

Supporting People Programme Re-inspection

Torbay Council

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Supporting People Inspections

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

Background

- 1 Torbay Council became a unitary authority in 1998 and is located in the south west of England within the region known as the English Riviera. The population is 129,000 but this swells to over 200,000 during the peak summer tourist season. 3.16 per cent are from groups other than white British.
- 2 The Council is now led by an elected Mayor (Conservative) and the 36 member council has a Liberal Democrat majority. The Council employs 2,500 persons across services plus 2,600 within schools.
- 3 Torbay Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with Torbay PCT (Care Trust from 1 December 2005) and Devon and Cornwall Probation Service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 4 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2005/06 is £5.8 million, a reduction of £309,000 on the previous year. In addition, the Council receives a £124,791 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 5 Torbay Council was one of a number of high cost administering local authorities identified by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). As a result, in August 2004, it was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme and earlier than originally anticipated due to concerns raised by the ODPM over the relatively high costs of some services.
- 6 A number of the highest cost services have subsequently been de-commissioned or unit costs reduced. At the time of the re-inspection in November 2005 the highest cost service was £347 per person per week, (but was set to reduce further following service review) and the lowest £3.56.
- 7 The inspection in August 2004 found that the Council was providing a poor service and had uncertain prospects for improvement. This has led to a mandatory re-inspection of the Supporting People programme.

Scoring the service

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

Table 1 Scoring chart¹

		Prospects for improvement?				
Excellent						'a fair service that has uncertain prospects for improvement' A good service?
Promising						
Uncertain		☀				
Poor						
		Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	
			★	★★	★★★	

Source: Audit Commission

- 9 During our re-inspection we identified the following strengths in the way in which the Supporting People programme has been administered. These represent real improvements and show the progress that has been made since the original inspection in August 2004.
- The service review programme is now on track for completion by March 2006 and user views are given a high priority during the review process. All services receive a visit, rather than desk top reviews.
 - The quality of the services provided in the schemes which the inspectors visited is high and a number of services that were poor quality have been de-commissioned or replaced following reviews.
 - High quality information has now been produced, aimed at service users, providers and stakeholders. A comprehensive directory of services has also been published.

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.

- Training has been provided for staff in the Council and in Health, which has raised awareness of the programme and what it can offer. This has helped to improve access to services.
 - The Supporting People team is now at full strength. It is dedicated, well-managed and has a good range of relevant skills and experience.
 - There is now sound financial management of the programme. Action has been taken to match expenditure to the annual grant and bring the programme into balance.
- 10 However, there are a number of areas where past performance has been weak and still needs to improve.
- Research to inform the new five-year Supporting People strategy is incomplete and priorities are not clear. This means that for some groups of vulnerable people, particularly minority groups, needs are not known and are therefore not addressed by the strategy.
 - Housing and housing-related support strategies for older people and offenders do not exist. Strategies for some other groups are several years old and require updating. The Supporting People strategy has therefore not been able to link with these and point to clear priorities for action.
 - Where priorities have been identified, the new strategy fails to identify how they will be met and where needs are known, what the benefits or outcomes will be for people who use services.
 - Access to move-on accommodation is still poor. Although the Council is introducing measures designed to address this, some people are occupying places they no longer need while others have to wait for services.
- 11 We have judged that the Supporting People programme still has uncertain prospects for improvement.
- The Council and its partners can show how it has overcome many of the weaknesses identified in the original inspection and has implemented a recovery plan. However, in doing so, insufficient emphasis has been placed on the future of the programme in terms of understanding and meeting local needs.
 - The commissioning body has not taken the initiative in setting a clear work programme for the core strategy group and its stakeholder subgroups. This has resulted in delays in the plans to address the gaps that exist in the strategy.
 - Ongoing arrangements for performance management of the programme by the commissioning body, as opposed to the initial recovery plan, are not robust and need development.
 - Opportunities for joint commissioning have not been exploited. There are still elements of care for some individuals that are being funded through Supporting People grant which are not covered by the locally agreed eligibility criteria.

- 12 There are however, areas where progress is evident and can be built on.
- There are constructive partnership arrangements between the Council, the new Care Trust and Probation. There is a good understanding of how Supporting People can fit with other statutory and voluntary services to provide a comprehensive network of support for vulnerable people.
 - Work is starting to better understand the needs of BME communities in Torbay and to work with other councils to address the needs of travellers and gypsies.
 - The Council and the Supporting People team can demonstrate how they are learning from other councils to improve access and information for users and strengthen scrutiny arrangements.
 - Governance arrangements, resources and structures are in place. The Council, its partners and the Supporting People team all have vision, commitment and enthusiasm. The challenge will be maintaining the momentum and addressing the issues highlighted during this re-inspection.

Recommendations

- 13 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs¹ and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with customers, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Expand the focus of the commissioning body so that it takes a proactive lead in developing and directing the programme. To do this the commissioning body should:

- *clearly specify the work which it expects the core strategy group to undertake itself and through its subgroups;*
- *set outcomes and target dates for delivery of specific pieces of work;*
- *ensure that linked strategies such as an offenders accommodation strategy and older persons housing strategy are developed within respective organisations; and*
- *actively support, monitor and manage delivery of the core strategy group's work programme.*

¹ Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high costs is over 5 per cent.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- that actions will be completed within clear time scales so that the Supporting People strategy can be refreshed and gaps in knowledge addressed; and
- that the commissioning body will have the information it needs to set the future direction of Supporting People in Torbay.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by March 2006.

Recommendation

R2 Develop an accurate picture of the needs of people across Torbay for housing related support services. Then use this to determine and address priorities. To do this the commissioning body and core strategy group should:

- *determine a methodology which the five strategy subgroups can use to identify local needs, drawing on existing sources of information within the Council, Care Trust and other agencies;*
- *ensure that the needs of smaller groups of clients such as care leavers and those with a physical disability or sensory impairment are effectively represented in the strategy subgroups;*
- *make use of existing research and resource expertise within the Council and Care Trust to co-ordinate and draw robust conclusions from information on needs; and*
- *use this information to determine priorities and address these in an updated strategy.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the needs of local people will be understood and priorities for future investment determined based on robust information; and
- this will lead to improved outcomes for people who most need services.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2006.

Recommendation

R3 Ensure that service reviews that were undertaken before the introduction of eligibility criteria or that did not include a specific action plan aimed at improving quality standards under the QAF are identified and revisited.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- only services that are strategically relevant and appropriate use of Supporting People grant will be funded;
- funding can be refocused on priorities; and
- the quality of services will continue to improve for the people who use them.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. A plan to do this should be agreed by March 2006.

Recommendation

R4 Capitalise on partnerships to ensure maximum value for money is obtained and that effective outcomes are achieved for people who use services. To do this the Council and its partners should:

- *implement opportunities for joint commissioning with the new Care Trust and other bodies such as the Drug and Alcohol Action Team; and*
- *engage with the voluntary sector to promote a mixed economy of service which will better meet local needs.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- maximum use will be made of resources to provide a comprehensive network of support aimed at allowing people to remain independent or become independent; and
- outcomes for people who use services will help the Council, health services and probation to meet their respective priorities and national targets.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by December 2006.

Recommendation

R5 Agree on a performance management framework for assessing progress, identifying any slippage against the new Supporting People work plan and evidencing performance against key indicators. To do this the Council and commissioning body should:

- *decide on a method for reporting progress against the new work plan to the commissioning body and to the Council;*
- *agree on trigger points for action and escalation if slippage occurs; and*
- *develop a small number of outcome measures that can be used to demonstrate the contribution that the programme is making to service users and to achievement of Council priorities as well as those shared with health and probation.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the Council and commissioning body will have a robust framework in place that will enable them to monitor progress against shared targets and act swiftly to take remedial action if this becomes necessary; and
- actions will be determined by shared priorities and outcomes, rather than processes.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with lost costs. This should be implemented by March 2006.

- 14 We would like to thank the staff of Torbay Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 28 November - 2 December 2005

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Report

Context

The locality

- 15 Torbay Council is a unitary authority in South Devon on Tor Bay, an area known as the 'English Riviera'. A prime tourist destination, the resident population of 129,000 often grows to over 200,000 during the peak summer season. 3.16 per cent of the population are from other than white British, considerably lower than the England average of 12.5 per cent.
- 16 Residents aged 65 years and older constitute 22.6 per cent of the population as compared to an England average of 16.32 per cent. The 2001 Census shows that 23 per cent of the population have a limiting long term illness which is higher than the regional and national averages which stand at around 18 per cent.
- 17 In terms of deprivation, Torbay ranks 100 out of 354 areas of England using the average of the Super Output Area (SOA) score. However, four wards are in the most deprived top 10 per cent and a higher than average proportion of the population receives benefits such as income support and incapacity benefit.
- 18 House prices have increased significantly in Torbay over the last five years and the average price of a house is now averaging £176,000. This raises serious issues of affordability for local residents. Although only two per cent of the working age population are unemployed, over 80 per cent of the population is employed in service or service related industries, which are subject to seasonal variation and low pay. Mean annual gross pay in Torbay was £15,000 in 2004 and it is the twelfth lowest earning local authority in England.
- 19 The Council's housing stock of around 3,000 dwellings was transferred to Riviera Housing Trust in 2001. The Council works in partnership with Riviera to provide a joint Housing Register that is run and managed by Riviera Housing. A choice-based lettings system was introduced in June 2005.

The Council

- 20 The Council's revenue budget for 2005/06 is £263 million, which includes around £59 million for social services and £41 million for housing. The Council is one of the major employers in the area with over 5,000 staff, of which around one-half work in schools.
- 21 The Council's vision for Torbay is 'A healthy, prosperous community, living, learning and relaxing in a safe and beautiful bay'. To achieve this, the Council has identified a number of key objectives and priorities. These include:
 - making Torbay a safer place;
 - improving health and social care;
 - improving access to good quality affordable homes;

- improving the economy;
- valuing the environment, placing learning at the heart of the community;
- developing Torbay's culture;
- creating sustainable communities; and
- corporate improvement.

The service

- 22** Torbay Council acts as the administering local authority, (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council received a Supporting People grant of £5.8 million for 2005/06, which is a reduction of £309,000 on the previous year. The Council received an administration grant £124,791 which is £31,000 reduction on the previous year. The Council and its partners have however, invested a further £126,000 in 2005/06 to strengthen the administrative resources available to the Supporting People team.
- 23** The service is now managed within the Housing Services department and consists of a team of 9.6 whole time equivalent staff. This includes a manager, review officers, finance officer, a seconded social worker and administration support officers. Information Technology and accountancy support is also provided to the team.
- 24** Torbay received a slightly higher Supporting People grant per head of population in 2004/05 than the regional and national average. However, unit costs for the services that are commissioned are significantly higher than the regional or national averages, when community alarms and sheltered housing are excluded. The unit costs of services in Torquay are £105.75, compared to the regional and national averages of £80.42 and £76.37 respectively.
- 25** The highest cost service at £347 per person, per week, is for people with mental health problems. The lowest cost services are around £3 per person, per week, for support in sheltered housing schemes and community alarms.
- 26** The pattern of expenditure in 2004/05 was characterised by:
- high expenditure on services for people with mental health problems, almost 30 per cent of the total of £7.2 million;
 - a bias towards accommodation based services and no floating support for older people;
 - no specific services for travellers, older people with dementia or for people with HIV/AIDs; and
 - a mixed economy of provision split mainly between private providers, registered social landlords and charitable organisations.

