

Inspection report

June 2004



Supporting People Programme

Wokingham District Council

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Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

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

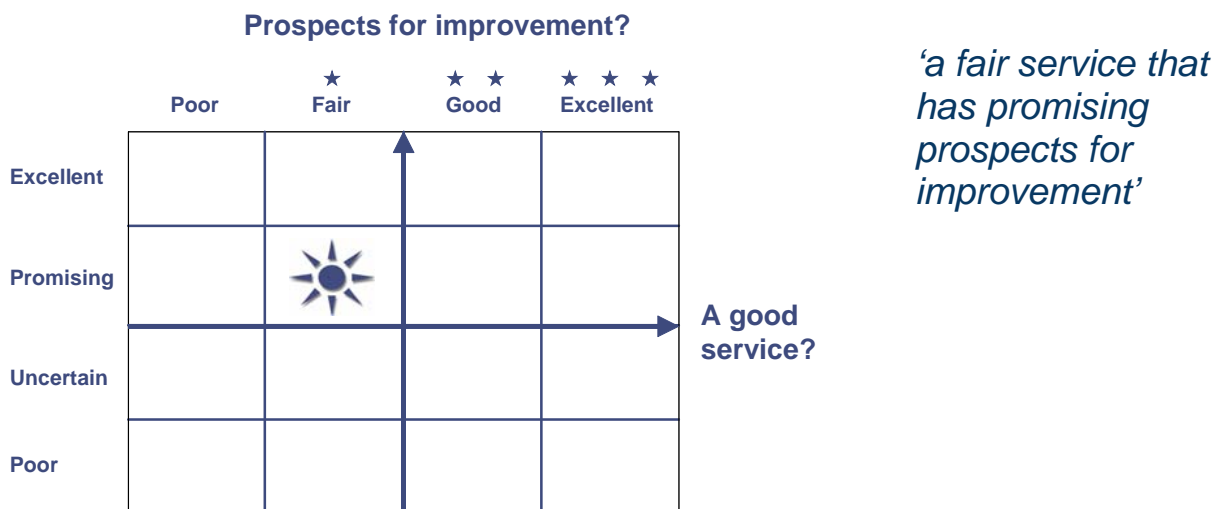
Background

- 5 Wokingham District Council is a unitary council in the south east of England. The population is 151,200 of which 10.1 per cent are from minority ethnic communities (all groups other than white British).
- 6 The council is Conservative led with 33 of the 54 seats. The council employs approximately 5,300 full time equivalent staff across all services, of which 3,800 work in schools.
- 7 Wokingham District Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with Wokingham primary care trust (PCT) and the national probation service Thames Valley area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 8 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2004/05 is £1.7 million. The council has the second lowest grant per head of population in England after the Isles of Scilly. In 2004/05 the council is receiving £125,000 to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 9 The highest cost Supporting People service in Wokingham is £874 per week for supported accommodation for one person with learning disabilities. The lowest cost service is £0.47 per person per week for seven older people living in sheltered housing.

Scoring the service

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

Scoring chart¹: Wokingham District Council - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 11 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date:
- ◆ The council and its partners have set clear aims in the community strategy such as helping more people to live in their own homes, improving health, and preventing homelessness.
 - ◆ Services for women fleeing domestic violence, people with learning disabilities, and people with mental health problems have improved.
 - ◆ Performance in social services is improving, with relatively few older people admitted to residential care and to hospital.
 - ◆ The council's public information is clear, well presented and available in a range of languages and formats. Frontline staff give mainly helpful responses to enquiries.
 - ◆ The council is shifting resources towards preventative services such as extra care sheltered housing, and services to help people live in their own homes.
 - ◆ The council has achieved a smooth implementation of Supporting People programme.
 - ◆ Service providers find the Supporting People team helpful and responsive, and have been paid promptly and accurately.
 - ◆ The service review process is challenging providers to improve standards.
 - ◆ The council has strong links with health services, and in particular works closely with the PCT.

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

Areas for improvement

- 12 However, we found a number of weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed. These include:
- ◆ Wokingham has very low overall provision of Supporting People services, with minimal provision of floating support.
 - ◆ Current provision is almost all for older people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental health problems, with less than 9 per cent of funding going to other groups. This is much lower than at comparable councils and compares to 43 per cent for England as a whole. Most service development in Wokingham has benefited groups who have traditionally been users of mainstream social services.
 - ◆ Wokingham has similar levels of homelessness acceptances to comparable councils, but spends a very low proportion (2 per cent) of Supporting People funding on services for single homeless people and homeless families. This compares to 22 per cent for England as a whole.
 - ◆ The council has not fully investigated and responded to evidence of significant unmet needs. It has not made use of the Supporting People programme to improve services for people from BME communities, homeless people, young people, offenders, or travellers.
 - ◆ The council has made progress with including users in service reviews using a range of methods, but has made only limited use of some good user involvement arrangements already in place.
 - ◆ Access to information about services funded through Supporting People is limited. In particular staff training on domestic violence needs further development. An enquiry to the homelessness team about services and support for women fleeing domestic violence met with an unhelpful response.
 - ◆ Performance on homelessness has been poor, with large numbers of people living in temporary accommodation often outside the district, at a high cost to the council.
 - ◆ The council has not set challenging objectives for Supporting People or shown how the programme will help to deliver corporate aims.
 - ◆ The council has yet to develop clear aims on social inclusion, and has not understood how the Supporting People programme could help to prevent homelessness, reduce crime and improve the life chances for young people.
 - ◆ The council and its partners do not have a comprehensive commissioning strategy for older people's services. The range of services in place includes home care, a preventative OT service and a handyperson scheme. However, there are no plans to develop floating support services which could help older people not eligible for home care to remain at home.
 - ◆ Partnership arrangements for Supporting People need strengthening. The commissioning body is not providing a clear strategic direction for the programme.
 - ◆ The Supporting People IT system is not working, and the council has yet to sign most contracts with service providers.
 - ◆ Service reviews have yet to fundamentally challenge whether services are meeting needs and offer value for money.
- 13 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for delivering further improvements. We found the following strengths:

What works well

- ◆ The council has recognised that it needs to address the current imbalance in service provision, by improving services for groups who are not traditional users of mainstream social care services.
- ◆ The council has recognised that it needs to improve its services for people from BME communities.
- ◆ The council has reduced numbers in temporary accommodation in the last 12 months, and achieved the national target of no families in bed and breakfast for over six weeks by 31 March 2004.
- ◆ The council has set targets to reduce the number of homelessness presentations and to end the use of bed and breakfast by March 2006.
- ◆ The council is working to reduce reliance on residential care, by developing services that enable people to live in their own homes for longer.
- ◆ The council has succeeded in bringing its budget under control. This provides a more stable basis to plan improvements in services.
- ◆ The council and the PCT have recognised the need to strengthen partnership working.
- ◆ The Supporting People team is committed and well organised. Team members have relevant skills and experience.
- ◆ The council has recognised that the Supporting People team lacks the capacity to carry out key tasks and needs to be strengthened.

Areas for improvement

- 14 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve:
- ◆ The council recognises that some people living in Wokingham face social exclusion, but has not explicitly linked the Supporting People programme to its work in this area.
 - ◆ The council has plans to develop floating support services, but these are at a very early stage.
 - ◆ Councillors have yet to be engaged in developing a case for investing in preventative services for underserved groups. Councillors have approved investment in work to prevent homelessness, but this approach could be extended to include further investment in services for BME communities, women fleeing domestic violence, young people, people with drug and alcohol problems, travellers and offenders.
 - ◆ The council has missed opportunities to increase the resources available for the Supporting People programme. The council is now locked in to a very low level of Supporting People grant and will need to find the money to improve services from other budgets.
 - ◆ The council has not focused on making progress with key tasks. It chose to delay starting its review programme and has made limited progress towards developing a robust five-year Supporting People strategy.
 - ◆ Performance management for Supporting People is weak. Other than financial information, there is no formal reporting of performance to the commissioning body. There is no overall project or service plan, although the council intends to put one in place during 2004/05 taking into account the inspection recommendations.

Recommendations

- 15 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations:
- ◆ Take action immediately to improve the response to women fleeing domestic violence by taking steps to ensure that the correct advice is given and that women are given the number for the Berkshire women's aid helpline. Identify and carry out any additional training that may be required to address this issue (by May 2004).
 - ◆ Ensure that service reviews lead to measurable improvements in quality and value for money, by making a strategic assessment of the provision for each user group, investigating whether existing services are appropriate to meet needs, and making rigorous comparisons of unit costs (by September 2004).
 - ◆ Strengthen arrangements for monitoring progress and outcomes from Supporting People and link this to national and local objectives. Ensure that progress and performance is regularly reported to partners, councillors, providers and users (by September 2004).
 - ◆ Review the governance arrangements for Supporting People, including the membership and roles of the commissioning body/core strategy group. Considering best practice elsewhere, assess whether the commissioning body functions should be integrated with the joint commissioning board or similar group with membership at chief executive or director level (by September 2004).
 - ◆ Improve access to services, to ensure that users and potential referrers can easily find out about housing related support services, by producing a directory of housing related support services and including information about relevant services in publications such as the better care, higher standards charter (by March 2005).
 - ◆ Agree priorities, achievable targets and resources for the development and delivery of the five-year Supporting People strategy, after full consultation with service users, providers, and health and probation partners. Carry out research to establish the extent of hidden needs including those of people from Wokingham who are currently living outside the district, and the needs of people from BME communities (by March 2005).
 - ◆ Ensure the five-year strategy makes clear links with related strategies and commissioning plans and shows how the Supporting People programme will help to achieve the council's overall objectives and those of partners. In particular ensure that the role of the Supporting People programme in tackling crime, homelessness, and drug misuse is made clear. Consider providing extra support including external expertise for the Supporting People team with developing the strategy (by March 2005).
 - ◆ Encourage the probation service to give sufficient priority and resources to Supporting People, so that it is integrated into mainstream probation work for staff at operational level, and leads to plans to improve services for offenders (by March 2005).
- 16 We would like to thank the staff of Wokingham District Council, particularly the Supporting People team, Keith Burns and Christine King, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

The locality

- 17 Wokingham District Council is in the south east of England. The population is 151,200, living in 59,000 households. Much of the population lives in the suburban areas of Woodley and Earley which are adjacent to Reading.
- 18 The district has a relatively low population of older people: 12.1 per cent of the population is over 65, compared with 15.9 per cent for England. However, numbers of older people are expected to increase. 10.1 per cent of the population is from minority ethnic communities (all groups other than white British), compared to the England figure of 13.0 per cent. In one ward over 20 per cent of people are from groups other than white British.
- 19 Wokingham is an affluent area. It is ranked the second least deprived district in England on the indices of deprivation 2000. Unemployment is very low at 1.1 per cent, and average household incomes are very high at £49,000. There is a high level of home ownership, with 89 per cent of households in owner occupation. House prices are high. The average price in 2002/03 was £209,260.

The council

- 20 The council has 54 councillors with 33 Conservatives, 20 Liberal Democrats and one vacant seat.
- 21 The council's overall budget for 2004/05 is £137.9 million. This includes £19.0 million for adult social services and £3.3 million for community well-being and partnerships which includes the Supporting People budget. The housing revenue account budget is £9.2 million.
- 22 The council receives significantly less funding from the Government than similar councils due to the affluence of the area. The PCT also faces major financial pressures for the same reason.

