

Inspection report

February 2005

Supporting People Programme

Wiltshire County Council

Contents

Summary	3
Introduction to the Supporting People Programme	3
Scoring the service	5
Recommendations	8
Report	10
Context	10
The locality	10
The council	10
Supporting People – housing related Support Services in Wiltshire	11
How good is the service?	12
Governance	12
Delivery arrangements	13
Financial management and reporting	16
Service reviews	19
Value for money	22
User involvement	24
Partnership arrangements	25
Access to services and information	27
Diversity	28
Outcomes for service users	29
Summary	31
What are the prospects for improvement to the service?	32
What is the evidence of service improvement?	32
How good are the current improvement plans?	33
Will the council deliver the improvements?	35
Summary	36
Appendices	38
Documents reviewed	38
Reality checks undertaken	38
Interviews	38
Positive practice	40

Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People programme

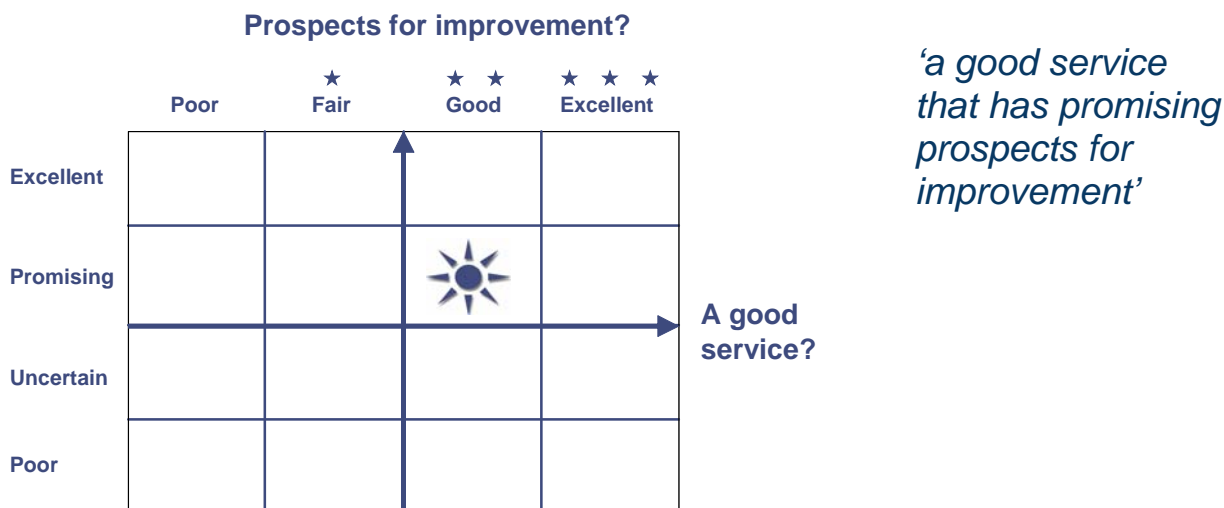
- 1 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services, which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the previous complex and uncoordinated arrangements for providing housing related support services for vulnerable people.
- 3 The Supporting People programme brings together a number of funding streams including Transitional Housing Benefit (THB), which 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 Wiltshire County Council was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.
- 5 The county of Wiltshire lies to the south west of England. Although it has no single centre of population, several towns including Trowbridge, Bradford on Avon, Chippenham, Calne, Melksham, Salisbury, Devizes and Warminster serve the counties extensive rural areas.
- 6 The population is 436,300 of which 4 per cent describe themselves as 'other than White British'; there are significant minority groups from the Moroccan and Polish community. The number of people over 65 is 16.5 per cent compared to the average in England of 15.9 per cent. The number of people aged 80 to 84 is projected to increase by 22 per cent by 2016.
- 7 Overall deprivation is low at county level, but this masks some high levels of deprivation at ward level. There are low rates of unemployment, 1.1 per cent compared to the England average of 2.6 per cent. Wiltshire has 351 villages and hamlets, including 189 with 250 or fewer residents. five wards in Wiltshire featured in the top 5 per cent most deprived wards in England in terms of geographical access to services.
- 8 The council comprises 47 councillors with the Conservative Party in control with 28 seats. There are 14 Liberal Democrat councillors; 3 Labour; and 2 Independents.
- 9 The council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. In commissioning Supporting People services the council works in partnership with three Wiltshire primary care trusts, (Kennet and North Wiltshire Primary Care Trust, South Wiltshire Primary Care Trust, and West Wiltshire Primary Care Trust); the National Probation Service, and four district councils; Kennet District Council, North Wiltshire District Council, Salisbury District Council, and West Wiltshire District Council.
- 10 The council employs 3,500 staff (excluding education services) and the total net revenue expenditure for the council in 2004/05 is £376 million.

- 11 The total amount of Supporting People funding available to the council in 2004/05 is £8,704,000. In addition, the council receives £358,624 to fulfil its role as the administering authority. The announcement of funding levels for 2005/06 was made on 2 December 2004. Due to national pressures on the Supporting People budget the total grant for services in Wiltshire will be reduced to £8,284,000 in 2005/06 (requiring a saving on the current budget of almost 5 per cent). The administration grant for the Supporting People programme in Wiltshire for 2005/06 will be £369,383 an increase of 3 per cent.
- 12 The highest cost Supporting People service is around £967 per person per week for specialist floating support services for people with learning disabilities. The lowest cost schemes are support for older people in sheltered housing and cost less than £1.80 per person per week.
- 13 There are 80 different providers, over 370 services, 4,700 units of supported accommodation and 550 units of floating support.

Scoring the service

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

Scoring chart¹: Wiltshire County Council - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 15 During our inspection we found some positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date.
- ◆ There is clear evidence that Supporting People has delivered a greater range of services to vulnerable people in Wiltshire.
 - ◆ Support plans are being used effectively to promote and sustain the independence of users.
 - ◆ A directory of local Supporting People funded services has been produced and the council’s website provides easy access to a range of information relating to Supporting People.
 - ◆ There is evidence of effective user consultation and involvement at scheme level that is helping to shape service improvements.
 - ◆ Good arrangements have been put in place to ensure that Supporting People funding issues and performance indicators are reported within the council and to the partnership groups.
 - ◆ Senior officers and elected members have a good understanding of the Supporting People programme and how it can help deliver their own goals and those of their partners.
 - ◆ The Supporting People programme has been effectively mainstreamed within the council linking into existing staff resources.

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.

- ◆ The council is adopting a mature approach to the procurement of Supporting People and with its partners has been prepared to consider the tendering of services.
- ◆ There is engagement of all organisational partners at the Supporting People officers group and the partnership board. The Supporting People officers group has benefited from the agreement to have provider representatives who can express the views of those involved in the delivery of Supporting People services.
- ◆ The accountable officer for the Supporting People programme is of a sufficiently senior level to ensure the programme has an appropriate profile and is understood within the council.
- ◆ A draft five year strategy has been produced and there is a clear timetable for consultation and agreement over the final version.
- ◆ An IT system is in place that effectively supports the administration of the Supporting People programme and further enhancements are being introduced.
- ◆ All Supporting People contracts are in place and have been signed-off. Payments to providers are accurate and are being made on time.
- ◆ There has been a prudent approach to the agreement of transitional housing benefit claims and there is no evident inappropriate funding of services from Supporting People funds.
- ◆ The service review programme has begun to deliver a significant number of reports and identifiable outcomes for users. The process for service reviews has been published and the criteria for the assessment have been clearly stated. User and other stakeholder involvement in the process is explicit.
- ◆ The council has been at the forefront of the development of a number of initiatives in the region in relation to performance monitoring and is developing relationships with neighbouring authorities to benchmark services.

Areas for improvement

- 16 However we found a significant number of weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed.
- ◆ While use has been made of existing forums to engage users there are several user groups where no appropriate forums for discussing Supporting People issues exist. As a result a comprehensive picture of the needs of all sections of the community in Wiltshire has not been established.
 - ◆ Information for users of Supporting People funded services is not widely available and a user leaflet is still only in draft form.
 - ◆ There is little understanding of Supporting People issues by customer facing frontline staff. Telephone contact with the council does not consistently signpost users towards Supporting People where appropriate.
 - ◆ Arrangements for fairer charging have been introduced but take-up has not been significant and there are variances in the levels of applications from different parts of the county.
 - ◆ Eligibility criteria for Supporting People funding have not been produced.
- 17 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for delivering further improvements.