How good is the service?

Governance

- 27 Governance of the Supporting People programme has improved. It now complies with grant conditions and is generally effective. Accountability is clear and the respective roles and responsibilities of the Council as the ALA, commissioning body and core strategy group have been specified. Previous serious weaknesses in ownership and governance of the programme that were identified in the original inspection have been rectified.
- 28 The inspection in August 2004 found that there was a lack of clarity over the respective responsibilities and roles of the ALA, the accountable officer, commissioning body and core strategy group. Overview and scrutiny arrangements were weak and councillors were struggling to find a role in governance arrangements. There was also a conflict of interest with the head of adult social services acting as the accountable officer and chair of the commissioning body.
- 29 A number of actions have been implemented by the Council and its partners in probation and health over the last year to address these issues. In particular, a memorandum of understanding was revised, agreed and signed in March 2005 by all partners which specifies:
- the decision making structure for Supporting People;
 - membership, responsibilities and voting arrangements for the commissioning body;
 - membership and responsibilities of the core strategy group;
 - arrangements for dispute resolution and any potential conflict of interest;
 - that the accountable officer is now the Council's director of communities and the commissioning body is chaired by the Care Trust's director of operations, removing the previous conflict of interest; and
 - the respective responsibilities of the ALA, the administering authority management group, elected councillors, the Council's executive, the accountable officer and the lead officer.
- 30 The document also makes an explicit commitment for Torbay to actively participate in all cross authority groups including the South West Regional Implementation Group, lead officer group, review group and the Peninsula community safety group.
- 31 These actions ensure that governance arrangements are now clear and unambiguous and comply with Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) guidance.

Commissioning Body

- 32** The commissioning body now comprises director level voting members representing the Council, Care Trust and the Assistant Chief Officer Probation, plus two councillors who are non-voting members. It meets monthly and it is now an effective decision-making body in terms of determining action as a result of service reviews. However, it is not fully effective because it has yet to fully develop its role in looking ahead, assessing future priorities and leading the programme.
- 33** Membership of the commissioning body has been stable over the last year and revised terms of reference (contained within the memorandum of understanding) were agreed in March 2005. Minutes show that attendance by all members has been good throughout the year, enabling them to build trust and constructive working relationships. Probation and the PCT/Care Trust are fully engaged and a Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) is in place. However, the development of shared strategies and identifying local performance indicators are still in the early stages of development.
- 34** The commissioning body has received regular, comprehensive and informative updates on the progress that has been made against the Supporting People recovery plan that was produced following the first inspection. They have also received regular financial progress reports and when necessary, directed further action. However, a large part of their agenda has by necessity, been devoted to decision making following provider service reviews that the Supporting People team has undertaken.
- 35** There has been less emphasis on looking ahead and determining future priorities and ensuring that delivery of Supporting People services is integrated with allied planning processes. Minutes show that there has been little or no discussion on the work that has been taken by the core strategy group and the planning subgroups that it uses to consult on and determine strategy.
- 36** The result of this has been that while there has been good progress in some areas such as reviews, the new five-year strategy that was submitted to ODPM in April 2005, contains inadequate information on needs and therefore includes only general priorities. This has an impact on the future of the Supporting People programme which is discussed in the second part of this report.

Core Strategy Group

- 37** The commissioning body is supported by the core strategy group, but there is no evidence of the commissioning body setting a defined work programme for the core strategy group or of regular progress reporting. There is insufficient output from the core strategy group to gain assurance that it is effective.
- 38** The main responsibilities of the core strategy group are to consult with stakeholders, develop and update the five-year strategy on an annual basis and monitor progress against the strategy action plan. The commissioning body and the core strategy group meet together twice a year.

- 39 There was no update at the last meeting on the work of the five strategy subgroups which are instrumental in helping to inform the future priorities for the programme. The commissioning body was therefore not fully aware of the lack of progress. The last two meetings that have taken place have concentrated on the action being taken to recover and bring delivery of the programme up to standard (March 2005 meeting) and prepare for the re-inspection (September 2005 meeting).
- 40 Each of these subgroups include, or will include, representatives from the voluntary sector; an area where links have not been fully exploited so far. The subgroups are however, still at an early stage of development. Some have not yet held a first meeting and a number of minority groups of service users are not adequately represented in the structures. The older peoples group was described as being the best developed, but even this group had not progressed beyond agreeing their terms of reference and some ideas on various work strands. Concrete work to identify and analyse needs information has not started. Without this, clear priorities cannot be determined and services reshaped to match them.
- 41 The core strategy group and commissioning body have not taken a sufficiently robust and proactive approach to getting these groups up and running. The absence of a full complement of review officers until the summer of 2005 has been given as a reason for slow progress. However, the subgroups include other more senior people with the necessary skills and expertise and it would have been reasonable to expect that they would have made more progress.

Delivery arrangements

- 42 Resources have been strengthened substantially in the last year, with the Council making an additional £126,000 in total available to ensure that the Supporting People programme could be brought back on track and that grant conditions can be met. Financial control of the programme is now strong. This has addressed the weakness identified in the original inspection, but has been largely focused on making up lost ground rather than helping the programme to move ahead.

Supporting People Team

- 43 The 2004 inspection highlighted significant failings in resourcing the programme and a lack of corporate commitment to making sure that it could show demonstrable outcomes for people who use services. These resourcing problems have been overcome. Skills and capacity within the team are now good and there is strong support from other areas of the Council.

- 44 Both the Council and its partners have demonstrated commitment to the programme by recognising that increased resources were needed to ensure that the small team was brought up to strength and was provided with the help that it needed to undertake the essential tasks for which it was created. The Council has committed £56,000 this year to supplement the Administration Grant to increase capacity within the team, plus £30,000 for consultancy. Adult Services have committed £40,000 to fund a review officer and a dedicated social worker has been seconded to the team.
- 45 The range of skills and capacity within the Supporting People team is well supported by other departments in the Council. For example, the team is able to call on expertise, including legal advice, financial support from the housing accountant and from the social services finance manager. An adult social services contracts officer has also been seconded to the team on a temporary part time basis to undertake work on contracts and develop an integrated approach to commissioning. A corporate policy officer has also been seconded as a project manager to ensure delivery of the recovery plan.
- 46 The result of the increased investment is that the Council and its partners have been able to make substantial progress against the recovery and improvement plan. In particular:
- financial control of the programme has improved, accurate payments are made to providers and the finance manager now produces detailed reports for the commissioning body which include forward projections;
 - eligibility criteria for Supporting People services have been agreed and published;
 - risks to the programme have been assessed, a risk log has been completed and recently updated;
 - the review programme is now back on track and action has been taken to de-commission some services and re-negotiate a number of contracts with providers;
 - the five-year strategy has been written, submitted to ODPM and launched;
 - information for users and stakeholders has been published;
 - the Supporting People team are playing an active part in the strategy subgroups and represent Torbay on various cross authority working groups; and
 - constructive relationships have been maintained with the majority of service providers.

- 47 There are however, some areas where progress has fallen short of expectations and further work will be needed in order to deliver improved outcomes for people who use services. In particular, there are weaknesses in the new strategy that are highlighted below.

Five-year strategy

- 48 A new five-year Supporting People strategy has been produced. The strategy includes priorities and an action plan, but needs mapping and analysis is weak for some groups of vulnerable people. This constrains forward planning, identification of priorities and the development of outcome measures.
- 49 The new five-year strategy was approved by the commissioning body in March 2005 and by partner organisations and submitted to ODPM by the deadline of 31 March. Omissions were identified by ODPM and amendments were made to the strategy before its public launch in September 2005.
- 50 The strategy now contains an action plan and links with the Supporting People annual service delivery plan. Both these plans have subsequently been brought together into a far more comprehensive action plan which was agreed by the commissioning body in November 2005. This incorporates the annual work plan for the Supporting People team and contains specified actions and time lines for delivery for individual team members.
- 51 A key weakness in the new strategy is the lack of robust needs information and analysis to support the priorities identified in the strategy. This is not surprising as at the time of the first inspection in August 2004, no work had been undertaken on developing the strategy at all and there was insufficient knowledge of the needs of many of the groups of vulnerable people in Torbay.
- 52 To try to address the problem, the commissioning body agreed to go out to tender and to use consultants to produce the strategy. However, the commissioning body were aware at their meeting in November 2004 that deadlines were extremely tight and the minutes record that this would not allow time for robust or good quality work on assessing needs.
- 53 The problem does not however, rest solely with the commissioning body or Supporting People team. Additional research would not have been necessary in some cases if housing-related support strategies had already been in place for specific groups of vulnerable people such as older people and offenders. These strategies do not exist or where they do exist such as for people with learning disabilities, do not fully consider needs. The result is that the current Supporting People strategy does not:
- fully quantify the housing-related support needs of some groups of vulnerable people, including older people, offenders, adults with mental health problems; and people with physical and sensory disabilities;
 - clearly articulate the priorities for each group;
 - specify how those priorities will be met; and
 - identify clear outcomes for service users.

Finance and contracting

- 54** The standard of the financial information that is presented to the commissioning body at each meeting is robust. Reports now include forward projections and are updated to reflect contracting decisions that are made by the commissioning body and the effect that these will have in future years. Financial management has improved and decisions taken by the commissioning body to terminate or re-negotiate contracts are bringing expenditure down. However, it will still exceed the grant by around £0.5 million in 2005/06.
- 55** At the time of the inspection in 2004 it was clear that the level of expenditure on Supporting People services was exceeding the allocation that the Council receives though its annual grant from ODPM. This was resulting in an overspend that was being added to each year and was not sustainable. At the end of the 2004/05 financial year, there was a cumulative overspend of £532,400.
- 56** Although savings of over £1 million have been realised in 2005/06 as a result of service reviews, contract re-negotiations and decommissioning, expenditure still outstrips the annual grant of £5.8 million. The result is that at the end of this financial year (31 March 2006) the Council is anticipating carrying forward a cumulative overspend of £943,000.
- 57** However, commissioning decisions that have been taken and implemented part way through this year will have a greater impact in subsequent years. The full year savings resulting from decommissioning and re-negotiated contracts is around £2.5 million each year. This means that from 2006/07 onwards, annual expenditure will be less than the Supporting People Grant (after allowing for a 5 per cent reduction in grant each year).
- 58** Financial projections include provision for modest service developments of £100,000 in 2006/07, rising to £300,000 a year by 2010, and an inflation uplift of 2.75 per cent each year on contract values (but this is largely offset by a requirement for 2.5 per cent efficiency savings each year). In addition to the grant, the Council has also made a firm commitment in its spending plans to increase baseline budgets by £300,000 each year for three years.
- 59** The overall impact is that although the annual Supporting People grant will have reduced by almost £1 million by 2010, the Council will have boosted funding by a similar amount and the cumulative overspend will have reduced to around £200,000. However, this is a worse case scenario, as there are a number of contracts where negotiations are still in progress and costs are likely to reduce.