Supporting People – housing related support services in Wokingham

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Framework for delivery

- 23 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
 - ◆ Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
 - ◆ Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Councillors: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.
 - ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 24 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each primary

care trust) and the area probation service. In two tier areas each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the administering local authority has a veto where it can demonstrate it faces a financial risk to the administering local authority.

Management Arrangements

- 25 The Supporting People team is located in the council's main offices. The team has two full time equivalent staff, made up of a full-time Supporting People project manager, a part-time project officer and a part-time support officer. The accountable officer for Supporting People is the corporate head of community wellbeing and partnerships, who has a wide range of responsibilities. These include managing the housing service, strategic planning for housing and social services, performance management, and support services.
- 26 The Supporting People commissioning body and the core strategy group are combined. The group meets monthly and is made up of the Supporting People project manager, the accountable officer, a housing strategy officer, a housing development manager representing the probation service, a service development manager representing Wokingham primary care trust (PCT), and two service provider organisations. The group agreed new terms of reference in January 2004, which comply with ODPM grant conditions. External service providers are required to leave the meeting when commissioning decisions are discussed.

Strategy

- 27 In 2002 the council produced a Supporting People strategy for 2003/04 which was approved by the commissioning body. The feedback from ODPM was that the strategy was rated as 'poor' in common with 18 per cent of authorities. The main comments were that the strategy did not make clear the local priorities and did not give a clear direction for the programme. There was little consideration of people with drug and alcohol problems, offenders, and travellers.
- 28 The council and its partners are now starting to develop a five-year strategy which is due to be submitted to ODPM in March 2005.

Services

- 29 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2004/05 is £1.7 million. In 2004/05 the council is receiving £125,000 to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 30 The data appendix at the back of this report shows the overall level of services funded through Supporting People grant and the share of provision between client groups. These figures are based on information submitted to the ODPM in 2003 as part of the reconciliation exercise known as the platinum cut.

How good is the service?

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 31 Inspectors look to see how a council has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.
- 32 Aims need to be challenging, address local needs and support national objectives. This requires the council to consider and demonstrate how a service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans.
- 33 The aims of the service are set out in the council's Supporting People strategy 2003/04. This emphasises the need to promote independence and choice. It includes the following vision statement:

'We aim to provide a high quality, cost effective and accessible service reflecting local need, empowering individuals and enhancing their quality of life.'

- 34 There are also specific aims set for different user groups:
- ◆ Older people: 'Offer supported housing that allows service users to maintain their health and independence'.
 - ◆ People with mental health problems: 'Address the lack of permanent move on accommodation for service users. Ensure move on continues to provide relevant levels of floating support so service users do not find themselves readmitted to hospital'.
- 35 The council has set clear aims which are relevant to Supporting People. These are set out in the community strategy, which includes goals to 'help older people to live for as long as possible in their own environment', 'to prevent and provide for homelessness', 'to maintain the health of the population through prevention of illness' and 'to build up an effective quality partnership with voluntary and community groups'.
- 36 The council's local public service agreement includes targets to increase the numbers of older people helped to live at home, process housing benefits claims faster, and increase the number of people receiving direct payments. It also recognises the need to improve services for people who are socially excluded:

'One consequence of living in an affluent area is the increased marginalisation of socially excluded groups. Increased effort has to be made to ensure their participation and access to services and facilities.' - **Wokingham local public service agreement.**

- 37 However, the council and its partners have not articulated what they want to achieve through the Supporting People programme. The vision statement for Supporting People emphasises choice, independence and value for money. It does not make clear how the programme will lead to better provision for people who are socially excluded. The council has not recognised the opportunity presented by the Supporting People programme to be a driver for improving services for groups such as offenders, travellers, and young people.
- 38 The objectives set for the Supporting People programme are not sufficiently challenging and are not well linked to corporate and community strategy aims. The Supporting People strategy 2003/04 does not make specific links with corporate aims. In particular it is not clear how the Supporting People programme will contribute towards the council's goal of preventing homelessness, or how it will contribute to the goals of partners such as to reduce re-offending. While some goals such as addressing the lack of move-on accommodation are ambitious, they are not supported by targets or other specific commitments. The council has not shown how it will balance this goal against the desire to limit housing growth expressed in the community strategy. As a result the council has not made clear the results it intends to achieve or how these will be delivered.
- 39 Involvement of service users and providers in developing the strategy was limited. Providers took part in meetings which helped to develop the vision statement. The Supporting People team consulted the chairs of planning groups for a range of user groups, attended two meetings of the sheltered housing tenants' forum for and met a number of users through visiting services. However, the strategy does not make clear what was learned and how the council planned to respond to the views of users.
- 40 The council's homelessness strategy has similar weaknesses. It has few specific targets and is not written in plain language. It does not make clear what resources will be committed to making improvements. The council did not consult service users directly before producing the strategy.
- 41 The council has made limited progress towards developing a robust five-year Supporting People strategy. It accepts that the 2003/04 strategy had weaknesses. It saw the strategy as a short-term document needed to meet an ODPM requirement. It has yet to demonstrate what it has learned from the

ODPM assessment of the strategy. Some further needs mapping work is complete but most of the work needed to develop a five-year strategy lies ahead.

- 42 In conclusion, the council has yet to identify a clear sense of purpose and direction for the Supporting People programme. The Supporting People strategy 2003/04 broadly supports corporate and community strategy aims. However, there is a lack of specific and measurable goals. The council has yet to clearly respond to the hidden needs identified in the strategy.

Does the service meet these aims?

- 43 Having considered the aims that the council has set for the service, inspectors make an assessment of how well the council is meeting these aims. This includes an assessment of performance against specific service standards and targets and the council's approach to measuring whether it is actually delivering what it set out to do.
- 44 The assessment was based upon the following key issues:
- ◆ Commissioning services to meet local needs.
 - ◆ User involvement.
 - ◆ Diversity.
 - ◆ Partnership working.
 - ◆ Quality and monitoring.
 - ◆ Outcomes for service users and carers.

Commissioning services to meet local needs

Implementation

- 45 The council has achieved a largely smooth implementation of the Supporting People programme. The Supporting People team has successfully completed several key tasks:
- ◆ The team worked with providers to map the existing service provision. However, some services were not included in the programme as landlords had not completed deeds of variation to tenancies. This meant that service users who would otherwise have been eligible could not claim transitional housing benefit, and therefore do not get Supporting People funding.
 - ◆ The team worked closely with the council's benefit service to ensure that claims for transitional housing benefit were correctly processed, with enforcement of the eligibility criteria in place at the time.
 - ◆ The council overcame a backlog of claims for transitional housing benefit with the result that most were processed in time to meet the ODPM deadline of 31 May 2003.
- 46 Providers find the Supporting People team helpful and responsive. All providers we met during our inspection told us that the team is easy to contact and provides a quick response to enquiries.
- 47 Arrangements for paying providers work well. Providers report that payments are accurate and timely. This has been achieved despite problems with implementing the Supporting People IT system. The team has ensured that payments remain accurate when users move in or out of supported accommodation. The Supporting People team continues to work closely with the council's benefits department and has a system in place to share data. This helps to identify new users who have not been notified by providers and people who have yet to claim housing benefit.
- 48 Contracts for providers have yet to be finalised. The council has produced interim contracts and these have been signed by all providers. The contracts accurately

reflect the services being provided and form a sound basis for accurate payments. However, by March 2004, the council had only signed 3 of 24 contracts, due to a lack of clarity over who should sign them. This is not causing concern among providers but demonstrates a need to ensure that corporate systems enable the Supporting People team to complete key tasks.

- 49 IT arrangements are unsatisfactory. The Supporting People IT system is not yet working, over one year after the start of the Supporting People programme. This is due to a wider problem not under the control of the Supporting People team which means that the council's information system for social services does not link to its corporate payment system. As a result the Supporting People IT system cannot be used to make payments to providers. The Supporting People team have continued to use the Supporting People interim IT system to make payments. The team are also not making use of the IT system for recording performance information and producing reports.

Identifying needs

- 50 The council made an early start with work to identify needs. It took part in a pilot needs mapping exercise for the Supporting People programme in 2001. The research provides a useful base of information for future planning. It identified unmet needs for a home improvement agency, direct access accommodation, services for people from BME communities and supported accommodation for people over 25. The council has since carried out further research to identify unmet needs among people with mental health problems.
- 51 The council has not fully investigated evidence of significant unmet need for housing related support services in Wokingham. In 2002 work by the Supporting People team found little evidence of people from Wokingham using short term supported accommodation in Reading. Data from the ODPM for April to December 2003 shows only nine new service users from Wokingham moving to Supporting People funded services outside the district. However, this may be an underestimate as some short term services are not collecting this information.
- 52 A range of other evidence points to significant unmet needs:
- ◆ The provision of Supporting People-funded services in Wokingham is low in comparison with similar councils such as the neighbouring areas of West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead and Bracknell Forest.
 - ◆ Current provision is almost all for older people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental health problems, with less than 9 per cent of funding going to other groups. This is much lower than at comparable councils and compares to 26 per cent in West Berkshire, 31 per cent in Bracknell Forest, 36 per cent in Windsor and Maidenhead, and 43 per cent for England as a whole.
 - ◆ Wokingham has similar levels of homelessness acceptances to comparable councils, but spends a much lower proportion (2 per cent) of Supporting People funding on services for single homeless people and homeless families. This compares to 5 per cent in Bracknell Forest, 16 per cent in Windsor and Maidenhead and West Berkshire, and 18 per cent in England as a whole.
 - ◆ The council's needs mapping research highlighted a tendency for needs to remain hidden, which the council recognised in its Supporting People strategy:

'The hidden homelessness issue proved difficult to quantify as many people moved away due to a lack of service provision in Wokingham. Wokingham individuals often are unable to find appropriate supported housing within the area and move elsewhere. This was evidenced across all client groups'. - Supporting People strategy 2003/04.

- ◆ Around 300 people present as homeless to the council each year, many of whom are likely to have support needs. Of these, around 100 are accepted as being homeless and in priority need. The rate of homelessness acceptances increased sharply in the last two years and in mid 2003 was close to the average for the south east. Previously the council had incorrectly rejected applications, which artificially depressed the figures. Recently acceptances have fallen.
- ◆ Research by the council on the needs of people with mental health problems have found that significant numbers were not known to the community mental health team, some of whom have presented to the council as homeless.
- ◆ The council has placed high numbers of people in temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast. This accommodation is mainly outside the district, and has limited access to support services. As a result, people likely to have support needs have not been receiving services, and are not included in estimates of needs.
- ◆ Providers and other stakeholders can point to examples of people from Wokingham who are accessing services elsewhere. Advice agencies report that they deal with significant numbers of people who are accessing services outside the district.
- ◆ People with support needs who move to live outside Wokingham will become ordinary residents in the place where they live, unless the council has accepted them as homeless. Responsibility for meeting their needs will then fall upon the council where they are living, so that they do not appear in estimates of needs.

53 The lack of hard data on the extent of unmet needs means that the council does not have robust evidence on needs on which to plan future services.

