and identified two instances in sheltered housing where top-up charges were being raised. Both of these have been resolved satisfactorily. A further exercise will be undertaken to check compliance across the programme.
- 132** Fairer Charging is well embedded in Barnet. The Council is working with the Department of Work and Pensions to establish a joint service whereby all financial assessments are carried out during home visits which incorporate comprehensive benefits advice for the service user and their household. This is supported by easy to understand information leaflets and an appeal process. The Council has used the sheltered housing forum to raise the level of awareness of Fairer Charging opportunities and to emphasise that income maximisation is central to support provision. The Council continues to provide transitional protection for ALMO sheltered housing tenants, at a cost of approximately £130,000 per annum. The new Supporting People website includes information for providers' which gives clear instructions and advice about subsidy procedures. Posters are displayed in service locations and provider offices to inform people about Fairer Charging. The Council recognises the very low level of Supporting People involvement in its expanding leasehold provision. In line with the new Supporting People grant conditions, the Commissioning Board has approved a leaseholder charging policy and obtained leasehold providers' consent to display posters in these buildings to build links with these service users.

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- 133** We found good customer care responses to the reality checks we undertook, these included telephone calls to the out of hours duty service and visits to contact points, the Council offices and a library. The three office contact points are accessible to users with adequate provision for people with disabilities. The offices were welcoming, clean and located close to transport routes. The majority of queries we raised were answered promptly by reception staff who demonstrated that they knew their service areas and could offer a range of services to enquirers. They were able to give the contact details for relevant staff by checking their databases and they ensured that we were appropriately sign-posted to the correct department. However, there are some areas of weakness. At one location our query was not investigated and a full answer not given. There was no call forwarding or answer-phone message for out of hours calls to two of the contact points, the Hornsey Housing Trust and the Barnet Council Support team. A message taking system would be helpful for people who are unable to ring in office hours.
- 134** Policies on local connection and access for transient groups are fair and transparent. At the September 2005 meeting of the providers forum Barnet providers they said they would continue to support open access to services such as the women's refuges which operate as a regional resource.
- 135** The Modernising Access Project has some clear goals, these include:
- the publication of a revised service directory that is easy to use and comprehensive;
 - the establishment of three contact points for help with information, advice and referral; and
 - a programme of publicity for organisations working with potential service users and their contacts.
- 136** We saw evidence that the project has begun to deliver results. Providers we met, and those who responded to our survey, said that the key improvement in last year has been communication to providers through the website, the newsletter, and informative emails. The project is also widening access opportunities for potential service users. Providers such as Mind, who do not provide accommodation services in Barnet, are aware of its impact and it has been well publicized. This project will help to increase access for potential service users.
- 137** Translation services are available for all providers to access and will be extended beyond the current arrangements, which end at the end of March 2007. April 2007. We did however speak to one provider who had had no response to a request for information to be translated for a service user.

Diversity

- 138** Diversity is a strength for the Council and has benefited the delivery of the Supporting People programme. The Council values the diversity of its local population and has ensured systems are in place to promote equal opportunities and fair access to services. It demonstrates experience and awareness in the way it has developed Supporting People services that are appropriate to the specific additional needs vulnerable people may have arising from their age, gender, culture, faith or disability. The Council has several mechanisms to ensure that all equality areas are considered where they relate to or affect service provision, employment, community involvement and social cohesion. The Council has achieved level 3 of the CRE race equality scheme and plans to attain level 4 by March 2008.
- 139** The Leader of the Council, as the lead member for equalities and diversity, has stated that equalities and diversity is integral to everything the Council does. In September 2006 the Council radically altered its policy framework by presenting all equality policy proposals to Cabinet and removing the Cabinet Equalities and Social Inclusion Committee. All proposals to cabinet include diversity considerations. The Council has achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and aiming to achieve Level 4 by March 2008. The council adopted a corporate Diversity Monitoring Form in 2005 setting out the minimum standards for data collection, which has been extended by Adult Social Services to reflect service specific priorities. The Council has an officer led corporate Equalities and Diversity group in which Adult Social Services play an active role and dedicated officers are in post to drive the diversity agenda forward corporately; this in turn has benefits for the Supporting People programme.
- 140** The Council has a Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy and uses the Civic Network to support engagement to the Local Strategic Partnership Board. In addition, Barnet has an active Citizen's Panel constructed to reflect the demographic profile of the borough. There are also booster panels to enhance sampling of disabled and BME residents. The Council engages with residents through the use of electronic voting surveys, focus groups, as well as traditional surveys. All data collected is analysed for equalities profiles. Involving all sections of Barnet's diverse communities is a fundamental part of the Council's consultation strategy and engagement with vulnerable, minority and hard to reach groups.

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- 141 In August 2006 the Council's Adult Social Services piloted an equality impact assessment tool. These equality impact assessments have assisted the Council in judging how policies, plans and strategies adversely affect any groups and are aimed to increase access to mainstream services. The tool is being amended in the light of the pilot and, from 2007 all significant new projects will be subjected to it. The Supporting People programme specifically contributes towards the delivery of the Council's diversity agenda. Unmet needs and gaps in diverse user groups have been researched and analysed. Barnet's ethnic population has been profiled and the Supporting People needs survey identified how ethnicity is represented in various needs groups and issues for different ethnic minorities. Barnet's 2006 Housing Needs Assessment contains chapters on the specific needs of households with support needs, older people and ethnic minorities. The housing service equalities group is implementing significant enhancements to the housing management system to record detailed equality and diversity information of all applicants. Monitoring of client record information and the housing advice and options database is contributing to needs identification. Unique applicant identifiers will ensure that long term monitoring and research into housing support services can also be undertaken. The Council's Black and Minority Ethnic Housing strategy is to be reviewed during 2007.
- 142 The Commissioning Board was particularly concerned about low levels of access by people of Asian origin and the feedback from Barnet Refugee Forum and Barnet Refugee Service highlighting concerns about the Somali community and the wider difficulties experienced by refugees. The core strategy group is considering how best to adjust services to meet these needs, building on the advice surgery at the Somali Community Centre operated by the Council's Housing Service, and are debating whether to provide a specific service or to improve access to the range of services. To address this situation in the interim, the Council's Housing Support team has been resourced to employ a specific worker to work with Barnet Refugee Service and this will be evaluated for effectiveness.
- 143 There is also a commitment by the core strategy group to ensure that refugees should have equal access to services, and probation has been able to draw on local work to input into Supporting People. However, probation also recognises that there is still some way to go to sufficiently addressing the diverse needs of offenders.
- 144 Disability access and diversity issues were covered as part of service reviews. Providers are expected to be able to cope with the full range of diverse customers' needs, and their ability to do so was used in the VFM analysis of the sheltered housing sector. Particularly concerning was the reluctance of one service to take customers who do not speak or read English because of the interpretation and translation costs. To address this the Council made funds available for Supporting People providers to access translation services.