Performance management

- 60** There has been strong and effective performance management of the recovery and improvement plan that was agreed following the first inspection.

- 61 In addition to performance managing the financial aspects of the programme, the commissioning body and the Council also monitor progress against the recovery and improvement plan that was agreed after the first inspection. Briefings are submitted to the Council leader and the Directorate management team at regular intervals, clearly showing what has been implemented and where actions are outstanding, the reason and what needs to be done. This ensures that there is corporate responsibility for managing recovery of the programme.
- 62 The Supporting People team continues to obtain quarterly monitoring information from service providers. Using data from the Council's Consultation and Research team, a comprehensive report was prepared which went to the commissioning body in October 2005. The report draws on quarterly performance information that providers have submitted during the two years from April 2003 to March 2005 which has been collated nationally by the Client Record Office. The commissioning body has not however, decided how it will use this information to drive service improvement.

Providers

- 63 The Supporting People team has established professional and constructive working relationships with the majority of service providers. Training and information is made available to providers and specific help has been directed at small providers which lack the administrative infrastructure and administration resources available to larger providers.
- 64 Information letters are sent out to providers with payments and are used to good effect to supplement the information published in quarterly Supporting People newsletters. They are used to keep providers up to date with the latest developments and give information on training courses, conferences and other events that may be of use such as a falls prevention course and a housing strategy development day in July 2005.
- 65 Of the 17 out of 41 providers who responded to our questionnaire, most expressed high levels of satisfaction. In particular:
- 94 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the Council's approach to determining strategic relevance of services;
 - 88 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the provision of information for users and applicants; and
 - 83 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with advice and support from the Council.
- 66 There were lower levels of satisfaction over arrangements for accessing move-on accommodation, the Council's approach to contract negotiation arrangements and the outcome of service reviews.

Service reviews

- 67 The service review programme is almost complete and is on target to be completed by March 2006. This is a significant achievement and demonstrates the commitment and resources that have been deployed to address the failings that were apparent at the previous inspection.
- 68 In August 2004, the Supporting People team had suffered from difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff with the result that only seven services (out of a total of 93) had been reviewed. The commissioning body had made no decisions on the future of those services that had been reviewed. This meant that action had not been taken to address services which were poor quality, high cost, or were not strategically relevant.
- 69 This has changed. The Supporting People review team is now at full strength and has a good range of skills and experience. All services reviewed to date have been visited rather than just undertaking desk top reviews. Contract negotiations following reviews can be protracted and at times difficult, but the team has the necessary expertise to secure the desired outcomes. Although reviews are rigorous, the providers visited during the course of the re-inspection commented on their positive experience of reviews and that review staff were supportive throughout the process.
- 70 Reviews of all high cost services have been completed along with those that gave concerns over quality or strategic relevance. By November 2005, 41 reviews had been completed, and the remaining 32 (mainly low support sheltered housing schemes) were well underway. As a result of reviews 10 services have been de-commissioned and others have had costs reduced through negotiations with providers. After allowing for re-provision, savings of over £1 million have been made in 2005/06. This will increase to around £2 million in subsequent years.
- 71 The commissioning body receives summary reports on service reviews following an agreed template. These outline performance against the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF), strategic relevance and highlight cost comparisons and value for money issues. Reports are concise, but contain sufficient information to enable the commissioning body to make a decision on the service. Although no steady state contracts have yet been issued, providers have been given notice that, where applicable, these will be issued on termination of their interim contract. This gives them a measure of assurance and stability that is especially important to small businesses.
- 72 Reviews give a high priority to obtaining the views of the people who use them. A small selection of service review files were examined during the re-inspection and show evidence of interviews with service users, supplemented by questionnaire surveys in some cases, to obtain their views on quality and the nature of the services that receive. They also evidenced assessments against the QAF and how the unit costs of the service had been compared with others in the South West and nationally.

- 73 There are no arrangements for reviews to be subjected to moderation outside of the Council and commissioning body. However, to reduce the burden on providers and promote consistency, review officers continue to liaise frequently with their peers in neighbouring authorities over specific services, although the regional review officers group now meets infrequently.
- 74 There are, however, some weaknesses that will need to be addressed and action that will need to be determined as the current review programme comes to an end in early 2006. In particular, the small sample of service review files examined did not contain specific action plans with target dates that had been agreed with providers to improve the quality of services and no dates had been scheduled for follow up visits to check on progress. This is because the team did not start to use the ODPM workbook for reviews until July/August 2005.
- 75 This has now been addressed and the latest reviews that have been undertaken do contain detailed action plans and a schedule for follow up to ensure implementation. However, there is no agreed methodology in place for identifying and then following up on service reviews, such as the ones we examined, where there is no documented action plan in place to drive up quality and improve QAF scores from C to B.
- 76 The reports that have been presented to the commissioning body over the past year contain action plans to address costs and reconfigure services where necessary. However, for services that are to continue with little or no change, they do not contain plans that are aimed at raising the quality of services for users. The commissioning body does not receive reports that can give them assurance that action plans (where agreed) are being implemented by providers.
- 77 Although the service review programme is drawing to a close and steady state contracts will become the norm from early 2006, plans to have service users working alongside officers when undertaking reviews have not been implemented. This is an area that could still be explored when undertaking follow up visits and assessing how much services have actually improved for those who use them.

Value for money

- 78 The increased investment made in the administration of the programme is being used to good effect, helping the Council and its partners to ensure that the services it commissions represent value for money and achieve significant cost savings. Firm action has been taken to re-negotiate contracts to bring costs down, while achieving a balance which reflects the quality of services that are provided.
- 79 As identified earlier in this report, increased resources have been invested by the Council to strengthen the Supporting People team and provide support. This additional funding has enabled the team to recruit additional review officers so that the service review programme could be completed on time and in effect catch up on over a year's backlog of work.

- 80** Funding has also allowed the Supporting People team to bring a social worker into the team on secondment from October 2005. This is an important development aimed at improving the co-ordination of services and contracting between adult social services (part of the new Care Trust from December 2005) and Supporting People. The post holder is currently co-ordinating assessment of users within specific services with social workers. This is aimed at further reducing the cost of some services and ensuring that other (particularly statutory) services pay for services where they should and ensuring that they better meet users' needs.
- 81** However, there has been no benchmarking against similar councils in order to assess the optimum size of the team that will be required once the recovery programme and service review schedule is complete.
- 82** There is evidence from review files and reports that the Supporting People team has worked with providers to improve the value for money of their services. Contract negotiations have been undertaken with a number of providers around costs based on comparisons with other providers. In a number of schemes, assessment of service users who have care and support needs has been undertaken to identify if statutory services should be contributing to the costs.
- 83** Other areas where performance has improved include:
- review officers now having access to financial expertise scrutinising providers' accounts and identifying any anomalies that require further investigation;
 - calculating the cost per support hour of services during reviews and questioning this if it falls at the upper or lower levels of a specified range; and
 - the development and agreement of eligibility criteria drawing on examples from those used by other councils.
- 84** However, the Council is still not achieving full value for money from its Supporting People services. This is because access to appropriate move-on accommodation is a significant issue for a number of providers of accommodation based services. The result is that some service users are taking up Supporting People funded places that they no longer need, while others are waiting for a service.
- 85** The following areas also need to be improved.
- Review reports to the commissioning body over the past year make no reference to the cost per support hour.
 - Although this is now calculated during service reviews, it is a recent development and some of the case files we reviewed where services had been reviewed in early 2005 contain no evidence that hourly costs were considered.
 - Eligibility criteria have been set, but there is no agreed approach to revisiting decisions that were made on services which were reviewed before the criteria were approved.
 - The Council has made very little use of joint commissioning of services for users who need both care and support.

- Procurement decisions have not always been transparent from the perspective of some providers, who were unsure why some decisions had been made when contracts were renewed or let without inviting tenders.

Service user involvement

- 86** The Supporting People team has continued to demonstrate commitment to involving service users in shaping the programme. In spite of other difficulties, this was an area where the Supporting People team were able to demonstrate clear strengths during the original inspection and they have continued to build on these.
- 87** The Supporting People team is actively engaging with service users on an ongoing basis. In addition to involving service users through scheduled reviews of providers' services, a number of other recent developments have taken place. In particular, a service user panel has just been established with its role and remit agreed in September 2005 and updated during the course of the inspection. The group has specific terms of reference, a job description for members, as well as an emerging work plan which identifies the necessary training and ongoing support from the Supporting People team.
- 88** Service user representatives are (or will be represented) on each of the core strategy group stakeholder subgroups. For example, service users and a parent of a service user are members of the housing subgroup for people with learning disabilities. A member of the Supporting People team is also on the group and attends quarterly meetings. Through this group, Supporting People will be contributing to work that is being done to update the Learning Disability Housing Strategy that was produced in 2003.
- 89** Service users also contributed to development of the new five-year strategy, although the timescale was pressurised. This was done by inviting a small cross section of service users to a series of focus groups. Three meetings were held during February 2005 and the output from meetings was given to the consultant who was drafting the strategy. A basic questionnaire survey was also used to ask people who were unable to attend a focus group about their services and what gaps they thought there were that needed to be filled. This fed into the strategy along with views from others who were consulted and helped to shape some of the areas identified for future work.
- 90** Due to the pressured timescale for developing the strategy, engagement with minority groups and with the wider community who were not actually receiving a service was poor, meaning that they had little chance to influence priorities in the new strategy.