Commissioning

- 54 The Supporting People team is well linked to commissioning and planning mechanisms. The team is located in the council's main office, giving easy access to key managers in social services and housing. The Supporting People manager has taken part in planning groups for service for a range of user groups. Despite this, links with housing managers are not sufficiently strong, with the result that managers do not have a clear picture of how the Supporting People programme will contribute to work to prevent homelessness.
- 55 The council is shifting resources towards preventative services. It has developed an 'invest to contain' financial model covering homelessness prevention, services for people with learning disabilities and people with mental health problems, and services for older people. This aims to contain or reduce homelessness acceptances, and placements in residential and nursing care. These plans form part of the council's three-year revenue and capital strategy.
- 56 Arrangements for joint commissioning of health and social care services need to be strengthened. The current arrangements include planning groups for mental health, learning disability services, older people, physical disability and other groups, together with a local joint planning group which is intended to cover cross-cutting issues, and a joint commissioning board which includes the chief executives of the council and the PCT. Strategic planning also takes place through the west partnership board which covers the West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham areas. The council and the PCT have begun work to review these arrangements. In particular, the role and remit of the joint commissioning board and the local joint planning group are not sufficiently clear.
- 57 Strategic commissioning plans are not fully developed. There is no comprehensive commissioning strategy for older people, which would cover housing, social care and support services. The council has made good progress on several key elements including plans to develop extra care housing and the

home improvement agency bid. However, it is not clear what plans are in place to develop services already in places such as community alarms and the handy person service, and to develop floating support services aimed at homeowners.

- 58 The council has adopted a cautious approach to developing services through the Supporting People programme. A number of providers and stakeholders told us that the council did not encourage them to submit proposals for developing services. Providers and partners have low expectations of what improvements can be achieved. The council's view is that its approach is justified by the subsequent financial pressures on the Supporting People programme nationally:

'Since initiating our preparations for Supporting People in early 2001 we have always been concerned that there was a real risk that the programme at a national level would not be fully funded. We have always, therefore, adopted a fairly prudent approach to service development growth, as a means of mitigating any risk arising from the setting of a savings target. It is our view that the savings target for 2003/04 and now the independent review justify this prudence'. - Council self assessment.

- 59 However, given the very low base of services in Wokingham this overstates the risk to the council. Effectively, the council has chosen not to increase funding for Supporting People services to avoid a risk of having to make savings. The actual efficiency savings the ODPM has required are relatively small. In practice the council has been easily able to absorb these. Despite the freezing of the Supporting People grant, the council has been able to pay from within the Supporting People budget an inflation increase for providers in 2004/05.

- 60 The council has planned and implemented improvements in services for some groups. These developments include:

- ◆ supported housing for people with learning disabilities including accommodation to replace a local authority hostel and eight new self-contained flats on the former hostel site;
- ◆ supported accommodation for six people with mental health problems;
- ◆ three women's refuge places;
- ◆ plans to refurbish existing sheltered housing and develop extra care sheltered housing; and
- ◆ a bid to the ODPM which has succeeded in obtaining part funding for a home improvement agency, which will also receive funding from the council.

- 61 However, with the exception of the refuge, all these initiatives are aimed at improving services for people who are users of mainstream social care services. There has been no development of Supporting People funded services for other groups including offenders, young people, single homeless people or homeless families. There is a tenancy sustainment worker for people with drug and alcohol problems, but this service was already in place; Supporting People funding has replaced money previously provided through the drug action team. An obvious source of unmet need would be people placed in temporary accommodation who have support needs. As the council has placed many people in bed and breakfast accommodation outside the district, some potential users are likely to have been excluded.

- 62 The council has had limited success in developing floating support services aimed at people living in their own homes. The council has identified this as a priority. The council attempted to develop a floating support service through a bid to the ODPM for Supporting People pipeline grant. However, this did not succeed as the ODPM subsequently decided only to accept bids linked to accommodation. This decision in March 2003 left too little time to develop a service through transitional housing benefit. The lack of available move-on accommodation in the district would in any case have restricted the number of

people eligible for a service. The council did not explore opportunities to work together with neighbouring councils to develop a viable floating support service.

- 63 The council missed opportunities to develop or enhance support services at existing accommodation:
- ◆ The only short-term accommodation for young single people is provided by Sanctuary Housing Association. This service provides one member of staff in the day and no night staff. The low level of staffing means that this service is not able to house people with complex needs.
 - ◆ The council's hostel for homeless families has no support funded through Supporting People. This service has had a history of problems due to low support levels. The council has employed a housing officer for temporary accommodation whose role includes this service and also plans to provide a live-in volunteer. However, the service remains unsuitable for people with significant support needs, such as people with serious drug and alcohol problems, or severe mental health problems.
- 64 There have been no developments in services for offenders. The Supporting People strategy for 2003/04 omitted any reference to the needs of offenders or those at risk of offending. The probation service provided evidence of need during the development of this strategy, but it is unclear how this information has been used.
- 65 Information from the probation service continues to highlight the lack of suitable accommodation in Wokingham and provides evidence of a need for services, in particular for people with a chaotic drug history and high risk offenders. The gaps identified include a need for direct access provision, floating support services and more use of the rent deposit guarantee schemes through private sector landlords. Information forwarded to the council in January 2004 highlighted that within the Thames Valley probation area, one third of offenders under supervision are homeless or in unsatisfactory housing. Of offenders from Wokingham given drug treatment and testing orders, one person per month is currently being housed outside the district due to a lack of suitable accommodation. This reinforces well-documented research highlighting that an increase in the likelihood of re-offending can be attributed to a lack of settled accommodation. There has been no joint work with other councils to plan how to meet the needs of offenders.

User involvement and access to services

- 66 The council has improved user and carer involvement in planning social care and health services. The council funds an advocacy service for people with learning disabilities. The learning disability partnership board has user and carer representatives, with users supported by advocates. There are arrangements in place for other user groups. However, the council needs to do more work to engage with people who are socially excluded and who are unlikely to take part in formal consultation exercises. For example, there is no advocacy organisation in place for people with mental health problems. The council is establishing a housing forum for young people, which is a welcome development.
- 67 User involvement in the Supporting People programme needs further development. The council has not made full use of arrangements already in place for consulting users and carers. Direct consultation with users has mainly been through visiting services. The Supporting People team has developed a range of methods for involving users in service reviews, including questionnaires, and meetings with users, and includes care managers in the review process. These methods work well for some people, but other approaches are needed to involve people who are not easily able to advocate for themselves, who may lack confidence to raise concerns, or who are not currently using services. Some people will need access to training and independent advocacy to enable them to voice their views and feel confident to raise concerns.

- 68 The council has relied mainly on council and provider managers and providers to act as a proxy for user involvement in identifying needs and planning services. An example is the work done on identifying unmet needs for people with mental health problems, which was led by a carer, but did not involve users. The council has not made clear how it is responding to users' views, and how users have influenced decisions about priorities.
- 69 The council's public information is clear and well presented. The better care, higher standards charter for Wokingham provides information about a wide range of health and social care services, and services provided by the voluntary sector, and explains how to make complaints. The council has produced a leaflet about Supporting People and a leaflet to explain service reviews to users. Both are clear and well written. The review leaflet is sent to all service users before a review takes place. A version of the Supporting People service review leaflet has been produced specifically for people with learning disabilities.
- 70 Public information is available in a range of formats. The council uses an interpreting and translating service which is available on request. Information leaflets have straplines advertising this service in four languages. The better care, higher standards charter states that copies are available on tape and in large print, although this is not advertised prominently. The council has produced a user friendly version of its valuing people implementation plan for people with learning disabilities using pictures and plain language. However, the leaflets on Supporting People do not state that they are available in other formats.
- 71 Access to information about services funded through the Supporting People programme is limited. There is no directory of services which could be used by users, carers or professionals. The better care, higher standards charter produced in 2003 includes relevant information about sheltered housing, disabled facilities grants, renovation and repair grants and handyperson services. However, services such as community alarms, supported accommodation for groups other than older people, and services for people with drug and alcohol problems are not included. Despite attempts to promote fairer charging assessments, take-up by users of Supporting People services has been low. There is a risk that some people may miss out on benefits to which they are entitled and may pay higher charges than they need to.
- 72 The council provides a generally helpful response to people seeking advice and information. Users and stakeholders told us of positive experiences of contacting the council. We tested access to information by visiting council reception areas and phoning the council to make enquiries. Staff we spoke to were helpful, and provided some useful information such as contacts for Age Concern. However, information about services such as community alarms and sheltered housing was not given until prompted. Information displays in the council's main reception area could be improved to make the relevant information easier to find.
- 73 The council's response to women fleeing domestic violence has improved, but staff training needs further development. The council works closely with other agencies including Berkshire women's aid who provide a helpline, refuge accommodation and outreach workers. The relationship with women's aid is excellent and has led to good outcomes for women facing extremely complex situations. The domestic violence forum has produced practice guidance for staff. However, we found that the section of the guidance applying to the housing needs team does not clearly state that women should always be given the helpline number. There has been no recent training for staff in the homelessness team on domestic violence and the use of the guidance. An enquiry to the homelessness team about services and support for women fleeing domestic violence met with an unhelpful response. We were told that if the woman was a homeowner she would need to get an injunction against a violent partner. No information was given about other options or about the advice and support services available and the phone number of Berkshire women's aid was only given when prompted. We were told that the woman would need to make an

appointment to see the homelessness team. This could discourage a woman in a violent situation from seeking help, and failed to take account of the urgency of the situation and possible risks to the woman and her children.

Diversity

- 74 Services for people from BME communities are not well developed. In 2001 the council commissioned research which showed that people from BME communities mainly live in the parts of the district adjacent to Reading and tend to rely on services and community organisations based in Reading. The only examples of services funded by the council which are specifically aimed at minority communities are a lunch club run by the Indian Community Association and a specialist organisation providing accommodation for Jewish people with learning disabilities. The council is taking action to help ensure that its services are geared to the needs of BME communities, for example by providing training for home care staff. However, these initiatives have yet to be extended to services funded through Supporting People. While service reviews will address diversity as part of the quality assessment framework, there are as yet no relevant examples of improvements to services funded through Supporting People resulting from reviews.
- 75 There has been limited development of services for groups who are not users of mainstream social care services. There are two sites for travellers in Wokingham and the council has recently appointed a travellers liaison worker. There are thought to be very low numbers of people with HIV/AIDS and no specific services are in place. No Supporting People funding is currently spent on services for these groups.

Partnership working

- 76 There are strong links between the council and health services. The council and Wokingham primary care trust (PCT) work together closely at strategic level and there are good links between operational managers. The PCT has taken part consistently in the Supporting People commissioning body. However, the PCT representative is an operational manager whose main responsibility is commissioning nursing homes. This manager has no delegated responsibility to make decisions. The PCT is recruiting new senior managers and is considering providing a representative at director level to the Supporting People commissioning body.
- 77 Links with the voluntary sector are strong. The community strategy has a strong emphasis on developing voluntary organisations, and these are actively involved in the local strategic partnership. The council has recently agreed a compact with voluntary organisations which states how it will consult and work with the voluntary sector. Organisations taking part in the inspection were concerned about low levels of grants they receive from the council. Several local organisations provide services such as lunch clubs, day care and handyperson services which help to maintain independence. However, the council has made only limited use of the opportunity to work with these local community groups to develop housing related support services. Groups such as the Age Concern and the Indian community association may be well placed to develop such services. Only one locally based organisation, Berkshire women's aid, receives funding through the Supporting People programme.
- 78 There are very good working relationships with service providers. Providers have been involved through two forum meetings per year, visits from the Supporting People team, and other contacts. There are also annual conferences organised across the six unitary councils in Berkshire, to inform providers about developments in the Supporting People programme. This approach is sensible as most providers have services across the area. Currently two service providers are members of the core strategy group.