- 145** Diversity is beginning to be embedded more fully in the Supporting People programme in Barnet and some services have already been provided to meet identified need. There is a good range of culturally-specific services for the Jewish community, including Jewish Women's Aid, Sheltered Housing, and Learning Disability Provision.
- 146** In 2004 the PCT identified a specific gap for people with mental health issues in the Chinese community and the Commissioning Board agreed to commission a support service to address the community's low rates of service access. During contract monitoring, the Supporting People team discovered that the Chinese community had wider needs than first identified. The service now offers a generic support service to the Chinese community and the recent reviews have highlighted the very positive feedback from both service users and other stakeholders.
- 147** Other examples of meeting the needs of socially excluded groups include the following.
- Funding Homeless Action in Barnet to provide a service for rough sleepers. This aims to work with the 'precariously housed'. Few people sleep on the streets in Barnet but there is a significant number of 'sofa surfers'. The agency already offered a range of services for this group in our purpose-built Homelessness Day Centre, including the Foothold tenancy sustainment project and the Council has expanded the Supporting People support service, originally for Council tenants, to meet cross-tenure needs.
 - Responding to the imbalance in Supporting People support provision for offenders and substance misusers with specialist services. The cluster-flat based Extended Hours Service was supported by Supporting People funding funded to address complex risk behaviours including mental/ill-health, substance misuse and offending. The successful piloting of this service led to the conversion of an unfit hostel to further expand this service in late 2005.
 - A small specialist service was commissioned from Turning Point, the main community-based substance misuse provider. Supporting People-funded workers support people completing drug rehabilitation, and access Barnet's special re-housing quota to assist these service users into settled housing.
 - Evidence from the 2005 Supporting People Needs Survey of the unmet needs of ex-offenders and people with substance misuse problems led directly to the 60-unit Foundation service.

Outcomes for service users

- 148** Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The Supporting People programme in Barnet has been developed to ensure there is a range of services in place to meet the particular needs of individual service users. To do this the pattern of provision and the adaptation of existing services has been well managed. There is a range of examples of good joint working across different agencies and service providers to secure positive outcomes. However, the Council has been unable to ensure all service users can move on to suitable accommodation and outcome measures are still being developed for all service areas.

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- 149** In line with the identified needs in the five-year strategy, the way services have been provided has changed. There has been a significant shift in investment from accommodation based support to floating support which enables service users to remain within their communities as opposed to being moved to residential care. The Council is moving away from accommodation-based projects, with limited throughputs, to offering floating support that is fully integrated with the new homeless prevention and options approach which is being put in place by the Housing Service. Almost one third of funding is now allocated to floating support funding, nearly double the 2003 position and representing a net increase of over £800,000 in annual value. In contrast, funding for accommodation based support has fallen by £1.5 million, a reduction of 15 per cent in the share of total funding. This is designed to reduce evictions and homelessness and is linking support with more flexible mainstream housing options currently being developed and implemented.
- 150** There has been some improvement in the increased amount of short-term support that enables service users to move on to independence. The proportion of funding allocated to services intended to provide short-term support has increased as compared with services providing long-term support of more than two years duration. However, the long-term support sector mainly comprises sheltered housing and learning disability provision which has been unaffected by decommissioning and remodelling activity over the past three years. The growth in floating support and the reduction in accommodation based support has mainly affected short-term services so there has been relatively little impact on the overall balance between the short- and long-term sectors.
- 151** Service developments have benefited all main sectors and as a result the overall provision of services is more closely aligned to the objectives of within the five-year strategy. Service have been developed or expanded in the following areas.
- Substance misuse and offending behaviour - with a total annual value of £306,000, including one major service for people with mental illness and complex behaviour.
 - Young people - two services with a total annual value of £280,000 providing a high-support accommodation based service and low-level floating support.
 - Learning disability - two services with a total annual value of £210,000 providing a high-support accommodation based service and low-level floating support.
 - Homeless people - five services with a total annual value of £250,000 providing floating support for different need groups.
 - Older people - floating support provision with a total annual value of £200,000.
 - Domestic violence - £140,000 of funding for Barnet's new refuge and expansion in floating support provision.

- Mental health - funding for a crisis house and additional floating support, comprising £170,000 in total.
 - Community safety focus. Forty three per cent of the total of £1.5 million expenditure on new and expanded services is attributable to this theme.
- 152** There is evidence that services are achieving the intended outcomes. For example children and young people in the borough have benefited through the following.
- The Families in Need service, commissioned in October 2004 to meet an identified gap for the support of families for children in need under the Children Act has had excellent outcomes for families. By supporting the inter-agency child protection plans children have been safely removed from the Child Protection register. The Council has also been able to reduce the number of children who need to be looked after by providing support within the community. Social workers in Children and Families meet the provider to tackle any improvement issues for either party and offer training and support to enhance the service provider's practice.
 - Approximately three per cent of children and young people in Barnet live in unsatisfactory housing. At any time, just over one in 21 of the borough's children and young people live in temporary accommodation, but by addressing this through the Supporting People programme no families with children have been placed in bed and breakfast for several years.
 - Floating support services also link effectively with service users in temporary accommodation and the Council, with no 16 and 17 year olds in bed and breakfast accommodation is ahead of the Government's target to achieve this by 2012.
 - All young people leaving the care of the Council are offered housing accommodation, and all those who need it have their own permanent council tenancies however, four young care leavers are currently placed in shared facilities.
 - The provision of support for women fleeing domestic violence, which has reduced the use of short-term temporary accommodation for this vulnerable group and increased the stability of their children's lives.
- 153** Overall, the position of homeless people has improved. The numbers of both individuals and families are reducing and are the lowest for some years. A strong team approach and the flexible use of resources have averted homelessness by supporting tenants in a number of ways. Partnership working with the private sector is strength with 50 leases in place and a Connexions worker has close links with team.
- 154** The Hornsey Housing Trust's service for older people which opened in January 2005, was Barnet's first specialist Supporting People floating support for this user group, and was jointly commissioned with adult social services using an outcomes-based approach.