Drivers for improvement

- ◆ The corporate 'Transforming the Customer experience' initiative should improve access to Supporting People services through the provision of council access points across the county's towns.
- ◆ The council and its partners are outcome focused and have concentrated on delivering the priorities that they agreed within the Supporting People shadow strategy.
- ◆ Partnership working extends beyond the Supporting People officers group and partnership board body but also links to other established inter-agency working arrangements such as the drug and alcohol action team and the teenage pregnancy project.
- ◆ The service review procedure, as the most powerful tool to shape the Supporting People programme and ensure service improvements, has now been thoroughly tested and decommissioning decisions have been agreed by all partners.
- ◆ The council is self-aware and open to challenge. There is an acceptance that mechanisms and processes can always be challenged and improved for example in the examination of the financial arrangements for the programme by internal audit.
- ◆ The council makes effective use of project planning in the delivery of the Supporting People programme to ensure the focus on agreed priorities is maintained and this commitment remains in place.
- ◆ There is corporate support for the Supporting People programme with evidence of a considered response and additional resource allocation when monitoring has indicated that action needs to be taken.
- ◆ The council operates a corporate appraisal system and ongoing supervision that ensures that staff are aware of their role and are achieving their objectives.
- ◆ The council has undertaken a risk assessment of the Supporting People programme and has agreed actions to manage any identified risks.

Barriers to improvement

- 18 There are, however, some significant areas in which the council needs to improve.
- ◆ A full understanding of customer preferences is underdeveloped, in part, due to the poor access arrangements on offer to potential users of the Supporting People programme.
 - ◆ A thorough understanding of the diverse needs within the Wiltshire community has not been established to fully inform the debate around what should be the future priorities for service delivery.
 - ◆ The five year strategy for the Supporting People programme has not been finalised and as a result priorities for the future remain undetermined.

Recommendations

- 19 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.

Customer care and access to services

- ◆ Ensure the needs of the Supporting People programme are reflected in the corporate 'Transforming the customer experience' initiative and that new frontline staff in access points and handling telephone calls are provided with training on the full range of Supporting People services to ensure a consistent approach to signposting and referral by March 2005.
- ◆ Discuss with partners and providers, in particular the district councils, how their frontline staff will handle first point of contact with potential users of Supporting People funded services by March 2005.
- ◆ Deliver training to frontline staff working for partners and providers to ensure they understand the operation of the Supporting People programme by March 2005.
- ◆ Deliver the user information leaflet and circulate this widely to existing users, providers, advice agencies and access points by February 2005.

Diversity

- ◆ Using effective consultation mechanisms to establish the diverse needs of all elements in the Wiltshire community that might be entitled to funding from Supporting People grant by October 2005. Utilise this information to inform any updates of the five-year strategy for the programme.

Service reviews

- ◆ Ensure that sufficient staff resources are made available to the service review programme to meet the deadline for completion in March 2006.
- ◆ Provide the necessary training to contract officers to allow them to conduct user consultation in the service review process in an effective manner and where this is inappropriate use external advocacy and advice services to fulfil this role by March 2005.

Delivery arrangements

- ◆ Close scrutiny of the delivery by the Supporting People team of the service review programme and the timetable for the production of the five-year strategy at least every month by the Supporting People lead officer, Supporting People accountable officer and Supporting People officers group. This scrutiny to inform discussions over additional resources that may be required to supplement the team by March 2005.
- ◆ The action plan attached to the Supporting People service plan might be developed still further through the inclusion of specific milestones within the report to ensure that the delivery of key objectives could be monitored more closely.

Value for money

- ◆ Develop a methodology for the clear cost and quality benchmarking of services to establish cost effectiveness and value for money by March 2005.
- ◆ Produce clear and concise eligibility criteria for Supporting People funding and advertise these criteria widely by March 2005.

User involvement

- ◆ Build upon the user involvement strategy to ensure that there are effective mechanisms for engaging with all groups that may require services that could be Supporting People funded by July 2005.
- ◆ Build on existing arrangements to allow user views to be reflected in the strategic direction of the Supporting People programme by October 2005.

Outcomes for service users

- ◆ Ensure that service providers are identifying exit strategies for users in the support planning process to ensure that the prospects for moving-on from schemes are highlighted at an early stage and that accommodation based projects do not become 'silted-up' by March 2006.

20 We would like to thank the staff of Wiltshire County Council, particularly Clair Wheeler, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Jim Wilson, Frances Childs, Masaud Subedar – Housing Inspectors

Mary Barnish - HMIP Inspector

Christa Wiggin - CSCI Inspector

Leona Fuidge - Tenant Inspection Adviser

Dates of inspection: 29 November – 3 December 2004

Email: Ji-wilson @audit-commission.gov.uk

f-childs@audit-commission.gov.uk

m-subedar@audit-commission.gov.uk

**For more information please contact
Audit Commission
Southern Region
Westward House
Lime Kiln Close
Stoke Gifford
Bristol
BS34 8SU
www.audit-commission.gov.uk
Telephone: 0117 923 6757**

Report

Context

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

The locality

- 22 Wiltshire County Council is in the south west of England. The population of the area is 436,300, living in 176,600 homes. four per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities. Wiltshire has 351 villages and hamlets, including 189 with 250 or fewer residents. five wards in Wiltshire featured in the top 5 per cent most deprived wards in England in terms of geographical access to services.
- 23 Ten per cent of the housing of stock is owned by registered social landlords; 71.5 per cent of the stock is owner occupied; 4.5 per cent of the stock is council owned; and 13.5 per cent is private rented accommodation. The need for more affordable housing is a recurrent theme of community plans and district council housing strategies.
- 24 Unemployment stands at 1.1 per cent compared with the national average of 2.6 per cent.

The council

- 25 The council comprises 47 councillors. The Conservative party has overall control. Currently a leader and cabinet govern the business of the council.
- 26 The council's net revenue expenditure for 2004/05 is £376 million.
- 27 The council's priorities as identified in the Wiltshire County Council strategy are:
- ◆ the council's purpose is:
 - ◆ to improve the opportunities and quality of life of everyone who lives and works in the county, and to help to make Wiltshire 'a County fit for our Children';
 - ◆ the council has five broad goals:
 - ◆ to be a County Council which has the ambition, focus and capacity to serve the community;
 - ◆ to balance the need for growth with the protection of the environment;
 - ◆ to engage and educate all learners in a vibrant learning society and strive to ensure that every school is excellent and inclusive;
 - ◆ to provide supportive services in ways that increase people's independence and choice while protecting vulnerable people; and
 - ◆ to enable Wiltshire people to live healthier and safer lives by working with health, police, District Councils and other partners.
- 28 The council was assessed as a 'good' authority by the Audit Commission as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in December 2004 and as being a two-star social care service by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (previously known as the Social Services Inspectorate) in 2004.

Supporting People – housing related Support Services in Wiltshire

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Framework for delivery

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

How good is the service?

Governance

- 31 There are sound governance arrangements for the Supporting People programme in Wiltshire. Partnership working around care and housing provision is well established. There have been joint working arrangements in place bringing together the county, the districts and the health sector, which pre-date supporting people. As a result there is an understanding of the individual agendas of each organisation by the other members of the partnership and a willingness to reach decisions that accommodate the interests of all parties.
- 32 There are robust legal arrangements in place covering the governance of the supporting people programme in the county. Wiltshire has adopted a partnership legal agreement to define the roles and responsibilities of the partnership board (commissioning body), Supporting People officers group (core strategy group) and the administering authority. The partnership agreement has been signed by all the relevant bodies.
- 33 Transparency in decision-making is ensured as the partnership board has agreed a conflicts of interest protocol for the workings of the board and the Supporting People officers group. This protocol is being observed and requires officers and members to declare in writing any services that they are involved with and to declare these interests when decisions are being taken.

Commissioning body

- 34 In Wiltshire the commissioning body is known as the partnership board. The board is taking a clear strategic lead in driving the Supporting People programme in the county and has met quarterly since its inception in September 2002. The partnership board is well attended with membership made up from elected members from all of the statutory partners, supported by senior officers. In addition members of Wiltshire and Swindon users network attend the board in an advisory capacity.
- 35 Meetings held since June 2003 have attracted more than fifteen representatives from partner organisations. The representation from some primary care trusts has been sporadic. Often there has only been one primary care trust representative at the commissioning body meetings and as a result the views of the health care sector may not have been adequately represented.
- 36 The partnership board receives reports that effectively monitor the delivery and performance of the supporting people programme. In June 2004 the partnership board received a report on the achievement of key targets and milestones by the supporting people team. The report covered performance against targets for 2003/04 with regard to delivery of the service review programme and user involvement in this process. Partners have also shown a commitment to enhancing the performance monitoring of the Supporting People programme, for example the district councils have agreed to capture additional data on homelessness applications.

Core strategy group

- 37 In Wiltshire the core strategy group is known as the Supporting People officers group. It has worked well over a number of years and has changed its focus as the programme has developed. The group first met in January 2001 and has subsequently convened every month. Senior officers from all statutory partners attend the officers group as well as representatives from local providers, the Drug and Alcohol Team and Community Safety partnership.

- 38 The officers group is not chaired by the county council to enable there to be some balance in the relationship between the county as the administering authority and the other partner organisations. The group has set up a sub-group to look specifically at the service review programme.
- 39 The Supporting People officers group shows a high level of commitment to and knowledge of, the local supporting people situation. We attended a meeting of this group while we were on site and saw a high level of debate. For example, a discussion on the needs of service users demonstrated a good understanding of the needs of teenage parents and the nature of support they may need to receive. The high quality of the debate and engagement at the Supporting People officers group is also evidenced by the minutes of previous meetings.