Access to services and information

- 91 The standard of information that is produced to inform service users and other stakeholders about Supporting People services in Torbay is good. There has been a marked improvement in the last year and some very high quality information is now available. The directory of services that the team has produced is amongst the best that has been seen during inspections. Gaining access into some services is however, still problematic due a shortfall in move-on accommodation and a lack of low level floating support.
- 92 The Council's Internet site has a web page specifically for Supporting People information. This can be accessed either via the A-Z index, or by links from the Housing page or the Social Care and Health page. The Supporting People pages contain all the essential information that potential service users or carers might need. This includes links to the eligibility criteria, charging policy, a directory of service providers which gives telephone numbers and client group served and the Supporting People complaints procedure. The Supporting People web pages do not however, state that information can be made available in other media such as Braille or tapes.
- 93 A Supporting People Directory of Services has been compiled and published. This is comprehensive, easy to use and gives relevant information. Strap lines in Chinese, Urdu, Gujarati etc, explain how it can be accessed in alternative languages. The Supporting People team has drawn on best practice from other councils to help them develop this document. Some information on local services is also available via the directory on the national web-site (SPKweb) with plans in place to add the remainder.
- 94 In contrast to the original inspection, staff in Housing Services and the 'Connections' office (Council one-stop shops) demonstrated a sound knowledge of Supporting People services and how to access them when approached in mystery shopping exercises. The sites visited during the course of this re-inspection had leaflets and posters together with the Directory of Services.
- 95 Enquiries also established that there is no barrier to people accessing services who come from outside of Torbay. Two days before the inspection, the Council had coped well with an emergency situation where families had arrived with virtually no notice from another area of the country, requiring accommodation and services.
- 96 To improve awareness of services and how to access them, the Supporting People team has gone out and undertaken 'road shows' for health staff in the community hospital and health centres. A presentation has also been made to the PCT's Professional Executive Committee. Because of this, GPs now have an understanding of what Supporting People is and how it compliments other services.

- 97 The Supporting People team has also helped to educate Community Mental Health Team staff on what Supporting People services can (and cannot) do to help support people with mental health problems. A member of the Supporting People team attends social care panel meetings which consider residential placements and can advise on alternatives that can be considered to allow people to remain at home. The same member of the team is also on the Torbay mental health local implementation group.
- 98 Information on 'Fairer Charging' and the charging policy for Supporting People services is clearly labelled and accessible via the Council's Supporting People web pages. The policy explains that users can apply for a financial assessment direct to the Council or via the service provider. The telephone number to contact the assessment (FAB) team is prominently displayed on the web page, but is not included in the policy document.
- 99 The charging policy is factually accurate, but it is written in a legalistic style, rather than in plain English and is not aimed at potential service users. This could deter some people from seeking an assessment.
- 100 Take up of 'Fairer Charging' assessments has been relatively low. This is because the majority of people who receive services receive housing benefit and therefore do not have to pay. Since April 2005, 15 clients have received assessments. Currently 38 clients are being billed by the team and of these, eight have had an assessment and do not qualify. However, the team has been proactive in contacting people to remind them that they may benefit from an assessment. On 19 December 2005, a letter will be sent with the bills encouraging all those being charged to apply for a financial assessment.
- 101 The Supporting People complaints policy points people correctly to the service providers own complaints procedure and then explains how the Supporting People team will adjudicate if this first stage does not resolve the issue. The policy also specifies how to complain about the Supporting People team. The policy includes information on advocacy services and advises that any complaint about abuse can circumvent the provider and be made direct to social services in line with the Council's policy on Protection of Vulnerable Adults from Abuse.
- 102 Other improvements since the last inspection include a:
- quarterly Supporting People newsletter which is accessible, informative and available on the web;
 - Supporting People fact sheet which outlines key questions users would ask with pictorial representations which is suitable for people with learning disabilities and is easy to read and covers all key questions; and
 - Supporting People leaflet which is easy to read and outlines the groups that Supporting People helps and the services that are provided in a positive, engaging way.

- 103** A draft Supporting People communication strategy has been developed which outlines the various methods to be used to consult a variety of stakeholders. A table outlines, in detail, the methods and approaches to be used for different groups. There is also a commitment to produce an annual plan. The draft has been updated in recent weeks following consultation and will now be finalised and published.
- 104** Torbay Care Trust Charter contains a section which is entitled 'Helping people to stay independent'. This refers to Supporting People services, gives examples of services and the contact details for the Supporting People team. This replaces the 'Better care - Higher Standards', and is a useful and informative document.
- 105** There is however, still a real problem with gaining entry into some services. There are three main reasons for this:
- access is largely determined by service providers, rather than on the basis of those with the greatest need;
 - appropriate move-on accommodation is a significant issue for a number of providers of accommodation based services; and
 - there is a predominance of accommodation based support services, rather than low level floating support that could reach far greater numbers of people.
- 106** The overall result of these factors is that some service users are taking up Supporting People funded places that they no longer need, while others are waiting for a service.

Diversity

- 107** Progress to address the weakness in understanding and addressing the needs of minority groups has been slow. Although there has been some improvement, the five-year strategy still shows how little the Council and its partners know about the housing support needs of some sections of the community.
- 108** Baseline information is not available on the needs of people from minority groups and the strategy is therefore unable to point to any action other than to research needs. These gaps in information were acknowledged in the shadow strategy in 2002, but some three years later have still not been addressed. This sends a negative message to people from minority groups. The housing support needs of travellers, gypsies, people with HIV/AIDs, people with sensory impairments, physical disabilities and to an extent offenders are still not known and plans cannot therefore be developed.
- 109** There are some linkages with other work on diversity, such as impact assessments of the race equality scheme under the Race Relations Amendment Act and work on hate crimes. While this is welcome, it is not a comprehensive and inclusive approach to setting diversity standards, measuring performance and ensuring equality of access and outcomes for the people who use Supporting People services.

110 However, some initiatives have been undertaken and further work is planned. For example, performance information that was submitted to the commissioning body in October 2005, included an analysis of people accessing support services by ethnic group over the last two years. Other action that has been taken over the last year includes:

- training small providers on diversity and all providers on the Council's equality scheme;
- representing Supporting People on the Corporate Diversity Group and on a local forum (TORPAT);
- training all Supporting People staff in equality and diversity; and
- completing Impact Assessments.

Outcomes for service users

111 Outcomes for service users have improved since the original inspection and many of the services that were visited in 2004 that were extremely poor have closed, been de-commissioned or improved significantly. The seven services visited during the re-inspection are of a high standard and users were able to tell inspectors how they were being helped to become independent.

112 Services and the accommodation visited by inspectors are of a high standard. Those visited had a range of opportunities for residents to get involved in decisions about how services were delivered. Users had been able to comment upon and/or change various policies and approaches within schemes. The people we interviewed felt they were improving their skills and abilities and were supported to become more independent. The staff could also outline instances where clients had become fully independent, gone back to work or completed education.

113 The commissioning body is however, aware that the bias towards accommodation based services needs to change to enable more people to benefit from lower level support. To achieve this, increased floating support services are now becoming available and are providing a more flexible approach which is helping to avoid placement in residential care. These are aimed at empowering users to do things themselves, rather than providers doing it for them.

114 Social workers were able to recount recent experiences where being able to access Supporting People funded services at short notice alongside other services had effectively met users' needs and prevented a deterioration that could have led to a residential placement or hospital admission. The case study below is a recent example of this.

Case study

Making a difference

Service user: older person with multiple needs

An older person who is accommodated in a Housing Association (HA) property, was referred to Torbay Care Trust (TCT) by his neighbour who raised concerns regarding his welfare. These concerns identified that the individual had no heating and inadequate food in his home, although his neighbour had recently assisted him to obtain appropriate benefits and a motability car. It was noted that the individual's daughter was using the car, which prompted concerns related with financial abuse.

Action taken

The referral co-ordinator from the Care Trust contacted the HA and arranged for provision of immediate temporary heating due to an extremely cold weather spell being forecast. This would provide time to investigate the issue of inadequate heating ie failure to use heating due to worries related with finances or faults with the heating system etc. The HA responded to the request promptly. The co-ordinator also referred the individual to the Supporting People team to arrange for floating support to assist him with housing related support needs.

The co-ordinator also discussed the referral with the Care Trust local multi-disciplinary team requesting immediate allocation and an urgent home visit which was responded to by an Occupational Therapist. The individual's immediate needs were addressed and the case referred for a specialist social work assessment/investigation of financial abuse.

Outcome

The individual's immediate care needs have been addressed and he continues to receive housing related support funded through Supporting People.

- 115** The accountable officer, Councillors and members of the commissioning body are aware of the interrelationship between Supporting People funded services and those that are delivered by partner agencies. Although it is possible to point to successful outcomes for various individuals who use services, the Council, Probation Service and the new Care Trust know that they need to do more to quantify outcomes. Services need to be able to demonstrate that they really are preventing hospital admissions, re-offending or placements in residential care. Work in this area is still in its formative stages.

- 116 The new five-year strategy gave the Council and its partners an opportunity to focus on shared goals and outcomes, but it does not do this and lacks specific underpinning action plans for each client group and the anticipated outcomes. Without plans that can quantify the benefits and expected outcomes for people who use services, the Council and partners cannot be sure that the £5 million invested in Supporting People services is being targeted to make maximum impact.

Summary

- 117 The Council's current approach to administering the Supporting People programme in Torbay is fair. This represents a significant improvement on the original inspection due to the rigorous improvement plan that was implemented and the hard work of the Supporting People team.
- 118 There are some clear strengths in the way in which the programme is now being delivered. In particular, the Supporting People team is dedicated and well managed. Service reviews, which are essential to maintaining and improving the quality of services, are being undertaken and the review programme is now back on track and will be complete by March 2006. Information for service users and other stakeholders is widely available and is now amongst some of the best seen.
- 119 Performance in other areas is mixed, and in a number of areas it is still weak. In particular, local needs are still not well understood. The new five-year strategy is therefore incomplete and lacks clearly articulated priorities and outcomes for service users. Plans to engage more widely, and research the needs of people who are not currently receiving services are only now being developed through strategy subgroups. Some of the subgroups have yet to hold their first meeting and others have progressed little beyond agreeing a terms of reference.
- 120 The role that the voluntary sector could play has not been fully explored and a number of other key related strategies, such as an offender's accommodation strategy and an older persons housing strategy do not exist.

What are the prospects for improvement?

What is the track record in delivering improvement?

- 121 The Supporting People programme can demonstrate how it has overcome many of the weakness identified during the 2004 inspection and implemented the majority of recommendations that were agreed in response to the report. A huge amount of effort and resource has been committed to making up lost ground. However, in doing so, less emphasis has been placed on the future of the programme.
- 122 Following the original inspection, the Council acted quickly to agree a recovery and improvement action plan and performance management arrangements to monitor its implementation. The plan covered all of the recommendations made in the inspection report and other areas where the Council identified the need to improve. This was approved by the commissioning body in late 2004.

- 123 Evidence in the preceding section of this report shows just how far the Council and its partners have come in the space of one year. Providers can also see a marked difference and told inspectors how much progress the Supporting People team had made, saying that arrangements are much more structured and that there is now a framework in place which was lacking before.
- 124 The progress that has been against the recommendations in the agreed action plan is shown below.

