

Supporting People Inspection Report

March 2006

Supporting People

Cambridgeshire County 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

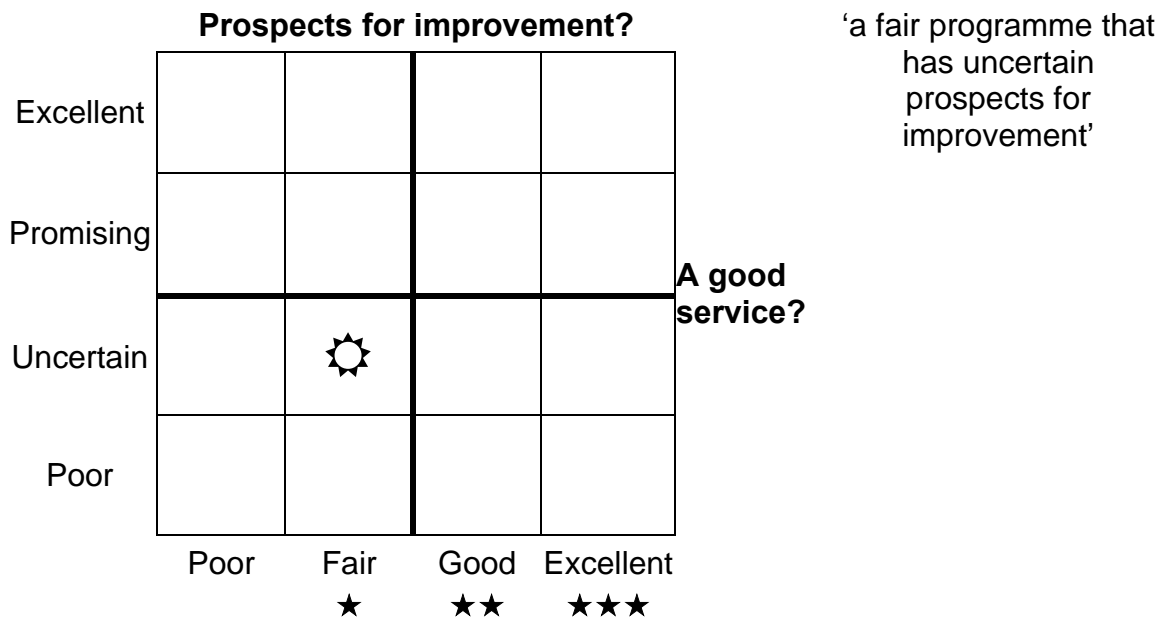
Summary

- 1 Cambridgeshire County Council is situated in the eastern region of England. The population is 552,655, of which 4 per cent are from minority ethnic community groups.
- 2 The Council is led by a Conservative administration and uses the leader and cabinet model of governance. There are a total of 69 councillors; the Conservatives hold 42 seats, Liberal Democrats 23 and Labour 4.
- 3 The Council has a revenue budget of £511 million for 2005/06. It employs approximately 6,140 staff across all services.
- 4 Cambridgeshire County Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with four primary care trusts (PCTs) - Cambridge City, South Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire and Fenland - together with the Cambridgeshire Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 5 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2005/06 is £12,541,678. The Council also receives £411,525 in administration grant towards its role as the administering authority. The highest cost service is £402.08 per person per week providing housing-related support to people with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £1.54 per person per week providing housing-related support to older people.
- 6 Cambridgeshire County Council was inspected during the third year of the Supporting People programme. This report, therefore, reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

Scoring the service

- 7 We have assessed Cambridgeshire County Council as providing a ‘fair’, one-star Supporting People programme that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

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.

- 8 We have scored the Council's administration of Supporting People as a fair, one-star programme because of the following.
- New services have been developed to meet needs, for example young people at risk, the frail older people, offenders and homeless families.
 - Services funded through the Supporting People programme cater for a wide range of diverse groups, and the programme has achieved some positive outcomes for service users.
 - Service reviews have been well-managed and have involved service users.
 - Changes have been made to some services as a result of users comments and feedback.
 - Forums for service providers are effective and there are good working relationships between providers and the Supporting People team.
 - Successful liaison to ensure the eligibility of funded services prior to implementation of the programme resulted in few high cost services being set up and principles have been agreed to ensure value for money across the services.
 - There has been consistent involvement of the district councils in the programme.
- 9 However, we found a number of weaknesses that need to be addressed. These include the following.
- Service users are not sufficiently consulted or engaged in the strategic direction of the programme.
 - Accessible information for users and advocates is limited and signposting from front line staff is inconsistent. As such, potential users may have difficulty in gaining access to the services or information they need.
 - The lack of a diversity strategy has delayed work in understanding the needs of all hard-to-reach groups.
 - The five-year strategy was completed in autumn 2004 and has become out-of-date in the light of subsequent information.
 - The influence of health partners in the governance arrangements for the programme to date has been limited.
 - The commissioning body has not, until recently, been providing the leadership and direction that the programme needs to ensure its strategic fit with, and relevance to, all partners.
 - The core strategy group has not been co-ordinating all the work on housing-related support that is being undertaken in a number of different groups.
 - Financial management and reporting has been weak.
 - A strategy to identify and deal with the issue of accessing move-on accommodation has not been developed.