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- 155 Outcomes for service users with learning difficulties have improved and at the time of our inspection were good. There is sufficient registered care home provision and Barnet does not intend to commission more. Barnet's modernisation programme will provide over 40 new flats, responding to client choice. Mainstream council housing provision has also worked well. Of the 53 people taking up tenancies under the Learning Disability Quota since 1995, 43 were still in situ at the time of our inspection.
- 156 Services for offenders and ex offenders have improved but measurable improvements are more difficult to evidence in terms of outcomes. NOMS and DCLG are both developing outcomes measures but this is not yet finalised. In Barnet probation has taken a lead in starting to develop outcomes for the services that support their service user group and these will include a focus on individual service users and re-offending rates. Probation were also involved in service reviews and were able to make recommendations regarding the improvement of outcome measures.
- 157 Working in partnership has secured positive outcomes; The common link with probation is at the Grove project where co-location has improved partnership working, communicating, and good information-sharing. The project has a specialist post which covers treatment needs and offending behaviour and there is on site access to treatment and access to floating support.
- 158 Outcomes for people with drug and alcohol problems are improving in some areas. There is an alcohol strategy in place to address the needs of people with drug and alcohol misuse problems and a working group set up with an action plan. Services are reasonably integrated and delivered together but there is still insufficient funding for alcohol services and polydrug users although the Foundation also supports alcohol users.
- 159 However there are some areas for improvement. Some young people we met during our inspection told us they were offered accommodation in deprived areas. We found that of the 194 16/17 year olds in short-term accommodation 38 per cent are on these on these types of estates The Council recognise that this is not ideal but they compare favourably with other London boroughs and risks are offset by extensive use of floating support.
- 160 Outcome measures are not yet fully developed for all service user groups and therefore the Council is unable to evidence improvement in the lives of all service users of the programme.

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

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

- 161** Strengths outweigh weakness in the Councils ability to deliver improvements. Barnet Council demonstrates it has made significant and sustained progress in moving towards a strategically well aligned Supporting People programme underpinned by effective policies, management and funding frameworks that place outcomes for service users central to the process. The Council is ambitious in seeking to deliver good quality services to the local community. This is achieved by having strong leadership, a learning culture, clear and agreed priorities and strong management of its resources.
- 162** The Council has a good record of delivering change and improvement and achieves this through involving others. The recent Comprehensive Corporate Assessment rated the Council as performing well. Managers have a strong sense of personal responsibility for making improvements and a commitment and energy to achieve their goals. The leadership and achievements of members of the Supporting People team in both preparing for and implementing the programme are significant.
- 163** The Council has been able to secure strong partnerships that contribute to the strategic development and implementation of the programme. This is evident in the make up of the Supporting People Commissioning Board. The officers and partners involved have the ability to make decisions and influence change. This has led to the partnership delivering on key priorities in the five-year strategy. For example, it has delivered on the expansion of floating support, the provision of good advice and support for domestic violence victims and achieved positive outcomes for children and young people 'at risk'.
- 164** Supporting People Commissioning Board and the Supporting People Team have secured improvements in governance and delivery but these improvements have been relatively recent and addressed several issues that should have been established at the inception of the programme. New investment has been made available since 2003 and released back into the programme to fund 17 new services and initiatives. These services range from improved support to children and young people to expanding support for women fleeing domestic violence and people at risk of homelessness.
- 165** The Council has developed a value for money methodology and there is evidence of its approach to value for money delivering savings and improvements in the quality of provision (see Value for money earlier in this report). Savings targets have been achieved and exceeded and this will assist in meeting future savings requirements.

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- 166 During service reviews, the Council has asked service users and organisations about their experience of accessing services and information. Organisations who represent customers told the Supporting People review officers about the difficulties of getting appropriate information and accessing services. As a result, an audit of access policies and practice will be undertaken once a model of good practice has been agreed with providers.
- 167 The service users we spoke to during our visits were generally positive about their service providers and the support they received and the extensive use of support plans was noted.
- 168 Outcomes for service users with learning difficulties are well developed and the outlook for further development is promising. The Supporting People needs survey in 2005 has clear evidence on which to assess future needs and plans to meet these are already in place and progressing. The Learning Disability modernisation programme has clear aims and priorities to meet the aspirations and preferences of service users with learning difficulties. The appointment of a specific lead commissioner for an initial 12 month period to liaise between the Supporting People team and Barnet joint commissioners is a positive move and should drive forward the Learning Disabilities New Choices Project to modernise all in-house services as well as other Learning Disability commissioning priorities.
- 169 The Council recognise that improvements in access, service user involvement and consultation need to be improved; since they embarked on actions to address these issues, improvements have been delivered and interviews with providers and others confirmed this during our inspection, however, further work need to be undertaken to ensure this is delivered quickly and addresses all aspects. There is good practice to be built on but the steps that have been identified to secure comprehensive involvement across all service user groups have yet to be delivered and improvements that have been made are not yet embedded to inform the delivery of the programme.
- 170 The Local Area Agreements for the Council is aimed to be agreed in 2008 and the Supporting People is well placed to ensure the priorities of its programme will be incorporated.

How does the Council manage performance?

- 171 The performance of the Supporting People programme is well managed and it is being refined and improved. The partnership is clear about its objectives and priorities these are linked to wider corporate and community objectives. There is a hierarchy of improvement plans that contain clear actions and are monitored. However, reporting arrangements to the Council's executive bodies has yet to be agreed and the development of outcomes measures is underdeveloped.

- 172** Performance management is good and is producing positive outcomes for service users. There is a clear performance monitoring and management framework in place within the governance arrangements with the exception of the improvement plans following service reviews. Regular quarterly management reporting against key tasks in the annual plan is reported to the Commissioning Board and a traffic light system identifies progress or lack of it. The Commissioning Board tracks the outcomes closely, which has enabled it to unblock obstacles to improvement and keep delivering improvements.
- 173** Member support has been strong in developing and delivering the strategy. Members are clear about the need to prioritise the needs of vulnerable people and commissioning a best value review of services for this group. Members and officers have taken difficult decisions in the best interests of service users which have enabled the Supporting People programme to be effective in focussing its efforts appropriately.
- 174** There is a clear approach to future commissioning. The five-year strategy has driven the delivery of the programme until now and is being revised to incorporate a thorough update of needs. This will set out the programme's commissioning intentions and provide a detailed framework for future contracting and performance support procurement. This will be further enhanced by improvements to the commissioning and procurement of Adult Social Services which had begun when we carried out our inspection.
- 175** The Council is building on its experience of joint commissioning as part of the procurement strategy and commissioning strategies on mental health, older people's housing and learning disability were approved by Cabinet in January 2007. Through the core strategy group, participation in the service review programme and annual contract reviews the awareness of commissioners and their knowledge of the role of Supporting People has increased. The Adult Social Services department is undertaking a core remodelling project which will substantially strengthen commissioning and procurement and benefit the Supporting People programme.
- 176** The Council's project management, and risk management are good and report through a framework of internal management boards. This enables the management structures to challenge and to ensure that key projects are delivered on target and within budget.
- 177** The Supporting People Team has placed significant emphasis on performance and over the last three years has provided considerable amount of support and guidance to providers through written guidance, dedicated workshops and intensive one to one support to individual organisations.

