

Housing - Supporting People Inspection Report

August 2005



Supporting People

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Inspection 2005/2006

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Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

The 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 and their partners will need to achieve in order to deliver the programme effectively. All the relevant papers for Supporting People can be found on the Supporting People k-web that can be accessed through the Supporting People website: www.spkweb.org.uk.

Summary

- 1** Bath and North East Somerset Council is based in Bath and is located in the South West of England. The population of the area is 169,600 people living in 71,000 households, with 6 per cent of the population from minority ethnic groups. The city of Bath is covered by World Heritage Site designation, two-thirds of the district are within the green belt and there are two designated areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs). There are 30 conservation areas and 6,406 listed buildings within the district.
- 2** The district is generally affluent, with the average weekly wage of £411.59 compared to £364.98 regionally. The majority of local people (85.2 per cent) are employed in the service sector, with 28.3 per cent in public services and 21.5 per cent in distribution. However, house prices are high, with the average home in the district costing £221,983 compared to £175,128 regionally. Therefore houses are becoming less affordable to local people.
- 3** Bath and North East Somerset Council transferred its housing stock to Somerset Community Housing Trust in 1999. The Council employs approximately 6,500 staff.

Scoring the service

- 4 We have assessed Bath and North East Somerset Council as providing a 'good', two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Table 1 Scoring chart¹:

| | | Prospects for improvement? | | | | |
|-----------|--|----------------------------|-----------|------------|------------------|---|
| Excellent | | | | | | good service that has promising prospects for improvement |
| Promising | | | ☀ | | | |
| Uncertain | | | | | | |
| Poor | | | | | | |
| | | Poor | Fair ★ | Good ★★ | Excellent ★★★ | |

A good service?

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- 5 We have assessed the Council's administration of the Supporting People Programme to be good because of the following.
- Service users have been involved in the delivery and development of the programme and a range of up-to-date information on the Supporting People Programme is available including a dedicated website.
 - Financial management arrangements and budgetary control are sound and payments to providers have been made on time.
 - A focus on achieving value for money is in place through the service review process and targeted value for money with high cost services.
 - The commissioning body has provided effective leadership to guide the development of the programme, with a clear focus on value for money, financial control and strategy development.
 - A five-year strategy has been agreed, following consultation with stakeholders which has produced a plan for future commissioning priorities.

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

- The Supporting People team is skilled and able to deliver the work programme with added capacity through established partnerships as well as their close links with key commissioners and regional groups.
 - Service providers are generally positive about the Council's administration of the programme.
 - There are clear procedures for service reviews and the review programme is on schedule to meet the Government target date of April 2006.
 - There have been positive outcomes for service users with a range of new services commissioned and improvements made to schemes following review.
- 6 However, there are a number of areas in which the programme needs to improve:
- the Council has no systematic means of continuous engagement with users particularly with governance arrangements;
 - there has been a lack of consistent involvement of Probation services in the governance arrangements, with no Probation representative routinely attending the commissioning body until January 2005;
 - there have been delays in issuing some service review reports;
 - more work is needed to research the housing related support needs of black and ethnic Minority (BME) communities; and
 - there are difficulties securing move-on accommodation for some client groups.
- 7 We have judged that the Supporting People Programme has promising prospects for improvement. We found the following strengths:
- the overall aims of the Council reflect a commitment to supporting vulnerable people and there is evidence of improvement in related services;
 - the Council has successfully delivered the early stages of the Supporting People Programme and has addressed the one weakness identified by the ODPM in the shadow Supporting People strategy;
 - there is political and corporate support for the Supporting People Programme;
 - the future priorities for the programme are clear in the five-year strategy, and supported by key partners;
 - service reviews have demonstrated that they can deliver improvements in quality and value for money;
 - there are strong performance management arrangements in place; and
 - the Council is working with partners to jointly commission services and increase capacity within the programme.