- 79 Links with neighbouring councils are well established. A cross-authority group covering the six Berkshire councils has met regularly since mid 2001. Following new guidance from the ODPM, the group is now being expanded to include Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. The group produced a cross-authority statement which was included in the council's Supporting People strategy for 2003/04. However, work to develop a cross-authority protocol has yet to be completed. This is needed to clarify which council is responsible for funding services and providing move-on accommodation when service users move across council boundaries.
- 80 Progress with developing plans with neighbouring councils on Supporting People is limited. The council is working with Reading Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council to develop a home improvement agency. The council has not explored the scope to develop housing related support services in partnership with its neighbours for groups such as single homeless people, young people, teenage parents or travellers, or people from BME communities. Economies of scale would make services more viable if they covered more than one council.
- 81 The Supporting People partnership arrangements are not well integrated with strategic commissioning arrangements. The core strategy group and commissioning body functions are carried out by one group. The terms of reference for the commissioning body are in line with Supporting People grant conditions. However, other than the accountable officer, the commissioning body includes no managers from the council or its partners who are responsible for strategic decision-making. In the current commissioning arrangements, the commissioning body operates at the same level as other planning groups such as those for older people and people with mental health problems. The main link with strategic groups such as the joint commissioning board and the local strategic partnerships is through the accountable officer. As a result, the combined commissioning body/core strategy group is not in a good position to make decisions and give strategic direction to the programme. The group has yet to develop a clear role as a commissioning body.
- 82 Representation from the probation service is not at a senior management level. Currently the probation service has three housing development managers responsible for Supporting People across the Thames Valley probation area. This includes six unitary councils in Berkshire, two county councils and Milton Keynes. However, from mid 2004, there will be only one manager responsible for the entire probation area. This will reduce the capacity of the probation service to contribute to the programme during the development of the five-year Supporting People strategy, and to play an effective role in the commissioning body. The staffing changes will remove from Wokingham a probation resource dedicated to the housing needs of offenders. This is of concern as it is not clear that the probation service will be able to advocate effectively to commission new services, achieve service improvements or contribute to reviews. In the light of imminent staffing changes, a review of the capacity and resources able to be dedicated to Supporting People from the probation service is urgently required².

Quality and monitoring

- 83 There are effective arrangements in place for high risk offenders. The council and health services have signed the multi-agency public protection (MAPP) protocol which governs information sharing about high risk offenders. An assistant chief officer of probation is responsible for managing the MAPP arrangements. In 2002/03 539 offenders were referred to the MAPP panel for the Thames Valley, although no high risk offenders were housed in Wokingham.

² The National Probation Service - Thames Valley does not accept these conclusions.

- 84 Service reviews are challenging providers to improve service quality. In the work completed so far the team have made detailed assessments using the ODPM quality assessment framework (QAF). All providers will complete self assessments against the standards in the QAF at an early stage. This is a positive move which is likely to help providers to reach the required standards before reviews take place. Early reviews demonstrate that the council has responded in an appropriate way to issues raised by users and carers, and is working with providers to improve practice.
- 85 The methodology for service reviews is not yet fully developed. The Supporting People team has produced an outline of all stages of the review process, but there is no more detailed guidance for the team or for providers. The council carried out a pilot service review at an early stage but has not made full use of this opportunity to work through all stages of a review. As a result there is no template for reports to the commissioning body which could make clear what information needs to be included, and make clear the basis for commissioning decisions.
- 86 Service reviews do not fundamentally challenge whether services are meeting needs. The reviews completed so far do not assess the need for the service or whether it is eligible for Supporting People funding. The team requires providers to complete the strategic relevance questionnaire published by the ODPM, which includes an assessment of whether the service is providing social care and other ineligible services. It is not clear how the council will use this information, as no completed service reviews have been reported to the commissioning body. More attention is needed in reviews to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people from BME communities, and whether staff practice is culturally sensitive.
- 87 Service reviews do not address value for money. The council is not using the published ODPM framework for comparing costs of services against regional and national benchmarks. There is no work being carried out to investigate the costs of services currently due for review. The council has yet to begin investigating the high costs of some services for people with learning disabilities to identify whether these services are eligible for Supporting People funding. It has also yet to assess whether accommodation designated as very sheltered housing is in fact providing a higher than normal level of support. As a result, the council is missing opportunities to get more for the money it receives in Supporting People grant.
- 88 Progress with service reviews has been slow. The review programme reflects risks and costs, with services for people with learning disabilities being reviewed first. The council's original review programme published in the Supporting People strategy 2003/04 required review of services for people with learning disabilities to be carried out in 2003/04. However, under the current review programme no reviews were due to start until January 2004. By the end of March 2004, no reviews had been fully completed, and the team had made validation visits to only two of the ten services where reviews were due to start in 2003/04. As a result, the council is unlikely to deliver the reviews planned in 2004/05.
- 89 The council has not made an up to date assessment of risks relating to the Supporting People programme. The council produced an assessment of risks at an early stage which is included in the Supporting People strategy 2003/04. This covered financial risks, implementation of the IT system, fairer charging and other implementation issues. The council included potential under-funding of the Supporting People grant as a high risk on its corporate financial risk register for 2004/05. However, the original risk assessment has not been updated and the council lacks adequate contingency plans for some key issues. This is a concern as the Supporting People team is small and there is a high risk of unforeseen events diverting the team from completing key tasks. Examples include the impact of the delays in IT implementation, the potential for delays in completing reviews, the impact of complaints and abuse cases and the consequences of the

failure of a provider. The council has also not identified the risk that some services may be providing social care or other services not eligible for Supporting People funding. The council may find the ODPM risk management practice aid produced in November 2003 a useful guide.

- 90 Performance management of the Supporting People programme is weak. Other than financial information, there is no formal reporting of performance to the commissioning body. The Supporting People team is collecting the performance indicators required by the ODPM, but has not produced any performance reports for the commissioning body. There is no overall project or service plan. The team did not produce an annual service plan for 2003/04, and no service plan has been developed for 2004/05. The council intends to put one in place during 2004/05 taking into account the inspection recommendations. As a result the commissioning body cannot provide effective monitoring of progress.

Outcomes for service users and carers

- 91 The council has worked with providers to develop some good new services which can demonstrate good outcomes for users. These include the refuge provided by Berkshire women's aid and supported housing for people with mental health problems. The council has replaced a council run hostel for people with learning disabilities and developed new supported accommodation. This has improved the quality of service and enabled eight people with learning disabilities to live in new self-contained flats with support provided.

Supporting People Case Study 1

Service User Group: *Domestic Violence*

Type of service: *Accommodation based*

Key players: Service provider, health services, social services, housing.

Issues addressed:

A pregnant woman seeking asylum in the UK and living with a host family was in an abusive relationship with her partner. She felt unable to escape the situation. She was very fearful of the abuse but was also concerned about her immigration status. She was therefore very reluctant to get in touch with statutory agencies or tell anyone of her situation. She needed a safe place to live while she established her immigration status and had her baby.

Action taken:

She was referred to Berkshire women's aid via health services, and accommodated in a women's refuge.

Outcomes for service user/s:

She has been helped to rebuild her confidence and has been able to develop independent living skills.

She has given birth to her child and has been assisted in developing links with other services.

She has been assisted in contacting immigration services about her status so that it is dealt with in an appropriate way which means she is no longer afraid.

She is being supported in her application for asylum and eventual resettlement to permanent accommodation.

- 92 The lack of suitable temporary accommodation in Wokingham has meant that people needing support were placed in bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation outside the district. This can be for long periods. In 2002/03, the average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation was 8 weeks and in

hostel accommodation 28 weeks. This is undesirable as it removes people from their natural support networks, and also means that the responsibility for providing education, health and social services is transferred to other councils.

- 93 The council has reduced numbers in temporary accommodation in the last 12 months, and achieved the national target of no families in bed and breakfast for over six weeks by 31 March 2004. However, as recently as September 2003, there were 21 families in bed and breakfast and 15 households had been in bed and breakfast for over 15 weeks.
- 94 Some services have high costs. Unit costs of supported accommodation for older people are in the highest 25 per cent for the south east. Some accommodation for people with learning disabilities receives Supporting People grant between £500 and £900 per person per week. Some of these services previously received funding from social care budgets and in at least two cases there is no revenue funding from sources other than Supporting People. This raises questions about the eligibility of these services for Supporting People funding. Services that do not have additional funding to pay for social care (such as accompanying users on trips and holidays) may be at risk when reviewed.

How does the performance compare?

- 95 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.
- 96 Where possible, we have compared the council with other councils in its Audit Commission family group (councils with similar general characteristics). We have also compared the council with the best and worst performing 25 per cent of unitary councils for that indicator.
- 97 Wokingham has very low overall provision of Supporting People services, with minimal provision of floating support. This is the case for all groups including older people. There is much lower provision in Wokingham than for similar councils within the family group. No services exist for offenders, single homeless people over 25, teenage parents or homeless families. At the start of the Supporting People programme in April 2003 around 91 per cent of Supporting People funding was spent on services for people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems and older people, with only around £62,000 per year available for other groups. No services exist for offenders, single homeless people over 25, teenage parents, homeless families, young people leaving care, travellers, refugees, or people with HIV/AIDS.
- 98 Costs are relatively high. Overall unit costs are above average, and unit costs of supported accommodation for older people are in highest 25 per cent. Some accommodation designated as very sheltered housing does not appear to provide extra support services, despite having higher than average costs. Over half the total funding was spent on services for 56 people with learning disabilities.
- 99 Performance in social services has improved. In 2002/03 the council had low numbers of older people admitted to residential and nursing care and preventable hospital admissions for older people were also low.
- 100 Performance on homelessness has been poor. In 2002/03 the council was in the worst 25 per cent of unitary councils for length of stay in bed and breakfast and other temporary accommodation. At one stage in 2003/04 there were over 100 households in temporary accommodation and 48 households in bed and breakfast. Recently these figures have improved. At the end of March 2004, 79 households were in temporary accommodation, including 17 in bed and breakfast accommodation. The council has reduced numbers in temporary accommodation

in the last 12 months, and achieved the national target of no families in bed and breakfast for over six weeks by 31 March 2004. Homelessness acceptances have also dropped significantly.

- 101 Performance on housing benefit has been poor. In 2002/03 the council was in the worst 25 per cent of unitary councils for speed of processing claims. Delays can lead to tenants getting into rent arrears, and deter private sector landlords from accepting tenants on low incomes. The council has worked hard to address these problems, and recent performance has improved significantly.