Table 2 Progress against the 2004 action plan

With immediate effect and ongoing	Progress to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish robust governance arrangements for the programme that fully meet ODPM requirements and the needs of the Supporting People team. 	Achieved - but focus of the commissioning body needs to shift towards leadership and future priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a financial monitoring programme that will address the consistent overspend within Supporting People. 	Achieved. Realistic financial plans are in place covering the next five years that will achieve balance and recover the overspend.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt and implement the revised terms of reference for the commissioning body and core strategy group to include provision for conflict resolution and conflict of interest for members. 	Achieved. The memorandum of understanding and terms of reference for both have been agreed and adopted.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider reassignment of the chair of the commissioning body so as to avoid conflict of interest in decision making. 	Achieved - now chaired by a Director from the PCT/Care Trust.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate a process to include providers and users/carers in the development of the Supporting People five-year strategy. 	Partially achieved. Because action started very late, the timescale for producing the strategy did not allow for the full involvement of users and other stakeholders.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackle the outstanding concerns regarding poor practice by some service providers. 	Largely achieved - some services such as the homeless hostel still require improvement to the fabric of the building.

With immediate effect and ongoing	Progress to date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish SMART targets in the Supporting People business plan to ensure progress can be measured and monitored. 	<p>Achieved. Recent work plan brings together the Supporting People team annual work plan with action plans in the five-year strategy.</p>
Within six months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that more is done to sustain the ability of service users to influence services that are commissioned. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that the needs of women fleeing domestic violence are adequately responded to in terms of risk. 	<p>Partially achieved through the introduction of a service users panel and the priority accorded to users' views during service reviews. But strategy subgroups which should include users are not yet working effectively. Satisfactory response to mystery shopping enquiry over woman fleeing domestic violence.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a better working arrangement with diverse community groups to ensure that the right levels of culturally sensitive services are available. 	<p>Not achieved yet, but action is beginning.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council needs to ensure that its frontline customer services staff and the staff of agencies it funds have sufficient understanding of the Supporting People programme and its services. 	<p>Achieved. Understanding amongst social services staff and frontline health professionals has improved due to road shows and training held by the Supporting People team.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the speed of reviews to ensure that all service will be completed in line with ODPM requirements. 	<p>On track to achieve with all reviews started and nearing completion.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen partnerships with voluntary agencies and the level of joint commissioning with health, probation and social care. 	<p>Not achieved yet, but the presence of voluntary agencies on the new strategy subgroups will assist and the new Care Trust has given a clear indication that it wishes to pursue opportunities for joint commissioning in its draft commissioning strategy.</p>

- 125** In addition to the action taken specifically in response to recommendations, the Council and the Supporting People team has taken the opportunity to learn from the experience of others. For example, a review of the operation of the scrutiny function undertaken by the overview and scrutiny lead involved networking with other scrutiny leads and visits to other councils. The review has led to changes in the arrangements which, although yet to be fully tested, aim to improve communication between scrutiny leads and support them in effectively carrying out their role.
- 126** A further significant improvement is that social workers within the new Care Trust and health professionals now believe that the quality of Supporting People services is much improved. Services that were poor or failing to meet needs have been addressed and de-commissioned where necessary, which gives them confidence that the Supporting People team and the process of service reviews are protecting vulnerable people.
- 127** Although it is hard to point to tangible wide scale benefits to date, there is a marked improvement in knowledge of Supporting People services amongst health and social care professionals. Rather than an entirely separate set of services, social workers described how it is now an integral part of the wider care networks that can be accessed. They gave examples of this, such as when needs are discussed at a multi-disciplinary team meetings (with GPs, social workers and community nurses), consideration is given to what Supporting People can do to help meet an individual's housing support needs.
- 128** All of the achievements highlighted, show that the Council and its partners have taken action to address the most urgent and immediate areas where the programme was failing. In doing so, it has successfully improved services for many of the people who were using them when the first inspection took place. However, for some potential service users, including some of the most vulnerable, services have not been developed. The absence of robust information on needs, coupled with a focus on financial recovery rather than investment has precluded this.

How is performance managed?

- 129** The Council and its partners recognise that more must be done to build on the work that has been done so far. The work of the strategy subgroups is key to moving the programme forward, but they have not progressed sufficiently rapidly. The commissioning body has not demonstrated robust leadership and performance management of this vital part of the programme.

Strategic priorities

- 130** The new Supporting People five-year strategy which was launched publicly in September 2005 is the overarching document which should set out the priorities for the programme in Torbay in the medium term. To do this effectively the strategy must be backed by reliable evidence and demonstrate how vision will be translated in tangible action that will improve the quality of services now and in the future. The Council's Supporting People strategy does not do this.

- 131 The commissioning body was aware that due to lack of preparatory work, the timescale for submission to ODPM at the end of March 2005 was too close to allow for gaps in information to be filled and priorities, other than in broad terms, to be determined. To address this, in January 2005 the core strategy group committed to the establishment of five subgroups each focusing on specific groups of clients. Arrangements were firmed up at the April 2005 meeting and the current groups are:
- single homeless and criminal justice;
 - older people and physical disability;
 - young people;
 - mental health; and
 - learning disability and sensory impairment.
- 132 A further group for homeless families may be established, but has no agreed membership as yet.
- 133 The work of these groups is fundamental to addressing one of the Council and commissioning body's key strategic aims for the programme:
- 'Ensure all services meet strategic need and services are developed where gaps exist in line with strategic priorities'.*
- 134 The older persons' subgroup meeting was described as having been further advanced than some others. However, the meeting that an inspector attended during the course of the re-inspection showed that the group was poorly attended and was still struggling to find its feet. The group concentrated solely on ideas for older people and there is a risk that the needs of young adults with physical disabilities will be completely overlooked. There is a similar risk with grouping people with sensory impairments in with adults with learning disabilities and it is not clear which subgroup will research the needs of clients with HIV/AIDs.
- 135 The subgroups have failed to make adequate progress, because the commissioning body, through the core strategy group has not assumed leadership and taken a firm role in specifying work programmes. The commissioning body, through the core strategy group has not sought assurance that the subgroups have the necessary capacity and expertise to deliver. It is the commissioning body that should have taken the responsibility for the output from these groups, not individual Supporting People review officers who are relatively junior members of the groups.
- 136 Although there is still much to be done as shown above, there are areas where action is being planned to address some immediate problems. For example, the commissioning body is consulting on a proposal to introduce a 'nominations hub' which is currently used in a London Borough. A resettlement team would act as a central co-ordinating point for referrals. This would mean that providers no longer picked who would use their service on an ad-hoc basis and access to services would be based on a needs assessment of potential users. This has the potential to improve access for users who need services the most.

- 137** Safer Communities Torbay has commissioned a diversity audit which focuses on community safety and crime and racial assaults. The consultants undertaking the work (which will include face to face and questionnaire surveys) are expected to report in February 2006. Supporting People are using this to ascertain information on the needs of BME groups and have asked for the diversity audit to include specific questions around:
- mapping, where do people live, languages, faith;
 - barriers to accessing accommodation/appropriate housing support for BME and other minority communities;
 - gaps in provision and what is needed to help remain independent; and
 - future access opportunities for consultation.
- 138** Information on the needs of gypsies and travellers will be obtained through work being undertaken jointly with Devon County Council and Plymouth. The Council is also joining with Plymouth City Council to start work on their Ethnic Minority Innovation project.
- 139** The Council has firm plans to work with partners to rebuild the direct access hostel at Factory Row. Work to make interim improvements will be completed in the spring of 2006. These will ensure greater privacy and safety of service users.

Plans and performance management

- 140** There is clear commitment to, and understanding of, the Supporting People programme at a senior level in the Council. Although there has been a very recent change in leadership, effective monitoring of the recovery plan at a corporate level is continuing. In November 2005 the commissioning body agreed a comprehensive work plan to guide action over the next one to two years. However, a performance monitoring process for this new plan has not been agreed.
- 141** Performance management of the Supporting People recovery plan to date has been robust and has included scrutiny and reports to the Council's externally chaired improvement board. However, actions have almost been completed and a new work plan to guide the programme over the next year and beyond has recently been agreed by the commissioning body.
- 142** The new work plan is linked to achievement of seven strategic objectives. These link with objectives in the new five-year strategy but are tighter and more focused. The seven objectives are correctly directed at the most fundamental issues for Torbay; improvements for people who use services, financial balance and securing value for money.
- 143** There is a direct read across between actions in this plan and those in the five-year strategy. Tasks have been prioritised; outcomes are clearly stated and are backed by detailed schedules identifying individual responsibilities and the timelines for completion. Efficient financial management of the programme is a key strategic objective and is incorporated in the action plan, with specific targets and outcomes identified.

- 144 A methodology for reporting progress to the commissioning body has not however been agreed. Some of the specific target dates for action have already passed and the commissioning body has not received a progress report. If it had done so it would, for example, have been able to identify that action was needed to progress the work of the strategy subgroups. Members of the commissioning body are currently considering the best format for reporting, exception reports, traffic lighting or a balanced score card approach.
- 145 The commissioning body has now begun to receive comprehensive reports on provider performance such as the one brought to the October 2005 meeting. This included an analysis of clients accessing services over the past two years and those using services by client group. Information on performance against ODPM key service and performance indicators was also included. However, it has not yet determined the format for subsequent reports and is still considering how indicators can be developed and used to drive service improvements.

Leadership

- 146 At a corporate level, the Council has demonstrated commitment to the programme and Councillors demonstrate an effective understanding of Supporting People and its potential. They are knowledgeable about its aims, clear about the challenges for Torbay in effectively managing the programme in the future and receive and act on regular information about the programme.
- 147 The Chief Executive of the Care Trust and the new cabinet member and a fellow councillor who now have the programme within their portfolios were however, able to articulate a clear vision for the programme. They showed an understanding of how Supporting People could build on existing networks with the voluntary sector to develop a range of services that could complement those delivered by other statutory agencies. Councillors and the Care Trust were able to demonstrate an understanding of how very low level floating support, particularly for older people, could enable them to stay safely in their own homes.
- 148 The challenge facing the Council and its partners is to turn this understanding and vision into a clear set of priorities. These must be based on reliable information, with explicit measurable outcomes for the people who use services now and for those who will do so in the future.

Is there the capacity to improve?

- 149 The Council has the capacity in terms of staff and skills within the Supporting People team, infrastructure, management support and resources to improve. However, maintaining the momentum and addressing the challenges identified during this re-inspection are essential to ensuring that the programme can deliver effective services for the people who need them most.

