

Inspection report

November 2004



Supporting People Programme

City of York Council

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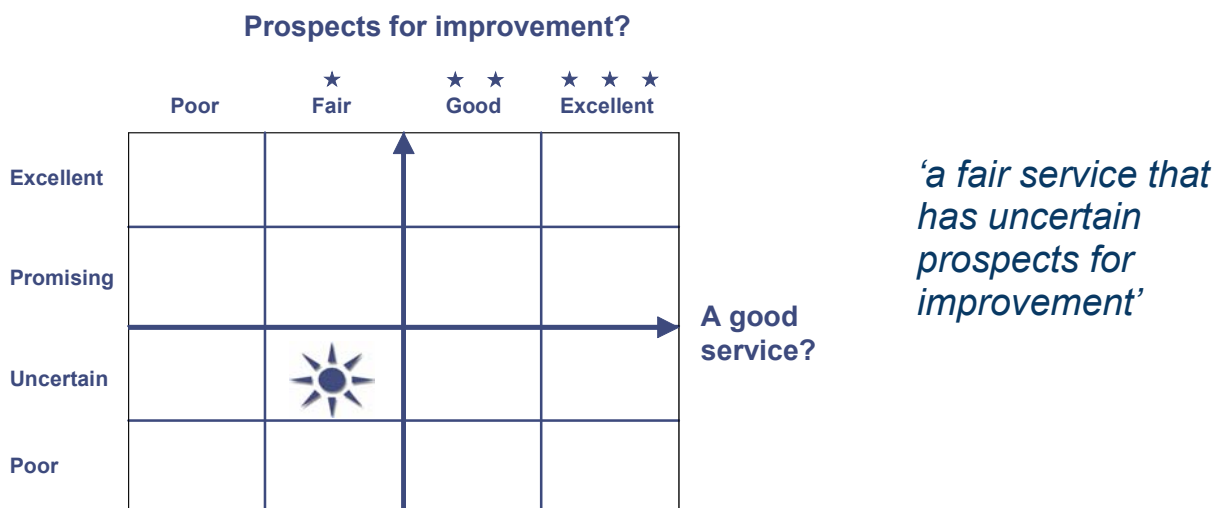
Summary

- 1 City of York is a unitary authority in North Yorkshire. The population is 182,000 of which 4.89 per cent are from minority ethnic communities. The council is Liberal Democrat led with 29 of the 47 seats. The council employs 7,500 staff across all services.
- 2 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide housing related support services which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 3 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered through local partnerships in response to identified local needs and has replaced the previous complex and uncoordinated arrangements for providing housing related support services for vulnerable people.
- 4 City of York Council acts as the administering local authority for the Supporting People Programme in its area. The council works in partnership with York and Selby primary care trust and North Yorkshire probation service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 5 The council was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme and was among the 19 administering local authorities considered by the ODPM to have the highest service costs. 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.
- 6 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the council in 2004/05 is £9.25 million. In addition the council receives £236,000 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 7 The highest cost service is £1,595 a week for accommodation support for a person with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is 45 pence per week for community alarms.

Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed City of York Council as providing a 'fair' one-star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Scoring chart¹: City of York Council - Supporting People programme



- 9 We have assessed the council's administration of the Supporting People programme to be fair. Positive features of the programme include:
- ◆ On the ground, there is a high level of service provision. Additional services have been developed through transitional housing benefit in the run up to the Supporting People programme, to increase the amount of housing related support in some areas and provide services in other areas where previously there had been no services. Examples include:
 - ◆ young people with chaotic lifestyles have benefited from the development of a five bedded hostel with outreach services to enable them to secure their own homes;
 - ◆ a new host and mentoring scheme specifically to reintegrate young homeless people into the community and secure their own permanent and sustainable accommodation;
 - ◆ services for rough sleepers have improved through the development of specialist provision for customers with an alcohol dependency;
 - ◆ 24 hour direct access for homeless and rough sleeping customers with dedicated housing related support;
 - ◆ five new small supported living facilities for individuals previously living in registered accommodation offering improved opportunities of independence within the community; and
 - ◆ reconfiguration of sheltered housing into extra care to enable tenants to remain in their own home as they grow older.

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.

- ◆ Our mystery shopper enquiries, testing access to services, were well dealt with by the council's contact centre and there is additional leaflet information for service users.
- ◆ The majority of housing related support schemes that we visited are providing good quality services based around agreed support plans to improve the ability of vulnerable individuals to live independently.
- ◆ Overall the transition to the Supporting People grant funding arrangements has gone smoothly. Interim contracts are all signed, data is being kept up to date and accurate payments are being made to providers on time.
- ◆ With the exception of an inclusive forum, the structural governance arrangements to deliver the Supporting People programme in York are in place.
- ◆ Senior councillors and board members from the PCT and probation are actively involved in the development and design of the programme.
- ◆ The council has a good team in place to support the programme; team members are enthusiastic and committed to delivery.
- ◆ Service reviews build on information acquired through the annual monitoring of contracts and allow for good comparisons across the sector within the borough.
- ◆ There is a sound approach to user engagement as part of the service review process.

10 However, we found a number of weaknesses that need to be addressed. These include:

- ◆ Gaps in provision remain in some areas, for example for drug users, teenage parents, mentally disordered offenders and people suffering from HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ Information on the housing related support needs is patchy, good in some areas but not in others. Progress is slow in drawing needs information together.
- ◆ There is no structured framework to ensure all client groups have the opportunity to be engaged and involved with the design and development of the programme, including those who have specialist communication needs or who traditionally are difficult to engage with.
- ◆ Information provision to users and other stakeholders is in need of improvement. Currently there is no information on Supporting People and signposting to services on the council's website. The council do not have a directory of Supporting People services.
- ◆ The membership and purpose of the core strategy group requires improvement.
- ◆ Although finances are closely monitored, the commissioning body do not have the means to effectively monitor the delivery and development of the programme as a whole.
- ◆ There is no system in place to adequately measure and monitor the outcomes for service users that the programme delivers.
- ◆ Payments to service providers are not all being made in advance as required by ODPM guidance and regulations.
- ◆ Future financial projections take no account of funding expected to be unlocked through the review of existing high cost services.

- ◆ The council is not doing enough to ensure that the services it commissions are eligible and value for money.
- ◆ The council do not have a local definition of which activities are eligible housing related support services.
- ◆ The approach to reviewing existing housing related support services does not target high cost, new or at risk services for early review so the potential to unlock legacy funding quickly for reinvestment in priorities is low.
- ◆ The service review programme was slow in getting started and we have concerns over whether it will be delivered by March 2006.
- ◆ No challenge or appeal procedure is in place to deal with service providers who may be dissatisfied with the outcome of a service review.

11 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has uncertain prospects for improvement. We found the following strengths:

- ◆ There is a track record of slow but steady progress within the Supporting People programme.
- ◆ Priorities are reasonably clear and fit with what the community partnership and the council is trying to achieve.
- ◆ The service review procedures are soundly based with good engagement of service users.
- ◆ There are a number of practical examples of learning where the team are adopting good administration practices from elsewhere.
- ◆ Positive service developments, such as the integrated mental health service, resulting from partnership working at a corporate level with the health service.
- ◆ The corporate performance assessment also provides evidence that the council has been successful over a number of years in focusing on providing good services and in making progress on some cross cutting themes.
- ◆ Corporate initiatives are being rolled out to improve the quality of service planning, performance and risk management, although they have yet to impact on the Supporting People programme.

12 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve:

- ◆ The pace of change is slow. Examples include the speed of developing information on Supporting People for the council's website or putting in place a framework to ensure all client groups are engaged in the development of the programme.
- ◆ Action to ensure priorities are based on up to date and comprehensive assessments of housing related support need including where there are gaps in provision is making slow progress.
- ◆ We are concerned at the council's lack of detailed plans for the development of its five year strategy and lack of early progress in key areas.
- ◆ The council is cautious and despite a significant under spend in 2003/04, future financial predictions take no account of estimates of potential funding that may be unlocked from services that are not strategically relevant or high cost.
- ◆ The council has a relatively small team and is not targeting its approach or its resources for maximum early impact.

- ◆ The service review programme is not yet delivering results to release funds for re-investment in priorities. Despite commissioning a number of high cost services, these are not being targeted for an early service review.
- ◆ Planning including contingency planning, performance management and risk assessment are weak and all need improvement.

Recommendations

- 13 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations:

Within six months of our published report:

- ◆ Plan how the under spend for 2003/04 and resources unlocked from the 2004/05 budget can best be utilised for benefit of the vulnerable people of York.
- ◆ Ensure that a framework for delivering the five year strategy is developed, resourced and adhered to, ensuring that:
 - ◆ providers, partners, stakeholders and user representatives are involved;
 - ◆ housing support needs, including those of black and minority ethnic (BME) and other 'hard to reach' groups are identified and suitable provision is prioritised for these needs within the plan; and
 - ◆ information and access to Supporting People services are improved taking full account of any special user communication requirements.
- ◆ Implement effective arrangements for involving users, carers and advocacy groups including 'hard to reach' groups who do not currently receive or are underprovided for in relation to housing related support.
- ◆ In relation to the governance of the programme:
 - ◆ develop protocols and procedures to resolve disputes should they arise between partners; and
 - ◆ review the membership of the core strategy group to ensure it has adequate representation from all stakeholders, including external service providers. Update the terms of reference for the group to reflect its current purpose and relationship with the commissioning body.
- ◆ Establish a local interpretation of which activities are eligible for Supporting People funding, involving service providers and user representatives.
- ◆ In relation to the service review programme:
 - ◆ amend the approach to service reviews to ensure that services which are suspected of providing activities ineligible for grant funding, not strategically relevant, high cost or at risk are targeted for early review;
 - ◆ the commissioning body should ensure that the service review timetable is resourced and adhered to, and that services are re-configured, as necessary, to ensure that funded services are eligible and provide value for money; and
 - ◆ establish in agreement with service providers a quality assurance mechanism to ensure reviews are consistent and a means of dealing with appeals or disputes that may arise following a service review.
- ◆ Comply with ODPM guidance and regulations by making payments to service providers in advance.

Within twelve months of our published report:

- ◆ Develop and deliver services with partners in response to identified need that plugs the gaps in housing related support provision for client groups who are currently not provided for.

- ◆ Tackle the barriers that are put in place by service provider exclusion policies and the 'silting up' of accommodation based services through shortages of move on accommodation.
 - ◆ Improve planning and performance management by:
 - ◆ introducing an overarching short to medium term plan which allows the commissioning body to oversee the development and delivery of the programme;
 - ◆ finalising risk appraisal and contingency planning for the Supporting People services in York with an emphasis on the potential for service failure. These plans must be linked to the corporate programme of risk management, should be clearly recorded and agreed by the commissioning body; and
 - ◆ considering how performance indicators and other statistical information provided by all the partners can be used to evidence the impact that the Supporting people programme is having in York.
 - ◆ Report the findings of this report to the council, commissioning body, staff, partners, providers, stakeholders and users setting out proposals for addressing these recommendations and all other weaknesses in this report within 12 months.
- 14 We would like to thank the staff of City of York Council, particularly Pippa Aspin and Kate Ormond, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

The locality

- 15 City of York Council is a unitary authority in North Yorkshire, situated in the north east of England. The population of the area is 182,400 and increasing. 4.89 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities (other than white British). The population has a high proportion of elderly people, with 16.9 per cent over 65 years of age compared to an England average of 15.9 per cent. This is primarily due to the attractiveness of the area as a place to retire.
- 16 In terms of deprivation, York ranks relatively low. It is 204th out of 354 areas of England, where 1 is the most deprived. Unemployment of 1.6 per cent in the borough is lower than the national average (2.6 per cent). York is a historical city attracting over five million visitors a year. In addition the university and local colleges attract 20,000 students to study. High technology and science based industries are replacing the more traditional manufacturing industries in the area.
- 17 Despite this relative affluence York faces a number of challenges presented by local conditions. Average house prices in York are over 30 per cent higher than the surrounding area². In contrast, average earnings in York are in line with the Yorkshire and Humberside regional average which is almost 10 per cent lower than the national average³. A number of prisons discharge to the area and there is net inward migration of homeless people, people with mental health problems, women fleeing domestic violence and people who have suffered brain injuries.