Summary

- 102 The council has achieved a smooth implementation of Supporting People programme. Service providers find the Supporting People team helpful and responsive. There have been some improvements including a new domestic violence refuge, better services for people with learning disabilities and accommodation for people with mental health problems. The service review process is challenging providers to improve standards.
- 103 However, the council has not made clear the results it wants to achieve through Supporting People. The council has yet to develop clear aims on social inclusion and has not understood how the Supporting People programme could help to prevent homelessness, reduce crime and improve the life chances for young people. Partnership arrangements for Supporting People need strengthening. The council has not fully investigated evidence of significant unmet needs and there are many gaps in services. Service reviews have yet to fundamentally challenge whether services are meeting needs, meet eligibility criteria and represent value for money.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

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

Ownership of problems and willingness to change

- 105 The council and the PCT have recognised the need to strengthen partnership working. The council and the PCT are reviewing the structures for joint planning and commissioning, but so far have not reviewed the effectiveness of the combined Supporting People commissioning body and core strategy group. The most appropriate group in the current structure for strategic decision-making is the joint commissioning board, but the probation service is not currently represented.
- 106 The council has recognised that it needs to improve its services for people from BME communities. It has developed an active BME forum which has the support of key councillors and senior managers. This is helping the council to demonstrate its commitment to improve, and to change the way it provides its services. Results include a commitment to revise the community strategy to include a chapter on social inclusion.
- 107 The council recognises that the community strategy does not have clear aims to reduce social exclusion. It has started work to develop a new section for the community strategy which will guide how the council and its partners will ensure that the needs of people from BME communities and other potentially excluded groups are met.
- 108 The council has recognised that it needs to address the current imbalance in service provision, by improving services for groups who are not traditional users of mainstream social care services. Its initial response to the inspection was to challenge our conclusion that there are significant unmet needs. The council now accepts that provision is weighted in favour of older people, people with mental health problems and people with learning disabilities. However, it lacks any convincing or robust plans to shift resources towards groups that are less well served.
- 109 The council has yet to make clear the impact it wants to achieve through the Supporting People programme. It recognises that some people living in Wokingham face social exclusion, but has not explicitly linked the Supporting People programme to its work in this area. The Supporting People programme is not clearly linked to the work at corporate level to engage with people from BME communities. The council has yet to identify how the Supporting People programme will lead to improvements in services for people from BME communities.
- 110 The potential of the Supporting People programme to address unmet needs is poorly understood. While it is sensible to integrate the Supporting People programme into mainstream activities, the programme is not sufficiently visible or understood. In particular the council has not clearly linked the Supporting People programme to its work to develop aims on social inclusion. The needs of significant groups such as travellers and offenders have yet to be considered. This has reduced the potential for using the Supporting People programme as an opportunity to drive improvements.

- 111 Councillors have yet to be engaged in developing a case for investing in preventative services for underserved groups. The council's 'invest to save' approach is positive and could be extended to include further investment in services for BME communities, women fleeing domestic violence, young people, people with drug and alcohol problems, travellers and offenders. The potential long term benefits include reduced crime, prevention of harm to children and vulnerable adults, and better educational achievement.
- 112 The council missed opportunities to learn from the ODPM feedback on its Supporting People strategy for 2003/04. This should have served as an early warning that more attention should be given to the programme and how it linked with key council priorities. There is little evidence that the council has fundamentally re-examined its approach to the Supporting People programme.

A sustained focus on what matters

- 113 The council has succeeded in bringing its budget under control. This is a key achievement given the financial pressures the council has faced. It provides a more stable basis for the council to plan improvements in services, and develop strategies such as invest to contain.
- 114 The council achieved a 'good' rating in the comprehensive performance assessment in 2002. It has maintained this rating in 2003, with improved performance scores in benefits, housing, children's social services and use of resources.
- 115 The council has a track record of improving performance in social services. Achievements include progress with modernising services for people with learning disabilities, and effective management of delayed hospital discharges. However, performance in areas such as people with physical disabilities helped to live at home remains to be improved.
- 116 The council is working to reduce reliance on residential care, towards services that enable people to live in their own homes for longer. It has focussed on shifting resources from residential care into supported housing.
- 117 The council has recently begun to address the poor performance in the homelessness service. It has achieved significant improvements in the last year. However, this is partly due to the provision of new social housing which has helped the council to reduce the numbers of families in bed and breakfast. It is unlikely that the council would have been able to meet the national target had these new homes not been available at this time. Inspection work by the Audit Commission found that the council has developed relatively few affordable homes in recent years, and concluded that the council's policies reduce the supply of lettings that the council will have to meet the needs of those who cannot afford market housing, including the homeless.
- 118 The council made an early start to the Supporting People programme. It recruited the Supporting People project manager in 2001, and carried out early pilot work on needs mapping and service reviews.
- 119 However, despite the promising start, the council has not focused on making progress with key tasks. It did not capitalise on the pilot service reviews, but instead chose to delay starting its review programme. It has not completed contracts or put the Supporting People IT system into operation.
- 120 The council has not focussed on identifying and addressing unmet needs. The early needs mapping work identified that there are significant hidden needs in the area, which result in people making use of services elsewhere. As yet there has been only limited progress with investigating and addressing these needs. There has been no response to information on unmet needs provided by the probation services, and the council did not encourage providers to develop proposals for new services.

- 121 The council is working on proposals to develop floating support services, but these are at a very early stage. The capacity of the scheme is not specified. The council intends to use funding from the Supporting People grant matched with mental health specific grant. However, the council has not include this service in its 2004/05 budget bids and the service is not expected to be in place until March 2005, more than two years since its bid for pipeline funding was rejected by ODPM. Given that the council identified floating support as a priority in the 2003/04 Supporting People strategy, this is slow progress. The total cost of the floating support service included in the pipeline bid was £47,000 per year. The council has chosen to offer providers a 2.5 per cent inflation increase in 2004/05, which is estimated to cost around £40,000. This could have been used to develop services.
- 122 The council failed to anticipate and plan for the changes resulting from the Homelessness Act which widened the range of people who the council had a duty to help. The homelessness strategy has significant weaknesses. Unlike other councils it did not develop better supported accommodation for young people including teenage parents, nor has it improved provision for offenders.
- 123 The council has not recognised the potential of the Supporting People programme to prevent homelessness, and has made limited progress with improving the low base of service provision. There is a risk that the low provision of services will result in further pressure and overspending in the homelessness service in future.

The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement

- 124 The council is strengthening its management structure. It is replacing a traditional departmental structure by giving more responsibility to heads of service. This is intended to help managers to take more of a strategic role and delegate responsibility for decision-making. A deputy chief executive and an assistant chief executive are replacing the previous director posts. There are also new posts to support strategy development.
- 125 The Supporting People team is committed and well organised. The Supporting People project manager has relevant skills and experience in supported housing and social services, including experience of quality assurance. The council has enabled the manager to gain qualifications in social care commissioning and contracting and in project management. The Supporting People team has had consistent staffing over the last two years. The team has demonstrated a commitment to ensuring payments to providers are accurate and on time.
- 126 The Supporting People team is well placed within the council to have influence over key managers. The Supporting People accountable officer is the head of community well-being and partnerships and has a key management role within the council and in strategic planning with partners.
- 127 However, the Supporting People team has been mainly focussed on implementation. The Supporting People project manager's capacity to engage in strategic planning has been hindered by delays in implementing the IT system and the need to carry out routine administration such as checking payments to providers. The delays in completing contracts have also added to the backlog of tasks. The council has not assessed the risks that other demands will prevent the Supporting People team from making progress with strategic planning and service reviews.
- 128 The council has not given priority to having a robust IT system in place. It plans to complete implementation of its IT system by July 2004, over 15 months after the Supporting People programme went live. The council is not currently able to put in place enhancements to the IT system required by the ODPM.

- 129 The council has recognised that the Supporting People team lacks the capacity to carry out key tasks and needs to be strengthened. It plans to recruit a full-time member of staff to carry out service reviews during 2004/05. However, the council missed the opportunity to do this at an earlier stage. The Supporting People administration grant for 2003/04 was underspent by a total of £35,000. The council has carried forward £20,000 with the agreement of the ODPM and the remainder has been used to fund enhancements to the IT system. If the council had used this money to expand the team earlier, it would have been able to speed up its service reviews. It could also have used some of the money to commission specialist support with developing the five-year strategy.
- 130 Supporting People reviews do not adequately challenge whether services are meeting needs, and give value for money. This will limit the council's ability to use the review programme to deliver significant improvements. While reviews are likely to improve the quality of existing services, the council is not clear how it will use the review programme to reshape the services it has inherited and to move resources to identified gaps in services.
- 131 The council has missed opportunities to increase the resources available for the Supporting People programme. There is a low level of housing related support services in Wokingham, and the council did not make full use of the opportunity to develop services in the lead up to Supporting People. Adopting an 'invest to save' approach at an earlier stage could have helped to contain the high levels of spending in the last two years on temporary accommodation for homeless people, allowing resources to be spent instead on improving services. This would have meant that there was a higher funding base at the start of the programme. Instead, the council is now locked in to a very low level of Supporting People grant, and will need to find the money to improve services from other budgets.

Integration of continuous improvement into day-to-day planning

- 132 The council has a track record of improving financial and performance management. This has enabled it to regain control over its budgets. It has put in place three-year revenue and capital programmes which provide a firm foundation for planning improvements.
- 133 The council has improved services following inspections. It is making good progress with its CPA improvement plan, and with achieving the targets set in its local public service agreement. However, it has yet to show sustained improvements following inspection of its housing service.
- 134 The council's policies help it to recruit and retain staff. These policies include flexible working and the ability to work from home. These arrangements are valued by staff, and help the council to compete in an area of low unemployment and high incomes.
- 135 The council has not ensured that the Supporting People partnership arrangements provide effective leadership and monitoring of the programme. The combined commissioning body/core strategy group is not yet effective. It is not yet clear what will improve as a result of the current review of partnership arrangements with the PCT.
- 136 Performance management of the Supporting People programme is weak. The Supporting People team has basic management systems in place. These include annual appraisals and monthly supervision. However, the team lacks performance management tools such as an annual business plan. The council intends to put one in place during 2004/05 taking into account the inspection recommendations. There are no performance reports to the commissioning body or councillors.

Summary

- 137 The council has recognised that it needs to address the current imbalance in service provision, by improving services for groups who are not traditional users of mainstream social care services. It has recognised that it needs to improve its services for people from BME communities. The council has set targets to reduce the number of homelessness presentations and to end the use of bed and breakfast by March 2006. The council is working to reduce reliance on residential care, towards services that enable people to live in their own homes for longer. The council has succeeded in bringing its budget under control. It has focussed on shifting resources from residential care into supported housing. The Supporting People team is committed and well organised, and has relevant skills and experience.
- 138 However, the council has yet to make clear the impact it wants to achieve through the Supporting People programme. It is now locked in to a very low level of Supporting People grant, and will need to find the money to improve services from other budgets. Councillors have yet to be engaged in developing a case for investing in preventative services for underserved groups. Performance management for Supporting People is weak.

Appendices

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

Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ a self assessment completed by the council;
- ◆ the Supporting People strategy 2003/04;
- ◆ Commissioning body/core strategy group reports and minutes;
- ◆ the service review timetable;
- ◆ reports from service reviews;
- ◆ Supporting People newsletters and information leaflets;
- ◆ housing and social services strategy documents;
- ◆ the community plan; and
- ◆ the council's best value performance plan.