- 10 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has uncertain prospects for improvement.
- Performance management of the programme is not yet effective.
 - Strategies are being developed but are not yet in place and operational.
 - The Supporting People programme is not consistently linked into other council or partners' strategies.
 - Evidence from corporate and social care assessments shows a decline in performance.
- 11 However, we identified the following strengths in relation to the prospects for improvement.
- There is increasing ownership of the programme at a strategic level from all partners.
 - Capacity in the Supporting People team has improved.
 - A culture of performance management is beginning to be embedded across the Council.
 - The Council's restructuring has enhanced the profile of the programme.

Recommendations

- 12 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 costs² 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 Improve the accessibility of services and information by:

- *ensuring frontline staff who are signposting customers are aware of the availability of housing-related support offered through the programme;*
- *improving the availability of leaflets and information both electronically and in hard copy;*
- *updating 'Better Care: Higher Standards' to include information on Supporting People and correct telephone contacts; and*
- *improving the information for service users on the website.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- ease and consistency of access for service users, potential service users, carers and advocates to good information in appropriate formats.

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

² 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.

Recommendation

R2 Improve the performance management of the programme by:

- *improving the financial management of the programme and producing a consistent suite of financial reports for both the commissioning body and the core strategy group;*
- *developing a range of local performance indicators across all services and use these for the management and development of the programme;*
- *developing a range of outcome measures to assess the impact that the programme is having for service users;*
- *assessing the impact and benefits of further improvements to the IT system; and*
- *resolving the two outstanding unsigned contracts.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- information will be available to the governing bodies of the programme on which to base decisions;
- the use of local performance indicators and outcome measures will demonstrate the achievements of the programme on improving the lives of vulnerable people; and
- further improvements to the IT system could improve the capacity of the team to undertake other tasks.

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

Recommendation

R3 Improve the value for money offered by services by developing an approach to a value for money assessment that builds on the work started through the service reviews but takes account of service costs, quality and outcomes for service users.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services for vulnerable people will be able to demonstrate how they achieve value for money;
- assessment of services will be made against the quality of the service provided; and
- assessment of services will be made against the outcomes that are achieved for service users.

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

Recommendation

R4 Improve the processes for managing and ensuring the diversity of the programme by:

- *completing the Supporting People diversity strategy;*
- *developing an action plan to implement the strategy with challenging outcome based targets that will make a real impact on individuals in the short, medium and long-term; and*
- *ensuring that performance against these targets is monitored and reported through the governance structures of the programme.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services for vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups will be specified and developed;
- access to services by all groups will be demonstrable; and
- information will be available to the governing bodies of the programme on which to base decisions.

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

Recommendation

R5 Develop a strategic approach to overcoming the difficulties of accessing move on accommodation by:

- *working with the district councils and local housing providers to understand the barriers to accessing move on accommodation;*
- *developing a strategy that will clarify the processes for Supporting People service users to move on to permanent accommodation as they gain skills in living independently;*
- *developing an action plan to implement the strategy; and*
- *reporting on performance through the governance structures of the programme.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved access to accommodation for vulnerable people who are able to live more independently; and
- greater through put in existing services as service users move on in a timely manner.

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

Recommendation

R6 Improve the programme's overall aims and objectives by:

- *revising the five-year strategy utilising the information that is now available through the service reviews;*
- *ensuring that information is explicit in the strategy about the needs of the local population, the gaps in services and the plans to address these;*
- *ensuring that all stakeholders are consulted on the revision of the strategy, including existing and potential service users; and*
- *feeding back to stakeholders on how their contributions have shaped the strategy.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the strategy will be up-to-date and be able to drive the future direction and development of the programme;
- ownership of the strategy will be improved; and
- information on the programme and the future plans will be located clearly and accessibly.