Accountable officer

- 40 The accountable officer for the Supporting People programme is the Assistant Director of the Department for Adult and Community Services (DACs).
- 41 The accountable officer is responsible for driving the Supporting People agenda forward at a corporate level within the county council; integrating the programme within the council's core business and making links to other related strategies. As a county council Wiltshire has not had responsibility for housing issues in the past and the accountable officer is effectively communicating these new responsibilities within the organisation. The accountable officer reports progress on the Supporting People programme to the monthly senior management team within the department of adult and community services and also to the department of adult and community services advisory panel.
- 42 The accountable officer has a good understanding of their role in the administering authority and their responsibilities to the partnership in the delivery of the supporting people programme. The accountable officer directly manages the supporting people team leader and there is regular supervision on a monthly basis.

Councillor involvement

- 43 Senior officers and politicians have a good understanding of the supporting people programme and are aware of areas that it will impact on, for example, procurement.
- 44 There is an appropriate level of knowledge among the county councillors involved in the supporting people programme. While information and recommendations are made to the partnership board by the officers group the strategic decisions are being taken by the appropriate councillors.
- 45 There are suitable arrangements in place for items relating to the delivery of the supporting people programme to be reported to councillors of the council. The Advisory panel for the department of adult and community services has received regular reports on the implementation of the supporting people programme. Recommendations from the Advisory Panel and related papers have been taken to the council's Cabinet.

Delivery arrangements

- 46 Wiltshire has adopted effective mechanisms for managing the delivery of work required for the successful running of the supporting people programme. There is a comprehensive work-plan that governs the delivery of the supporting people programme in Wiltshire.

The Supporting People Team

- 47 The Supporting People programme has been mainstreamed across the council. The lead officer for the Supporting People programme is the Supporting People team manager. Reporting to the team leader are one full-time project assistant, an information systems and performance officer, and an administration and communications officer.
- 48 In addition to this core team the Supporting People administration grant also funds three full-time contract officers and a contracts administrator. An additional temporary full-time contract officer is currently on secondment to the Supporting People programme. Funding also goes towards the cost of an accountant and a fairer charging assessor.
- 49 The contract officers are managed within the procurement team in the department of adult and community services. Recognising the volume of service reviews that the contract officers are responsible for delivering the council has funded the programme over and above the administration grant. The placement of contracts officers, responsible for Supporting People service reviews, within the department of adult and community services contracts team allows for a sharing of knowledge in relation to contracting and procurement issues. Corporate training in supply and purchasing is also available to the team.
- 50 The providers we met were very complimentary about the Supporting People team and the manager in particular:

'helpful and approachable'

Provider

- 51 Due to the split in Supporting People funded posts across the council there have been some problems with team meetings. These meetings have been scheduled to take place every month but they have been difficult for all staff to attend due to work pressures and geographical split particularly around the review programme. As a result the flow of information between all officers involved in the Supporting People programme has not always been effective.
- 52 The council has been operating a database to make payments and produce a limited range of reports pending the implementation of a new IT system that will link to the department of adult and community services system. These interim measures have worked effectively and have enabled them to carry on making payments to providers and to be in a situation where they can spend time ensuring the new system will be fully functional when it is implemented.

Shadow strategy and five-year strategy

- 53 A clear lead has been given to the Supporting People programme since its inception by the partnership board. In their preparation for the implementation of the Supporting People programme the partnership board were required to produce a shadow strategy for the programme covering 2003/04. The Partnership Board agreed a statement of values for inclusion in the shadow strategy which provide a good reflection of the national aims for the Supporting People programme. These values were:
- ◆ the fundamental right of an individual to have a home;
 - ◆ an individual's home should be determined by his/her needs and wishes;
 - ◆ all individuals should be able to exercise influence and choice regarding home setting;
 - ◆ care and support services should enable individuals to stay in their chosen home;

- ◆ a home and its environment should be physically accessible;
 - ◆ individuals should live at home with the maximum dignity and independence possible;
 - ◆ an aim to develop local mechanisms to consult, develop new and diverse options; and
 - ◆ the recognition of stakeholders, providers, users and carers and their treatment as partners.
- 54 The shadow strategy for Supporting People in Wiltshire was assessed by the ODPM as 'excellent'.
- 55 The partnership board received a lengthy presentation from the National Housing Federation's regional advisor for Supporting People on the steps for the delivery of the five-year strategy in September 2004. As the result of this exercise the partnership board have agreed the strategic priorities that will govern the development of the five-year strategy for Supporting People in Wiltshire. At the meeting in June 2004 the partnership board determined that the priorities would be:
- ◆ enabling people to live independently in their chosen home setting;
 - ◆ using Floating Support instead of accommodation based services;
 - ◆ linking with partners and other agencies to provide integrated housing related support and care packages; and
 - ◆ providing low level preventative housing related support services to minimise crises.
- 56 Crucially, the partnership board has made clear what the areas are which they do not see as priorities for future development under the Supporting People programme. The following areas are noted in the partnership board minutes of September 2004 as being areas for potential savings:
- ◆ services provided regardless of need, for example traditional sheltered housing or homeless hostels for families;
 - ◆ long-term accommodation based services where there is no flexibility in the support provided; and
 - ◆ floating support services that do not provide support across different tenures.
- 57 The five-year strategy is now at the draft stage. The officers group has considered a draft that includes a breakdown of current services; an analysis of need; the priorities for the future; and the shape that the services for different user groups will look like in 2010. This draft was presented to the Supporting People partnership board in December 2004 prior to further consultation with other stakeholders.

Existing services

- 58 The data appendix at the end of this report provides a detailed picture of how Wiltshire compares to the regional and national averages. It is notable that in overall terms, the county receives significantly less Supporting People grant per head of population, (£0.38) than the average for comparable authorities (£0.50 average for English shire counties).

- 59 The council, with its partners in the district councils, took a prudent approach to utilising transitional housing benefit (THB) as a funding source prior to the Supporting People programme going live on 1 April 2003. Comparisons between data submitted to ODPM in 2002 and in the summer of 2003 (the Gold and Platinum cut data returns) show that the total costs increased during this period, from around £5.7 million to £8.4 million (an increase of approximately 46 per cent). However this increase was due in a large part to the rise in the number of supported units available, up from 4,290 to 5,290 (an increase of approximately 23 per cent) over the same period.
- 60 The ODPM's final financial assessment of the council's grant allocation in July 2003, the platinum cut, shows that there were significant gaps in the provision for certain vulnerable groups in Wiltshire. Notably there were no accommodation based Supporting People services for people with drug and alcohol problems and teenage parents. There was also limited provision for the frail elderly, single homeless people, people with mental health problems and people with learning difficulties.
- 61 The council used the process of developing the shadow strategy to help identify where the supply of services for user groups were below the levels that might be expected in comparison to national averages. This supply mapping exercise drove the priorities for the development of new services in the shadow strategy. The partnership responded to known gaps through the development of new schemes prior to the implementation of Supporting People funding. These schemes were:
- ◆ short-term accommodation based services for people with learning disabilities;
 - ◆ specialist floating support service for people with drug and alcohol problems;
 - ◆ generic floating support service covering one of the four districts; and
 - ◆ young homeless accommodation service expanded.
- 62 Due to the savings requirements imposed by the ODPM on the Supporting People budget service development has been limited since the end of transitional housing benefit. This has resulted in difficulty in getting many new initiatives off the ground. In one instance the district council is funding a scheme for teenage parents that would be eligible to Supporting People funding should money be available. This is a good example of how well the partners work together to ensure adequate service provision.
- 63 A number of projects are underway to more accurately assess the needs of the different client groups. Bath University has been commissioned to research the support requirements of vulnerable people with complex needs and information is also being gathered by the district council's to assess the support needs of homeless applicants. The information from these needs analyses will be fed into the five year strategy although the information is too late to be in the draft that is currently out for consultation for example needs information on people who have drug and alcohol problems is still being collated.

Financial management and reporting

- 64 Supporting People grant expenditure is closely monitored and this information is effectively shared amongst the partnership. There are clear lines of accountability for the expenditure of supporting people funds. The partnership board has been receiving budget reports relating to the administration grant and supporting people grant since June 2003.

- 65 An accountant within the corporate finance team is part funded by the Supporting People administration grant. This officer meets on a monthly basis with the Supporting People team leader to discuss progress against the budgeted figures for the Supporting People grant and the administration grant. A summary report is presented to the monthly Supporting People officers group. Neither the partnership board nor the Supporting People officers group has raised significant issues or requested that action be taken in relation to financial management. Savings targets have been achieved and the Supporting People budget has been managed effectively.
- 66 Finance staff have also been involved in discussions around the implementation of the new IT system and the work that will be required to meet the cut in grant for 2005/06.
- 67 A number of interim contracts with providers were still unsigned when the Supporting People programme went live in April 2003. This was due to claims for transitional housing benefit being submitted late by some providers and consequent backlogs in the district councils who were responsible for validating this funding information. However this situation was soon rectified and there are no contracts currently unsigned.
- 68 Payments to providers are being made satisfactorily. Ninety five per cent of the providers responding to our survey reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the council's methods of payments for the Supporting People grant.