The Council

- 18 The council comprises 47 councillors. Since May 2003 the Liberal Democrat party has overall control with 29 seats. Currently the system of governance involves a leader and cabinet made up of nine portfolios. Each portfolio has a scrutiny committee.
- 19 The council's overall revenue budget for the year 2004/05 is £157.4 million net (£315.5 million gross). The budget for the delivery of social services is £36 million (£63 million gross) and the budget for housing (general fund and housing revenue account) is £1.26 million (£48.2 million gross). The council employs 7,500 people across all services.
- 20 Eight corporate objectives are identified in the 2004/05 council plan and best value performance plan. Three have particular relevance to the Supporting People programme, including:
 - ◆ Create a safe city through transparent partnership working with other agencies and the local community.
 - ◆ Work with others to improve the health, well being and independence of York residents.
 - ◆ Ensure that all council services are accessible and inclusive, and build strong, proud, local communities.
- 21 For 2004/05 the council's priorities are:
 - ◆ York Pride (cleaner streets).

² New Earnings Survey 2003.

³ HM Land Registry.

- ◆ A safer city (reducing crime).
- ◆ Customer access to services (a corporate project to improve customer access).
- ◆ Transforming York (a programme to improve the way services are planned and managed).

The service

- 22 The council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in their area.
- 23 The Supporting People programme subject to inspection is designed to meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable people including the homeless, older people with support needs, people with a learning difficulty, people with mental health problems, those with substance abuse problems, refugees, travellers and offenders.
- 24 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the council in 2004/05 is £9.25 million. In addition the council receives £236,000 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority. The highest cost service is £1,595 a week for accommodation support for a person with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is 45 pence per week for community alarms.
- 25 City of York Council was inspected in the second year of the programme as one of 19 'high cost' authorities selected by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) for early inspection. The report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.
- 26 In its' Shadow Strategy, City of York Council identified the following key strategic objectives and urgent priorities:

Key Strategic Objectives

- ◆ A sound understanding of customer needs and the provider market.
- ◆ Establish clear priorities and a commissioning strategy.
- ◆ Develop robust and measurable quality assessment framework and standards.
- ◆ Inclusive ways of consulting and communicating.
- ◆ Ensure Supporting People contributes and adds value to other strategies.

Urgent Priorities

- ◆ Young single homeless.
- ◆ Ex-offenders in general housing.
- ◆ People with severe mental health difficulties.
- ◆ Teenage parents.
- ◆ Extra support sheltered housing for older people.
- ◆ People with learning difficulties with ageing parents.
- ◆ Hard to reach drinkers.

How good is the service?

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

Governance of the programme

- 28 With the exception of the inclusive forum (which is discussed in paragraph 98), the structures outlined below are in place in York and partners are working together to develop the programme. Senior councillors are well involved. The main areas in need of improvement concern the need to review the membership and purpose of the core strategy group and putting arrangements in place for the commissioning body to effectively monitor the delivery and development of the programme.
- 29 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
 - ◆ Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
 - ◆ Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Councillors: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.
 - ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 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 areas each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the administering local authority has a veto where there is a demonstrable financial risk to the administering local authority.

Administering Local Authority

- 31 The council is developing its role as the administering authority. Two senior councillors, the executive member for social services and the executive member for Housing, attend the main governing body meetings. Strategic decisions on the

Supporting People programme are ratified by the relevant portfolio holder (the Supporting People programme is seen as the responsibility of both) after consulting and taking advice from a cross party panel of councillors. This is in line with the council's decision making procedures. Protocols between the commissioning body partnership and the council have not yet been formalised. A memorandum of understanding between the council and commissioning body is under consideration but is not in place.

- 32 It is, however, unclear how all councillors are involved and kept up to date with the Supporting People programme, other than in relation to local issues. Decisions of each portfolio holder are scrutinised by separate scrutiny committees although to date Supporting People has not featured on their programme of work. These reports are available to all councillors.

Commissioning Body

- 33 The commissioning body is now generally effective although some weaknesses remain. It has clear terms of reference and all key commissioning partners are members. The commissioning body is made up of two or more representatives of each of the three partner organisations. The council have both senior officers and senior councillors represented, and both the primary care trust and the probation service are represented by a senior officer and board member. Voting rights are clearly understood.
- 34 Meetings and representation have been inconsistent since the introduction of Supporting People arrangements. Two of the last three meetings were not quorate and special arrangements had to be taken to ensure decisions taken are properly approved. This does not appear to indicate any lack of commitment to the programme as attendance by many of the same officers at the core strategy group has been better. It is more to do with practical difficulties for the individuals involved, and forward scheduling of meetings is expected to resolve difficulties. However, it does highlight the fact that the roles and relationships of the two partnership bodies, the commissioning body and the core strategy group, need greater clarification. Partners are positive about their working relationships and their ability to contribute to developments.
- 35 Other weaknesses relate to the inability of the commissioning body to monitor progress and identify where the programme is producing positive outcomes for users and where it is underperforming. There is no overarching plan for the development of the programme or any reporting of performance, other than financial.
- 36 There are no procedures in place to deal with disagreements between the commissioning body partners other than a formal vote. Although this has not been necessary up until now, as the programme moves forward and more competing demands may be placed on a limited budget, the likelihood of disagreement increases. Without procedures to deal with such matters which have been agreed in advance there is a risk that relationships between partners may be affected or that decision making may be slowed down.
- 37 The commissioning body has not yet been faced with taking difficult decisions such as decommissioning or re-configuring services on the recommendation of service reviews.

Core Strategy Group

- 38 The core strategy group has operated effectively to support and implement the programme although its current membership and purpose need to be reviewed to take the programme forward.

- 39 The group is chaired by the senior assistant director of community services who also chairs the commissioning body. This duplication is also reflected by the PCT and probation representation where officers on the commissioning body also attend the core strategy group. There is a potential conflict here as the core strategy group are answerable to the commissioning body and having the same chair may stifle challenge and debate.
- 40 External service providers, users or advocates are not represented on the group. These are potential weaknesses in that their views may not be properly represented and accessibility to policy and decision making processes helps to build confidence and trust between those commissioning services and those who deliver or receive them. Internal service providers are represented.
- 41 The group has terms of reference which were drawn up at the implementation stage of the Supporting People programme and have ensured that milestones have been met. However, whilst existing membership has ensured that there is a deeper understanding of issues taken forward to the commissioning body, there are potential problems with this duplication. There is closer monitoring of the Supporting People team plan by the group and this may in part explain why monitoring has not been carried out at the strategic level. But it also means that there is no clear division between the decision makers and those doing the development work and making proposals.
- 42 There is broad officer membership of the core strategy group. Officers present reports and feedback from the core strategy group to the commissioning body. External providers are not represented on this group, nor are users.

Accountable Officer

- 43 Since the inception of the Supporting People programme there have been two accountable officers, including the current post holder, who is the head of commissioning and support services in the community services directorate. There is clarity over what the role entails including oversight of the programme and reporting progress although robust mechanisms to manage and drive the programme forward have not been developed.
- 44 The Supporting People programme is delivered through the Supporting People team. This is considered in the next section.

Delivery arrangements

- 45 We consider that the council has a good but small team in place to develop and deliver the programme. A timetable has been agreed for the production of the five year strategy but we are concerned at the lack of any early progress in some key areas, for example to ensure that needs information is adequately and comprehensively captured.
- 46 The level of provision of housing related support services generally in York is high and some new services have been developed to fill areas where there were previously gaps. Gaps in provision, however, remain in other areas. Progress is hampered by the lack of a clear definition of which are and which are not activities eligible for Supporting People grant.

Supporting People team

- 47 The Supporting People team is located in the community services department, reporting to the head of commissioning and support services, who is also the accountable officer. In order to provide a strong team infrastructure, additional funding of approximately £43,000, over and above the ODPM's administration grant of £236,000, has been provided by the city.

- 48 The Supporting People team is made up of the following posts of which one is currently unfilled:
- ◆ The Supporting People manager.
 - ◆ Communications advisor (part time).
 - ◆ Contract review and technical support.
 - ◆ Service review and development officer.
 - ◆ IT project officer.
 - ◆ Administrator.
 - ◆ Contract review officer (part time and vacant).
- 49 The team currently has one vacancy. Some members are recent recruits and there is evidence that progress is being made in a number of areas but from a slow start. For example, a newsletter has been introduced to keep service providers informed and up to date. However, only two have been produced so far although the programme is in its second year. No service reviews have been completed yet and no information on Supporting People is available on the council's website.
- 50 There are adequate skills within the team to administer the programme. Team members are enthusiastic and committed to delivery. Service providers have a positive view of the team.

'The team are particularly helpful in responding to individual queries' - Service provider.

- 51 We do have concerns about the capacity of the team alone to deliver all the requirements of the programme and in particular the service review programme as it is currently constituted by the March 2006 deadline.
- 52 Direction is provided by the team work plan which sets out what they need to complete in the current year. Individual performance is tied in to what the team is trying to achieve through a staff appraisal system. This sets out objectives for individual members of staff which are reviewed every six months.
- 53 Some additional capacity is generated by joining up the programme of contract reviews. Where community care services are also commissioned from the same providers, a joint annual review of compliance with contracted arrangements is carried out by community care staff.
- 54 Cross authority work is not being progressed under the umbrella of Supporting People. York has not met with its cross authority partner, North Yorkshire County Council in the last 18 months. However, it is acknowledged that many of the issues are being progressed through other wider and more appropriate groups. For example issues, such as benchmarking are being carried out through the regional implementation group. There are other partnership structures in mental health, learning disabilities, older people and homelessness that support cross authority work. In addition, probation has a dedicated role, the housing services manager that covers accommodation issues and regional resettlement work for offenders across both North and West Yorkshire. Probation's cross-authority working group has developed a value for money tool which ODPM has identified as good practice.
- 55 How this work feeds into the Supporting People programme and how other cross authority issues are identified, managed and work co-ordinated need to be made clearer and explicit in the five year Supporting People strategy being developed. This is important to ensure relevant issues are not missed and that responsibility

for progress is mapped. For example, issues such as protocols for cross authority movement of service users such as women fleeing domestic violence which is a particular issue for York is not addressed.

Five year strategy

- 56 Understanding the housing needs of the local population is fundamental to ensuring that sustainable services are developed and commissioned. Identification of local housing support needs is not inclusive of all client groups although information in some areas is good.
- 57 A timetable was approved in November 2003 to develop the five year strategy for March 2005. It is a high level plan and does not contain any detail. Whilst the first milestone has not yet been reached (August 2004), we are concerned at the lack of progress in a number of key areas including:
- ◆ Housing related support needs assessment - some information on the housing related support needs of some of the client groups, such as people with learning disabilities, already exists as a result of other recent studies. However, we saw no evidence or detailed plan to show how this information is to be drawn together. Nor did we see evidence of action to plug any gaps, such as the needs of people with substance misuse problems, in information or to ensure that research intelligence is inclusive covering all client groups, and is recent and relevant.

This information forms the basis for determining agreed priorities in the future strategy. Without robust and comprehensive intelligence, decisions on priorities will not be well informed.

- ◆ Performance management - no performance management arrangements are in place to demonstrate the contribution the programme makes to corporate objectives, outcomes for service users or agree shared targets with partner agencies. Action does not appear to have started to begin to develop such a framework.

Existing services

- 58 Legacy service provision demonstrates above regional average Supporting People provision for people with learning disabilities, people with a physical disability or sensory impairment, homeless families, rough sleepers and travellers. There are average levels of provision for frail older people, offenders and women fleeing domestic violence.
- 59 Provision is below regional averages for accommodation based services for single homeless people with mental health problems and young people. No provision was identified for a number of client groups, including drug users, teenage parents, young people leaving care, mentally disordered offenders and people suffering from HIV/AIDS.
- 60 Recent developments include schemes for homeless people with an alcohol dependency, new accommodation and floating support services for young people, the redevelopment of a sheltered housing unit into extra care for frail older people, remodelled services for people with learning disabilities and a direct access hostel for rough sleepers.
- 61 There is a lack of clarity around definitions and purpose of housing related support services in achieving shared aims, needs and aspirations of vulnerable people. The council continue to use definitions established under transitional housing benefit alongside the Supporting People grant conditions. However, although discussions have started at a regional level, there is currently no local agreed definition of what is (and what is not) eligible support activity. Without this

clarity both users and service providers lack certainty about the continuity of their support arrangements and investment in designing new provision is deterred.

Financial monitoring & management

- 62 Overall the transition to the Supporting People grant funding arrangements has gone smoothly. Interim contracts are all signed, data is being kept up to date and accurate payments are being made to providers on time. However, some service providers are paid in arrears and this does not comply with guidance and ODPM's financial regulations. Fairer charging arrangements are in place and service providers would like more information on this. Finances are closely monitored but projections take no account of funding unlocked through the review of existing high cost services. No contingencies are in place to replace Supporting People funding that may be withdrawn in circumstances where a service review finds that grant is inappropriately funding care activities.
- 63 In total 303 separate services are commissioned from 45 service providers with the capacity to deliver around 6,000 units of support.
- 64 All interim contracts have been agreed and have been signed by both parties. Payment arrangements are in place and accurate payments are being made on time. No services have come under any finance related threat and there has been a smooth transition to Supporting People funding.
- 65 Service providers expressed satisfaction with these administrative arrangements although a number of service providers with block subsidy contracts are concerned that payments are made in arrears.