- 8 However, there are some areas in which the Council needs to improve:
- the ability of the Probation service to sustain the recent level of engagement with the Supporting People Programme;
 - the Council is willing to learn from others but has not due to capacity issues taken a systematic approach to learning and replicating best practice within the programme; and
 - there is not yet a detailed programme agreed by the core strategic group to show how work on improving available move-on accommodation will be taken forward.

Recommendations

- 9 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:

| Recommendations |
|--|
| <i>Within the next three months:</i> |
| <i>R1 Ensure that the recently improved engagement by Probation is sustained and developed to establish a fully effective partnership.</i> |
| <i>R2 Develop a detailed project plan for taking forward the work on accessing and increasing the amount and range of appropriate move on accommodation.</i> |
| <i>R3 Ensure that all reports are issued on completed service reviews.</i> |
| <i>Within the next six months:</i> |
| <i>R4 Develop a continuous dialogue with all Supporting People service users.</i> |
| <i>R5 Develop and agree with partners and service users a medium-term improvement plan for the Supporting People Programme.</i> |
| <i>R6 Complete further work to identify the needs of BME communities.</i> |
| <i>R7 Ensure that new contracts are issued following completion of the service review programme.</i> |
| <i>R8 Take steps to identify any other weaknesses identified in this report.</i> |

- 10 We would like to thank the staff of Bath and North East Somerset Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 6 to 10 June 2005

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Report

Context

The locality

- 11 Bath and North East Somerset Council is in the South West of England. The population of the area is 169,600 people living in 71,000 households, with 6 per cent of the population from black and minority ethnic groups.
- 12 The local environment is of a high quality, with the city of Bath covered by World Heritage Site designation, two-thirds of the district are within the green belt and there are two designated areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs). There are 30 conservation areas and 6,406 listed buildings within the district.
- 13 The district is generally affluent, with the average weekly wage of £411.59 compared to £364.98 regionally. The majority of local people (85.2 per cent) are employed in the service sector, with 28.3 per cent in public services and 21.5 per cent in distribution. However, house prices are high, with the average home in the district costing £221,983 compared to £175,128 regionally. Therefore, houses are becoming less affordable to local people.
- 14 Unemployment in March 2005 stood at less than one per cent compared with the national average of nearly two and a half per cent. The district is ranked as the 268th least deprived area out of 354, where one is the most deprived. The least deprived ward is Saltford and the most deprived ward is Twerton.

The Council

- 15 The Council comprises of 65 councillors. No party has overall control. The Council has adopted a modernised approach to governance with a leader and executive governing the business of the Council. The executive is made up of representatives from the Liberal Democrats (29 councillors), Conservative (26 councillors) and independent councillors (four councillors), with the Labour group (six councillors) forming the formal opposition.
- 16 The Council's overall revenue budget for the year 2005/06 is £171.9 million – an increase of just over 7 per cent from the previous year. In 2005/06, the supported housing programme has a budget of just over £4 million.

- 17 The Council's five shared priorities as identified in their community strategy are as follows:
- be distinctive - 'promoting a sense of place so that people identify with and take pride in our communities';
 - be inclusive - 'celebrating the contributions from people of different backgrounds and with different experiences can make and promoting equality of opportunity';
 - be creative - 'sharing resources, working together, and finding new ways of doing things';
 - be safe - 'building communities where people feel safe and secure'; and
 - be sustainable - 'taking responsibility for our environment and natural resources, now and over the long-term'.
- 18 The Council was rated as 'good' following the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) undertaken by the Audit Commission between 2002 and 2004. In the 2004 Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) annual review of performance, Children's Services were judged to be serving most children well and to have promising capacity for improvement and Adult Services were judged to be serving some people well and to have promising capacity for improvement. The Inspection of Social Care Services for Older People in 2004 awarded the service as serving most people well and to have promising capacity for improvement.