Fairer charging

- 69 In 2002 the Department of Health (DoH) introduced a fairer charging policy providing guidance to local authorities on how to set charges for non-residential services. Councils are not required to charge for services but in the event of a decision to charge, they are expected to follow the principles contained in this guidance.
- 70 A charging policy with regard to Supporting People, that reflects the national guidance, was agreed by the partnership board in November 2002 and agreed by the County Council's cabinet in January 2003. By August 2004, 159 applications for fairer charging assessments had been received by the council. Ninety four of these applications come from the West Wiltshire district council area and 33 from the North Wiltshire district council area. Training was provided to sheltered housing scheme providers in 2002 and 2003.
- 71 Following an initial surge in applications for fairer charging assessments there has been a reduction in the number of assessments that have been required and as a result the element of supporting people administration grant that is passed to the charging assessment team has been reduced. While this alteration has resulted in a saving to the Supporting People administration grant budget no further investment has been made to explore why applications for fairer charging assessments have not been evenly spread across the county.
- 72 The partnership board minutes of December 2003 recognise that:

'claims made so far had all come from one district - West Wiltshire. This was because the biggest provider here, West Wilts Housing Society, had widely advertised and appointed an officer to visit tenants to help complete the forms'

Partnership Board minutes.

- 73 Failure to analyse the source of fairer charging assessments and investment in advertising of the service may result in some vulnerable users not being aware of their entitlement to this assistance. The partnership has attempted to tackle this variance through the discussions with the local Citizens Advice Bureaux. A joint agreement has been prepared by the county and district councils that will cover all the bureaux in the Wiltshire area. A benefit take-up campaign, that specifically covers the regime of fairer charging for supported housing users is being undertaken by the bureaux.

Achieving savings

- 74 In 2003/04 The Supporting People programme in Wiltshire was required to make savings of £151,000 required by ODPM restrictions on the grant. The Supporting People officers group discussed the methods for achieving these savings in March 2003 and the partnership board agreed their approach. This measured approach included:

- ◆ some contracts for floating support were varied following negotiation with the providers to remove the charges for administrative support. The savings realised from this exercise were £86,000;
- ◆ where Supporting People funding is allocated to residential care services that do not fit grant eligibility criteria (these schemes were originally included in the programme as they were formerly in receipt of Supported Housing Management Grant). The partnership board has agreed that the Supporting People funding will be phased out over the period 2003/06;
- ◆ delays in some pipeline schemes due to delays with construction of new accommodation have delivered some non-recurring savings. The savings resulting from these delays has been £137,000; and
- ◆ following recommendations from the service review programme, the partnership board has agreed to decommission a service that has is not strategically relevant and to tender a Learning Disability service jointly with care commissioners to realise cost savings and improvements in service delivery.

In addition to these measures for the financial year 2004/05 the meeting of the partnership board in February 2004 agreed that there would be no inflationary uplift to the grant paid to providers.

- 75 The partnership board has established a sub-group to consider value for money issues. The scrutiny and best value panel comprises members of the partnership board other than the administering authority. There is one member from a primary care trust, one member from a district council and one member from the national probation service.

- 76 The partners have adopted an approach to identified savings within supporting people services that maximises value for money. At the Supporting People officers group in April 2004 it was agreed that should a provider approach the administering authority with identified savings in their supporting people grant these savings could be 'recycled' should certain criteria be met. The criteria are that:
- ◆ there is evidenced unmet need for the service;
 - ◆ service considered of high strategic importance;
 - ◆ no concerns about quality or provider accreditation;
 - ◆ the administering authority can demonstrate service achieves best value without competitive process;
 - ◆ value of savings does not exceed £20,000; and
 - ◆ financial position is such that Supporting People Grant is available for at least three years.

Service reviews

- 77 After a faltering start the service review programme in Wiltshire is now beginning to deliver results. The Supporting People programme in Wiltshire has begun to produce a significant volume of service reviews. This progress has been recent and concerns have been expressed by some providers as to the quality of all the reviews and the capacity of the team to deliver the full programme.
- 78 It is recognised by the council that there has been an under-resourcing of the service review programme. An additional officer has been allocated to the service review programme on a temporary basis to alleviate some of the pressure on the contract officers. This post is being funded from council sources outside of the supporting people administration grant. A report has been prepared for the overview and scrutiny committee in December 2004 and this notes the integrated nature of the supporting people programme with other contracting arrangements operated by the department of adult and community services.

Implementing the review programme

- 79 The Supporting People partnership has agreed a clear approach to the administration of service reviews. A service review toolkit was agreed by the partnership board in September 2003. The toolkit is a comprehensive document introduced to ensure compliance with ODPM requirements.
- 80 Training events have been held for the providers initially involved in the review process. These events have been run by the council's own staff and in addition external trainers have been brought in to provide an objective view for providers of what they might expect from the process. Eighty five per cent of providers responding to our questionnaire were either satisfied or very satisfied with the level of information that they had received from the council.
- 81 The partnership board agreed a programme of service reviews based upon a concentration on high risk and high cost services in the initial stages. The risk associated with a scheme was based upon the collective knowledge of the stakeholders about a particular service. Where there was little or knowledge about a service amongst the partners these services were identified for early review. As a consequence of this approach many of the early service reviews concentrated on smaller providers operating in the county. Many of these providers were the least prepared for the rigours of the Supporting People service review structure.

- 82 Eighty five service reviews have been completed. These reviews have generated a total of 433 action plans which have been agreed with providers of which 148 have been completed successfully with the remaining 285 still being monitored by the contract officers. Of those reviews outstanding, all aspects of the review are outstanding for 116 services, reviews are partly completed for 22 services and the review is near completion for 10 services.
- 83 The review programme has slipped behind the original agreed programme. The council recognises that at the outset there was no clear understanding of how long the process would take and as a result it has been difficult to project manage the timetable.
- 84 The contracts and review team has had additional resources to help clear the backlog of work. One officer has been seconded until March 2005 and an administrative assistant has been appointed. The recent ODPM announcement of the levels of administration grant for 2005/06 has also allocated an additional £32,000 to the administering authority to fund further investment in the service reviews. The reviews are scheduled to be back on track by summer 2005.
- 85 Due to the predominance of small providers in the initial stages of the service review programme it became apparent to the council that additional assistance would be required to ensure compliance with the complexities of the Supporting People regime and the quality requirements. A small providers' toolkit has been developed by the Supporting People team to assist small providers in understanding issues such as referrals and admissions; support planning and risk assessments. This toolkit can be used by providers to help ensure their compliance with quality standards as agreed with the Supporting People team in the action plans arising from service reviews.
- 86 The council has developed the documentation that is required to enable decisions, following service reviews, to be placed in a transparent and logical framework. Protocols to cover the potential need to remodel and decommission services following on from the scrutiny of a service review have been adopted. The criteria by which such decisions will be reached are clearly set out and the responsibilities of officers and the administering bodies are spelt out. An appeals process is attached to the remodelling and decommissioning protocols.
- 87 A clear procedure for considering providers' appeals against service review decisions has been agreed and publicised. The appeals process states under which grounds an appeal can be made. It is also helpful that the procedure identifies the difference between a complaint about the conduct of the reviewing officer, to be dealt with under the council's complaints procedure, and an appeal against the service review decision.
- 88 There have been local enhancements to the process of service reviews that complement the national framework. The Supporting People team have designed their own workbook for providers to complete as part of the Quality Assessment Framework self assessment. Providers feel that this workbook is easier to use than the original document provided by the ODPM. The Wiltshire document also gathers further value for money data, in addition to all the information prescribed by the ODPM. The workbook has been shared regionally and with other Supporting People teams across the Country.
- 89 Wiltshire is taking a pragmatic approach to complete all its service reviews prior to the deadline of March 2006. The partnership board has agreed that contracts, which are being renewed or being renewed with only minor changes following a full service review, can be approved by the Accountable Officer. Only those contracts where the service review is suggesting major changes, or decommissioning will be referred for final approval by the partnership board.