'We were not satisfied with the way the team dealt with making the payments in arrears and not taking providers cash flow circumstances into consideration'. - Service provider.

'York pay 4 weekly in arrears. We challenged this, but to no avail'. - Service provider.

'Not clear why City of York Council are the only Administrative Authority that we deal with that make payments in arrears'. - Service provider.

- 66 York's own financial regulations prevent payments being made in advance. Approval to waive these regulations for Supporting People payments was sought and agreed for payment of block gross contracts but subsidy contracts were thought to pose too great a financial risk. This does not comply with guidance issued by ODPM in the interim financial pack. In addition, as one provider states, it puts York at odds with other councils.
- 67 Annual contract reviews have been introduced as a monitoring mechanism, and precede service reviews. Around 25 per cent of the contracts have been subject to this review which considers compliance with contractual arrangements. The results are used in the first instance to determine whether the service provider is complying with their contract and provide an information base for the service review. As a result of this work a number of contracts have been renegotiated or amended.
- 68 This work is beginning to identify a more complete picture of the funding streams that providers receive to assist and improve the service review process. Information is being pulled together as a part of service reviews and as a result of other work. To date the council know the different funding streams and levels of funding for 158 of 210 separate schemes.
- 69 Financial monitoring of Supporting People grant is strong. There are regular monthly reports on spending and projections are made for the next two years. In

2003/04 the council under spent its allocation by £712,000, around 7.5 per cent. Future predictions identify a further under spend, after taking account of the need to make a 2.5 per cent saving in 2004/05 of grant against contracted commitments, moving to a small overspend in 2005/06 if commitments remain the same and another 2.5 per cent cut is imposed on the budget.

- 70 While we recognise the council's need to be prudent, we feel the approach should be based upon a detailed assessment of risk, and needs to be balanced against the requirement to meet urgent unmet need in the area. Projections take no account of funding that may be unlocked from legacy provision. York have a number of high cost schemes, some with potentially ineligible service components.
- 71 At the time of our on site work, no detailed contingency had been allowed for in Supporting People planning to allow for cases where service reviews identify examples of Supporting People grant funding ineligible but needed activities or schemes. Both the Community Services department and the PCT accept that there have been budgetary gains, the PCT gained over £800,000 in 2002/03 as a result of the funding responsibility for residents in seven de-registered residential homes transferring to transitional housing benefit. Gains are said to have been used in clearing previous debts and developing other services for the sector. There is, however, recognition within the council that this may become a future issue and a contingency is being set aside for 2005/06 for 'estimated unavoidable growth'⁴ for Supporting People service reviews.
- 72 The council are in the process of introducing a new computer system which integrates Supporting People records with fairer charging⁵ details and financial assessments. The system currently provides basic management information which can be improved upon as staff become more familiar and better trained to take advantage of the computer system's capabilities.
- 73 A fairer charging policy which covered Supporting People service users was agreed by the commissioning body in February 2003. An explanatory leaflet was produced which is available on the website and through the council's advice offices. When Supporting People went live a leaflet was sent to all customers by tenure type to explain how Supporting People would affect them and inform them of their right to a financial assessment.
- 74 A small number of financial assessments have been requested. All have been processed by the separate community services team set up to deal with these claims. None are outstanding. Whilst providers have been supplied with copies of the leaflets, this is the one area where a number express dissatisfaction with the provision of information and training.

'I have no knowledge of this [the council's discretionary charging policy]'. - Provider of sheltered housing.

'Unaware of what this is'. - Provider of sheltered housing.

Service reviews

- 75 ODPM guidance requires administering authorities (ALA's) to review all services funded through Supporting People within three years starting from 1 April 2003.

⁴ Report 12 October 2004 to the council executive on the mid term financial planning.

⁵ The Government's fairer charging policy requires council's to have a policy and procedures designed to assess how much a person can afford to pay towards the help they receive with social care or housing related support.

ALA's are required to produce a service review timetable together with a rationale to explain how the reviews have been prioritised. Progress with the service review timetable is submitted to ODPM through their regular performance reviews.

- 76 City of York has put a rationally based programme in place, and supports it with a thorough contract and service review process. However, the approach does not target high cost, new or at risk services for early review so the potential to unlock legacy funding quickly for reinvestment in priorities is low. The service review programme was slow in getting started and we have concerns over whether it will be delivered by March 2006. No challenge or appeal procedure is in place to deal with service providers who may be dissatisfied with the outcome of a service review.
- 77 In February 2003, the commissioning body after considering a number of alternative approaches approved a client group approach to service reviews. There are a number of advantages to this approach including:
- ◆ enabling the needs and gaps to be addressed for the sector as a whole;
 - ◆ easier to compare quality and cost across the group;
 - ◆ easier links to strategic initiatives and best value reviews; and
 - ◆ an ability to protect the budget for the customer group.
- 78 In deciding which services should be reviewed first, the decision took account of:
- ◆ priority groups identified in the shadow strategy; and
 - ◆ co-ordinating work with other review activity.
- 79 The first service reviews scheduled for 2003/04 were services provided to young people and services provided to people with mental health problems.
- 80 The rationale for this approach is soundly based. It takes a broad view of the client group, ensures a consistent approach and allows decommissioning or reconfiguration decisions to be better informed. Its drawback is that it is a one track approach and does not prioritise those services which may not be strategically relevant, new or may not be value for money.
- 81 As a consequence funding will not be unlocked from legacy services as might be the case if high costs services were being tackled and the scope to develop or reconfigure services in line with priorities is diminished.
- 82 In fact the service review programme did not start in 2003/04. The first one commenced in 2004/05 and is due to be completed by the end of August 2004. The programme has been adjusted for the remainder of 2004/05 and 2005/06 and is expected to be completed by May 2005. This means that the challenging service review programme has been condensed from 3 years to one year and two months. Given the delayed start, limited resources to carry out service reviews and the fact that the first review is not concluded, we have serious doubts about whether the rescheduled programme will be delivered on time with the required degree of rigour to raise quality standards, unlock funding and deal with appeals or challenges to conclusions .
- 83 We examined both the documented and actual service review process and found it to be thorough and thoughtful, building on information gleaned from the annual contract reviews. Service providers were complimentary about the council's approach to user involvement in the mental health service review, listening to their advice and tailoring the approach to suit the needs of individual service users. However, no quality assurance processes are in place to ensure that the

approach, review and conclusions are soundly based and consistently applied. Peer review is seen to be good practice in this area.

- 84 As part of the service reviews, the quality of service provision is assessed against the quality assessment framework (QAF) standards. The QAF has also been offered to all providers to use as a voluntary tool to drive improvement in advance of the formal assessment under a service review.
- 85 The council has not established a challenge or appeal mechanism to deal with further representations from service providers dissatisfied with the outcome of a service review. Such a mechanism is necessary to ensure that service providers have confidence in the decision making process and that it is seen to be fair and transparent.
- 86 There are no procedures in place to capture what may be learned from early service reviews to amend the approach and ensure that later service reviews are better. For example, a post review evaluation of what went well and what did not go well in order to inform how the next service reviews are conducted. This should also encompass the identification of good practice which can be shared with other service providers across other sectors to give them the opportunity to change the way they do things before being formally examined as part of a service review.

Value for money

- 87 The council is not doing enough to ensure that the services it commissions are eligible for grant and represent value for money. Some work is being developed to establish reliable local benchmarks but high cost services are not targeted. On eligibility, the council do not have a local definition of which activities are eligible housing related support services. We visited a number of services where there are questions about whether the whole service or aspects of the service are eligible for continued Supporting People funding.
- 88 Data submitted to the ODPM indicates that several Supporting People services have unit weekly costs higher than regional and national averages. There was a 25 per cent increase in Supporting People funding from £7.59 million at golden cut stage to £9.47 million⁶ Supporting People funding at platinum cut. It should be noted that the council dispute these figures and claim the increase to have been 17 per cent from a golden cut figure of £8.26 million to a platinum cut figure of £9.66 million. Full details are shown in the appendix to this report.
- 89 The average weekly Supporting People unit cost in York is 22 per cent higher than the regional average and 60 per cent higher than the national average. More detailed analysis shows that unit costs for:
- ◆ accommodation based support is particularly high in comparison to the regional and national average for people with a learning disability; people with a physical disability or sensory impairment, single homeless and offenders; and
 - ◆ in contrast the unit cost of floating support services across the range of client groups is below average.
- 90 The commissioning body rightly consider value for money to be a broader principle than just cost, considering the wider benefits that services bring for the individual concerned. However, we found no evidence to show that the commissioning body is effectively tackling value for money in this broader sense.

⁶ Figures supplied by ODPM.

While there is recognition that quality issues need to be considered alongside indicators of cost, we are not aware of any work carried out to relate quality to cost or target areas where there appear to be high costs.

- 91 The council knows which of its commissioned services are high cost and is developing arrangements to establish reliable benchmarks across the borough and across the region. It has analysed the services that it commissions and knows which services are above the regional average cost. It also participates in regional benchmarking activity, mainly through the regional implementation group, to arrive at reliable local comparators. Service reviews also have a documented methodology of how the council proposes to assess value for money. This appears sound and costs are converted into hourly figures which are seen to be the most useful form for comparison.
- 92 The council, however, is unable to take advantage of the regional benchmarking results until data is available on the client groups to be reviewed under York's service review programme. Currently the best regional data refers to services provided for people with a learning disability which the council does not propose to use until they feature in the service review programme.
- 93 No local definition of what activities and services are eligible for Supporting People grant have yet been established by the council and agreed with service providers. This underpins much of the assessment work which is carried out as part of the service review, there needs for clarity about where the boundary is between housing management, personal and social care and housing related support. Clarity about what is and is not housing related support will also provide greater certainty for providers and service users.
- 94 We carried out over 20 visits to local service providers and talked to managers and service users. Our enquiries raised a number of significant questions relating to eligibility including:
- ◆ One recently de-registered home where services are provided to service users who are so profoundly disabled that it is hard to see how support is helping these individuals develop their independence. At least seven homes providing services for people with learning disabilities were deregistered in March 2003 in the run up to Supporting People funding.
 - ◆ Other schemes again with highly dependent service users where the cost of support heavily outweighs the cost of care seemingly at odds with the needs of the users.
 - ◆ Individual support schemes for disabled service users with special needs where Supporting People is the only source of funding providing 24 hour support seven days a week.
 - ◆ Examples of housekeeping services and cooking being provided by Supporting People grant.
 - ◆ A number of council provided schemes where some Supporting People costs of services, such as the legal costs of enforcement, appear to be housing management costs and not housing related support.
 - ◆ Supporting People funding in York has been applied to some schemes that are providing services that might usually be funded through service charges. For example supporting people grant is paying for the grass cutting, hedge trimming, decorating and small maintenance jobs for some users.
 - ◆ A small project for people with learning disabilities was receiving approximately 66 per cent of its funding from Supporting People for housing related support. However, the staffing at the project covered the scheme for

24 hours and would, for example, accompany users to the swimming pool and assist them into the water.

Questions raised over the eligibility of activities in these schemes defined as low level housing related support and funded from the Supporting People grant may also apply to others.

User involvement

- 95 The council is making use of existing user forums and is beginning to meet with some hard to reach group. There is a sound approach to user engagement as part of the service review process and there are some good examples of the involvement of users in individual housing related support schemes. However, the approach lacks structure to ensure all client groups are engaged and we are unclear how well formalised the links are with existing user forums.
- 96 User involvement with Supporting People administered through City of York Council started with an inclusive forum, bringing together users, advocates and service providers into one meeting. However, a meeting of this type, attempting to bring together a disparate group of vulnerable clients many with specialist communication needs, proved not to be appropriate or effective. The council has actively looked for more effective ways to involve users.
- 97 The main forum for service providers is administered by a local registered landlord, meets regularly and is well received by most providers. They appreciate the split nature of the meeting where part is reserved only for providers and the remainder is attended by representatives of the Supporting People team who pass on information and answer questions.
- 98 User involvement is intended to be secured through existing forums which already have user representation, such as the social services users consultation panel, homelessness forum and travellers trust. We are unclear, however, about how formalised the links are between Supporting People and these forums. In addition, not all client groups have an established forum at which housing related support issues can be discussed, such as people suffering from HIV/AIDS, how the gaps are intended to be filled.
- 99 Attempts are being made to engage with most client groups, although it is not clear how structured this approach is. For example, work has been undertaken with hard to reach groups of offenders, which involved bussing users and carers to a consultation event, which was considered to be very effective in picking up views.
- 100 Other work has included the Supporting People team visiting offenders to seek their views (without provider staff). They are also exploring the possibility of using MIND as an advocacy service for people wishing to access services. Supporting People has made a difference in the effectiveness of the work that can be done with offenders, and for probation staff it has meant greater access to a range of support services.
- 101 The Supporting People programme has developed a consultation strategy that includes a sound framework for involving service users as part of the service review. But it does not go beyond this to show how the participation of hard to reach groups in particular is to be secured and access and influence provided to decision making processes.
- 102 We did receive positive feedback about the way people with mental health problems had been engaged as part of that client group service review. This was in response to the review taking advice from service providers on how best to conduct the exercise, and tailoring the approach – using either questionnaire,

group meetings or one to one interviews – to best meet the needs and capabilities of the individual.