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- 178** Although the Supporting People team is relatively small it has demonstrated that there is sufficient skill within the team supplemented by additional support from Adult Social Services to monitor and manage performance. This has enabled the team to provide one to one support to providers to ensure timely performance returns, PI workbooks, and reject and advise on incomplete or incorrect returns. In addition, the team have monitored poor performers although the monitoring and reporting of all action plans is not consistent, an issue that has been recognised by the team manager.
- 179** There is a comprehensive Supporting People action plan that identifies the key improvements required, especially on outcomes and the involvement of service users and access to services. It is underpinned by specific work plans that detail each area of the team's work and these are regularly monitored by the appropriate line manager with performance reported to the Supporting People Commissioning Board and the core strategy group that is responsible for monitoring of the day-to-day implementation of the programme. However, we found some elements of the plan did not have completion dates and this could affect the programme's ability to effectively monitor delivery of these aspects.
- 180** Learning from others has been key in ensuring best practice in the delivery of services. Using the knowledge of the probation representative who is involved in other Supporting People programmes and the Supporting People team manager's involvement in the North London sub regional group has improved the team's knowledge. For example, the team have considered the approach taken by other ALAs to service costs; and the team will be examining providers' service budgets to assist the understanding of full service costs to achieve better VFM. In addition, having a provider representative on the Commissioning Board has ensured a more outward looking and inclusive approach.
- 181** The Supporting People team has developed local indicators to measure service user's outcomes against specific performance indicators and targets. These will be piloted in 2007 and seek to identify the differences that services have made to the lives of the people who use them and the contributions that services make to national and local strategic targets.

Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

- 182** The recent review of the staffing structure of the Supporting People team has resulted in the strengthening of the capacity of the team. The review took place in 2006 and identified the need to improve the delivery of the programme including service user involvement, consultation, access to services and diversity. Recruitment was completed and the additional post holders took up their posts in September 2006. The additional posts in the Adult Social Services commissioning and procurement unit will provide additional capacity and skills for the team and has started to demonstrate improvements.

- 183** The Supporting People Partnership has mapped its future improvement agenda and particular priority is being given to re-configuring its services for older people and learning disability services users. The Council has a good track record in terms of continuous improvement and shows itself to be capable of bringing about significant change in a timely manner in most cases.
- 184** The Supporting People programme has already driven improvements in the quality and availability of housing related support services for vulnerable people in Barnet. The vision is corporately owned and it is clearly understood by elected members and staff at all levels - both stakeholder agencies and service providers alike. An example of this is the strong commitment to the development of the Supporting People programme by all key partners in particular the health authority and the probation service. Both partners play a vital role in the decision-making processes.
- 185** Councillors are aware of the issues for vulnerable people, the impact of the Supporting People programme and its importance in terms of contributing to the Council's community plan priorities. The programme's focus is well connected to the needs of the local population, and is seen to be an important catalyst in enabling and supporting change. An example of this is the programme has been able to expand support to address the previously unmet needs of women fleeing domestic violence and young people.
- 186** The Council has effectively followed through changes in the governance arrangements with the appointment of a senior social services manager as the Accountable Officer. There is regular attendance at both the Supporting People Commissioning Board and the core strategy group that has enabled governance arrangements to work successfully, with clear distinction and discussion across strategic and operational delivery of the programme.
- 187** The Supporting People team is effective and established. They are keen to deliver a successful programme and with the addition of three new posts and the support of other social services departments, well resourced. The team have the appropriate range of skills to continue to deliver the programme. This has been evidenced by the completion of the service review process with the assistance of additional staffing resources supporting the existing team. The team and the wider administrative framework benefits from considerable additional investment from the Council and the ready availability of support from other services such as IT, and Corporate Finance.
- 188** The Supporting People team use a range of networks and formats to keep up-to-date on Supporting People developments and good practice. Staff access internal training provision, external specialist training for example contracting and commissioning and use a range of arrangements to access and exchange information for example networking, the North London regional group, SPK web and the internet, AC reports and other publications.
- 189** The Supporting People team pilots new initiatives to learn from the experience and has been described by providers as flexible, open to suggestions and willing to take calculated risks to try new approaches.

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- 190** The authority has increased the capacity of the Providers Forum by providing support until the providers felt able to run the Forum themselves. There has been extensive support for the many small providers in Barnet and a sensitive understanding of the particular challenges they face. The Council also facilitates the development and knowledge of service providers' staff by sharing examples of good practice.
- 191** Performance management for providers is improving and further developments are aimed to enhance the partnership's ability to deliver. The value for money framework is aimed to improve efficiencies across a number of service areas. The improvements in these areas will not only increase the positive outcomes for services users, but also assist the programme in demonstrating these outcomes more effectively.
- 192** Service user's involvement for the Supporting People programme is developing. The review process has empowered many service users to be involved and influence how their services have been provided and there are clear actions for the project officer, appointed to undertake this work, to achieve.

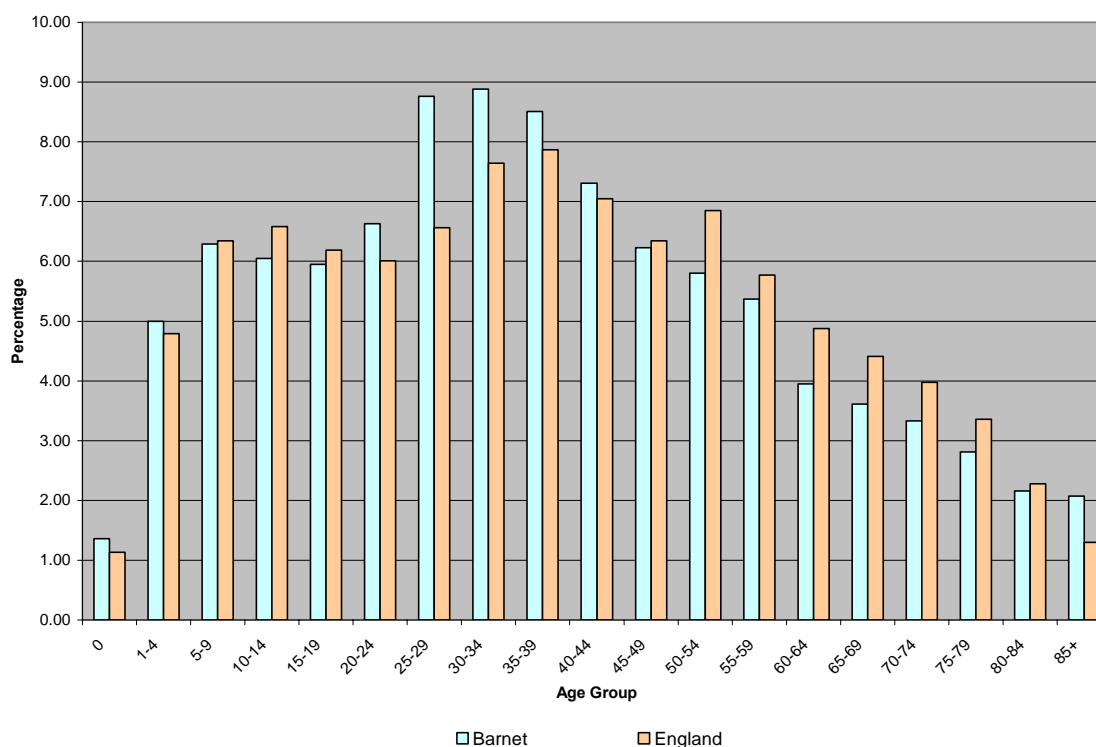
Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