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

Recommendation

R7 Improve the governance of the programme by:

- *mapping all the existing operational groups that are working on accommodation and housing-related support issues; and*
- *ensuring that the core strategy group is able to co-ordinate and oversee the work of these groups.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- greater involvement of a range of staff in the programme;
- the ability of the core strategy group to bring together all the discussions and work that impact on the programme; and
- better co-ordination of the development of the programme.

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

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

Dates of inspection: 24 November and 28 November to 2 December 2005

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Report

Context

The locality

- 14 Cambridgeshire County Council is situated in the eastern region of England. It is predominately a rural area which includes the university city of Cambridge, the cathedral city of Ely and a number of historic market towns. Within the county are five district councils and four primary care trusts (PCTs).
- 15 The population of the area is 552,655 (2001 census). Cambridgeshire is in a growth area of the country and the population is predicted to increase by 5,500 people a year up to 2016. This is a faster growth rate than any other area of the country. Part of this growth will be accounted for by people aged 85 and over. It is predicted that by 2016, 35 per cent of the population will be in this age group compared to 26 per cent nationally.
- 16 Black and minority ethnic community groups make up 4 per cent of the local population which is substantially lower than the national average of 10.44 per cent. Minority groups are not represented equally across the county with much higher populations living in Cambridge city to small communities living in the Fenland area. The area has a high level of gypsies and travellers who number between 3,000 and 7,000 people.
- 17 Unemployment at 1.3 per cent is lower than the national average of 2.6 per cent. The largest sources of employment in the area are the County Council, the University of Cambridge and the health services followed by the retailing sector.
- 18 The area is relatively affluent and the County Council ranks 134th out of 149 counties and unitary authorities where 1 is the most deprived. However, this score masks the wide variation across the county. South Cambridgeshire is one of the least deprived areas of the country at 345 out of 354 but Fenland has a more average level of deprivation, ranking 142nd out of 354.

The Council

- 19 The Council comprises 69 councillors and is administered by the Conservatives who hold the majority of seats. The model of governance used is the leader and cabinet structure.
- 20 The Council's revenue budget for 2005/06 is £511 million. The budget for the delivery of social services £136 million.
- 21 The Council's vision for Cambridgeshire is:

'to achieve a robust local economy for communities that are safe, healthy and socially inclusive, within a sustainable environment'.

- 22 The vision is supported by five values:
- customer focus – putting the customer at the heart of all that we do;
 - partnership – improving services by operating as a single organisation and pulling in the same direction as our partners;
 - accountability – being open and accessible and encouraging the public to participate;
 - value for money – achieving good or excellent services while spending public money wisely; and
 - equality – serving all our customers well, making sure services are accessible to all and fairly allocated.
- 23 The Council also has three priorities. These are:
- learning for life – seeking the highest attainment for children in schools;
 - promoting independence – safeguarding vulnerable adults and children; and
 - building Cambridgeshire communities – enabling economic growth but not at the expense of the environment.
- 24 The Supporting People programme makes a clear contribution to the priority of promoting independence.

The programme

- 25 The Supporting People programme is designed to meet the housing-related support needs of vulnerable people, including homeless people, older people with support needs, people with a learning disability, people with mental health problems, those with substance abuse problems, refugees, travellers and offenders.
- 26 The total amount of Supporting People grant made available to the Council in 2004/05 was £13,325,973 which reduced to £12,541,678 for 2005/06. This was a reduction in grant of 5.09 per cent. The Council also received an administration grant of £487,971 during 2004/05 to fulfil its role as the administering authority. This grant was reduced to £411,525 in 2005/06.
- 27 The highest cost Supporting People service supported by the grant is £402.08 per person per week for people with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £1.54 per person per week for older people with support needs.
- 28 Cambridgeshire County Council was inspected in the third year of the Supporting People programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

How good is the programme?

What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 29 Cambridgeshire County Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area.
- 30 The vision of the five-year Supporting People strategy is:
- ‘to improve the quality of life and wellbeing by ensuring housing and housing support is available that reduces risk and enables vulnerable people to live as full a life as possible’.*
- 31 Underlying the vision is the following commitment and principle:
- ‘the vision will require all partners to work together, and with communities, to develop preventative services, anticipate and avert crises, and support people to maintain or regain their independence in those ways that best meet needs’.*
- 32 The Council has identified priorities for 2005/06 in the strategy. These are:
- introducing strategic commissioning and pooled budgets in order to deliver objectives more effectively and improve outcomes for users and carers;
 - re-shaping services which will include decommissioning some sheltered housing schemes and re-modelling much of the remainder as well as improving value for money and cost effectiveness in all services;
 - tackling the implications of the needs-based distribution formula in both the short and long-term; and
 - improving the programme management and administration in relation to contracting, payments to providers, and monitoring and review.
- 33 Along with the work priorities for the year, the strategy has identified four client groups that are priorities for service development and service improvements following from the service reviews. These groups are older people, offenders, young people at risk and adults with mental health needs.