- 103 Results of an advance survey of service providers show a mixed response to the council's engagement of service users. There was satisfaction with the general level of consultation with service users, but dissatisfaction with the amount of information provided to service users.
- 104 Our visits to a number of schemes revealed a number of positive examples of service user involvement in their individual housing related support schemes.

Partnership arrangements

- 105 Probation and health are involved in the strategic direction and delivery of the programme. They have and do contribute to the strategy to deliver the Supporting People programme and there is some read across to other agency strategies. However, little progress has been made on identifying shared performance indicators or other measures that demonstrate outcomes for service users. Multi agency public protection arrangements are in place. Service providers are engaged through the providers forum. The cross authority group is not meeting and although some issues are progressed through other meetings, there has been no deliberate evaluation of what the issues are and how they will best be progressed.
- 106 Probation and health providers and service planners are actively involved in the strategic direction and delivery of the Supporting People programme. Partnerships build on good historical links of working in partnership with health. There are integrated arrangements for delivering mental health services and proposals to extend this to services for people with a learning disability.
- 107 Probation has been involved in the Supporting People programme from day one, and key staff are linked in, including board members, divisional managers and specialist strategic managers. Probation consider it has been well received into the Supporting People partnership, and has been involved in data collection and service reviews
- 108 The Supporting People programme has been critical in assisting probation to develop a model for housing high-risk offenders. Multi agency public protection arrangement⁷ protocols are agreed and in place.
- 109 Supporting People is linked to all health strategic planning forums. For example, there are strong links with the health and social care board.
- 110 There is evidence of the partners are working together to address problems, such as performance on delayed discharges from hospital, but overall there is much work to do to identify outcomes for service users and collate and agree a range of shared performance indicators.
- 111 Partnerships with service providers are improving and the regular forum meetings are well attended and well regarded. External service providers are, however, not represented on the core strategy group.
- 112 Service providers, through the providers' forum, are engaged with the programme. This could be improved by allowing representatives of providers'

⁷ MAPPA - multi agency public protection agreements were set up in England and Wales in 2001. Police and probation take the leading role with other agencies such as housing, health and social services. Agencies share information to ensure accurate assessments of risk are made about potentially dangerous offenders and plans put in place to robustly manage those risks.

access to membership of the core strategy group bringing them closer to the decision making processes and involving them more.

- 113 Cross authority issues are not being progressed through the cross authority group. York is partnered with North Yorkshire County Council as a cross authority group and the two have not met within the last 18 months. A number of issues are being progressed through an alternative and wider forum, the regional implementation group, which is considering matters of eligibility and leading on work around benchmarking. There are also other cross boundary partnership structures in mental health, learning disabilities, older people and homelessness that support cross authority work but we are not aware how these structures fit with Supporting People planning and developments.
- 114 There are issues that are not being progressed. Cross boundary movement of certain client groups are of particular importance to the City of York. If, for example, customers come to York to receive services because they do not exist in the neighbouring area, then the councils need to consider what protocols may need to be put in place if the situation is to continue, what services need to be developed and how the neighbouring authorities can help each other. There may be possible opportunities to jointly commission more specialised services which may be being lost or to jointly review some service providers which makes best use of limited resources available. A regional joint commissioner's day is set for the 6th September 2004, to be attended by York commissioning board members and aimed at addressing the wider issues.

Access to services and information

- 115 We found a mixed picture on access to services and information. Our mystery shopper enquiries were well dealt with and there is additional leaflet information for service users. However, although under development, there is currently no information on the website or a directory of local Supporting People services.
- 116 We carried out a number of mystery shopper telephone enquiries presenting a range of different scenarios and asking for information and advice in advance of our visit. On each occasion our enquiries were dealt with promptly through the council's advice centre. On each occasion we were given sound advice and properly signposted to service providers.
- 117 Leaflets have been produced to explain to existing and potential service users what Supporting People is. They are easy to read and understand. Included on the reverse is a strapline offering the information in different formats and community languages.
- 118 The council's better care: higher standards documents have been updated to reflect Supporting People services.
- 119 However, we did not find any structured approach to improving access and information overall which would identify what information and access requirements are needed and plan a series of actions to integrate with other provision and put these in place. There is no information available yet on the website. The council are intending to provide information on the website, however, delays have occurred for decisions to be taken on the best way to present the information for service users and service providers. Testing is currently being carried out before the information can new web pages can be added to the site.
- 120 There is no local directory of what housing related support services are available through Supporting People funding. Nor has there been any updating of information available on services by client group. The web page currently being developed will give a basic description of what Supporting People is in relation to

the customer, and will also provide a list of our providers and their contact details. The provider list is also planned to be produced in document form and be placed throughout our offices as required.

- 121 It is not clear how the council and its partners intend to ensure that service standards are available to all existing and potential service users. As commissioners of services, and with their stated commitment to giving due regard to the quality of services in assessing value for money, we would have expected that service standards would have been an area that partners would have been keen to promote.
- 122 The commissioning body has identified that accessibility issues in relation to exclusion criteria need to be investigated. To begin to address this, exclusions will be considered as part of the service review. However, it is not clear what the programme is aiming to achieve through this examination or how progress will be measured and monitored.
- 123 The council has few mechanisms in place to keep front line staff, other council managers, councillors and partners fully abreast of Supporting People developments. A newsletter has recently been introduced for service providers, but in comparison to other administering authorities this is relatively late. We saw no evidence of a structured approach to disseminate information or piggy backing on corporate arrangements. For example, there is no local information bulletin, or information on the local intranet. The newsletter is not distributed to front line staff or councillors.
- 124 Service providers appreciate the York newsletter but where service providers provide services in other council areas there is an awareness that information provision could be better.

'I feel that this area has improved reasonably recently due to the development of the 'providers forum' and Supporting People team newsletter'. - Service provider.

'Information received via Supporting People in York is not as good as some of the areas we deal with'. - Service provider.

- 125 User involvement at the scheme level was evident through all our site visits. Most providers had mechanisms for discussing the day-to-day running of schemes with users either through regular meetings with individual users or through scheme meetings. Newsletters for users are being provided by most providers where these are relevant to the user group as a means of consulting with and informing users.
- 126 The council has adopted community services comments, compliments and complaints leaflet and procedures for Supporting People. This is a clear, well written leaflet, offered in different languages and formats on request. Complaints are recorded centrally and there is periodic analysis of the records to identify any common issues or emerging trends although we did not see any examples of arrangements being changed as a result. Distribution arrangements may need to be considered to ensure that these leaflets are readily accessible to all, including Supporting People service users who may not traditionally be users of council services.

Diversity

- 127 On the ground, we found examples of services delivered to a diverse range of client groups within the borough, including new services which have been developed under transitional housing benefit. Whilst there is no doubt that there is a need for these services, there is no comprehensive picture of need to inform

decisions taken on priorities for the programme. There continue to be gaps in services for some client groups.

- 128 Needs assessments are not yet robust particularly for hard to reach client groups or minority groups, for example the housing related support needs of mentally disordered offenders, teenage parents or drug users. The housing related support needs of people suffering from HIV/AIDS or refugees have not been assessed. Nor are the specialised or cultural housing related support needs established of people from ethnic minority communities. The council has not engaged with representatives from minority communities about Supporting People funded services.
- 129 There is an influx of women from local prisons released to York; with there is no specific accommodation for female offenders locally.
- 130 At a corporate level there is some activity to develop and improve the involvement of diverse groups within the community. The council has had discussions with York racial equality network to identify barriers that prevent engagement with ethnic minority communities. There is a corporate proposal to adopt a conference approach for consultation.
- 131 To improve their performance on equality, the council has established an equalities group which is undertaking impact assessments throughout the council to identify areas for improvement that will lead to better performance and a higher performance indicator rating. Currently the council achieve level 1 of the Equality Standard. This has not yet impacted on the Supporting People programme.
- 132 Some minority groups do receive housing related support services and some new services have been developed. The council has been working with a service provider to support their move to new accommodation which will deliver improved facilities for women fleeing domestic violence.
- 133 Through transitional housing benefit, five supported houses were established to provide a stepping-stone between the hostel environment and independent accommodation for young people in the community. Young people with chaotic lifestyles have benefited from the development of a five bedded hostel with outreach services to enable them to secure and maintain their own homes. Services for rough sleepers have improved through the development of specialist provision for customers with an alcohol dependency. There are also housing related support services for travellers, although our enquiries revealed that these do not do not fully meet the needs in the community.
- 134 Through the contracts, all Supported People services are required to operate within fair access to services and equal opportunity policies. However, while there is a requirement within the shadow strategy for all services to have an ethnically sensitive approach, the council does not maintain a record of which service providers, schemes or services are able to provide culturally specific services or what these services are. Nor is there a directory available to staff on the front line of which services are accessible to clients or family members with mobility problems.
- 135 Gathering, monitoring and making use of intelligence about the use and appropriateness of services by the diverse groups in the community are key to successfully managing and delivering services. We found little evidence of this within the Supporting People programme. Priority setting and decision making are weakened because of this lack of a comprehensive picture.

Outcomes for service users

- 136 Additional services have been developed through transitional housing benefit in the run up to the Supporting People programme, to increase the amount of housing related support in some areas and provide services in other areas where previously there had been no services. Gaps in provision remain in some areas and there continue to be problems with move on accommodation and exclusion policies. There is no system in place to adequately measure and monitor the outcomes for service users that the programme delivers.
- 137 Service providers unanimously agreed that all could identify improvements in services for their users as a result of the introduction of the Supporting People programme. Improvements range from providing more and a greater breadth of services to improving the quality of existing services for service users.
- 138 New and reconfigured provision includes:
- ◆ schemes specifically for homeless people with an alcohol dependency developed by Supporting People via transitional housing benefit in line with identified need and strategic priority;
 - ◆ a new host and mentoring scheme specifically to reintegrate young homeless people into the community and secure their own permanent and sustainable accommodation;
 - ◆ a new supported living scheme and floating support in the community for young people at risk;
 - ◆ five new small supported living facilities for individuals previously living in registered accommodation offering improved opportunities of independence within the community;
 - ◆ re-configuration of sheltered housing to extra care to enable tenants to remain in their own home as they grow older; and
 - ◆ 24 hour direct access for homeless and rough sleeping customers with dedicated housing related support for clients.
- 139 Plans for a new home improvement agency are well advanced to bring services to vulnerable people living in the private housing sectors.
- 140 Probation consider that Supporting People has made a difference in the effectiveness of the work that can be done with offenders, and for staff it has meant greater access to a range of housing related support services.
- 141 We visited over 20 separate schemes where services are being provided. In general, we found these schemes to be of a high quality and that services were help users develop or maintain independent living.
- 142 The council do not, however, have robust mechanisms in place to measure, set targets and monitor outcomes for services users. This is necessary to ensure that grant is being spent effectively and delivers demonstrable improvements on the ground for service users in line with identified priorities.
- 143 Support plans are the means by which services are delivered specifically to meet an individual's housing related support needs. Some schemes, a minority, that are receiving supporting people funding have yet to implement support plans for all users. ODPM required support plans to be in place by July 2003 and the failure to do so places those service providers in breach of the conditions for receiving grant.
- 144 Generally providers that we visited did have support plans in place. The contents of these plans were developed with users and the documents shared with and

signed-off by the users. However, there were some schemes namely those for older people with support needs where support plans have not been implemented for all users. In other schemes for example some of those catering for the homeless, the recording of details on support plans was not of sufficient detail to ensure that the progress of individual users towards independence could be monitored.

- 145 There are, however, gaps in provision, as mentioned in paragraph 59, and the needs of a number of these groups have not been assessed to determine the scale and nature of services required, for example drug users, teenage parents or ethnic minority communities. Although a risk log has been opened for the programme, it does not specifically identify the risks that may impact on and effect positive outcomes for service users. Contingency plans also need to be developed to ensure that continued services to vulnerable users are adequately protected.
- 146 Accessibility generally is difficult, particularly for offenders, and where exclusions are made, these have yet to be challenged locally. The commissioning body has recognised that this is an issue and is planning to undertake work in this area. Shortages of move on accommodation are also a significant issue in York and results in existing accommodation based services for offenders becoming 'silted up'. We are not aware of how the Supporting People programme seeks to address these issues.
- 147 As explained above there are a number of positive outcomes for individuals which arise from transitional housing benefit and the Supporting People programme. The following case studies illustrate the benefits for two individuals.