Measure	Barnet	England
Population (mid-2005) ⁴	329,700	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	16.0	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	26.0	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁵	2.5	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁶	212	-

Percentage of the population⁷ in each age group compared with England



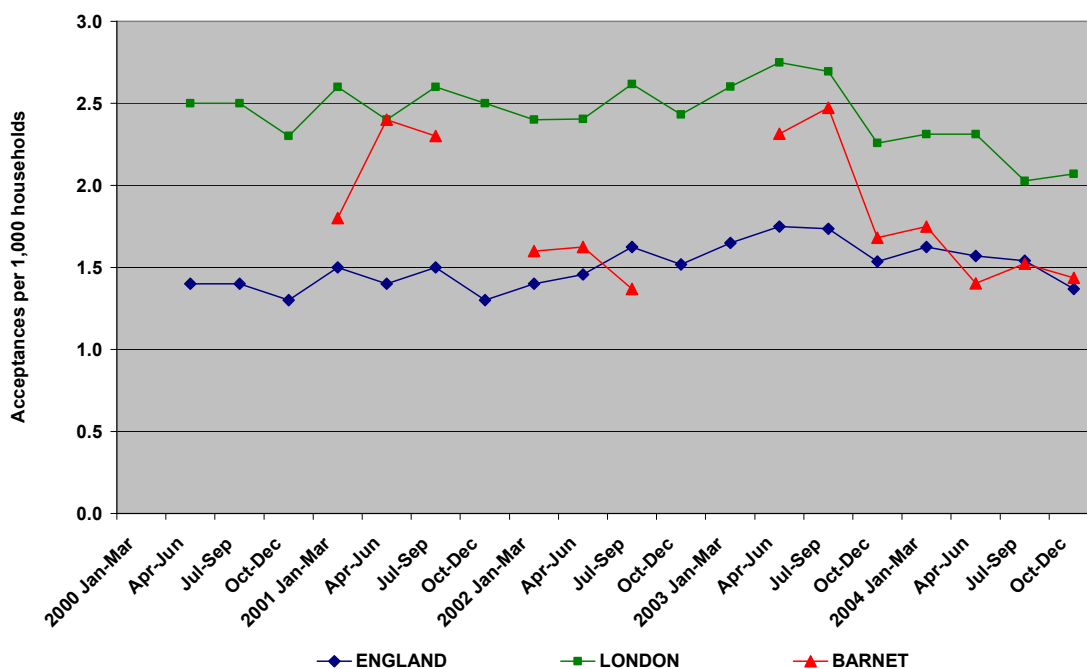
⁴ Source: midyear population estimates (2005)

⁵ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (January 2007)