Is the programme meeting the needs of the community and users?

34 The assessment was based on the following key issues:

- governance;
- delivery arrangements;
- service reviews;
- value for money;
- user involvement;
- access to services and information;
- diversity; and
- outcomes for service users.

Governance

35 This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. Governance structures are in place but have not been operating effectively to drive and develop the programme. Cambridgeshire had a history of positive joint working between the county and the district councils in relation to supported housing and the programme built on this. Elected members have been consistently involved in the governance arrangements. However, since the programme went live in 2003, the governance arrangements have not developed and matured as we would have expected.

36 The ODPM set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:

- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team – drive the whole process;
- inclusive forum – consults with service providers and service users;
- core strategy development group – proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme;
- commissioning body – agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme;
- councillors – approve key decisions of the commissioning body; and
- Supporting People team – delivers the local programme.

- 37 Elected member involvement in the programme is strong. A Joint Members group was established prior to the implementation of the programme and has continued to meet quarterly. It includes a member from the Probation Board as well as County Council and district council representatives. All political parties are represented. Board members from the PCTs had not been involved in this group but this was resolved during our inspection and a representative identified who will be attending future meetings. This group is the final decision-making body for the programme and members are both knowledgeable about, and interested in, the programme.
- 38 The County Council experienced a large influx of new councillors in May 2005 and an extensive induction programme was established to inform them about a range of council activities. The Supporting People programme was included in this and the briefings were well attended. This has enabled many elected members to have a better understanding of the programme and how to find more detailed information when this is needed.
- 39 The County Council has undergone major restructuring within the social services department over a number of years. Services for children and adults have been divided with many of the latter being relocated from the Council to the PCTs and the mental health trust. The establishment of a separate office for children and young people in April 2005 has led to a lack of direct involvement of these services in the governance arrangements of the programme.
- 40 The County Council has also undergone further restructuring across all other services. Throughout this period, the programme was marginalised as it did not have the strategic commitment it needed. Despite the continuing involvement of the district councils, the County Council's chair of the commissioning body did not attend any commissioning body meetings during 2004/05. This meant that the Council was not operating within grant conditions set by the ODPM and this risk was not addressed or managed by the Council.
- 41 It is only since April 2005 that the Council resumed chairing the commissioning body and has started to provide leadership and direction for the programme.
- 42 PCT engagement in governance arrangements is a weakness. At the time of our inspection, the four PCTs in Cambridgeshire were represented on the commissioning body by the Director of Primary Care who works across both Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire PCTs. This arrangement has been recognised as not working and a more appropriate position has been identified that will enable regular attendance at meetings, with a nominated deputy, and a more effective flow of information across the PCTs.
- 43 The Cambridgeshire Probation Area has maintained engagement in the programme but, due to staffing issues, has had a number of different representatives attending the commissioning body. These issues have now been resolved and the new Head of Service Development will be providing consistent representation. This will ensure that the probation service is engaged at both a strategic and operational level.

- 44 The commissioning body is developing its strategic leadership role through a series of 'away days' that allow for detailed discussions and agreement to be reached on issues. These days have included representatives from all partner agencies. This has enabled members of the group to focus on particular issues and have the information with which to make strategic decisions. These events have been used, for example, to fully understand the financial position of the programme and the impact that a reducing level of grant will have on service delivery and development.
- 45 Despite the group developing in its strategic leadership role, it still demonstrates a lack of maturity. We observed a meeting where no strategic decisions were made and much of the business could have been dealt with by the core strategy group. Examples include a discussion about work in progress on a strategy and a first draft of a report. Such agenda items can blur the different roles that the two groups should be undertaking and use time that could be devoted to more productive debates.
- 46 There is currently a conflict of interest with the new accountable officer also chairing the commissioning body. Since April 2005, the Director of Adult Support Services took over the role of the accountable officer and has worked hard to champion and improve the status of the programme. All members of the body are aware of this conflict but have agreed to this situation continuing as the current arrangements have improved the leadership of the programme. However, the commissioning body reports to the Joint Member Group which does ensure a further level of accountability and scrutiny. This situation will be resolved when the Partnership and Performance Manager takes over the role of accountable officer in April 2006; the Director will continue to chair the commissioning body.
- 47 The current accountable officer is in a senior role in the authority and has used this to the advantage of the programme. She has been able to raise the profile of the programme among her fellow directors and ensure that it is included in a wide range of council discussions and events as well as ensuring that it is operating effectively. The accountable officer is also a member of the Cambridgeshire Care Partnership which includes elected members and PCT non-executive directors and is responsible to the County Council's Cabinet and the PCT Boards. Supporting People has been discussed at these meetings, ensuring that the profile of the programme is raised and a wider audience is aware of the role it is playing in developing and maintaining the independence of service users.
- 48 Membership and effectiveness of the core strategy group has been limited. There is consistent and regular representation from the district councils but the attendance from health partners has been limited. Additionally, social care managers are not members of this group so there is no representation for the main service users groups such as people with a learning disability, mental health problems, older people or young people. Although formal governance structures were set up for Supporting People, in practice many of the linkages continued on the basis of personal relationships and through historical groups that pre-dated the programme. The previous accountable officer, for example, was the conduit through which information was relayed to and from social care commissioning managers.