- 90 Arrangements have been made to ensure the independent scrutiny of service reviews covering internal providers. The cross authority group, where Wiltshire meets with Swindon and Gloucestershire, has set up an arrangement for each of them to moderate and validate each others reviews of in-house services to provide a degree of external assessment.
- 91 The council has been proactive in addressing the issue of service reviews that impact across boundaries with other administering authorities. Wiltshire has undertaken its first joint review with Bath and North East Somerset Council of a support service for people with drug and alcohol problems.
- 92 Contract officers are appointed with specific concern for their knowledge and understanding of procurement issues. While this has ensured a robust approach to contract issues there is a lack of specialist knowledge of the needs of service user groups. The council has acknowledged that this is far from ideal and have now determined that user consultation as part of the service review process will be undertaken by two contract officers.
- 93 Feedback from providers regarding the review process is mixed. There is evidence that the service review process has challenged providers to reconsider their operating procedures and that this process has delivered positive changes for users.
- 94 Service users report a constructive engagement in the service review process. Users felt that their views had been taken seriously in the contract officers' deliberations about the service. In one example the feedback to the contract officer from users prompted further investigation by the Supporting People team and the development of an action plan with the provider to address some deficiencies in operational practices around support planning and needs assessment.
- 95 In general the service reviews have been carried out to a sufficiently high standard. However, in a number of cases providers expressed concerns to us about the review process. These concerns can be summarised as:
- ◆ the review staff did not always have the skills or expertise to communicate with the services users they were meeting as part of the review process;
 - ◆ the emphasis of the service review was on the paperwork and not about the quality of the service. For example the focus was on petty detail with stress being put upon issues such as policies not being dated; and
 - ◆ the contract officers had not had time to do any preparation for the review because of their workload. When they visited schemes they had not had time to read any of the paperwork that had been sent to them in advance.
- 96 Despite some problems in delivering the service review programme it is evident that the individual reviews are influencing the manner in which services are provided to users and have begun to raise standards. Although the providers had different experiences of the service review process, they all acknowledged how important the reviews are to raising the standards of their services.

Sharing information and improving practice

- 97 As yet there have been no structured efforts to utilise the knowledge and experience being gained from the service reviews to influence the manner in which providers structure their services. Good practice that is observed by the contract officers in one service is not automatically shared with other providers in the county.

- 98 However, information from the service reviews has been used to identify wider strategic issues across the county. For example, several reviews have considered services for homeless users and have identified similar issues around move-on accommodation and the potential for support to prevent homelessness. The partnership body has taken a decision to look at the strategic relevance of homelessness services across the county as the result of the review process identifying these common issues.
- 99 The council has identified changes to its own working practices resulting from the earlier reviews that have been concluded. Delegated powers for signing off reviews by the accountable officer have now been agreed by the partnership board. A further assessment of the risk associated with all schemes has led to a revision of the review programme with a greater emphasis being placed on desktop reviews.

Value for money

- 100 The Supporting People programme in Wiltshire has recognised the need for services to provide value for money for users and funders. Benchmarking information regarding scheme costs, drawn from the financial information submitted to the ODPM, was used to assess which services in Wiltshire could be considered as high cost. These high cost services were then programmed into the service review timetable for early review. The service review programme has begun to deliver savings to the overall grant pot and the placement of the service reviews with contract officers ensures that there is a mature approach to contracting and procurement.
- 101 The overall level of Supporting People funding being received in Wiltshire is low compared to other county council's across England. In 2003/04 the average level of Supporting People grant per head of population in Wiltshire was £0.38 compared to the national average of £0.70. The unit costs for Supporting People services in Wiltshire are generally below regional and national averages for most user groups. The exceptions are services for offenders and young people leaving care. For offender services the high cost has arisen because there are no offender hostels across the county which has resulted in the development of accommodation with intensive support to manage the risk attached to this client group.
- 102 From the inception of the Supporting People programme the partnership has taken a prudent approach to establishing the cost of housing related support for vulnerable people in Wiltshire. There is now some concern from council officers that this sensible approach might have adverse effects should future funding constraints on the national Supporting People grant pot continue to be applied on a pro-rata basis across all administering authorities.
- 103 The prudent approach to transitional housing benefit assessment between the county council and the district councils has worked to ensure funding for housing related support is appropriate. In visiting a range of providers during the inspection we could not identify any apparent cost shunting to the Supporting People budget from other funding sources. Any care funding for schemes comes from social care and health budgets in proportions that reasonably reflect the mixture of services being provided to users. Supporting People funding is paying for housing related support in those circumstances that we inspected.

Service cost comparisons

- 104 The initial thrust of the service review programme in Wiltshire concentrated on high cost services compared to regional and national comparator figures provided by the ODPM. The benchmarking of service costs is still being developed. Wiltshire has led on the development of a South West Regional Benchmarking Framework that will allow administering authorities in the region to compare costs per support hour rather than unit costs. The intention is that this information will be developed further during 2005/06 to provide a more accurate reflection of value for money.
- 105 There is also an acceptance by all the partners that cost comparisons need to be made within the county in the strategic review of similar services. The partnership board has endorsed an approach to the future of the Home Improvement Service in Wiltshire which should ensure value for money. A decision was taken at the partnership board meeting of June 2004 to tender the Home Improvement Agency service countywide towards the end of 2005 with the expectation that the new services will go live from April 2006.
- 106 Work has also been undertaken to consider the value of services where these are particularly low cost. Mental health services in Wiltshire are below the regional and national averages. Further analysis has revealed that the majority of low cost mental health services are provided by a few small charitable organisations that have not allowed for the same level of overheads as larger providers. As a result the partnership has recognised that there might be questions around the longer-term viability of these services. Discussions are underway with officers who commission mental health services who are currently undertaking a review of all accommodation based services. The intention is to use the outcomes of this review to inform future joint commissioning.

Addressing value for money through service reviews

- 107 An assessment of value for money is a key element of the service review toolkit that has been adopted in Wiltshire. An assessment is made of the cost effectiveness of each service as part of the review process and this is considered alongside other criteria relating to performance and quality. The partnership board have taken some tough decommissioning decisions with regard to schemes which no longer address corporate aims and do not deliver value for money. The Supporting People programme has ensured that within some service areas services have been withdrawn and therefore resources diverted to priority areas. This ensures not only value for money but also the targeting of limited resources.
- 108 The value for money element of the service review process has also led to an increase in the supply of supported accommodation in the county. For example on provider of accommodation for offenders was challenged as part of the service review to justify their high unit cost. As the result of negotiations with the Supporting People team the provider agreed to offer a resettlement service to an additional 16 users within the existing contract value.
- 109 The service review programme has also proved to be the catalyst for the remodelling of some areas of work to deliver more effective services. The review of the delivery of disabled facilities grants to people with physical impairments has enabled a more joined-up approach across the county and a reduction in the time from assessment to delivery. In a number of district councils Supporting People has enabled the joint funding of an Occupational Therapist to enable a more proactive approach. The impact of this is that fewer users have had to move to nursing homes or residential care and therefore independent living has been enhanced.

- 110 While the county has started to make provision for reductions in funding arising from service reviews the programme has not benefited from some immediate savings that might have resulted from the withdrawal of supporting people funding that is being paid to residential care homes. In June 2004 the partnership board was notified that £240,000 was being paid from supporting people funds to these residential homes despite them being outside of the funding remit for the grant. It is planned that this funding will be withdrawn by March 2006. This decision was agreed by all the partners as it was recognised that impact of this funding change would all be borne by the county council and that such changes might destabilise the local market in this type of provision. Also account was taken of the impact on service users and the time it will take to provide alternative accommodation provision for some vulnerable groups such as people with learning disabilities and the extensive consultation which will need to be undertaken.
- 111 Joint commissioning of Supporting People services with other funders is embryonic and needs further development to ensure that the procurement of housing related support services is fully integrated with decisions relating to the purchase of care services. The county council is currently preparing a commissioning strategy which will be in place by March 2005 concurrent with the delivery of the five-year strategy for Supporting People. The current approach towards commissioning of social services is based around the former national community care and local delivery plans.
- 112 Clear eligibility criteria have yet to be established for the Supporting People programme in Wiltshire. Until these criteria have been determined there is uncertainty over exactly what services the partnership is wanting to commission. The partnership has agreed that it wants to work towards outcomes-based eligibility criteria which will focus on what the service should be achieving for the service user rather than quantifying the inputs that are going into it. This work is being done in conjunction with the south west regional group.

User involvement

- 113 User involvement in the Supporting People programme, beyond the contact made in the service review process, is limited in Wiltshire.

Involving service users

- 114 The district councils' supported housing forums have been used as 'inclusive forums' for the supporting people programme. These groups have membership from providers, other agencies and, to a limited extent, service users. However the meetings are primarily a point for discussion between providers and statutory organisations rather than being an opportunity to investigate the emerging needs of users.
- 115 A one-off event to discuss Supporting People issues did attract over 60 users. However this example has not been built upon to promote ongoing engagement with users and their representatives. This is despite other areas of the county council's work demonstrating advanced mechanisms for talking to users. The Wiltshire learning disability strategy for housing and support is comprehensive, well researched, linked to all major legislation and related national and local strategies. It includes user views which have been actively sought throughout the process.

- 116 The council recognises that user involvement has been disappointing. Not all service users have been reached especially women fleeing domestic violence and people with drug and alcohol problems. The council is now looking to restructure how it is involving users and ensuring all users are included in this process. A user involvement plan was agreed by the partnership board in June 2004 which concentrates on the use of existing consultative mechanisms and the potential development of a Supporting People users' panel. Service users are now represented at the partnership board with two representatives from the Wiltshire and Swindon User Network attending.
- 117 The user involvement plan has an attached action plan. This document details all the user groups that need to be involved in discussions over the Supporting People programme; the existing mechanisms for consulting with each user group and potential contact points from among the partner agencies and the voluntary sector. While the action plan is a significant step forward in the systematic approach to user consultation there are still some groups, for example people with HIV/Aids, for whom there is no established arena for engagement.