- 150** Earlier sections of this report provide evidence of the financial commitment that the Council has made to bring the Supporting People programme back on track by investing in staff and infrastructure. It can also demonstrate that it has a robust financial plan on which it is already delivering. Although the Supporting People grant is decreasing in line with a nationally determined formula, the Council's medium term financial plans compensate for this and allow for the modest development of some new services.
- 151** In terms of commitment, optimism and a dedicated team of officers, the Council has the potential to make further progress. In particular, officers within the Supporting people team have a good range of relevant experience, a formal development and appraisal framework is in place and training has been provided as necessary. The Council is already starting to think ahead. In preparation for the end of the service review programme, a review of future staffing requirements is underway and will be completed in early 2006.
- 152** The new constitutional arrangements in Torbay are at a very early stage and have yet to be tested. Not only does the Council now have an elected Mayor and a three member cabinet, but a new Care Trust was formally established on 1 December 2005. Both developments provide opportunities for the future of the programme, but also pose some risk to the stability of the programme. For example, corporate budget priorities are currently under review.

Achieving results through partnerships

- 153** The Council and its partners recognise how Supporting People plans must link and be co-ordinated with other national and corporate priorities. The need for support services for people who are or who may become homeless has been recognised and the Council's homelessness strategy has, as one of its six objectives, the need to secure the satisfactory provision of support services to help prevent homelessness.
- 154** The new Care Trust also recognises the contribution that the Supporting People programme can play and makes specific reference to this in its draft older persons commissioning strategy. The director from the PCT (now the new Care Trust) who is a member of the commissioning body has invested time and energy into raising the profile of Supporting People amongst General Practitioners (GPs) and other health professionals. This has helped to improve access to services for users as shown in the case study highlighted earlier in this report.
- 155** Probation now has an additional manager who is working on Supporting People as part of a core part of their role. This continuity on the core strategy group and commissioning body will enhance the contribution that probation can make to future planning. The employment of four partnership managers (one with a specific focus on accommodation and Torbay Supporting People) will bring additional expertise and resources to the programme. There are also effective links between MAPPA and the Supporting People programme. The Council recognises its responsibilities towards people in the community who pose a risk to others and takes an active part in multi-agency work to manage any risk to the public.

Summary

- 156 Our judgement is that the service has uncertain prospects for improvement. This is not intended to detract from the investment that has been made and the work that the Council, its partners and the Supporting People team have undertaken during the past year. It is in part, a result of just how far the Council needed to come to bring the programme up to an acceptable standard.
- 157 In concentrating almost exclusively on this and addressing the most pressing weaknesses in terms of undertaking and acting on service reviews and addressing the overspend, there has been insufficient time to devote to planning for the future and developing a robust strategy. Performance management has concentrated heavily on recovery, rather than looking ahead and taking a proactive approach towards the future development of services other than in visionary terms.
- 158 It is the lack of reliable information on local needs and the resultant vague priorities that undermine the prospects for improvement. The plans which the commissioning body and core strategy group formulated almost a year ago to address this have not yet led to action and any tangible output. This does not provide the measure of assurance that is required to move the prospects for improvement into the promising category.
- 159 There are plans for improvements and structures are in place to drive strategy development. However, these structures are not delivering improvements and are unable to demonstrate significant outcomes that meet identified needs.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

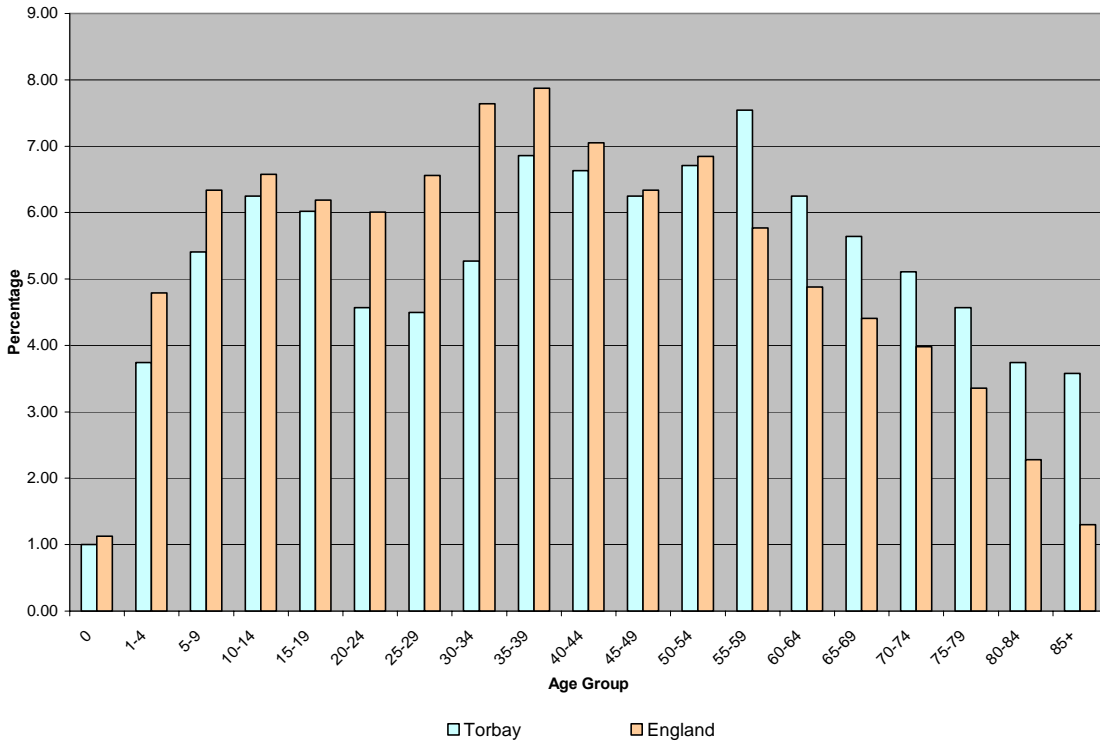
Measure	Torbay	England
Population (mid-2003) ⁱ	132,500	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2003)	25.9	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2003)	1.2	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁱⁱ	2.1	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁱⁱⁱ	100	-

ⁱ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

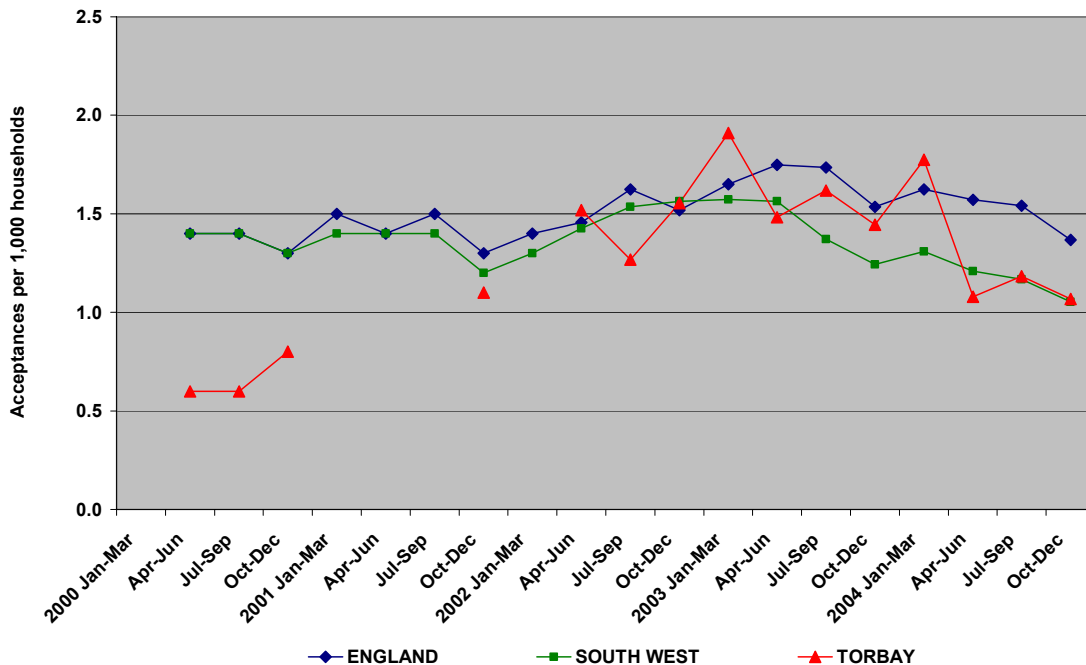
ⁱⁱ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (September 2005)

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

Percentage of the population¹ in each age group compared with England



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



¹ Source: midyear population estimates (2003)

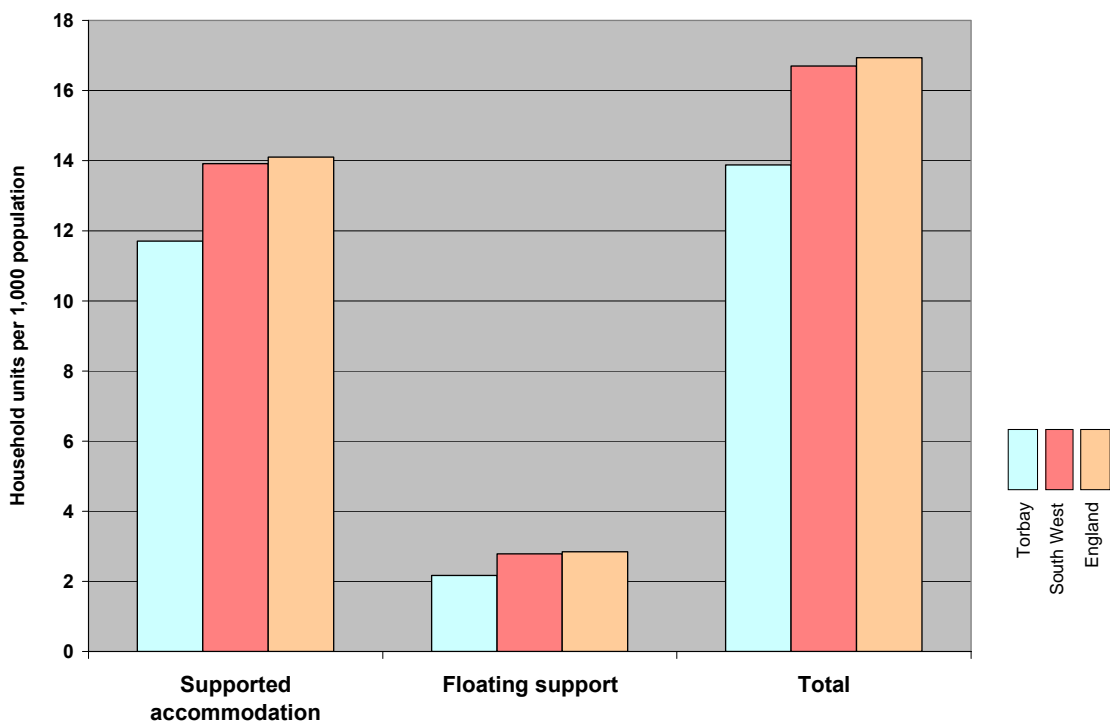
Performance information

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.