- 49 There are wide networks and groupings of operational managers looking at client-based issues, including accommodation and supported housing, across health and social care. These various groups are not clearly mapped out or documented and as a result there is little orchestration of the work by the core strategy group. This leads to duplication of work and a loss of a clear and co-ordinating overview of the impact that the programme could have for different groups.
- 50 The core strategy group has been successful in its oversight of the service reviews and has ensured that a wide range of operational staff have been involved in these. This is discussed in more detail later in this report.
- 51 A provider representative has been a regular member of the core strategy group but this has not been supported by any formal mechanisms to ensure that there is feedback to the wider group and that their views are sought. Indeed, many providers did not know who this representative was and discussions have started at the providers' forum to clarify this role and how it will operate in the future.
- 52 The Council, along with the district councils, has successfully engaged and contributed to the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA). These arrangements are working well and although there are shortages of move on accommodation, high risk offenders have been successfully accommodated. This enables the effective resettlement of offenders and contributes to public protection.
- 53 Engagement with the voluntary sector including advocacy groups that operate across Cambridgeshire requires further development. There is a varying level of knowledge and understanding of the programme. Although a number of groups reported that they had been consulted about the programme, they did not receive feedback on this and did not know to what extent they had influenced decisions. Work has not taken place with groups to support service users in being more engaged with the programme, especially at a strategic level.

Delivery arrangements

- 54 This is an area with a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The team has the skills and capacity needed and is operating to a robust work plan. The five-year strategy is light in needs information and is out-of-date but is in the process of being reviewed. Financial monitoring is improving and is being reported to the commissioning body and the core strategy group. There are good relationships with the providers as well as effective involvement in the regional Supporting People group.
- 55 Corporate understanding of the programme has improved. The Supporting People team is located in the Adult Support Services division of the Office of Environment and Community Services. Following a major restructuring in April 2005 the business of the council is conducted through three offices and the Chief Executive's department. Environment and Community Services includes all the outward facing services, except those within the office of Children and Young People, and the programme has already benefited from this move by being included in a range customer-focused activities.

- 56 However, the work of the team continues to be hampered by the imposition of restrictions by the Council's Department of Information Technology (DIT). An example of this is the inability of the team to produce reports from the IT system. A member of staff was trained to use a new reporting tool in November 2004 but DIT would not then allow her access to the software to undertake this work. System slowness due to network issues is also a frustration for the team. This lack of understanding of the particular IT needs of the programme has resulted in increased workloads for the team as they have to find alternative ways of working.
- 57 The Supporting People team has the skills and capacity needed to carry the programme forwards. Staff come from a range of backgrounds. The team has drawn on staff from partner agencies and stakeholders to undertake service reviews so there has been a clear understanding of the needs of particular client groups.
- 58 It has taken time for the team to get up to full strength. A number of appointments were made earlier this year and the team has been considerably expanded. Staff are now in place to cover all the range of activities for the delivery and the development of the programme. However, the team experienced a number of absences through the summer, for a variety of reasons, which impacted on their ability to deliver the programme. Although temporary staff were used, the team is still in the process of making up for these gaps.
- 59 The Council produced and submitted a well written and succinct five-year strategy to the ODPM by the target date of 31 March 2005. The strategy communicates the key messages in clear, non-technical language and contains more detail in the appendices. However, it does not contain enough detail on local needs and how these have informed the decisions on what services should be provided. Needs analysis is available for the majority of client groups but this information is held in a number of different places and it is not clear how or where to find it. As it stands, the strategy does not give the reader a full sense of how services fit with the local strategic vision.
- 60 The strategy was actually completed in October 2004 and has become out-of-date. Since that time, a number of things have changed. For example, more information has been gathered through the review process and clearer information on needs gained through commissioned research work. This has led to the growing recognition that the current strategy will not drive the pace of change that is needed for supported housing provision to move from legacy services to a needs-led service delivery model. The Council accepts this and is undertaking a revision of the strategy.
- 61 Although there was good consultation on the development of the strategy, it was finally written by the Council. Stakeholders did not have feedback on their contribution or an opportunity to understand how their input influenced the strategy. Providers reported a high level of dissatisfaction with the completed strategy because of this. This is another area that the Council is aware of and will ensure that the revision of the strategy is undertaken in a more participative way. This will enable the wider group of stakeholders to have more ownership of the document and its key messages and priorities.