Partnership arrangements

- 118 All partners are actively engaged in supporting people and this has developed from the foundations built by the housing and community care partnership that pre-dated the programme. There are effective mechanisms that ensure that the Supporting People programme is understood at a strategic level and that the programme can contribute to wider community objectives.
- 119 The county council's chief executive makes links to chief executives in other partner organisations through the local strategic partnership for the county. Some members of the partnership board for Supporting People are also members of the Wiltshire Strategic Board and act as champions for Supporting People in this capacity.
- 120 The leader of the county council and the chief executive have a programme of meetings with senior officers from all of the partners and other organisations, such as the police service where their work may touch upon the Supporting People agenda. While Supporting People is not the main area of discussion at these meetings there is a wide understanding of how the programme fits into areas of joint concern.

Providers

- 121 Providers report that Supporting People team are approachable and informative. Provider representatives now attend the Supporting People officers group and have an opportunity to influence the debate.
- 122 There has been reliance upon the district councils' supported housing forums to operate as the vehicle for engaging with providers collectively. However it has been recognised by the county council recently that this approach has not allowed providers with the opportunity to meet together and discuss countywide topics. Over the past nine months the council has worked to develop a county provider forum for Supporting People issues.

Health and Probation partnerships

- 123 The local primary care trusts have experienced major upheaval and senior staff changes recently. This has affected their ability to play a full role in the programme, but this is now starting to change with senior appointments having been made. All three primary care trusts were without a chief executive officer until the past few months. One chief executive is now fulfilling this role for two of the primary care trusts.

- 124 Health representation in the development of the Supporting People programme has been maintained through the attendance of primary care trust board members at the partnership board and the county council has done what it can to support the primary care trusts and the health sector generally through these difficulties.
- 125 There is effective engagement of the Supporting People programme with related agendas in the health sector. For example the Teenage Partnership Board has incorporated other partners and partnership boards to effect a joint approach to addressing the needs of this group. Supporting People are involved in all the aspects with regard to housing.
- 126 Arrangements with the national probation service are again well developed and are based on healthy working relationships with the county council and district councils over a number of years. Comprehensive risk management policies and procedures are in place to handle the housing of offenders in the area and the probation service is confident that Supporting People is integrated into arrangements for housing high risk offenders through the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).
- 127 The Wiltshire Probation Accommodation strategy was developed in consultation with the Supporting People lead officer and other stakeholders including local providers. As a result of these mature partnership arrangements a protocol for moving on offenders who cannot return to their home area has been negotiated with all district councils.

District councils

- 128 Overall the partnership between the administering authority and district councils has worked well. Partnerships have been established over a number of years. For example a member of staff from one of the district councils has been seconded to the supporting people team and the district council recognise that they will get some benefit from this arrangement.
- 129 The county council and the Supporting People team have actively sought the views of the district councils in relation to the service reviews that are being undertaken in their area and where possible validation visits have been conducted jointly with officers from the district.

Cross authority working

- 130 Successful partnership working is being developed by Wiltshire with other administering authorities in the region. Wiltshire is actively involved in the South West regional implementation group for the Supporting People programme meeting with other administering authorities from the region. Agreement has been reached to adopt a passport approach to providers who have been accredited by other administering authorities in the region and consideration is being given to the development of a regional benchmarking system.
- 131 In the period before the implementation of Supporting People the programme in Wiltshire was developed with a joint team operating with the neighbouring unitary authority in Swindon. This approach delivered economies of scale and provided consistency for providers. The geographical nature of Wiltshire means that Swindon operates as a major urban centre for much of the north of the county. This close relationship was severed when the programme went live as the administration of the grant had to be formally separated. However, close working relationships still exist between the two administering authorities.

- 132 For the purposes of cross authority working the ODPM have grouped Wiltshire with Swindon and Gloucestershire. Links with Gloucestershire, while adequate, are less developed as there is little interaction between the users of services across the two counties. Work is underway to develop a cross authority statement for inclusion in the five-year strategy.
- 133 Wiltshire has approached neighbouring comparator authorities to set up a benchmarking and peer review group to explore continual improvement through the sharing of ideas and good practice. The first meeting of this group is scheduled for early in 2005 involving Oxfordshire County Council, Gloucestershire County Council, and Somerset County Council.

Access to services and information

- 134 Access to the Supporting People programme and information regarding Supporting People funded services is underdeveloped in Wiltshire.
- 135 Some leaflets have been produced that explained Supporting People to sheltered housing tenants and leaseholders. However, these leaflets were in a small font and the strap-lines regarding the availability of translations were not translated nor were they in larger print for those users who might require alternative formats. No versions of these documents have been produced in alternative formats although these could be made available if requested.
- 136 The council are developing a user leaflet that is to be distributed to all current users and will be available at access points provided by the county and the districts. At the point of the inspection this leaflet was still in draft form.
- 137 Following the corporate assessment of the council in 2002 it recognised that access to its services was an area of weakness. The council has responded with the implementation of the 'Transforming the Customer Experience' programme. Part of this exercise is to provide one-stop customer facilities in centres of population across the county. Currently the programme is in its pilot phase.
- 138 The county council website does provide a link to Supporting People information. This information is provided in an easily accessible format. Also included on the webpage is link to a directory of Supporting People funded services. The directory as displayed electronically is not helpful to the user as it appears in a format that is difficult to read. However a hard copy of the directory has been produced and has been circulated to access points run by the county and the districts as well as advice agencies and providers.
- 139 A Supporting People communication strategy has been adopted by the partnership board. In the first instance, this strategy concentrates on the dissemination of information regarding Supporting People to frontline staff to ensure users contacting the county or the districts receive good information.
- 140 Other literature for the public recognises the existence of Supporting People. The document 'Better Care: Higher Standards' is produced jointly by the council and the primary care trusts. The document recognises its duty to inform the public about the services they can expect to receive from the caring and support services in the area. The document has been revised from previous versions taking into account the new relationship with Supporting People funded services. The Better Care Higher Standards charter is accessible in all formats and is well presented. It includes reference to Supporting People and relevant contact information.

Diversity

- 141 The council and its partners are aware that they lack a complete picture of the services required by all sections of the local community. Initial attempts are being made to research the needs of the diverse community but as yet there is not a complete coverage of all potential user groups by the Supporting People programme.
- 142 The Supporting People team have liaised with the county council's communications team and partners to develop their understanding of local needs through the identification of related strategies and action plans that contain relevant information regarding need. For example all the Wiltshire community plans have been cross-referenced to identify issues relating to Supporting People. Other strategies relating to Supporting People, such as the learning disability best value review; the service plan for vulnerable children; and the service plan for older people have been well researched to take account of the needs of all the community.
- 143 Where gaps in the knowledge of the partners have been identified contact has been established with responsible officers of the co-ordinating body. For example:
- ◆ vulnerable young people – work with Connexions and the Youth Offending Service;
 - ◆ mental health – work with MIND and with Mental Health Co-ordinators;
 - ◆ domestic violence – work district based Domestic Violence Forums and the Domestic Violence Intervention Partnership; and
 - ◆ travellers and gypsies – work with the county council Travellers and Gypsies Officer.
- 144 In other areas, research is ongoing into the needs of users, for example:
- ◆ teenage parents – a 'Teenage Pregnancy Toolkit', which includes questions about housing related support needs is being distributed through health visitors;
 - ◆ drug and alcohol misuse – a questionnaire is being distributed through the Drug and Alcohol Action Team; and
 - ◆ complex needs – research commissioned from Bath University to recommend the models of provision and consultation required.
- 145 The Partnership Board has asked for strategic reviews of services to take place to inform future commissioning arrangements. In the past development has been provider led and the supporting people partners want to replace this with a response that tackles identified needs. The reviews completed so far include the review of home improvement agency services and floating support needs.
- 146 The expansion of services where possible has addressed user groups that might otherwise be excluded. Early service development through pipeline schemes has resulted in services being provided for drug and alcohol users in Wiltshire where there was previously no provision. Transitional housing benefit was used to increase the support available in offender provision to allow for more high risk service users to be supported.

- 147 The council is using its contact with the Wiltshire Race Equality Council (WREC) to explore the needs of the local black and minority ethnic communities. Council funding is supporting an officer of WREC who is engaging with forums that consider the social and health care agendas across the county. However WREC report that there is a real issue of consultation fatigue among the black and minority ethnic community and as a result any detailed research into housing related support needs has not been delivered.
- 148 The district councils have also introduced more effective and co-ordinated monitoring of homelessness applications. This information is now stored on a county wide database. This joint effort is the result of a decision taken by the local strategic partnership to seek additional government funding under the Public Sector Agreement rules to provide support to all 16 and 17 year olds in their own tenancies. The funding that might be released from this initiative will be directed to the local strategic partnership to agree spending priorities.
- 149 District councils have not undertaken joint county-wide housing needs studies for many reasons. These include timing, ensuring valid comparisons with previous studies and local plan publication requirements. The district council's have been encouraged by government to look at sub-regional housing markets which do not always strictly correspond to the county boundaries. For example Kennet and North Wiltshire district councils have co-ordinated their housing needs survey with Swindon as this grouping best reflects the movement of populations. As a result of this there is an absence of robust data on housing needs of many special needs groups that might have been made available through this route.
- 150 A sub-group has been set up by the Valuing People partnership board which is to look at the housing options for people with learning disabilities. The Supporting People programme is represented in the discussions of this sub-group. The intention is to consider whether models such as shared ownership might be applicable to users in Wiltshire. A consultation day has been arranged for early in 2005 to which service users, families and carers have been invited.