⁶ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

⁷ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

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

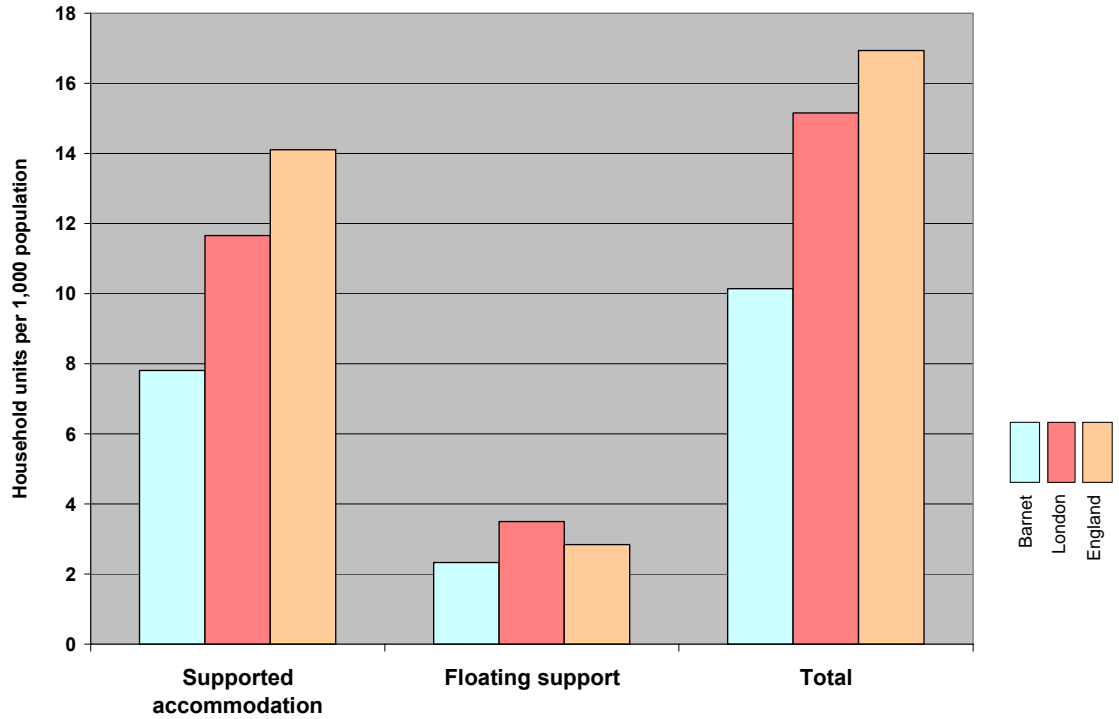


Performance information

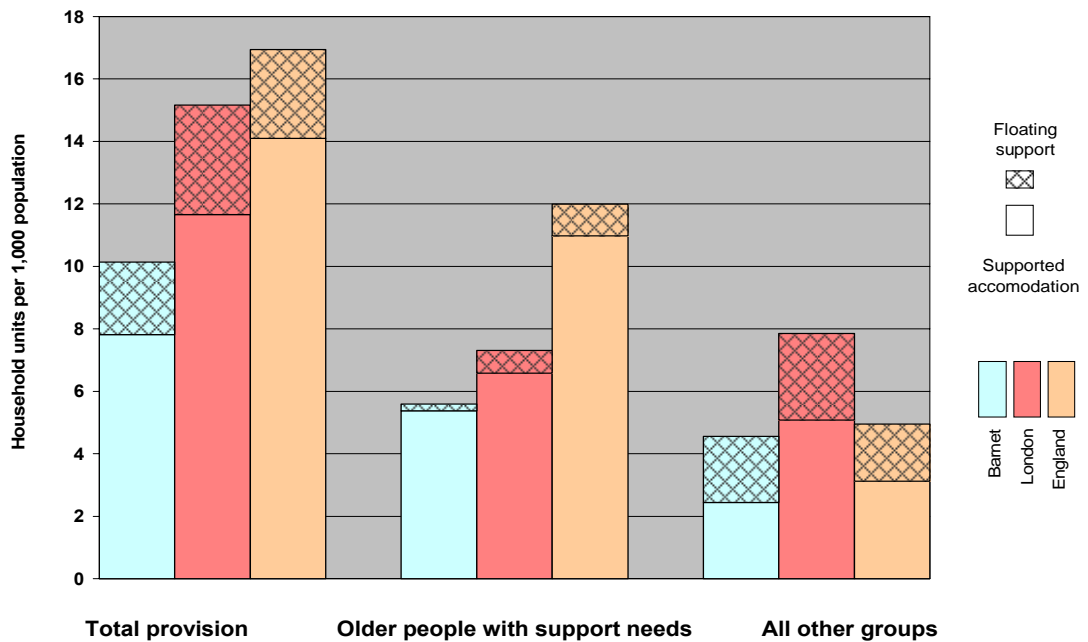
- 2 This section highlights strong and weak areas of the Council’s performance in services that are relevant to Supporting People. We have used the following information to help us reach our judgements:
 - data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment scores;
 - star ratings for social services; and
 - Performance Assessment Framework indicators for social services.

Supporting People data

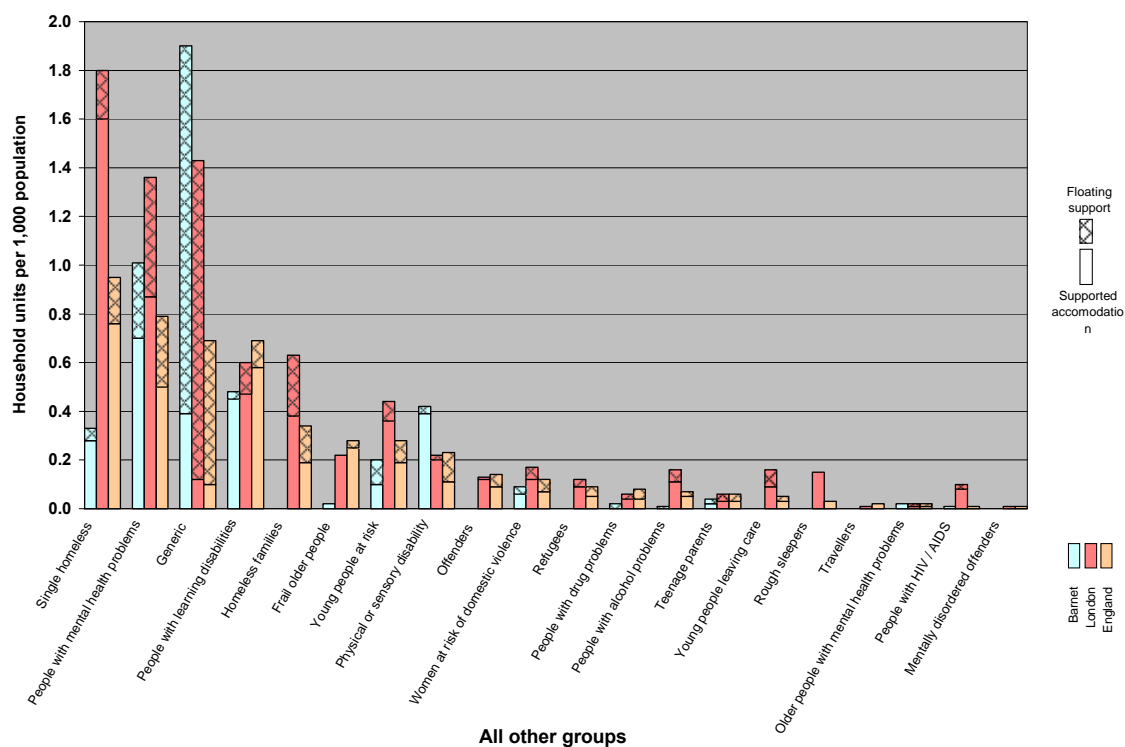
Total service provision funded through Supporting People



Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England



Services for other groups compared with the region and England



Funding for Supporting People⁸

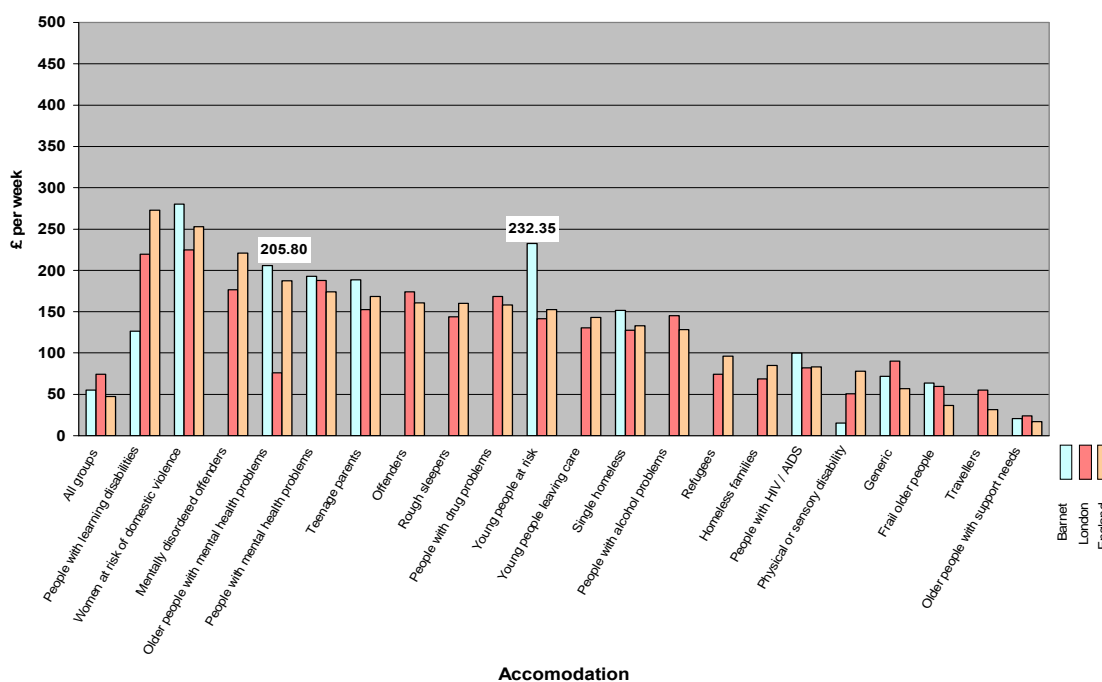
Barnet	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 7,542,572	£ 7,490,689	£ 7,210,584
Pipeline allocation	£ 140,272	£ 235,906	£ -
Administration grant	£ 315,270	£ 225,627	£ 180,502