Reality checks undertaken

When we went on site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. We also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Our reality checks included:

- ◆ meetings with users and staff in services funded by Supporting People;
- ◆ phone calls to the council;
- ◆ a survey of the information available in reception areas; and
- ◆ a survey completed by Supporting People service providers.

List of people interviewed

	Representatives of Supporting People service providers
	Representatives of voluntary organisations and advocacy groups
	Members of the Wokingham black and minority ethnic forum
Debbie Agostino	Housing benefits manager
John Beckerleg	Interim director of social services
Narinder Brar	Corporate policy officer

Pat Brecknock	Corporate head of community care
Keith Burns	Corporate head of community wellbeing & partnerships
Steve Cross	Social services finance manager
Carolyn Davies	IT project worker
Jane Foster	Supporting People lead officer, Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Sue Heatherington	Chief executive, Wokingham PCT
Pauline Heliar-Symons	Portfolio holder for community services
Sarah Hollamby	Housing strategy officer
Laura Johnson	Housing development manager, Thames Valley Probation Area.
Lindy Jones	Supporting People officer
Pat Jones	Head of mental health
Sandra MacLeod	Supporting People team support officer
Sue Moore	Service development manager, Wokingham PCT
Doug Patterson	Chief executive
Stuart Rowbotham	Head of learning disability services
Sarah Saych	Supporting People project manager
Paul Turrell	Head of corporate policy
Jude Whyte	Housing needs manager
Alan Wilks	Service manager – older people and physical disability
Debbie Wright	Supporting People lead officer, Reading Borough Council

Demographic information

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

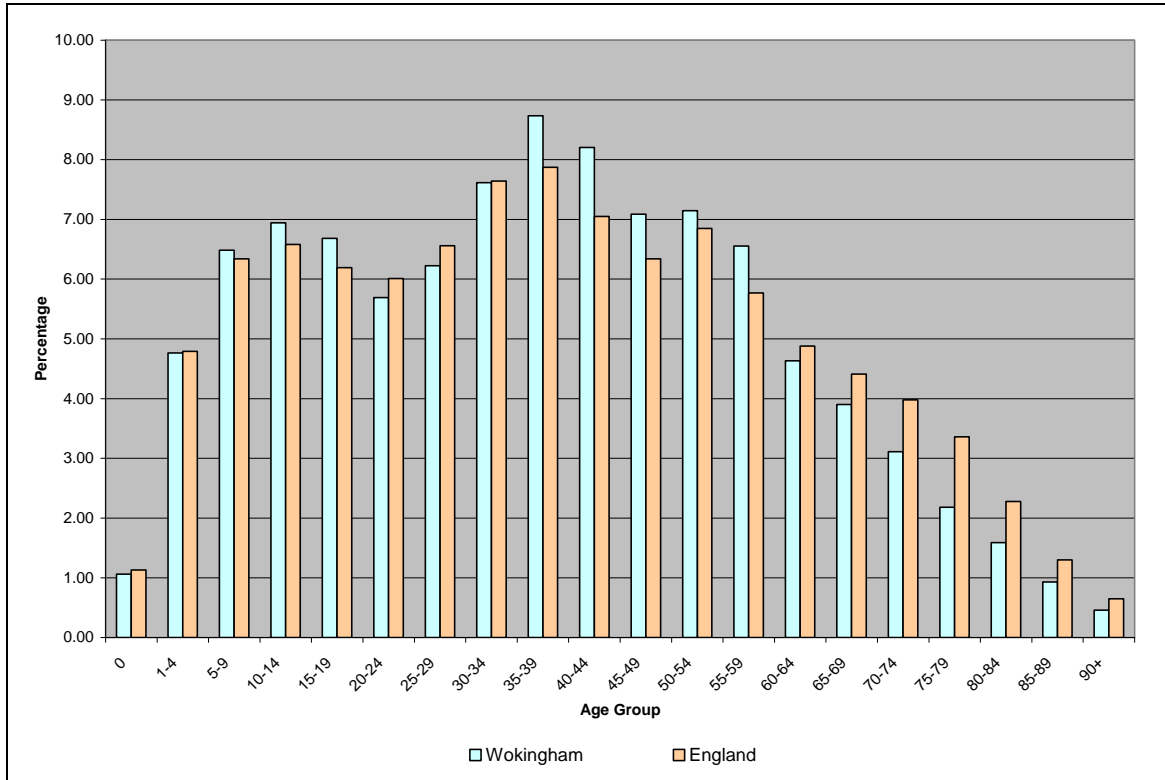
Measure	Wokingham	England
Population (mid-2001)	151,200	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	12.18	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001)	10.19	13.0
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	1.1	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ³	353	-
Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁴	0 of 24	-
Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁵	0 of 24	-

³ Indices of Deprivation 2000, average ward score for the authority.

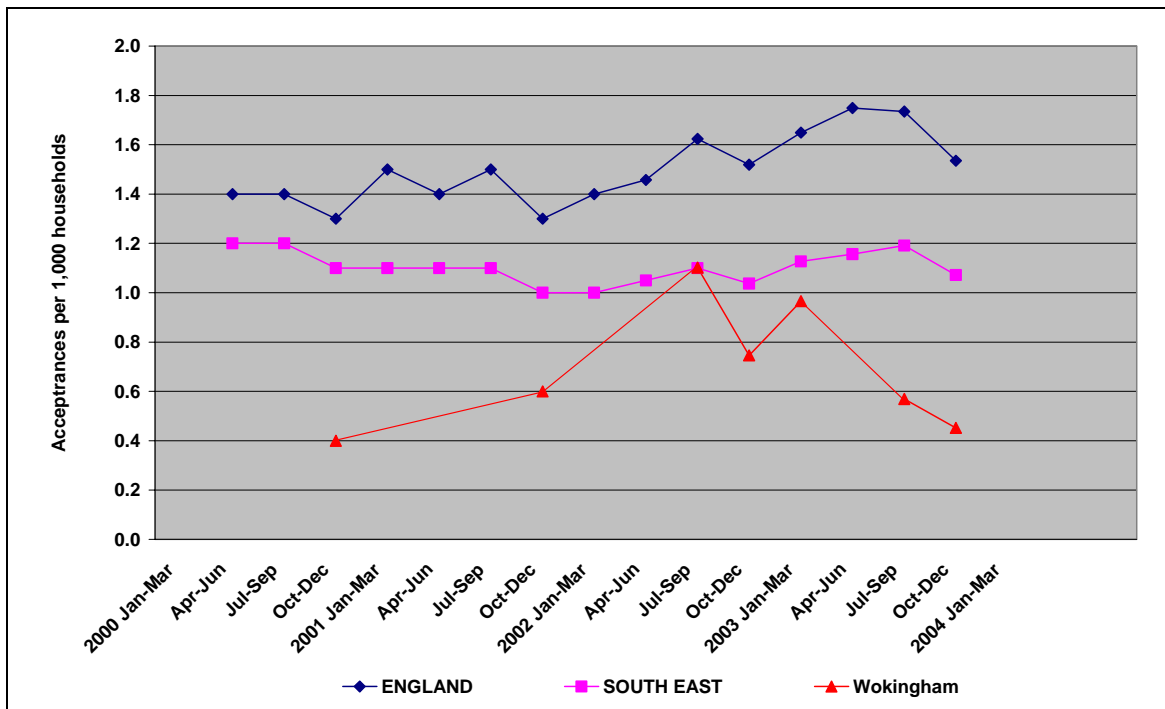
⁴ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

⁵ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of access domain (out of 8414 wards).