Outcomes for service users

- 151 There is evidence that the Supporting People programme has produced real benefits for vulnerable people in Wiltshire. These improvements have arisen not only from the injection of additional revenue resources but also as the result of how the programme has been implemented locally.
- 152 Examples of additional schemes that were developed as part of the pipeline of new initiatives that were Supporting People funded include:
- ◆ housing related support for three young people leaving care;
 - ◆ a generic, cross-tenure floating support service;
 - ◆ women's refuge which has accommodated 35 women fleeing domestic violence since it opened in September 2003; and
 - ◆ a mother and baby scheme for teenage parents.
- 153 Support plans are in place across a range of services for different user groups. All the schemes visited had implemented support plans for users. These plans were being used as a tool for identifying the steps that the user needed to take to achieve or sustain their independence. Where applicable the support plans, that detail the housing related support required by the user, were dovetailed to their care plans that identify the care services they receive.

- 154 Risks to the programme are well understood and are catalogued. The Supporting People programme caters for the most vulnerable people in any community and, as such, it is vital that the risks associated with the programme are effectively managed to ensure that services are maintained and any changes are well managed. A risk analysis has been undertaken by the council to establish what risks face the programme and these have then been ranked in order of their likelihood and impact. There has been a clear emphasis on the minimisation of risk to users. The existing controls on the risk have been identified and additional actions that are required are listed. The risk analysis for the supporting people programme was last updated in October 2004 and has been included in wider corporate risk schedules. The latest updated version of the risk register shows that the actions required to minimise and control risks are being delivered.
- 155 Several of the providers we visited mentioned problems with the availability of move-on accommodation for users who have achieved a level of independence that should allow them to move into their own accommodation. The lack of affordable rented accommodation across the county has been recognised by the district councils and the county and is listed as one of the key priorities in the community plans and their housing strategies.

Supporting People Case Study 1

Service User Group: Young mother

Type of service: Floating support

Key players: Voluntary sector support provider

Issues to be addressed

- ◆ Repeated homelessness.
- ◆ Experience of domestic violence.
- ◆ Low self-esteem.

Action taken

- ◆ Placed in own self-contained tenancy.
- ◆ Support to develop self-confidence.
- ◆ Help with parenting skills.
- ◆ Development of life skills.
- ◆ User agrees all plans with support worker.

Outcomes for service user

- ◆ User has achieved a stable living environment for the first time.
- ◆ User gaining in self-confidence and building housekeeping skills.

Supporting People Case Study 2

Service User Group: Offender with mental health and physical problems

Type of service: Floating support

Key players: Voluntary sector support provider

Probation Service

Community Mental Health Team

Issues to be addressed

- ◆ Conviction for arson.
- ◆ Severe depression and insecurity.
- ◆ Burns and related surgery.
- ◆ Crohns disease.

Action taken

- ◆ Help developing assertiveness.
- ◆ Assistance in qualifying as football coach.
- ◆ Development of self-reliance and independence.

Outcomes for service user

- ◆ User able to handle contact with agencies on their own.
- ◆ User gaining in self-confidence and building housekeeping skills.

Summary

- 156 We have assessed the Supporting People programme being delivered by Wiltshire County Council to be a good, two-star service.
- 157 There are many positive aspects to the manner in which the Supporting People programme has been delivered in Wiltshire, notably the sound governance arrangements; the positive regard in which the Supporting People team is held by providers and partners; the attention being paid to the value for money being achieved by services; the reliable systems that have been developed to sustain the programme; the implementation of the service review programme that has brought about real improvements to services; and crucially the evidence of improvements to the range and quality of services available to vulnerable people. Moreover, the partnership has made transparent decisions about the future priorities for the programme.
- 158 However, against these strengths must be weighed a number of areas of weakness. The needs of all communities within Wiltshire are not clearly understood. Users have not been effectively engaged in the delivery of the Supporting People programme and access arrangements for users do not offer care for the customer. Lack of affordable accommodation across the county is limiting the options for moving on users who have achieved the ability to live independently.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

159 In reaching our judgement we look at three key areas.

- ◆ What is the evidence of service improvement?
- ◆ How good are the current improvement plans?
- ◆ Will improvements be delivered?

What is the evidence of service improvement?

160 The council is a stable organisation and has been improving its performance. The corporate performance assessment rating has moved from fair in 2002 to good in 2004. The council was shocked at the feedback it received in 2002 about the low levels of customer satisfaction. A corporate emphasis has been placed upon improving the council's interaction with users and as a result customer satisfaction has improved from the bottom quartile to the top quartile in the past two years.

161 The county council knows that it has not done enough in the past to deal with diversity issues. A number of initiatives have been started but it is recognised that there is still more to do in this area. For example, the council found that they had a lot of racial incidents reported in schools and as a result a programme of training with teachers has been introduced to combat this problem.

162 Corporately the county council have focussed on setting up the structure to analyse diversity issues and help develop services to meet these needs, the director of the department of adult and community services is leading on this initiative.

163 The county council is ambitious about its performance and wants to improve its star ratings in social care. It is aware of the issues that need to be addressed to achieve this and is working on these. For example work is being focused on reducing the number of placement moves experienced by young people being looked after by the council.

164 There is an awareness of the areas where improvement work is required within the partnership board for the Wiltshire Supporting people programme and a track record of achieving the necessary improvement. For example, the meeting of the partnership board in December 2003 noted the recommendations made by the ODPM in relation to the operation of commissioning bodies nationally and a list of areas requiring attention was drafted from this appraisal. These areas were:

- ◆ conflict resolution procedures;
- ◆ risk and contingency planning; and
- ◆ emergency plans if a service collapsed.

All of these areas have now been addressed through the adoption of suitable protocols and contingency plans.

165 There is evidence that the Supporting People programme has delivered on the priorities that have been agreed by the partners. Of the 18 priorities for action identified in the Supporting People service plan for 2003 to 2006 15 have been achieved. The three outstanding items are: the delivery of the five-year strategy, the obtaining of user views, and the implementation of the new IT system.

- 166 One of the main achievements has been the establishment of the Wiltshire Supporting People team in early 2003 after the split from the joint implementation team that was previously run in conjunction with Swindon. Despite this relatively late start the programme has successfully been implemented and mainstreamed across the council.
- 167 Developments of new schemes under the Supporting People programme have broadly reflected the priorities set within the shadow strategy. For example schemes have been developed for young single homeless people and high risk offenders. In addition to this it is clear that the values expressed by the Supporting People partnership in the shadow strategy with regards to the promotion of independence are also being delivered through the reinforcement with providers of the need to use support plans as a tool develop the skills of users.
- 168 The service review programme is also producing improvements in services that will be evident to users. In one case the service review consultation threw up concerns around the operational practices of a national provider. Through the establishment of an action plan with the provider these issues around support planning and needs assessments for users are now being addressed.
- 169 The Supporting People partnership is open to scrutiny and learns from this engagement. The partnership board has received an action plan that resulted from an internal audit review of the Supporting People programme in December 2003. The agreed tasks are clearly identified with a responsible officer and target dates and have been tied into the Service Improvement Plan 2003/04 for the Supporting People programme.

How good are the current improvement plans?

- 170 The plans and strategies governing the Supporting People programme and related areas of activity for the partners are well developed. The plans reflect the evident areas of weakness around user engagement and access to the Supporting People programme.
- 171 Further work is needed to ensure that the views of users are completely understood and that the needs of all elements of the community are taken into account in developing priorities. Until this analysis is undertaken there remains a key weakness in the development of priorities for the improvement of the service.
- 172 The delivery of Supporting People in Wiltshire is evidently linked to other related strategies. Arrangements are in place for the cross referencing of the Supporting People programme to other areas of work such as teenage pregnancy and community safety.
- 173 There are a range of robust related strategies and plans in place governing the partnership arrangements across the county. These documents are well researched and take account of the views of users, for example:
- ◆ learning disability commissioning strategy;
 - ◆ Teenage Pregnancy Plan; and
 - ◆ Wiltshire learning disability strategy for housing and support.
- 174 The effective working of the Supporting People partnership has allowed for the development of clear guidance for the development of the programme and ownership of the priorities across all agencies.