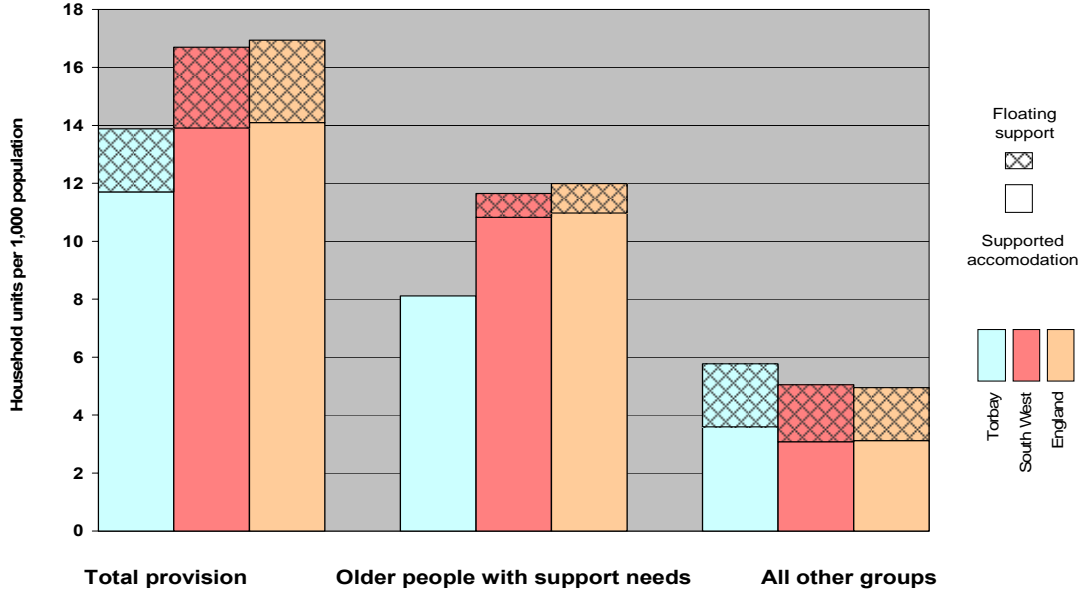
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People¹

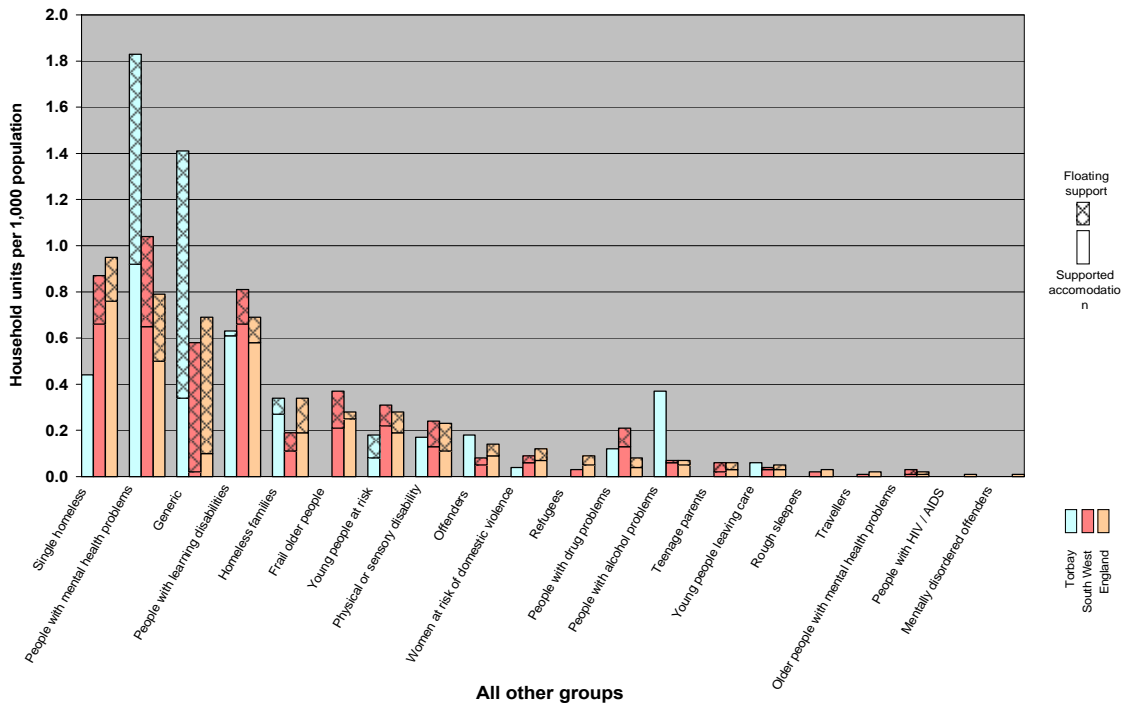


¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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



Services for other groups compared with the region and England^{II}



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

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

Funding for Supporting People^I

Torbay	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 6,059,204	£ 6,133,583	£ 5,824,661
Pipeline allocation	£ 236,746	£ 393,577	£ -
Administration grant	£ 183,181	£ 155,989	£ 124,791

Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)^{II}

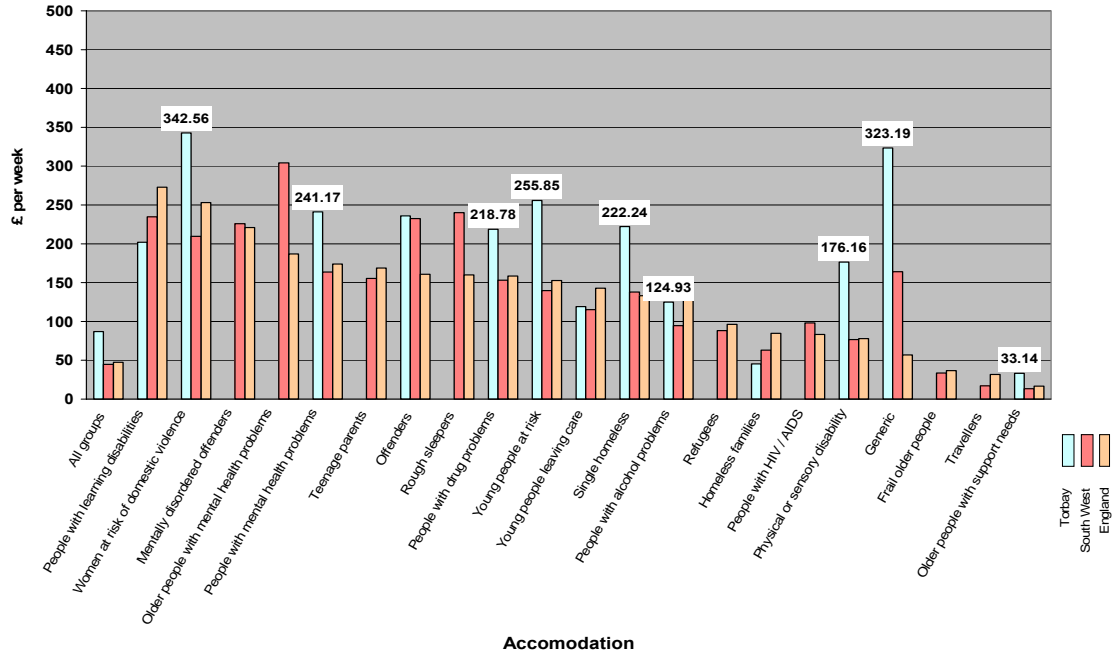
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Torbay	£ 0.89	£ 59.97	£ 59.97	£ 105.75
South West	£ 0.73	£ 33.33	£ 36.46	£ 80.42
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

‘The data quoted is taken from ODPM sourced material 2003/04. This is the only data currently available. ODPM will be able to provide updated data from September 2005 and this will then be used.’

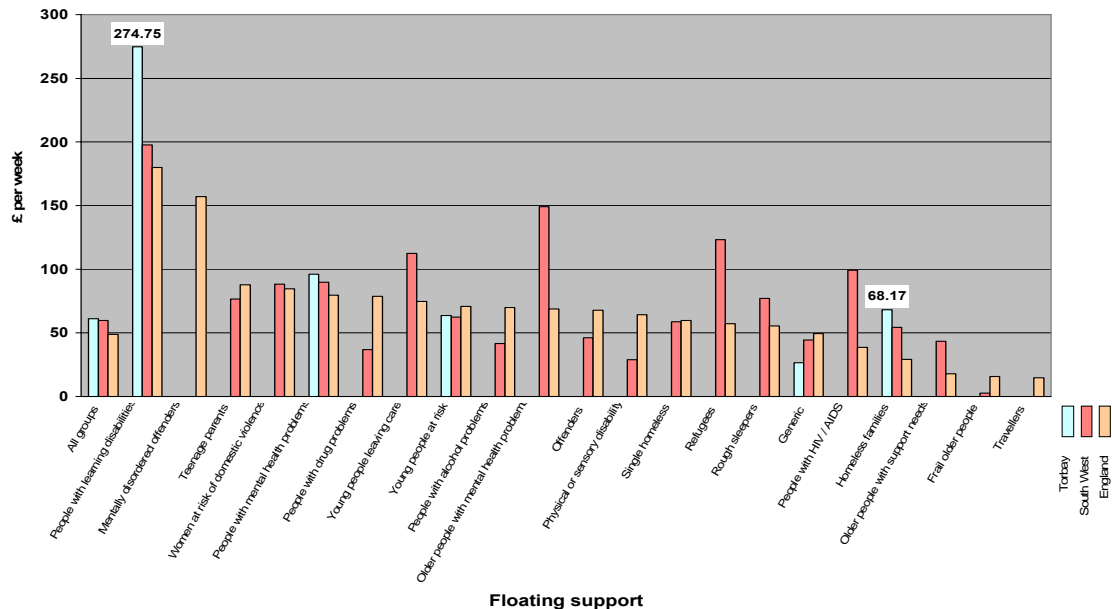
^I Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