Supporting People Case Study 1

Service User Group: Learning Disability

Type of service: Accommodation based

Key players: Registered Social Landlord (RSL), support worker

Mr A is an adult with a learning disability. Until recently he lived with his parents. Their relationship was deteriorating as his mother was dictating when he should be in and what he should do. Mr A wanted to have his own place.

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ Learning to live independently.
- ◆ Lived with mother and stepfather.
- ◆ Lacked confidence.

Action taken:

- ◆ Mr A was helped to find and settle into a shared flat.
- ◆ In discussion with his support worker, Mr A's support needs were assessed and documented in the form of a support plan.
- ◆ The support plan forms the basis of the support provided and is reviewed regularly to monitor progress and identify changing requirements.

Outcomes for service user:

- ◆ With support, Mr A is now living independently.
- ◆ Now Mr A has a choice in what he does.
- ◆ His self confidence has grown and he has started banking on the internet.

Supporting People Case Study 2

Service User Group: Young People at Risk

Type of service: Accommodation based

Key players: Voluntary Organisation, volunteer provider, support worker

Mr B is a teenager. He was having problems living at home with his parents, was becoming disruptive and had been asked to leave home.

Issues to be addressed:

- ◆ Problems living with mother and stepfather.
- ◆ Could not control his anger.
- ◆ Lack of confidence.

Actions taken:

- ◆ Mr B was helped to find some accommodation which offered him support to begin to develop the skills he needed to live independently.
- ◆ His support needs were assessed and he was given particular help with.
- ◆ Mentoring on a 1 to 1 adult basis with:
 - ◆ anger advice/management; and
 - ◆ confidence building.
- ◆ Helped to claim benefits, register with a doctor and manage his money.

Outcomes for service user:

- ◆ Mr B is learning life skills which he will need to successfully live independently.
- ◆ He is starting college in September to gain more qualifications.
- ◆ He is more able to control and deal with his anger now.
- ◆ He is beginning to lead more of an independent life.

Summary

- 148 Overall, we judge that City of York Council is delivering a fair one-star service in its planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme. Progress has been slow but steady. We have highlighted the following areas in reaching this judgement.
- 149 Governance structures are in place and partnerships are developing. The council has a good but small team in place to develop and deliver the programme. Interim contracts are all in place and payments are being made to service providers on time, although some are paid in arrears contrary to ODPM guidance and regulations.
- 150 The level of provision of housing related support services generally in York is high and some new services have been developed. There is a sound approach to user engagement as part of the service review process. Our mystery shopper enquiries were well dealt with and we were promptly and adequately signposted.
- 151 However, we do have a number of concerns around the council's approach and the speed of development in some areas. There is currently no comprehensive picture of housing related support needs of the diverse client groups that can

benefit from Supporting People funding. Progress in this area for the five year strategy is slow.

- 152 There are gaps in service provision for some vulnerable people and the needs in these areas are not known. The council is not doing enough to ensure that the services it commissions are eligible for continued funding and value for money. Progress is hampered by the lack of a clear local definition of which are and which are not activities eligible for Supporting People grant.
- 153 The review programme does not target high cost, new or at risk services for early review so the potential to unlock legacy funding quickly for reinvestment in priorities is low. In addition, the service review programme was slow in getting started.
- 154 User engagement and involvement overall lacks structure to ensure that a framework is developed to involve all client groups, including people who are traditionally difficult to engage with. Access to services and information needs for service users and other stakeholders needs further development.
- 155 There is no system in place to adequately measure and monitor the outcomes for service users that the programme delivers.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the evidence of service improvement?

- 156 Overall evidence indicates a slow but improving trend in performance. At a corporate level there is evidence of positive service improvements delivered in partnership with the NHS.
- 157 To date the administering authority has met ODPM implementation milestones to deliver the programme in York and make the necessary returns to ODPM. A range of new services have been introduced and a number of existing ones enhanced or remodelled. The transition to Supporting People funding has gone smoothly and no services or individuals have had services threatened. Structures are in place to deliver the programme and confidence is developing within the partnerships.
- 158 The track record for the programme is one of slow but steady progress. Milestones have been met for implementation but there are examples where progress is slow. In particular this includes progress with the review programme which started late and is still to report final conclusions of the first service review. Other examples include little progress establishing comprehensive, solid and reliable intelligence on the diverse housing related support needs of the vulnerable people in York, and little progress in developing a means for measuring the success and progress of the programme in York.
- 159 The service review programme is not yet delivering results to release funds for re-investment in priorities. Whilst there is evidence of growth in the sector, it is difficult to see how the interpretation of the programme locally is delivering additional discernable benefits for service users.
- 160 There are a number of practical examples of learning where the team are adopting good administration practices from elsewhere, examples include designing the service review workbook, introducing a template to help manage the contract monitoring process and a report template for service reviews. There was less evidence of learning elsewhere within the programme, for example, adopting an approach to reviewing services that may be delivering results elsewhere or designing a system to manage performance.
- 161 At the corporate level, the council point to the comprehensive performance assessment rating of two star, good, as evidence that the council has a track record of delivery. The assessment identified areas of strength and weakness. For example it reported that the council has been successful over a number of years in focusing on providing good services. However, it also noted that there is poor business management practice within the council, with particular regard to a corporate approach to performance management.
- 162 The council has put in place a major project to address the corporate weaknesses, including service planning and performance management and this is currently being rolled out.
- 163 City of York Council has developed a strong strategic partnership with the health sectors and there are signs that there are some positive service developments as a result including:
- ◆ intermediate care and rapid response;
 - ◆ integrated mental health service with PCT;
 - ◆ 24 hour home care service;
 - ◆ multi-disciplinary team in accident and emergency to prevent inappropriate admissions to acute inpatient care; and

- ◆ improvements in performance on delayed hospital discharges where York was once a hot spot for poor performance.
- 164 Other external inspections show a mixed picture of improvement. The benefit fraud inspectorate and a recent Social Services Inspectorate inspection of children's services report an improving picture, whilst the Audit Commission Inspection reports identify a record of maintaining existing levels of performance.
- 165 A recent analysis of trends with national performance indicators related to the Supporting People programme [identified in the data appendix] show a general improving trend. Against performance returns reported for 2003/04 (which have not yet been independently confirmed by auditors) four indicators show an improvement in performance over 2002/03 against one which shows a reduction in performance. Performance with the other nine indicators remained broadly the same as the year before.

How good are the current improvement plans?

- 166 Supporting People improvement plans generally are weak and are not driving improvement in a co-ordinated and cohesive way.
- 167 There is no overarching plan in place for the Supporting People programme as a whole which identifies what the key developments necessary to ensure the success of the programme. Consequently the commissioning body are not in a position of being able to identify and oversee progress on key factors. These includes areas such as:
- ◆ Housing related need assessed and data collated for all client groups.
 - ◆ Formal consultation/involvement arrangements in place for all client groups including those that are hard to reach.
 - ◆ Developing a performance management system that shows:
 - ◆ what outcomes the programme is delivering for service users; and
 - ◆ measurable contributions to York's Supporting People programme, community, council, PCT and probation objectives.
- 168 There are a number of plans in place that aim to deliver improvement. These include:
- ◆ an annual team plan used to guide the work of the Supporting People team;
 - ◆ a timetable with target dates for the production of the five year strategy;
 - ◆ a programme of service reviews which illustrates when reviews are due to start and be completed;
 - ◆ a Supporting People risk log created in June 2004;
 - ◆ wider strategic plans such as the homelessness strategy or the housing strategy which are intended to assist in meeting the aims of the Supporting People programme; and
 - ◆ corporate improvement planning arrangements as part of the transforming York change management programme.
- 169 We do not consider that improvement plans are well co-ordinated with related improvement activity and brought together under one cohesive plan.
- 170 One positive development concerns a tool developed to assist in the setting of priorities. The core strategy group have agreed a framework based on a points system for determining priorities within the Supporting People programme where

there is competition between the needs of differing client groups. Proposals are to be put to the commissioning body.

- 171 The annual team plan identifies a range of important issues necessary for the successful delivery of the Supporting People programme. It identifies desired outcomes, allocates responsibility and sets timescales. However, as the main improvement plan it has a number of weaknesses. As you would expect of an annual team plan, it is short term and relates only to the current year. Actions to be taken are not clearly set out and there are no customer focused outcome targets. It does not robustly address what are the key weaknesses with the programme.
- 172 The timetable for the production of the five year strategy was agreed in 2003 and sets key milestone dates for the production of the strategy. While the first milestone had not been reached at the time of our inspection we are concerned that more detailed plans of specific actions to take were not available to demonstrate whether satisfactory progress was being made. We have concerns that progress, such as on collating available information on housing related support needs of the various client groups and putting arrangements in place to plug gaps are slow to be put in place.
- 173 The service review programme has the potential to deliver results. The approach itself is rational looking across services provided for a particular client group. Work is undertaken to consult with service users to assess whether needs are being adequately met. A view is taken across the client group sector which assists in identifying the adequacy of services and provision overall. Benchmarking is carried out to enable comparisons to be made across the sector and the appropriateness of the procurement method is considered.
- 174 The risk programme is a reasonable start at beginning to identify the risks to the programme. It identifies the cause, consequences, probability, impact, ownership and actions to take to minimise the risk. It is not clear, however, how the actions are to be taken forward. There does not appear to be a direct link with any team or service plan.
- 175 Contingency planning is also under developed. Outline contingency arrangements are needed for areas where there is a significant risk to the programme and where risks have a high impact, particularly to protect the services and welfare of vulnerable individuals.
- 176 Strategic and operational plans connected to the homelessness strategy and housing strategy are not SMART and it is therefore difficult to measure the contribution these strategies make to Supporting People's overall aims and objectives.
- 177 A corporate change management programme is rolling out across the council to improve the way services are managed. This includes introducing a hierarchy of service planning and improving risk management. The programme has not impacted on the Supporting People team yet. Service planning, based on good solid theory, and risks management has still to be introduced.

Will improvements be delivered?

- 178 Overall we feel the evidence points to uncertainties over whether improvements will be delivered. Priorities are reasonably clear although action to ensure they are informed by a robust assessment of need is slow. The programme fits in with the community and corporate priorities. However, the council is cautious, has a relatively small team and is not targeting resources for maximum early impact. Planning, performance management, risk assessment and contingency planning

within Supporting People are weak, although there are proposals to improve these corporately.

179 There is an agreed sense of direction and reasonable clarity around priorities which are agreed and shared by the partners. Priorities need to be further developed to make clear, based on good and reliable intelligence on needs, what areas are not considered to be priorities. In addition to identifying which client groups are a priority it is also useful to take this a stage further and identify the nature of the housing related support which is in most need of development.

180 Objectives and priorities link well with corporate and community plans. For example the Supporting People programme can help deliver three of the seven priority themes set out in York's community plan. These are:

- ◆ to be a safe city with a low crime rate and to be perceived by residents and visitors as such;
- ◆ to be a city where residents enjoy long, healthy and independent lives through the promotion of healthy living and with easy access to responsive health and social care services; and
- ◆ to ensure that all residents and visitors can take part in the life of the city.

Within these broad themes there are specific objectives related to supporting vulnerable people to maintain or regain their independence.

181 Aims are ambitious but the drive to deliver that change quickly within the Supporting People programme is tempered by caution and prudence. To some extent this is understandable, given the uncertainties around future longer term funding and the council's overall financial position. However, these need to be balanced against the need for services by vulnerable people when current grant is not fully spent. This issue of the sustainability of services versus meeting the immediate housing related support needs should be carefully considered on the basis of a thorough assessment of the risks involved.

182 Corporately, the council is establishing a contingency fund of £500,000 for 2005/06 to address possible shortfalls in government grant. Success in transforming the programme in York, however, will not depend on this contingency, more on the council's ability to unlock funding from legacy services.

183 The key factors to moving from a position of legacy services to one of needs led services is firstly to have an in-depth understanding of the level and nature of housing related support need in the community. Unlocking funding from services that may not be strategically relevant, eligible or value for money is the next step. On both these issues the council is moving slowly.

184 The council has a small team in place to administer the programme and we were impressed with their energy and capabilities. They are supplemented by resources within the department to work on the five year shadow strategy, process applications for fairer charging assessments, and give financial or other specialist support.