⁸ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)⁹

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Barnet	£ 0.45	£ 29.30	£ 40.40	£ 71.22
London	£ 0.97	£ 42.37	£ 48.73	£ 68.40
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

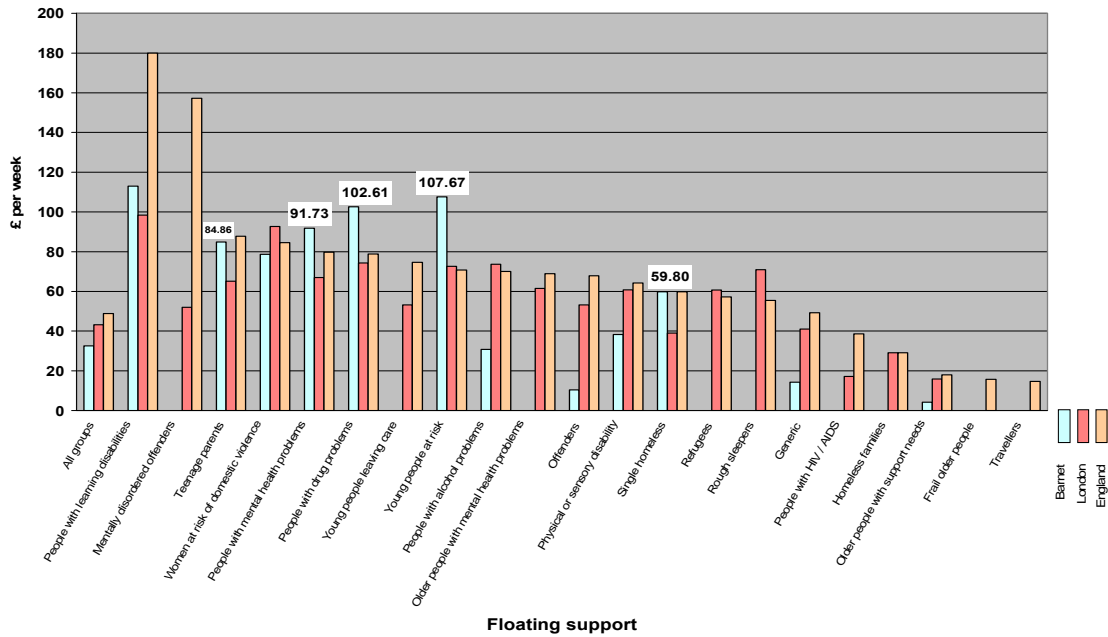
“The data quoted is taken from ODPM sourced material 2003/04. This is the only data currently available. ODPM will be able to provide updated data when it becomes available and this will then be used.”

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁰

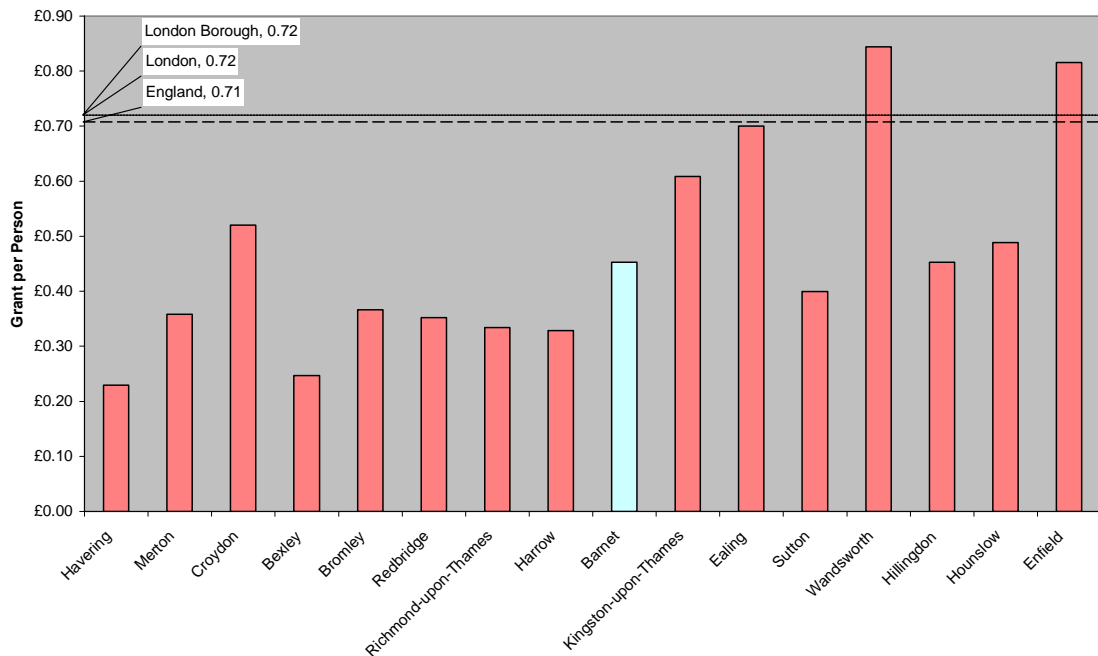
⁹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