- 175 Wiltshire has adopted a rigorous process for establishing the service plan for the supporting people programme. The service plan is a thorough document which considers issues such as financial management and procurement and sets itself within the national context while being aware of local factors.
- 176 The action plan that is attached to the service plan for the supporting people programme in Wiltshire is comprehensive. There is a clear link between the actions that have been identified and the improvement of the supporting people programme. For example the plan recognises that 'there is still some confusion around the objectives of the supporting people programme and the function of the team, externally and within the county council'. To tackle this acknowledged confusion it is proposed that a communications strategy is developed to be implemented over the following 12 months. The resources required to deliver this strategy are identified in the plan and the key officers responsible for delivering this action are listed.
- 177 Wiltshire has adopted effective mechanisms for managing the delivery of work required for the successful running of the supporting people programme. There is a comprehensive work-plan that governs the delivery of the supporting people programme in Wiltshire. This document is presented as a Gantt chart in spreadsheet format. Officers or bodies responsible for delivering actions or agreeing decisions are clearly identified with required completion dates. Some of the tasks, particularly in relation to strategic development, are marked as 'ongoing' and require further refinement to ensure they are time limited.
- 178 Attempts have been made to use existing consultation methods to bolster the engagement of users with the Supporting People programme. The Supporting People team is involved with a research project that is considering the needs of people over the age of 50 in Wiltshire. The results of this research are not due for a further 18 months but the involvement of the team has ensured that there will be specific consultation about housing and related support needs. The Supporting People team have also developed links with the council run Carers Voice and Carers Forums. There are plans to develop this model and create a Supporting People Users Forum, inviting users who have already engaged in consultation to join a standing panel for regular consultation. Where developments for people with learning disability have been made or are underway consultation has been undertaken at a group and individual level. This has fed into the Supporting People services which have been developed.
- 179 As part of the strategic review of floating support services, an exit questionnaire is being developed which will allow service users to give their views of the service they have received when they leave. This will provide ongoing service user feedback and is independent of the service review process.
- 180 The user involvement plan has an attached action plan. This document demonstrates that the council and its partners are aware of their previous failures to engage all users and is a significant step forward in the systematic approach to user consultation.
- 181 There is not currently needs information on some groups such as women fleeing domestic violence, travellers and people with AIDS/HIV. The council is aware of this and looking at ways of working with these groups to find the information. However, it will be too late to be included in the five-year strategy. The council has plans for different ways of consulting with, and involving service users in the programme. They are keen to build on the 'panels' that already exist and have a panel specifically for supporting people separated into users of short and long term services. These panels would then nominate a representative to attend the partnership board.

Will the council deliver the improvements?

- 182 There is ownership and leadership of the programme at a senior level within the council and strong capacity to deliver the programme and improvements from the lead officer and Supporting People team. Leadership of the commissioning body is also strong with engagement from all key partners. There is a track record of delivering the programme to date. Weaknesses exist in the effective engagement of users and the establishment of a complete picture of needs across the county.
- 183 Additional resources are being invested to improve the capacity of the council to communicate with the public and improve access to services. The council have recognised that they need to improve the access that the public has to their services. As a result a corporate initiative has been launched called, 'Transforming the customer experience'. One of the intentions of this initiative is to provide customer access points in all of the major population centres across the county. An initial pilot for this project has been developed in Salisbury.
- 184 Additional investment is being made in the systems that support the Supporting People programme. The council experienced initial problems in the implementation of the new IT system for Supporting People. The system links to the main database operated by the department of adult and community services and complications over the integration of the two products caused delays. These issues have now been resolved and the system will go live in January 2005. The new IT system will enable the Supporting People manager to monitor workloads more effectively and it will improve communications within the team by enabling them all to view data relating to users, providers and contracts at the same time.
- 185 An additional element of software is also being introduced that allows information taken from the new IT system to be manipulated to produce a suite of performance reports that will be used to monitor the programme more effectively.
- 186 Effective mechanisms exist to ensure that staff time and resources are being directed to the areas that are recognised as needing improvement. The Supporting People team is relatively new with all appointments having been made in the period since the summer 2003. The council operates an annual appraisal system that links the objectives for individual members of staff back to wider departmental and corporate objectives. This will ensure that officers understand their individual role in achieving the service improvements that have been agreed by the partnership.
- 187 The supporting people team meets on a monthly basis. These meetings have a specific topic each month as well as a general round-up of what is going on for individual members of the team. Given the geographical spread of the team and the pressure on workloads resulting from the service review programme not all officers have been able to attend meetings.
- 188 Additional capacity has been provided to cope with the service review programme. The council has noted the delays in the delivery of the service review programme and due to the location of contract officers in the department of adult and community services procurement team the resourcing of additional staff support to assist in the review process has not been problematic.
- 189 Performance is managed well across the council and supporting people team is part of this. An assistant director responsible for performance and review reports directly to the chief executive ensuring a good understanding of service development at a senior level within the council. The service improvement plan for the team focuses on the right areas to deliver enhancements to the programme and the internal scrutiny arrangements enable formal monitoring to take place by senior officers and elected members.

- 190 The partnership board receives reports that monitor the delivery and performance of the supporting people programme. In June 2004 the partnership board received a report on the achievement of key targets and milestones by the supporting people team. The report covered performance against targets for 2003/04 with regard to delivery of the service review programme and user involvement in this process, for example. These reports are received quarterly and are in addition to the regular financial updates.
- 191 Partners are able to give a clear lead to the Supporting People programme based upon their history of joint work in the area of accommodation and related support. The partnership board has agreed a mission statement for the five-year strategy.

'The Supporting People Partnership in Wiltshire will work with others to ensure flexible support services are provided to people in our County who need them. These services will support people to live independently in a home of their choice and will prevent housing crisis or homelessness'. - draft five-year strategy.

- 192 The commissioning body has agreed the strategic priorities that will govern the development of the five-year strategy for supporting people in Wiltshire. These priorities fit with the information that is currently known about the match between the supply and demand for supported housing in Wiltshire. There is a clear emphasis on using the Supporting People grant to maximise the quantity and quality of services that can be delivered and minimising the need for high cost crisis intervention.
- 193 The partnership board has made clear what the areas are which they do not see as priorities for future development under the Supporting People programme. A clear lead has been given to focus services on the user. This approach will allow the limited Supporting People grant to be used to the best advantage.
- 194 The five-year strategy recognises where further service development is required to meet gaps in provision that have been identified and where needs are understood. In addition alternative funding routes are being sought, for example extra care provision for older people is under-resourced in the county and the council and their partners have already applied to the Department of Health for additional funding to provide three extra care facilities.
- 195 The close working between the partners is evident in their approach to issues that might adversely impact upon individual members of the partnership. It was decided to phase the withdrawal of funding from registered care homes over a three-year period so as to not de-stabilise the service and also to provide savings to the programme over a number of years.

Summary

- 196 We have assessed the Supporting People programme in Wiltshire as having promising prospects for improvement.
- 197 There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the delivery of the Supporting People programme will improve in the future. The partnership has achieved the objectives that were agreed in the shadow strategy; service plans focus on the key areas for improvement and are being delivered; there is a history of constructive work between providers and partners; there is openness to external challenge; and the recognition of areas of weaknesses allows resources to be targeted on key areas for improvement. While the significant workload involved in the service review programme is a key concern the council has handled staffing issues appropriately in the past and there is a corporate commitment to deliver to the ODPM's timetable. We envisage that customer access issues should largely be resolved by the corporate 'Transforming the customer experience' initiative.

- 198 However, a full understanding of customer preferences is underdeveloped and more work is needed to ensure a thorough knowledge of the diverse needs within the Wiltshire community.

Appendices

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

Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Supporting People service improvement plan 2004 to 2007;
- ◆ Learning disabilities best value review;
- ◆ Learning disabilities commissioning strategy;
- ◆ Supporting People learning disabilities strategic review;
- ◆ Teenage Pregnancy Plan;
- ◆ service plan for vulnerable children;
- ◆ service plan for older people;
- ◆ Wiltshire Community Strategy – A county fit for our children;
- ◆ Supporting People partnership legal agreement;
- ◆ partnership board meeting minutes;
- ◆ Supporting People officers group meeting minutes;
- ◆ Supporting People risk analysis;
- ◆ Supporting People workplan 2004/05;
- ◆ DACS Advisory panel meeting minutes;
- ◆ remodelling and decommissioning protocols;
- ◆ service review appeals procedure;
- ◆ service review toolkit; and
- ◆ draft five-year strategy.

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.

Interviews

We met a range of people involved with the Supporting People programme including representatives of the other statutory partners, providers and users. We interviewed key officers in the council responsible for delivering the Supporting People programme and councillors who are responsible for overseeing the programme.

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.

Positive practice

‘The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources’. (Seeing is Believing).

- ◆ Member engagement in the governing bodies for the Supporting People programme in Wiltshire, the partnership board, has ensured a good level of understanding about the opportunities the programme can offer to vulnerable people in the county among key decision makers.
- ◆ The council has effectively integrated the operation of the Supporting People programme into other functions already delivered by the council. This has allowed the sharing of knowledge and good practice across disciplines and ensured that additional council resources have been made available to the programme.
- ◆ The council has focused on enabling the continued role of small providers in the county. The toolkit that has been developed for small providers to help them tackle the complexities of Supporting People administration is one example of how the authority has enhanced the capacity of the sector.