The Supporting People Programme

- 19 The Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People Programme in their area.
- 20 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.
- 21 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2005/06 is £4,082,544 million. In addition, the Council receives £179,433 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 22 The highest cost Supporting People service at the time of our inspection is £1,160 per person per week, for a supported housing service for people with sensory and physical disabilities. The lowest cost service is £1.08 per person for a community alarm service.

- 23 The Council's shadow Supporting People strategy 2003/04 was evaluated by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) as 'excellent'. A revised five-year strategy for 2005 to 2010 has now been produced. This sets out the following vision for Supporting People for the Council:

'We will highlight current inequalities in the provision of Supporting People services and identify unmet needs.

We will identify ways in which we can complement related strategic plans and initiatives and make best use of resources.

We will deliver services which prevent homelessness and promote independence.'

- 24 Bath and North East Somerset Council was inspected in the third year of the Supporting People Programme. 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.

How good is the service?

- 25 The assessment in this report was based upon the following key issues:

- governance of the programme;
- delivery arrangements, including strategy and needs assessment;
- 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 and information;
- diversity; and
- outcomes for service users.

Governance

- 26 The commissioning body has provided effective leadership and has demonstrated its ability to take hard decisions. The core strategy group is providing operational and policy support to the commissioning body and there is appropriate political awareness and involvement in the programme. However, there has been a lack of consistent involvement of Probation services in the governance arrangements and there is scope to develop on going service user involvement.

- 27 The Council attaches a high priority to Supporting People and this is reflected in the views of senior managers, partners and staff involved in the service. The Council has recently completed a matrix of links with local strategies which highlights how Supporting People will contribute to relevant areas across the Council such as the Community Plan. This helps to show how Supporting People supports the wider aims and priorities of the Council and its partners.
- 28 Supporting People is well integrated into the planning and decision-making processes of the Council. The Supporting People Programme is part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's annual work plan and there is broad political consensus amongst councillors. This ensures that the importance of Supporting People Programme is reflected within the mainstream work of the Council at a corporate level.
- 29 In January 2001 the Supporting People Decision-making Group (DMG), comprising senior managers from Social and Housing Services, Finance, Revenues and Benefits, Probation and Health was formed, this evolved into the commissioning body in 2003. A core strategic group was also established in 2003. The commissioning body is responsible for approving the strategy and Supporting People annual plan, making decisions about the restructuring of Supporting People services, agreeing service reviews, and financial control. The core strategy group has responsibility for overseeing the work of the Supporting People team, including consultation with service users and stakeholders, monitoring progress of key plans, identifying opportunities for programme development, and ensuring links with other commissioning work. Both groups have agreed terms of reference which clarify their respective roles and responsibilities and reflect recent ODPM guidance.

Commissioning body

- 30 The commissioning body includes the Head of Housing and Supported Living Services (non-voting Chair), the Head of Adult Care and Commissioning, the Assistant Chief Officer of Avon and Somerset Probation Area and the Director of Intermediate Care and Commissioning of the local Primary Care Trust (PCT). There is also a non-voting (Group Manager) representative from the Children and Families Service. The seniority of commissioning body representatives mean that they are able to take decisions about the pattern of spend and strategic priorities.
- 31 The commissioning body meets on a regular basis and if voting members are occasionally unable to attend there is a mechanism in place for substitutions and decision-making in absence of a key partner. This ensures that the business of the commissioning body runs smoothly and that decisions are not held back due to an individual's one-off absence.
- 32 The Accountable Officer (AO) is a Group Manager within the Housing and Supported Living Service and is chair of the core strategic group. In both capacities the post holder makes links to strategies across the Council and acts as a reporting link between the core strategic group and the commissioning body. The Accountable officer is helping to mainstream the work of the Supporting People Programme.