- 62 There is no needs analysis for offenders. This is because the probation offender assessment system (OASys) is not yet being used consistently across the area. Probation recognises that it lacks an overview of accommodation and other needs and that this hampers its ability to contribute effectively to strategic planning.
- 63 Although there is a probation offender accommodation strategy this does not link to the national reducing re-offending action plan's offender accommodation pathway, the local crime and disorder reduction plans or community safety strategies. More work is needed to integrate these strategies to ensure the issues of social inclusion and community safety remain paramount and agencies do not operate in isolation.
- 64 The work of the Supporting People team is effectively managed through the team plan. This is a robust document that is SMART³ and covers all tasks that are the responsibility of the team.
- 65 Eligibility criteria was agreed with providers at the start of the programme in 2003 and has been consistently applied. This has formed an essential part of the service review process where ineligible services or tasks have been identified and resolved. This has ensured that providers have a clear understanding of what the programme covers and how this impacts on their services.
- 66 Financial management and reporting has been weak. Although considerable time and effort has been directed at reconciliation work relating to payments from the start of the programme to date, there is still more to do. There are ongoing problems in respect of reconciliation of payments to providers. Payments are being made regularly, but there are still users who are not receiving funding who are entitled to it. This is in the process of being resolved by the Supporting People team.
- 67 A post of Finance and Performance Manager has been created to lead on this work and the situation is starting to improve. Reports are now being presented to the commissioning body and the core strategy group on the financial situation. However, the Council is not yet able to set out, with confidence, the current financial position relating to the Supporting People main grant.
- 68 Two interim contracts remained unsigned at the time of our inspection. All contracts should have been signed by 31 July 2003. These outstanding contracts are with small charitable organisations. The Supporting People team has attempted remedy this but these have now be passed on to the contracts section of the County Council for resolution. ODPM grant conditions require that such services be brought forward for review, but this did not happen due to lack of resources in the Supporting People team.
- 69 Relationships between the Supporting People team and providers are generally positive at an operational level. However, providers were anxious about the lack of leadership for the programme.

³ SMART - specific, measurable, allocated, resourced and time-bound.

- 70 Satisfaction with Cambridgeshire's management of the programme is variable. We undertook a survey of providers as part of the inspection to assess satisfaction over a number of variables. Some elements scored very highly, for example:
- advice and support available from the Supporting People team (96 per cent);
 - the Council's grant eligibility criteria (92 per cent);
 - involvement of users in service reviews (90 per cent); and
 - the Council's approach to determination of strategic relevance (89 per cent).
- 71 The lowest satisfaction ratings were for:
- the Council's approach to determining value for money (36 per cent);
 - the completed five-year strategy (44 per cent); and
 - arrangements for accessing move on accommodation (64 per cent).
- 72 Providers' forums are held regularly and are effective. There was general agreement among providers that the forum is a useful meeting for information gathering. Providers have seen the influence of the commissioning body growing over recent months and feel that there is now encouragement for them to actively influence decision-making. Although there is regular time at the meetings for providers to discuss issues in private, the Supporting People team still arrange and co-ordinate the meetings. Until the providers are sufficiently unified to take full control of the agenda, it is appropriate for the Council to continue to lead the meetings.
- 73 Cambridgeshire works positively with the regional group on Supporting People issues and developments. The Supporting People Eastern Region group (SPERG) is well attended by the East Anglian authorities and has produced a regionally agreed 'Steady State' contract. The group is currently working on value for money and accreditation, again to produce regionally agreed policies and processes that will improve cross-authority working and benefit providers with services across the region.

Service reviews

- 74 The work that has been undertaken on service reviews is an area of strength. Reviews have been conducted through a client-based approach and are on schedule to be completed by the ODPM deadline. Capacity to undertake the reviews has been supplemented through the use of partners and stakeholders in the process and there are examples of positive outcomes and improvements to services.