185 However, given the slow progress on a number of issues, we question whether the team have the capacity to deliver particularly against the service review programme in the way that it is currently organised. Better targeting of resources is necessary to deliver improvements. The commissioning body needs to review its approach to the review of legacy housing related support in order for its limited more effective results.

186 Service providers are becoming better informed and there has been a number of training events to help them understand how to implement new requirements and improve the quality of services for service users.

- 187 Councils are expected to use the service review process to identify where savings can be found and so protect the most vulnerable clients in the borough. Whilst contract reviews have reduced expenditure, there is no evidence that the service review process is unlocking funding and the future programme does not target high cost services. Savings in 2004/05 in York were achieved by delays in new services becoming operational and offering service providers no inflationary increase in funding. ODPM require councils to deliver efficiencies through their commissioning arrangements in addition to releasing funding for re-investment.
- 188 Generally there is clarity over responsibilities, who is responsible for what, and the role and involvement of councillors and board members. All commissioning body members operate at a strategic level across the borough sitting on a number of bodies within and across the three partner agencies bringing an understanding and recognition to the network of boards and panels, for example the health and social care board.
- 189 Use is also being made of the regional implementation group to help the council move forward on a number of issues including eligibility and benchmarking. Cross authority working on Supporting People is, however, not used to add capacity.
- 190 Planning and performance management within Supporting People is currently weak and requires significant progress to move the programme forward in a structured and controlled manner. The wider management change programme rolling out within the council should move this along although it has not yet impacted on the Supporting People programme.
- 191 The pace of IT development to support the programme has been slow. Payments were initially made clerically as there were IT problems. These have now been resolved and a new system introduced. There is a dedicated resource in place to develop this area so the pace is expected to improve.

Summary

- 192 Overall, we judge that City of York Council has uncertain prospects for delivering further improvements in the delivery of its Supporting People programme.
- 193 There is a track record of slow but steady progress within the Supporting People programme. Implementation milestones have been achieved, structures generally are in place, a number of new and reconfigured services have been developed and related performance indicators show a marginal upward trend.
- 194 Corporately there is evidence of the council putting in place a major project to address identified weaknesses in corporate business management practice that are important for driving improvement. These weaknesses are also evident in the Supporting People programme and we are not clear how they are to be addressed. Performance management is weak and there is no formal framework in place to systematically engage and involve all client groups in the design and development of the programme. Planning, including plans to improve these areas, is also weak. Work to identify and address risks has begun but needs further development to ensure all risks are identified and appropriately managed. Contingency plans also need further development.
- 195 Priorities are reasonably clear and fit with what the community partnership and the council is trying to achieve. However, action to ensure that priorities are based on up to date and comprehensive assessments of need, including where there are gaps in provision, is making slow progress. The council is cautious, has a relatively small team and is not targeting resources for maximum early impact.

Appendices

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

Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Supporting People Shadow Strategy.
- ◆ Council Plan.
- ◆ York City Vision and Community Strategy.
- ◆ Supporting People risk register.
- ◆ Housing Strategy.
- ◆ Homelessness Strategy.
- ◆ Audit and Inspection Letters 2001/02 and 2002/03.
- ◆ Procurement Policy and Code of Practice.
- ◆ Better Care: Higher Standards including amendments.
- ◆ User Leaflets.
- ◆ Model Contract.
- ◆ Service Review Timetable.
- ◆ A variety of other council plans and strategies.
- ◆ Minutes of a variety of meeting relevant to Supporting People.

Reality checks undertaken

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

- ◆ A desktop review of a sample of contracts.
- ◆ An open meeting with service providers.
- ◆ Focus group of probation and PCT board members.
- ◆ Focus group of the Supporting People team members.
- ◆ Focus group of people with physical disabilities and sensory impairment.
- ◆ Focus group of travellers.
- ◆ Focus group of young people.
- ◆ Focus group of black and minority ethnic community representatives.

Visits to / interviews with:

- ◆ York Housing Association.
- ◆ Railway Housing Association.

- ◆ Abbeyfield.
- ◆ Wilberforce trust.
- ◆ Real Life Options.
- ◆ Milberry Care.
- ◆ Northern Life Care Limited.
- ◆ Wilf Ward Trust.
- ◆ Nightstop.
- ◆ YACRO.
- ◆ Arclight Drinkers scheme.
- ◆ Peaseholme Centre.
- ◆ Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

List of people interviewed

We met a range of people involved with the service:

Councillor Susan Galloway	Executive Member for Social Services
Councillor Sue Sunderland	Executive Member for Housing
Gary Millard	Director of Mental Health Services
Peter Hart	Housing Services Manager North Yorkshire Probation Service
Paul Belbin	Group Director of Foundation Housing
Laura McGillivray	Deputy Chief Executive
Bill Hodson	Deputy Director of Community Services
Kathy Clark	Head of Commissioning and Support Services
Pippa Aspin	Supporting People Manager
Hywel Benyon	Supporting People Strategy Manager
Paul Whittle	Supporting People Review Officer
Jane Moor	Leaving Care Manager
Julie McMurray	Head of Revenues
Ruth Bringham	Finance Officer
Gary Brittain	Commissioning Manager
David Bulmer	Health and Disabilities team
Maggie Browne	York Support City of York Council

Neil McFarlane	Tenancy Support City of York Council
Becky Ward	Dispersed Properties City of York Council
Gabrielle Seager	Drug Action Team Co-ordinator
Avril Hunter	North Yorkshire County Council Supporting People Manager

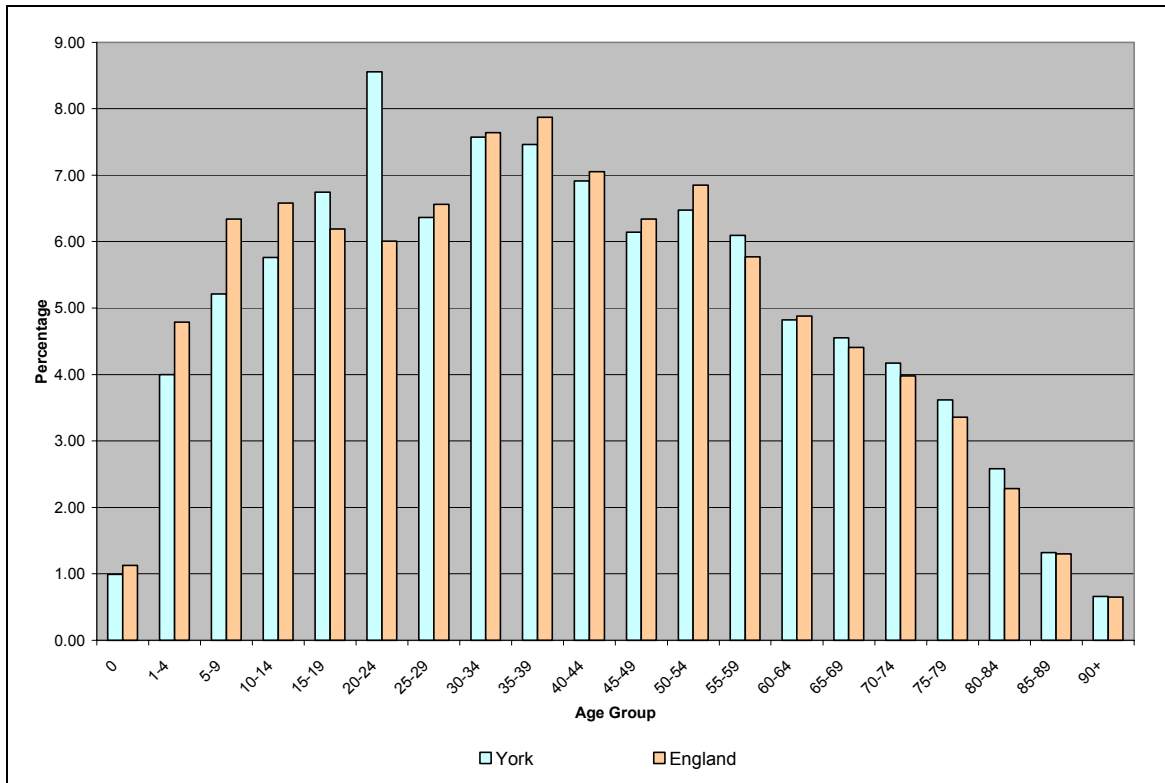
Demographic information

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

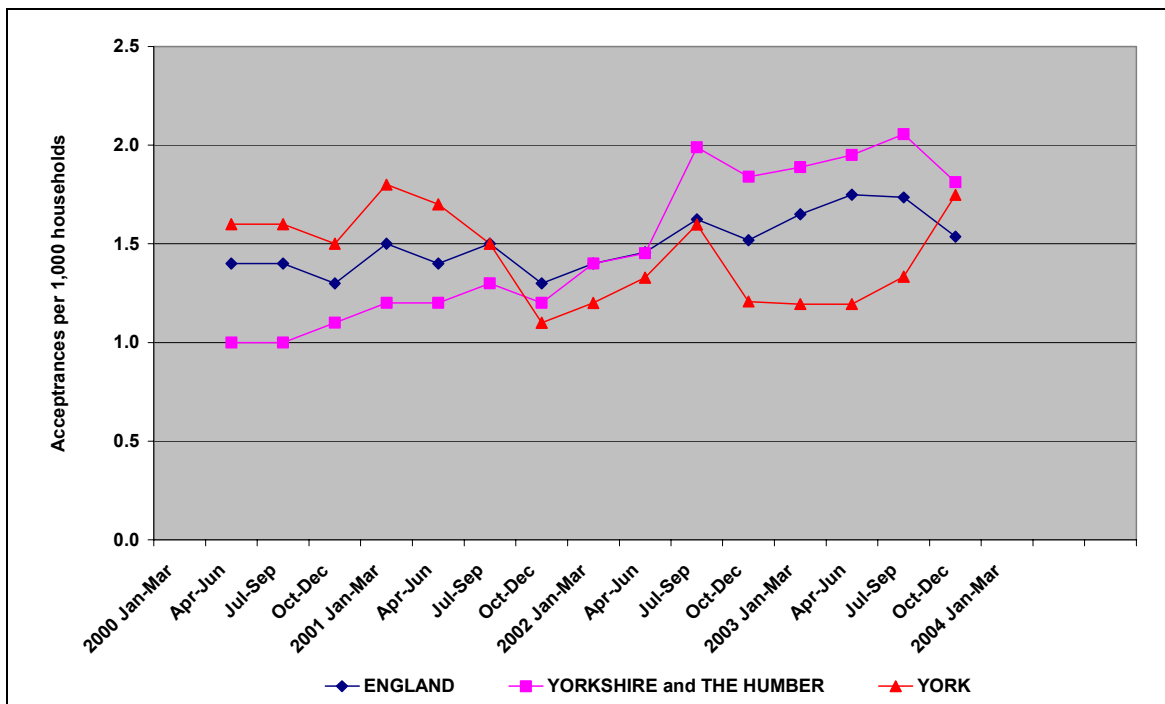
Measure	York	England
Population (mid-2002)	182,400	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2002)	16.89	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2002)	4.89	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	1.6	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁸	208	-

⁸ 2004 Deprivation Index, average ward score for the authority.