- 33 Terms of reference (TOR) have been in place since the start of the programme. The commissioning body's relationship with the Council is set out in a Memorandum of Understanding which has been developed in partnership with the Council's legal advisors and approved by Councillors, PCT and Probation Boards. The TOR are clear and demonstrate voting arrangements that allow for parity between all members and provide a clear process in the case that the commissioning body is unable to agree and need to follow a disputes procedure.
- 34 The PCT have effectively engaged with the work of the commissioning body and routinely attend the commissioning body. The effective engagement of health has led to an understanding of the opportunities provided by the programme in meeting health priorities or improved health outcomes for vulnerable people from the Supporting People Programme.
- 35 There has been consistent attendance by Council representatives on the commissioning body and this has contributed to a clear understanding of how the Supporting People Programme links to both their own commissioning area and their role and responsibilities within the group.
- 36 The commissioning body receives regular financial and performance information reports relating to the Supporting People Programme which provides a strong basis from which the commissioning body can monitor the effectiveness of the programme. The commissioning body have considered the development of the five-year strategy and identified the key priorities groups for expansion over the next three year period.
- 37 There has been a lack of consistent involvement of Probation services in the governance arrangements, with no Probation representative routinely attending the commissioning body until January 2005. Minutes of previous meetings indicate that there has been a concerted effort at a senior level within the Council to engage Probation and there has now been a firm commitment from the Probation service to future involvement with the programme. All commissioning body decisions have been ratified by the Probation service through the Terms of Reference agreement. The failure of the Probation service to fully engage with the commissioning body has until recently meant that it has not been in a position to promote the housing support needs of offenders in the area with in the Supporting People Programme.

Core Strategy Group

- 38 The core strategic group was re-launched in March 2005 to enable a more effective and wider strategic input from all services in to the Supporting People Programme. The aim has been to strengthen the role of the core strategic group and this has been achieved through engaging representatives from across key policy and strategic groups. This has produced a core strategic group that represents all service streams and has a range of experiences suitable for rolling out the Supporting People Programme. The core strategic group is providing a steer to the commissioning body for future planning and the day-to-day delivery of the programme.

- 39 The Probation service does not have a track record of attending core strategic group meetings and engagement at this level has only recently been achieved. The effects are that the Probation service has not been in a position to maximise their contribution to the work of the core strategic group.

Inclusive forum

- 40 The Provider Forum reflects the cross section of providers working across the area and is responsible for identifying provider issues and concerns, contributing to the strategic planning process and engaging service users in the programme. The meetings are well attended and have included presentations on the service review process and the five-year strategy. Providers are generally positive about the level of consultation and information provided by the Supporting People team and found the forum meetings useful.
- 41 To date, there has been no direct involvement of service users in the provider forum. Links have been made between the Supporting People team and user forums run by other service areas within the Council and on one-off consultation exercises around specific issues. However, members of the provider forum recognise that this is an area for future development on an ongoing basis. Regular and routine involvement of service users would link service users in to the day-to-day governance arrangements of the Supporting People Programme.

Delivery arrangements

- 42 The Council has established effective delivery arrangements for the Supporting People Programme. The Supporting People team has the appropriate mix of skills in place and it has made good progress against its team plan for 2004/05. The team has met all deadlines as set out by the ODPM for Supporting People Programmes.
- 43 The development of the five-year strategy has been well-managed, with wide consultation with providers and other stakeholders. The level of consultation and use of needs research has produced a set of shared priorities for the future and clear identification of existing gaps in the service. Where there have been imbalances in service provision this has been responded to by either the re-modelling of existing provision or the commissioning of new schemes. Along side this work the Supporting People team have worked closely with the Council's corporate finance team to establish how future funding constraints may impact on the delivery of the five-year strategy as well as other statutory budgets such as Social Services.
- 44 The team has an agreed annual work plan which sets out the tasks to be taken forward by the team, with target dates and individual officer responsibilities clearly defined. This shows satisfactory progress in all key areas of work in 2004/05. Previous capacity problems in terms of delivering service reviews have been addressed through increasing capacity by working with internal partners and the recruitment of an external consultant. This means that the timetable for