¹⁰ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹¹



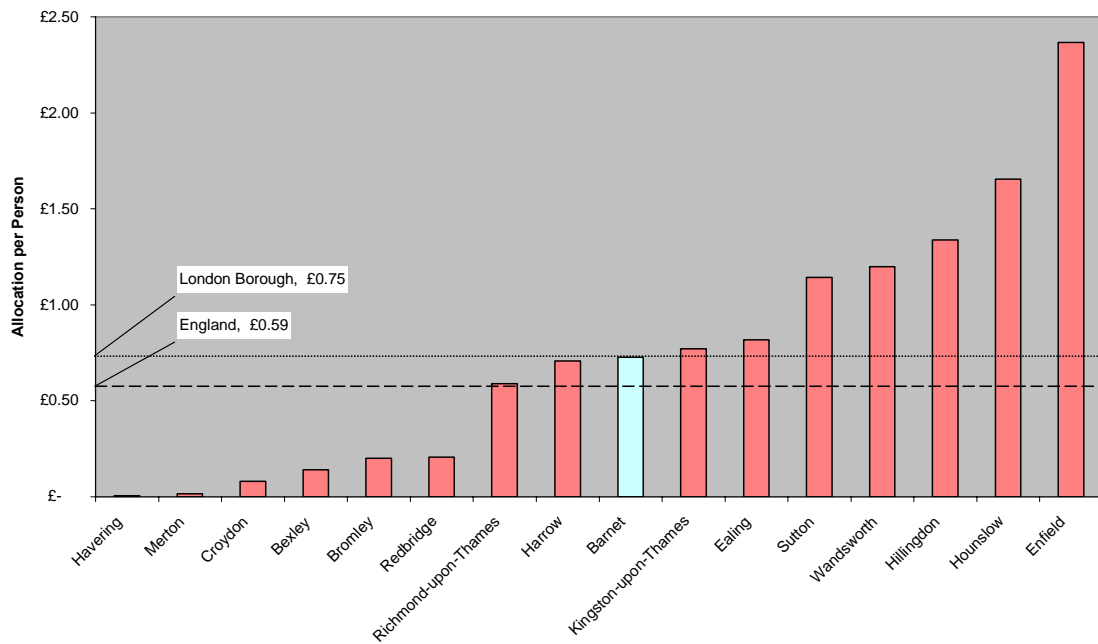
Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹², all London Boroughs and all English councils (2004/05)



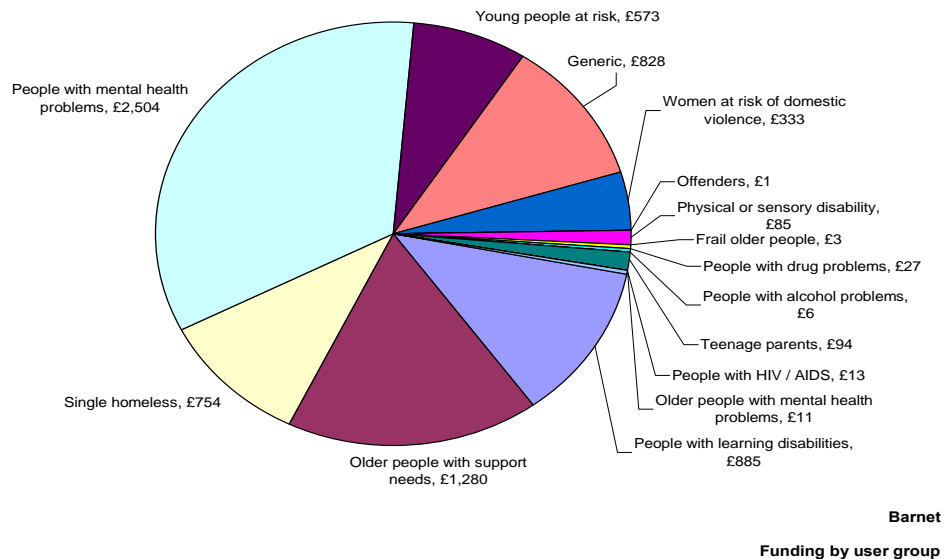
¹¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹² A comparator group of similar councils.

Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹³, all London Boroughs and all English councils



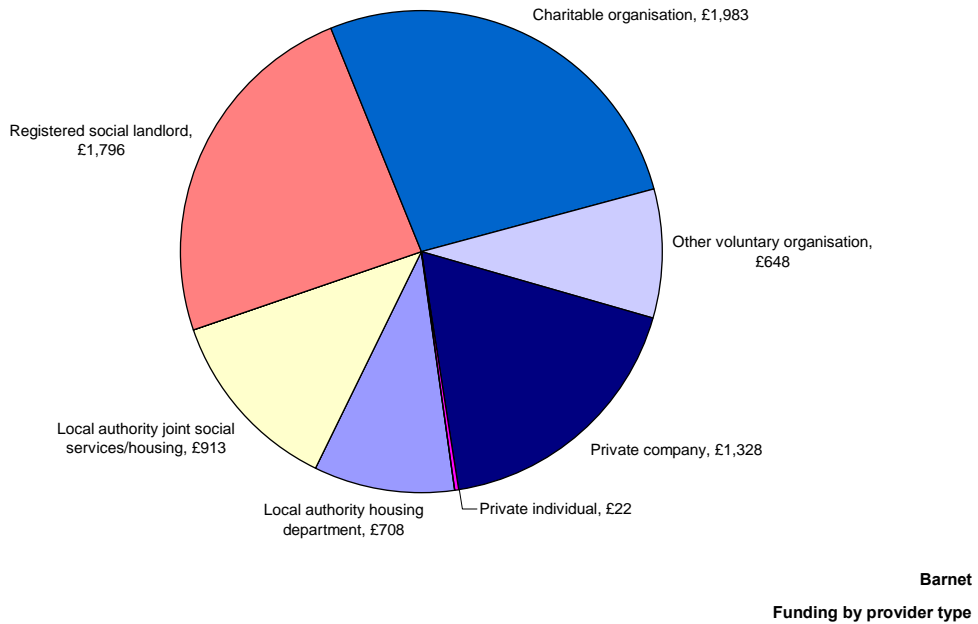
Share of spending between user groups (£000s)¹⁴



¹³ A comparator group of similar councils.

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

Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)¹⁵



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	Some	Promising	✱ (1)
Children’s Services	Some	Promising	

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

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 personnel, including the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group representatives, supporting team members, senior managers, partner organisations, lead Councillors for related areas;
 - visits to a range of services funded by Supporting People grant;
 - mystery shopping telephone calls;
 - focus groups with providers from a range of services and commissioning managers;
 - visits to public offices; and
 - review of leaflets and the Council's website.

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)

Foundation project

- 1 The Foundation Project is a model of positive practice. It has retained 56 people in the private rented sector since the beginning of the service and helped people with considerable difficulties to maintain their tenancies.