^{II} Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹



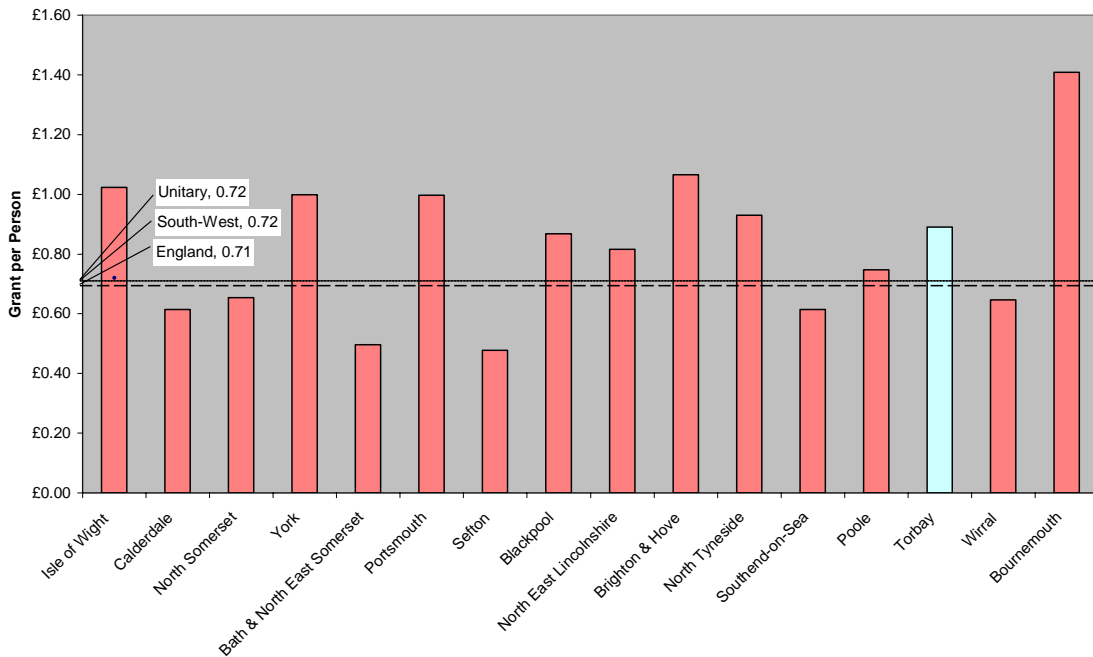
Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹¹



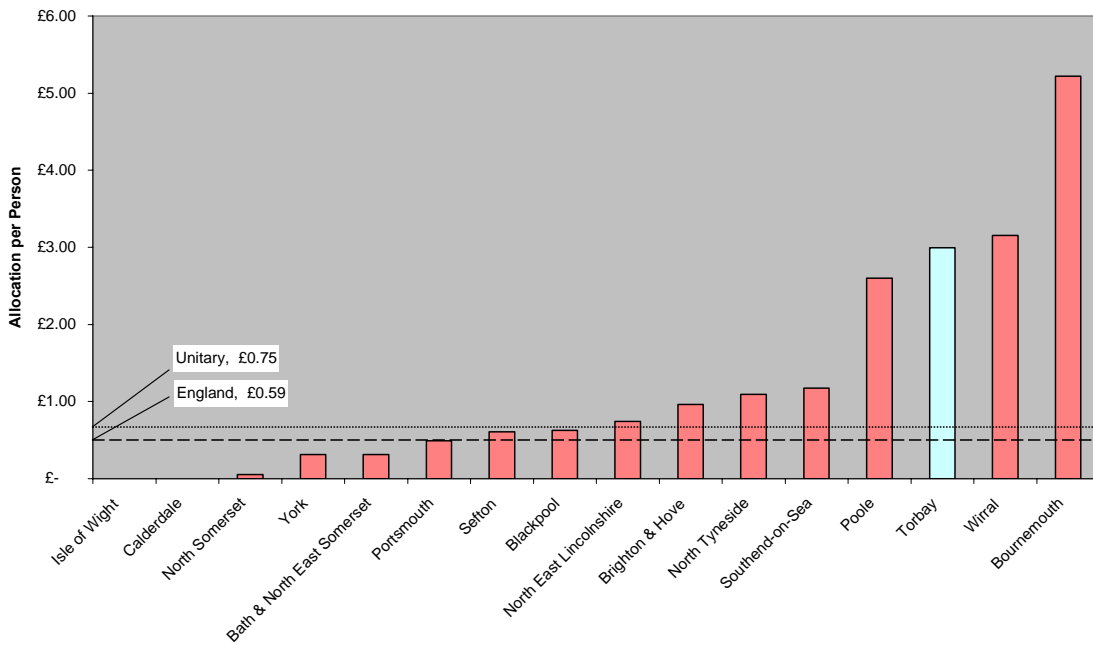
¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours^I, all unitary councils and all English councils (2004/05)



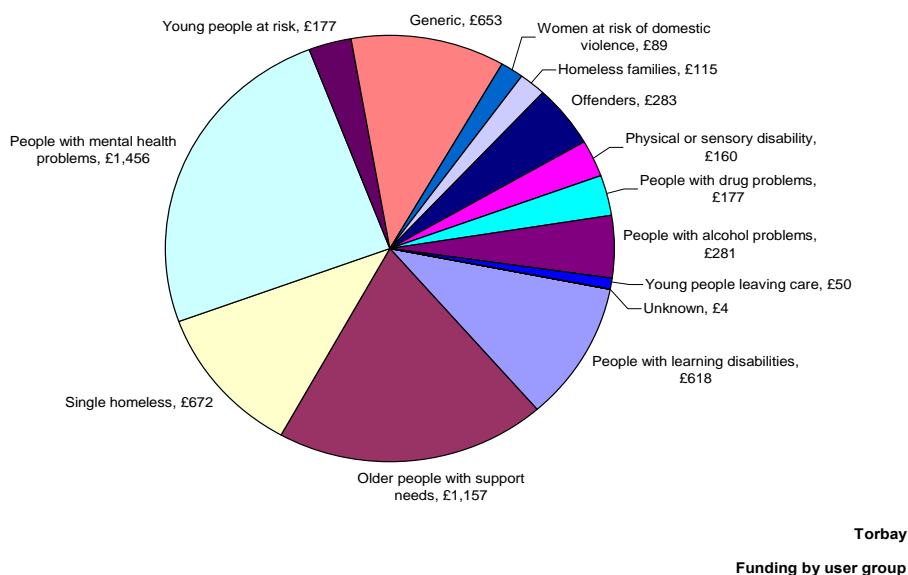
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours^{II}, all unitary councils and all English councils



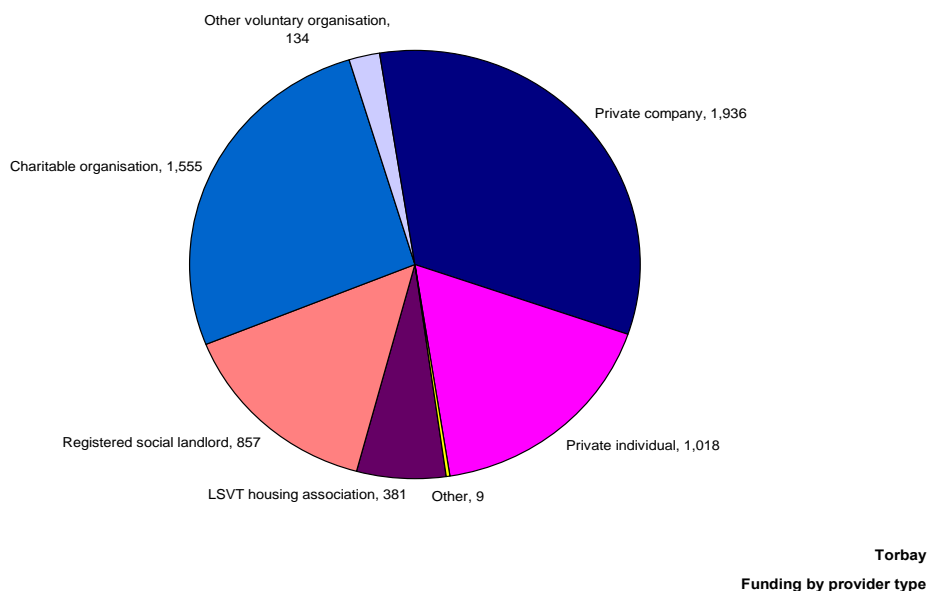
^I A comparator group of similar councils.

^{II} A comparator group of similar councils.

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



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



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

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

Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults' Services	Some	Uncertain	★ (1)
Children's Services	Some	Uncertain	

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

Torbay	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	Admissions of older people to residential/ nursing care (C26) Employment, education & training for care leavers (A4) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)
Above average (●●●)	Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Delayed transfers of care (D41) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)
Average (●●)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39)

Torbay	
	Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27)
Below average (**)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51)
Significantly below average (*)	Older people helped to live at home (C32)

Best value performance indicators

Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with unitary councils

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

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

Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

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

- documents from the August 2004 inspection and report;
- the Council's Supporting People recovery and improvement plan and subsequent performance monitoring reports;
- all of the Council's corporate strategies that impact upon Supporting People, including the community plan and housing strategies;
- plans and strategies from other planning groups and partner agencies such as Torbay Care Trust and the Probation Service that may impact on Supporting People;
- the five-year Supporting People strategy, the new 2005/06 work plan and the review programme;
- minutes of the commissioning body, core strategy group and providers forum; and
- Supporting People newsletters, directory of services, the Fairer Charging policy and advice leaflets.

Appendix 3 – 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. Our reality checks included:

- a questionnaire survey which was sent to all providers of housing-related support services;
- focus groups for service providers, social services care managers, service user panel and councillors;
- visits to seven supported housing schemes, to talk to service users and frontline staff;
- calls to test how easy it is to access services; and
- interviews with a wide-range of stakeholders, including the elected Mayor of Torbay, Chief Executive of the Council, Director and Chief Executive of the new Care Trust, accountable officer, Supporting People lead officer, the manager and the team, councillors, finance staff, and representatives of the Probation Service, Youth Offending Team, Drug & Alcohol Action Team, mental health local implementation group (LIT) and the older peoples strategy subgroup.

Appendix 4 – 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)*

Supporting People Service Directory

A comprehensive directory of services is available in hard copy and on the Council’s website. It includes information about useful organisations and sources of advice and is available in a variety of formats. An index by service name and an index by provider name are included. The Directory has sections that:

- introduce and explain what Supporting People is;
- explain how services can be accessed;
- show how services are paid for and contact details;
- give a definition of terms used; and
- provide guidance on how to use the directory.

Supporting People action plan workbook

An Excel workbook has been developed which includes a detailed action plan to guide the Supporting People work programme over the next one to two years. The plan is linked to achievement of seven strategic aims. These link with objectives in the new five-year strategy but are tighter and more focused. There is a direct read across between actions in this plan and those in the five-year strategy. Tasks have been prioritised; outcomes are clearly stated and are backed by detailed schedules identifying individual responsibilities and the timelines for completion.

Efficient financial management of the programme is a key strategic objective and is incorporated in the action plan, with specific targets and outcomes identified.