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



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



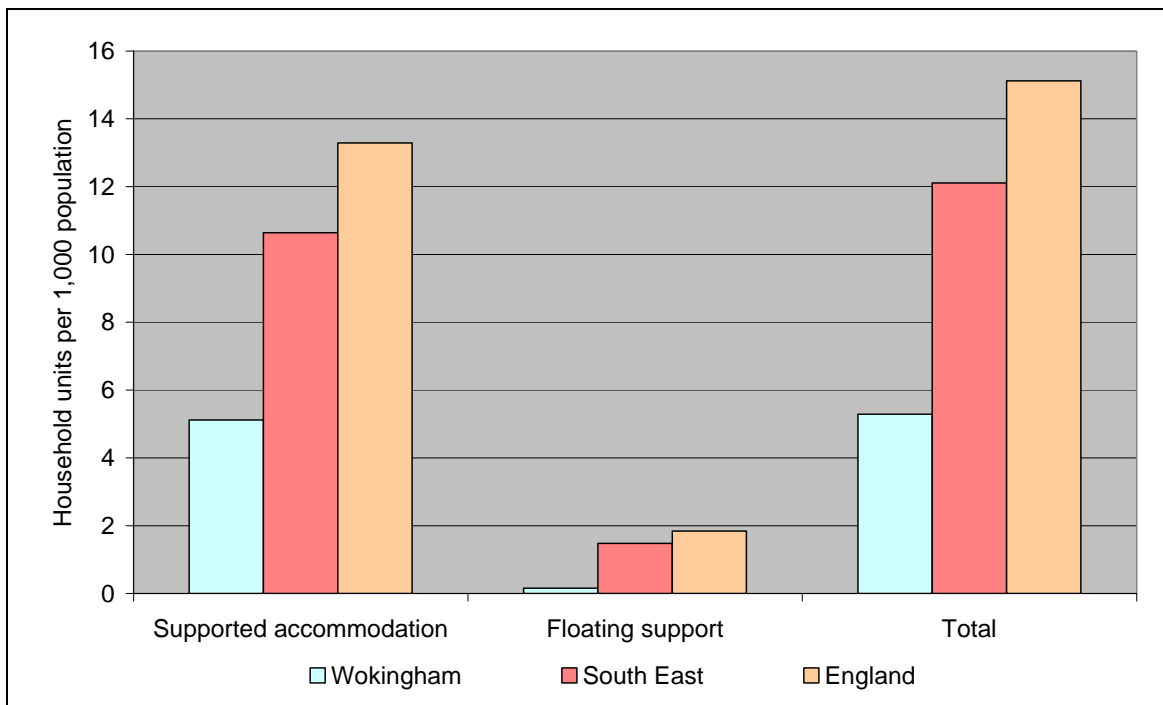
Performance information

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

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

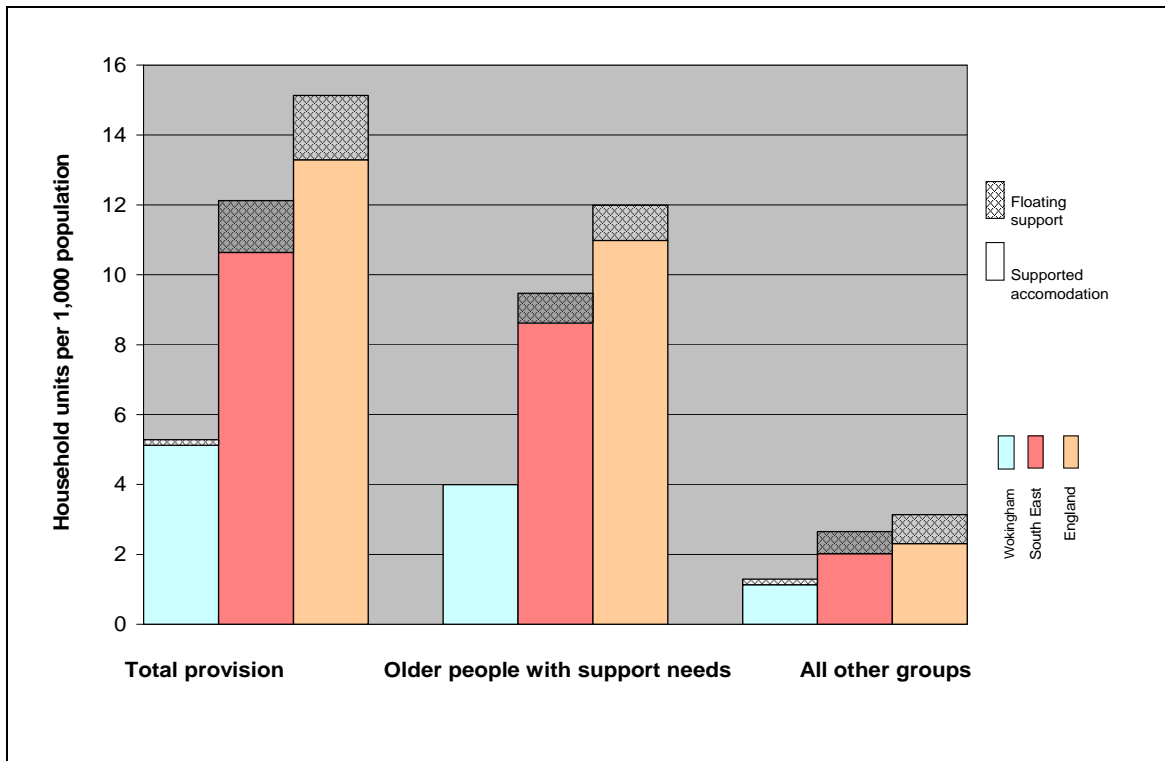
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁶

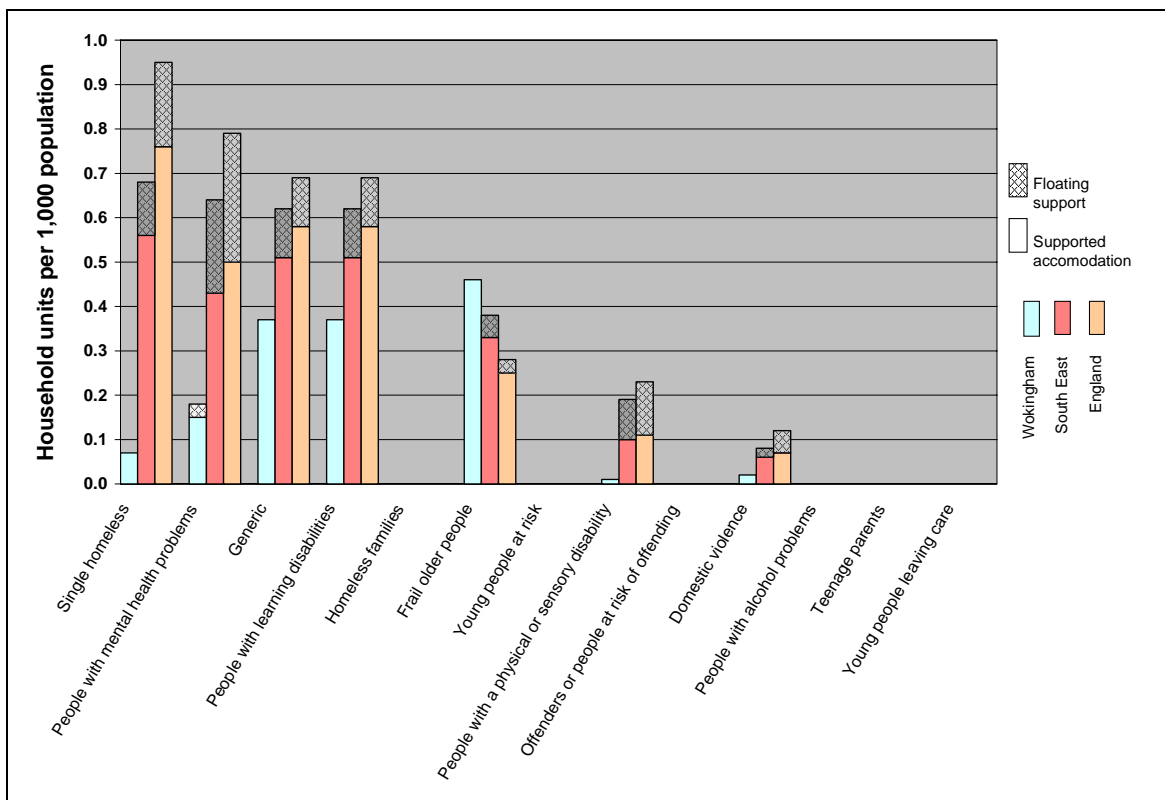


⁶ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁷



Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁸



⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

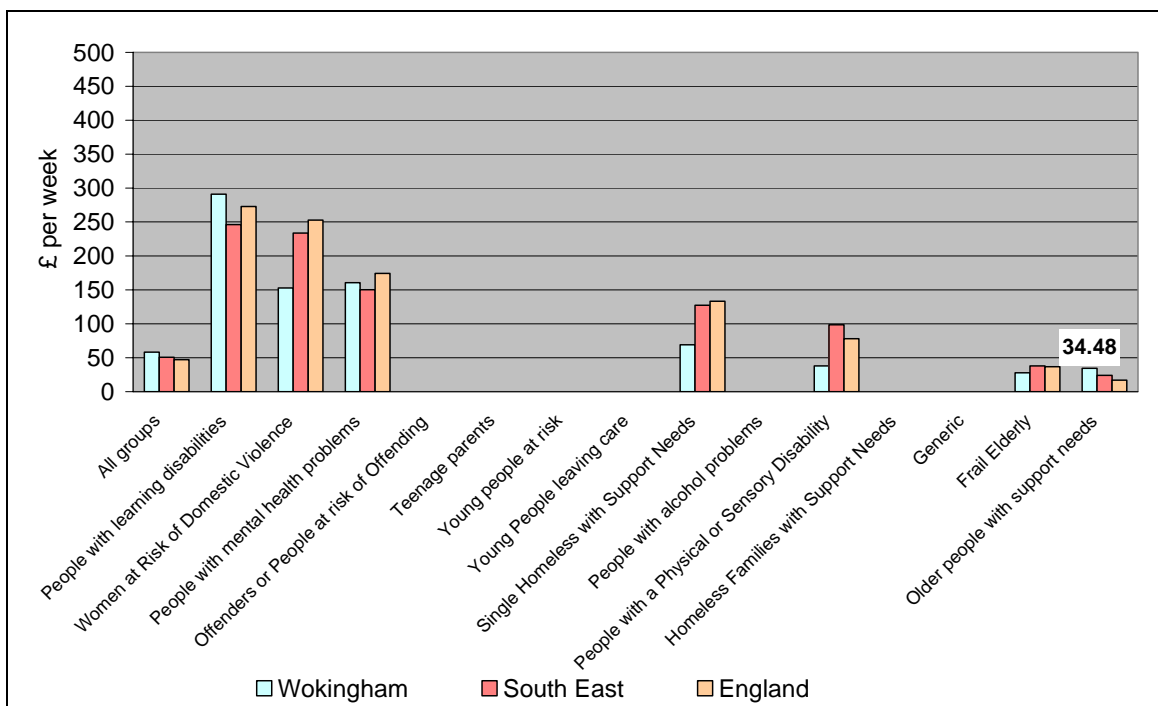
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Final Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Wokingham	£ 1,691,876	£ 91,397	£ 162,703

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

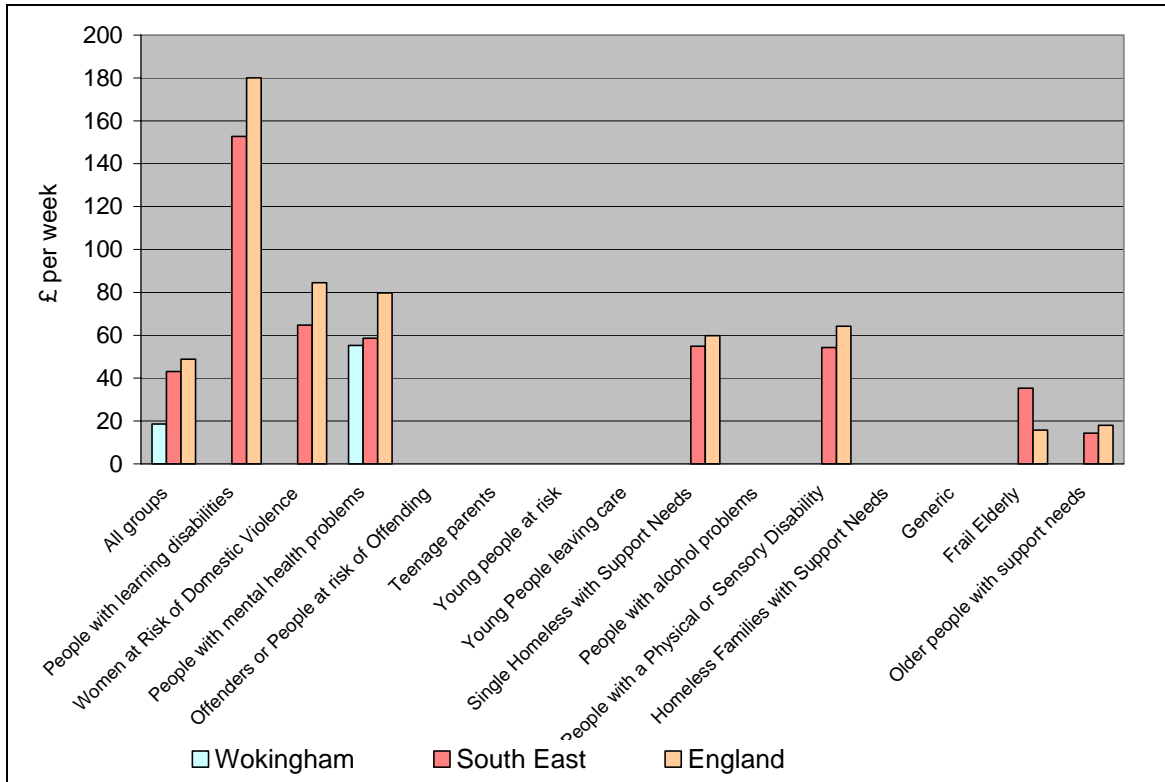
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Wokingham	£ 0.22	£ 35.83	£ 36.97	£ 100.61
South East	£ 0.52	£ 24.94	£ 32.26	£ 71.78
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)⁹