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



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



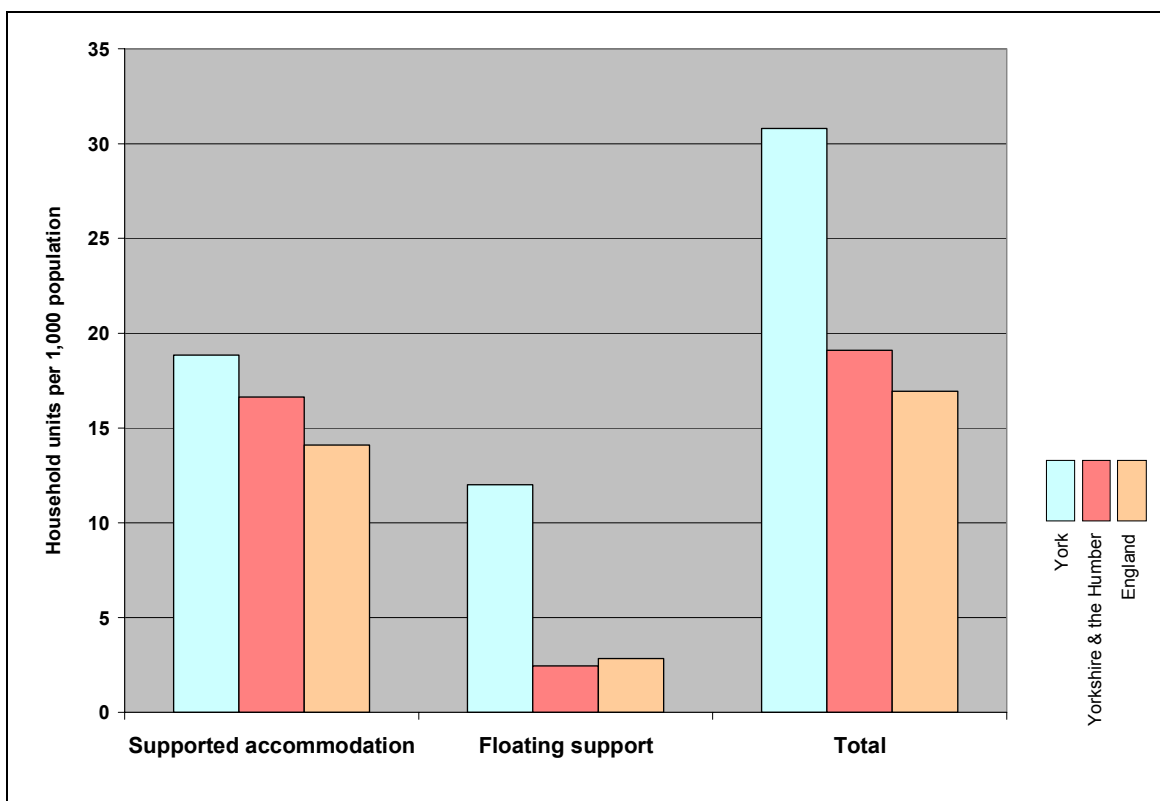
Performance information

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

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

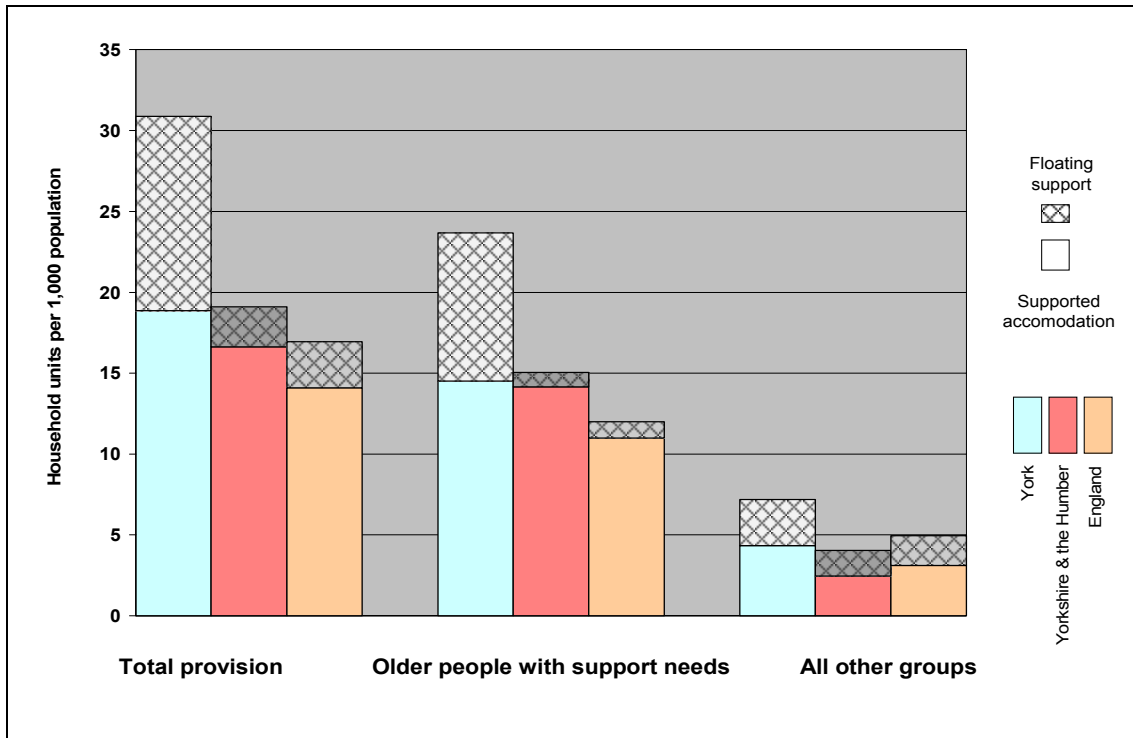
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁹

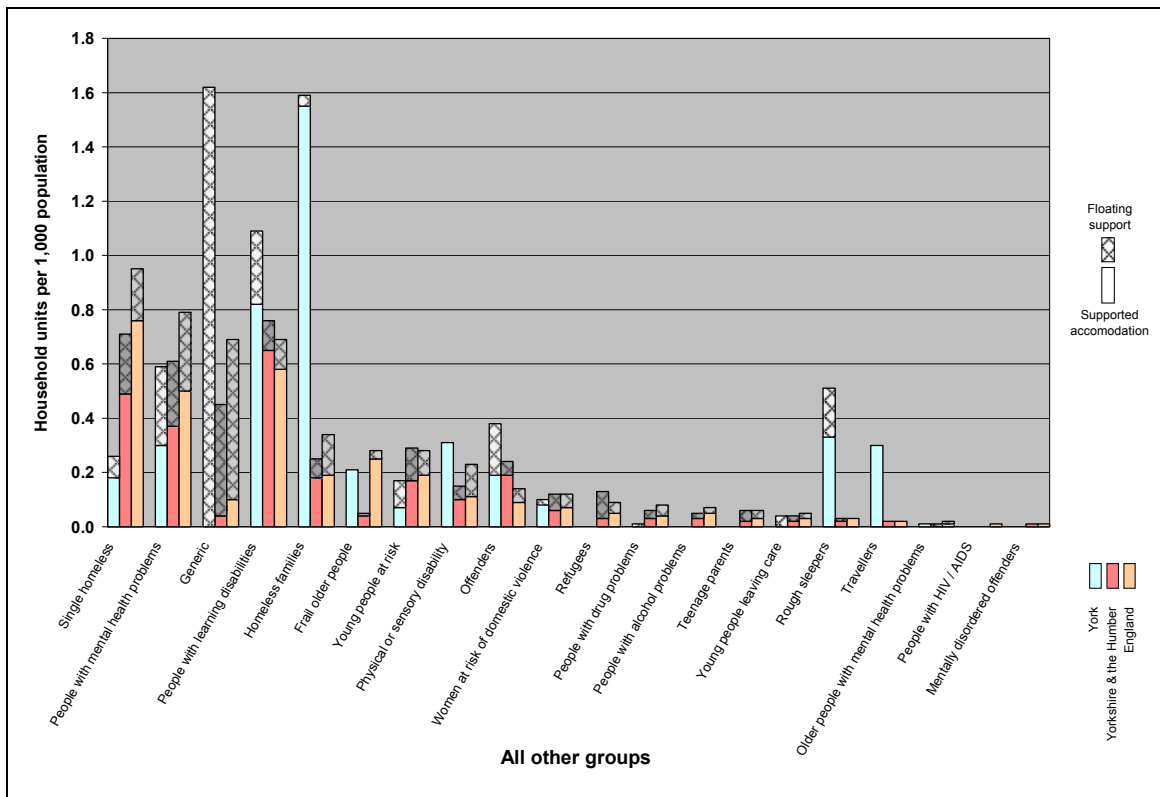


⁹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹⁰



Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹¹



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

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

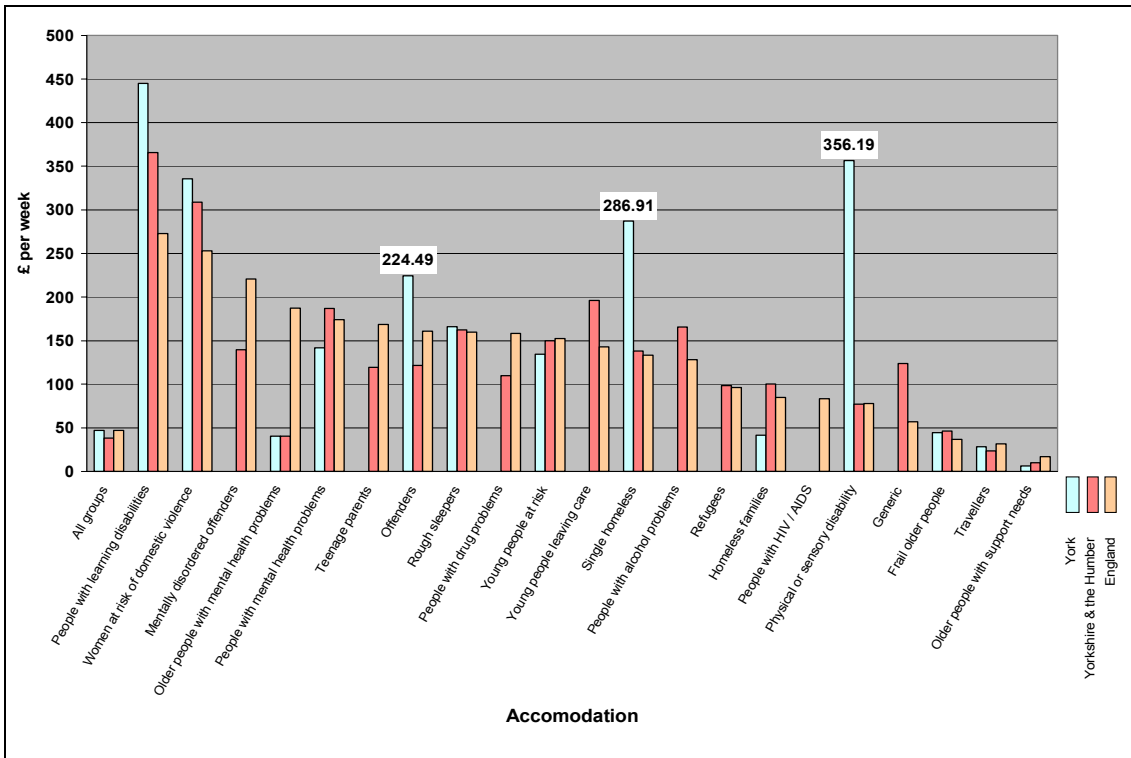
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Final Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
York	£ 9,474,340	£ 54,605	£ 313,210.35

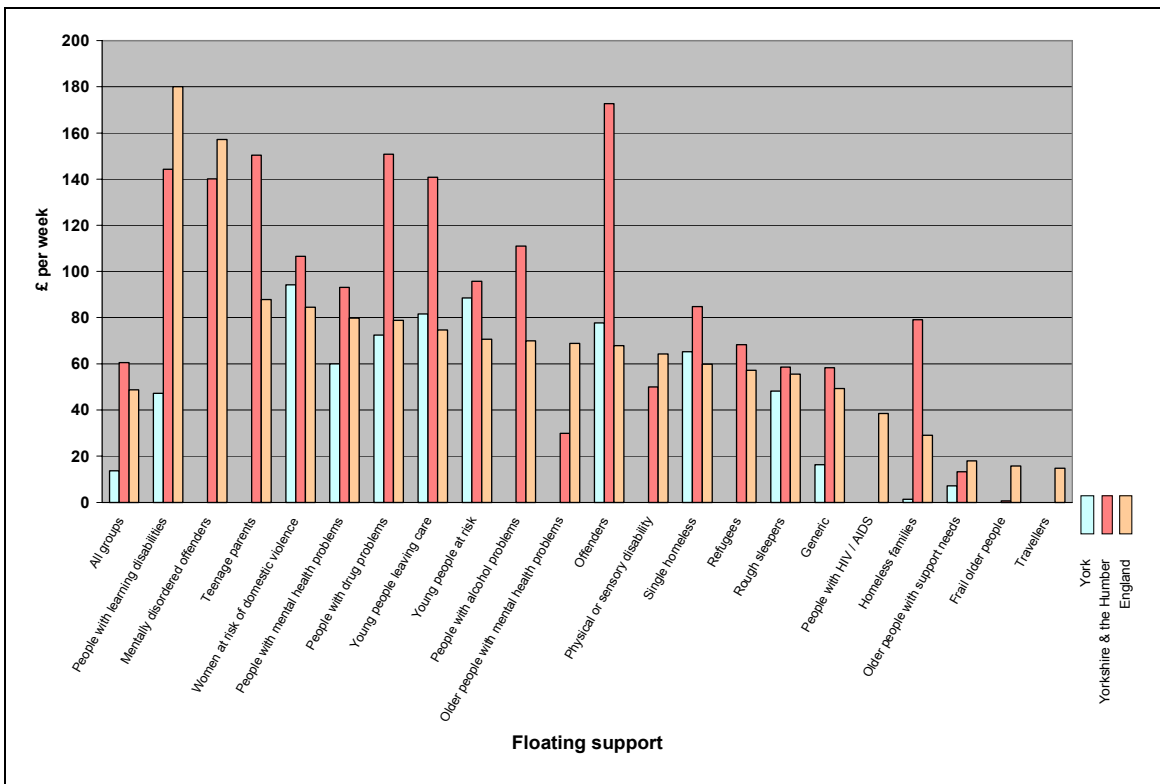
Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
York	£ 1.00	£ 29.53	£ 30.01	£ 122.50
Yorkshire & the Humber	£ 0.72	£ 25.38	£ 32.87	£ 100.47
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹²