- 75 The Council's approach to service reviews has been consistent from the start of the programme. These have been structured around client groups to ensure a strategic approach. The Council had worked closely with the housing benefit sections in the district councils during the implementation of the programme. As a result of this, there were very few high cost transitional housing benefit claims and the review programme did not therefore have to be structured around the early review of high cost schemes. However, the service reviews have looked at service costs especially as value for money has increased in significance. This work has provided the building blocks for the commissioning body to use in developing the principles underpinning its approach to value for money.
- 76 When the timetable was being developed in 2003 stakeholders were contacted to find out if any other reviews were being scheduled and these were then co-ordinated. This approach has ensured that services were examined holistically and economies of scale were achieved. Providers were also actively engaged in the process by suggesting how their services should be logically grouped to ensure that a representative sample of validation visits were undertaken. A positive example of how well this worked was in the best value review of sheltered housing. This review involved all the district councils and included the review of Supporting People funded services as part of its scope.
- 77 The timetable has been well-managed and the Council is on target to complete the programme of service reviews by the March 2006 deadline set by the ODPM. At the time of our inspection, 253 reviews had been completed across 9 client groups. A further 4 client group reviews were in various stages of completion involving 135 reviews. A further 3 groups of reviews are about to take place covering 17 schemes.
- 78 The reviews follow established policies and procedures. The larger, client-based, reviews have been effectively co-ordinated by the establishment of a steering group that has directed and overseen the working of the process. These steering groups have included members from social care, health, probation, service providers and service users or their representatives as well as the Supporting People team. Additionally, members of these steering groups have been active in the process and have undertaken validation visits to schemes and interviewing service users. For the review of sheltered housing, providers were also involved in reviewing each others services.
- 79 The commissioning body and core strategy group have been involved in the process through 'signing-off' various stages of the reviews as well as being members of different steering groups. This involvement has ensured that the process has been applied consistently and fairly across all the different client groups.
- 80 The steering groups have continued to meet after the conclusion of the reviews to oversee the implementation of the recommendations. This process has ensured a consistency of approach and the ownership of the outcomes of the reviews. It has also contributed to the knowledge of partners in the range of services on offer.

- 81 An agreed appeals process is in place although, to date, it has not had to be used. Providers have the opportunity to challenge outcomes at all the stages of the review. Decisions that will materially affect schemes are discussed with providers so that recommendations are made by agreement.
- 82 The Supporting People team is currently developing plans for how it will manage and monitor services once the service reviews have been completed. These new arrangements will become effective from April 2006.
- 83 Service reviews have not been streamlined across regional authorities. Although SPERG has now established a group to look at joint accreditation and joint reviews this will have limited benefit to service providers although will be helpful in future monitoring. A number of providers we visited work across the region and reported multiple reviews having taken place so far.
- 84 Providers report high levels of satisfaction with the process. Providers felt that the processes are thorough and that the reviewing officers are knowledgeable and helpful.
- 85 There have been positive outcomes from reviews. This includes the decommissioning of one scheme where there were concerns about the suitability of the accommodation as well as the standards of care and support that were being provided. The scheme has now closed and the service users have been placed in more suitable schemes.
- 86 The reviews have also been used to drive up standards; for example, an early review of a homeless families' service was triggered by concerns about the quality of the service. The review was viewed positively by the service and the quality of the service improved to score at level 'C' on the core service objectives. The service has been reviewed subsequently as part of the whole client approach to assess strategic relevance.
- 87 Further examples of reviews driving up standards are the improvements that have taken place at a number of schemes. Criticisms were made about the standard of accommodation provided for service users in some mental health schemes and these have been refurbished providing a better living environment for service users. Following the best value review of sheltered schemes, difficult to let schemes are being decommissioned and the overall service remodelled to provide more effective services to users.

Value for money

- 88 This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. The average weekly cost of Supporting People services is lower than those in the region or nationally but there has been limited benchmarking to understand why this is. Savings have been made through the service reviews process but the commissioning body is only just developing their approach to value for money. The grant has been consistently under spent but this money has not been used to develop services that would benefit service users. Transitional housing benefit claims were well-managed and did not result in the Council inheriting high cost services.

How do costs compare?

- 89 The Council received a Supporting People grant of £12,541,678 for 2005/06. This represented a reduction of 5.09 per cent on the 2004/05 allocation. The administration grant for 2005/06 was £411,525, which was 16 per cent lower than the previous year.
- 90 Figures produced by the ODPM in 2003/04 (see Appendix 1) indicate that Cambridgeshire had the same unit cost of Supporting People per head of population as the rest of eastern England at £0.46. This was substantially lower than the average cost of all English authorities which was £0.70 per head.
- 91 Areas where costs were higher than average include the following.