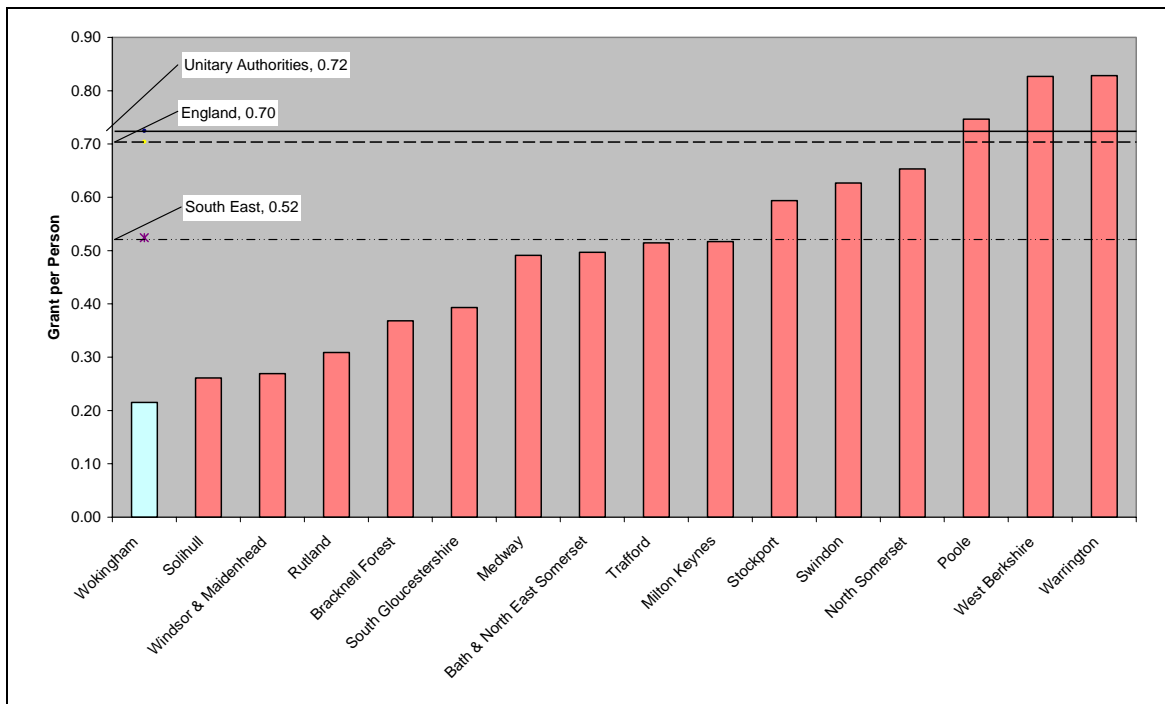


⁹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

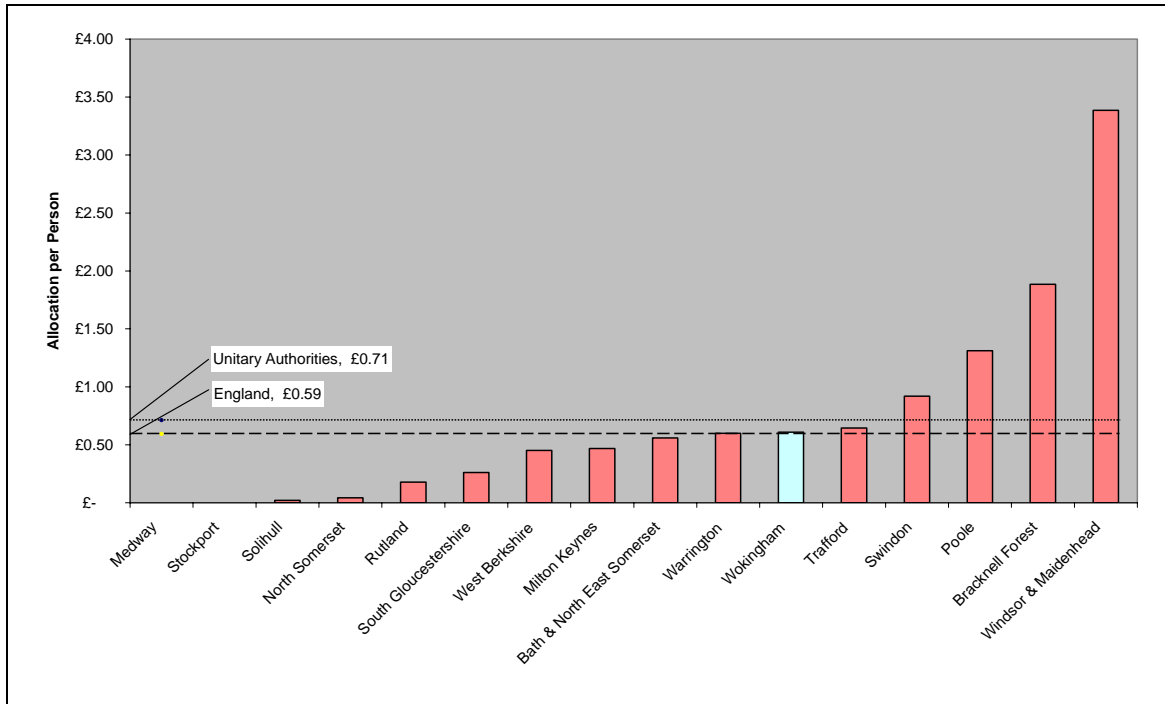


Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁰, all unitary councils and all English councils (2003/04)

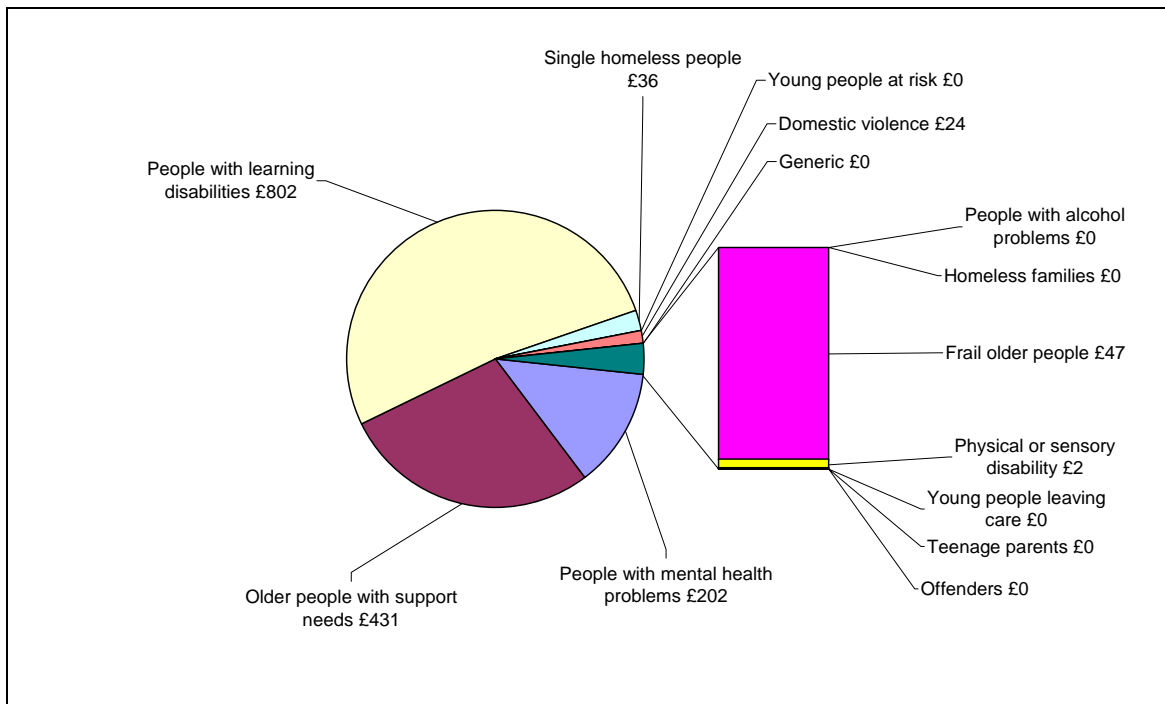


¹⁰ A comparator group of similar councils.

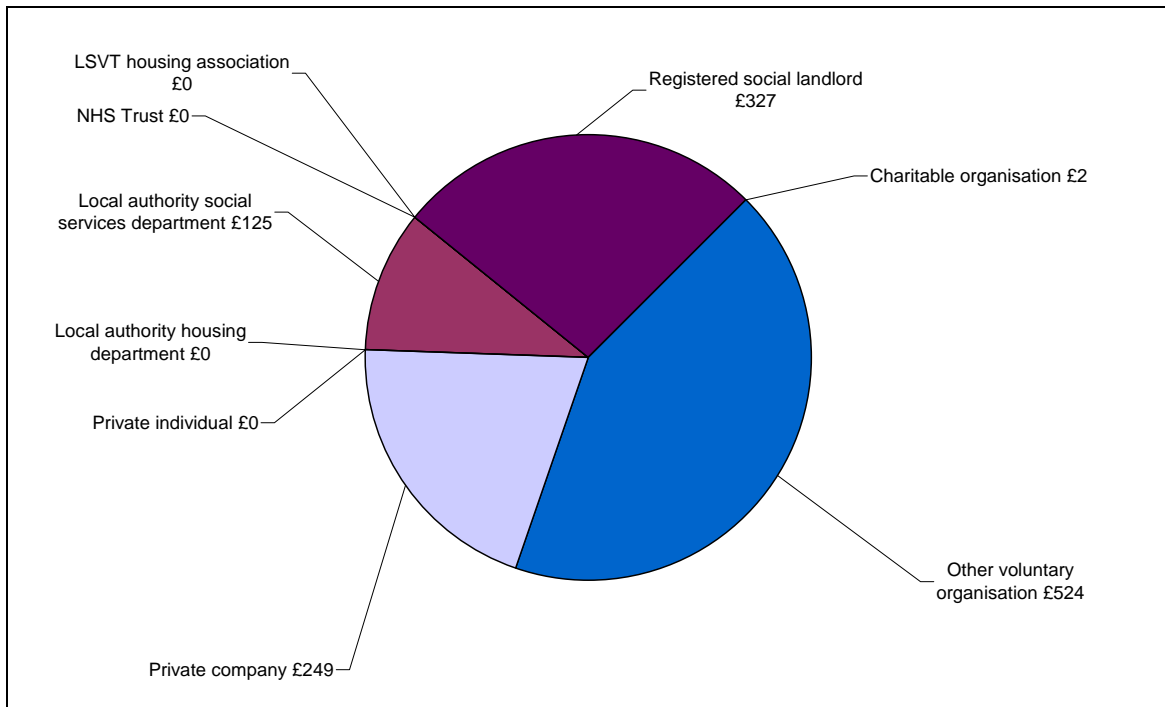
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all unitary councils and all English councils.



Share of spending between user groups (£000s)



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



Social Services star ratings November 2003

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

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

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03

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

Wokingham	
Significantly above average (★★★★)	Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care (C26) Admissions to hospital of people aged 75 or over due to hypothermia or a fall (C33) Items of equipment costing less than £1,000 delivered within three weeks (D38)
Above average (★★★)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31)
Average (★★)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6)

	Admissions of adults aged 18-64 to residential or nursing care (C27) Delayed discharges for older people (D41)
Below average (**)	Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks (D43)
Significantly below average (*)	Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Older people helped to live at home (C32)

Best value performance indicators

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

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

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

Supporting People – Housing related support services

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

The Supporting People programme brings together significant funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase; the Housing Corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG) and probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities (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 support services with housing, social services, health and the probation service. Negotiation and consultation is also required with all housing and support service providers, other statutory service providers, the private sector and voluntary organisations to plan and commission support services to meet identified needs.

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

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

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