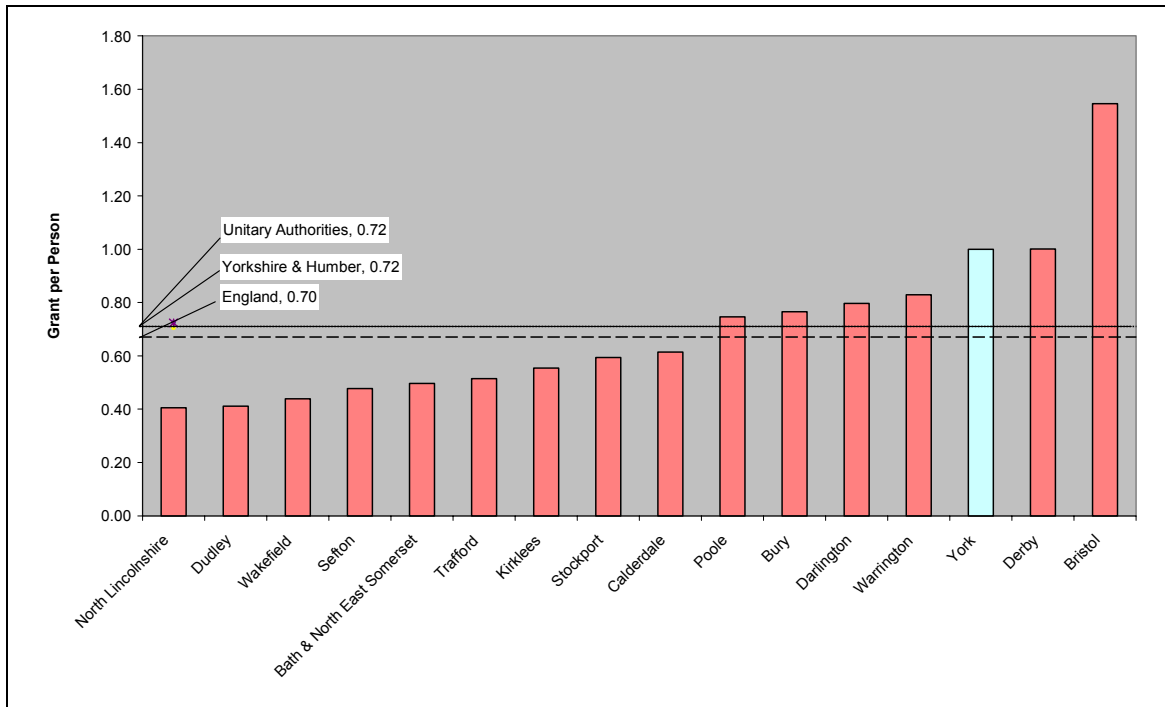


Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)

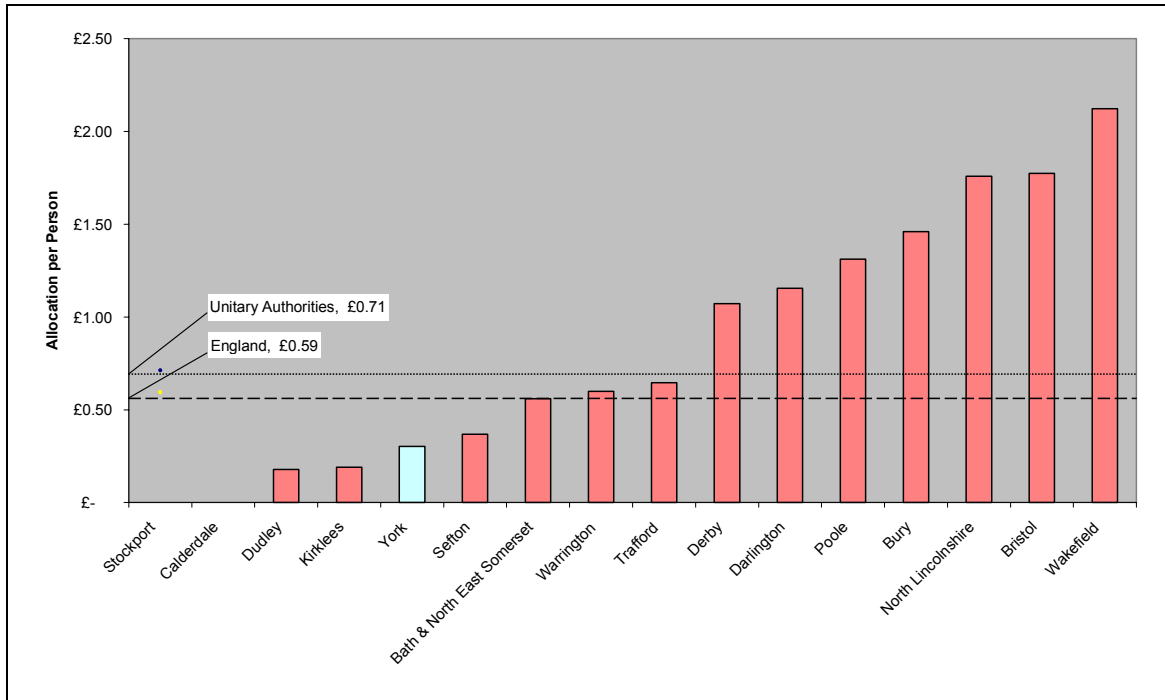


¹² Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹³, all unitary councils and all English councils (2003/04)

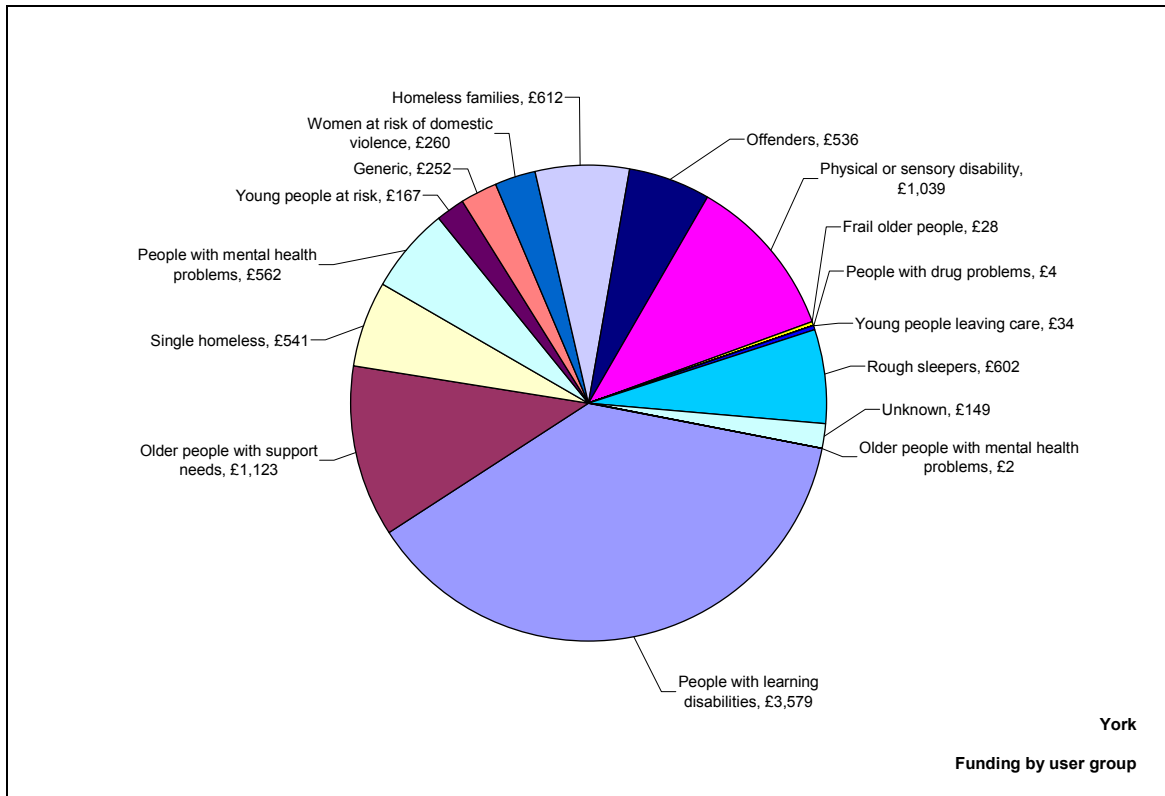


Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all unitary councils and all English councils

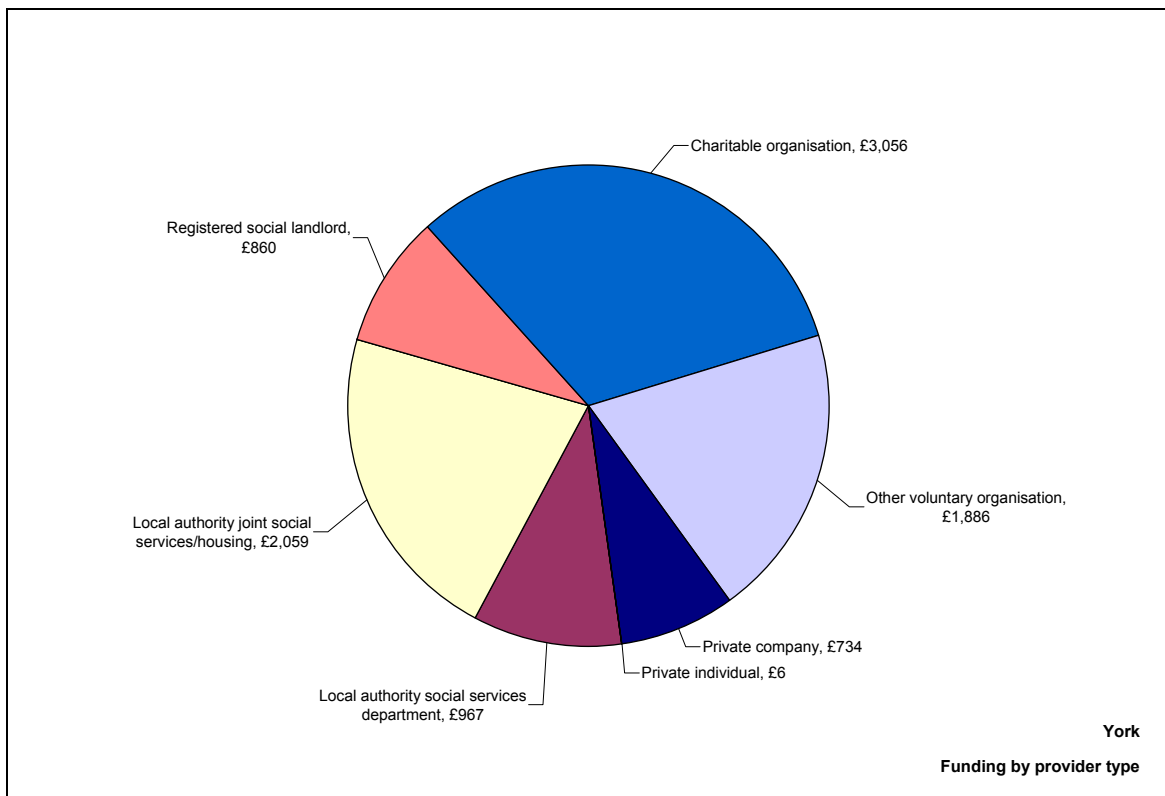


¹³ A comparator group of similar councils.

Share of spending between user groups (£000s)



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



Social Services star ratings November 2003

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

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

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03

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

York	
Significantly above average (★★★★)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31)
Above average (★★★)	Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care (C26) Admissions to hospital of people aged 75 or over due to hypothermia or a fall (C33) Items of equipment costing less than £1,000 delivered within 3 weeks (D38)
Average (★★)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Admissions of adults aged 18-64 to residential or nursing care (C27) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Older people helped to live at home (C32) New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks (D43)
Below average (★)	Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Delayed discharges for older people (D41)
Significantly below average (●)	

Best value performance indicators

Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/03 compared with unitary councils

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

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

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).

Item 1 User consultation on service reviews

The council approached service providers and advocates to seek advice on how best to engage with service users who have particular communication needs. In response to that advice a differential approach was adopted using a questionnaire, one to one interview or group meeting depending on the needs of particular individuals.