Table 1 Higher than average costs - accommodation-based services

| Client group | Cambridgeshire | Eastern England | England |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|---------|
| Offenders | £304.48 | £235.53 | £160.66 |
| Teenage parents | £212.70 | £124.48 | £168.62 |

Source: ODPM

- 92 Areas where costs were lower than average include the following.

Table 2 Lower than average costs - accommodation-based services

| Client group | Cambridgeshire | Eastern England | England |
|---|----------------|-----------------|---------|
| People with a physical/sensory disability | £33.35 | £74.75 | £78.02 |
| Homeless families | £23.35 | £31.29 | £84.85 |

Source: ODPM

- 93 The data appendix at the end of this report provides further information and illustrates the cost and levels of provision for all client groups against regional and national averages.
- 94 At £63.26 per person per week, Cambridgeshire has a lower average weekly unit cost than both the eastern region and the rest of England (excluding services for older people).
- 95 Limited benchmarking on costs has taken place through SPERG but, as yet, cross-sector cost variations are not well understood. Until the programme has a full understanding of sector and regional variations it will be difficult to demonstrate that value for money is being achieved.

How is value for money managed?

- 96 Cambridgeshire is actively involved with SPERG in developing an approach to value for money. It is jointly leading a working group with a neighbouring authority. The workgroup has clear terms of reference and will deliver a value for money tool that will be implemented consistently across the region. However, this will not be effective until spring 2006.
- 97 Value for money is not yet being effectively addressed. An approach to determining savings for 2006 onwards is being developed but this is focused on costs. Value for money should address costs but also look at the quality of the services provided and the outcomes from those services for users.
- 98 The commissioning body has built on the work of the service review process and agreed a set of principles to underpin value for money. These have been agreed by stakeholders and currently relate to a maximum hourly rate and a maximum number of support hours per week. Providers who fall outside of these parameters will now be assessed as to the reasons why and will have the opportunity to justify their costs. This has raised concerns from a number of providers who thought that value for money issues had been addressed at their service reviews but are now being revisited.
- 99 Grant expenditure is monitored by the commissioning body and the core strategy group. There have been significant underspends on both the main grant and the administration grant. The underspend on the main grant was £638,920 in 2003/04 and in 2004/05 was £646,758. The underspend has primarily been through the delay in bringing pipe line schemes into operation. As these are new-build accommodation schemes, there have been significant delays in the planning processes.
- 100 Service users have not benefited from the underspends. The Council has been planning for how it will manage the reductions in the grant and has taken a cautious approach to using the underspend. It has used £10,000 to help fund two temporary schemes for offenders who are a priority group. This cautious approach has meant that over the two year period just over one million pounds has been available that could have funded a range of albeit temporary schemes or 'pump primed' other housing-related support schemes that would have further extended the range of services available to service users.
- 101 Efficiency savings have been made as a result of the service reviews. For example, one provider has reconfigured services to decrease the supported lodging provision which was not fully utilised and increase the units within shared flats. This has improved capacity without increasing the cost to the Supporting People budget. The Supporting People team has also been successful in obtaining refunds paid for supported lodgings that were not being used.
- 102 As a result of the service reviews of mental health services, approximately 10 per cent of the funding on these services was recovered.
- 103 The Council has not paid any inflation increase to providers. Savings this year of 2 per cent have been achieved through negotiations with providers.

Service user involvement

- 104** Service user involvement in developing the programme is an area of weakness. Service user involvement in the programme through the service reviews has been more effective and there are outcomes that can be demonstrated through this involvement. The Council has acknowledged this weakness and is currently developing a Supporting People service user consultation and involvement strategy.
- 105** The programme has not consistently engaged with service users or with user, carer and advocacy groups. There are a number of user, carer and advocacy groups across the county and although there has been consultation on the programme, this has achieved varying levels of success. Some groups we met with had very little knowledge or understanding of the programme despite it funding services for their service users. Although there has been involvement of service users through the learning disability partnership, involvement of service users with a physical or sensory disability is underdeveloped.
- 106** Service users are not involved in the strategic development of the programme. The Council is aware of this and the need to improve user involvement in other ways and is currently working on a user involvement strategy. This document will detail all the ways that users are involved in the programme from receiving basic information to be consulted on changes and developments to the strategy. While this will improve the situation in the future, the lack of engagement to date means that service users have not been able to influence the direction of the programme.
- 107** The Council has relied on service providers to be the main conduit for informing and involving service users. Although the providers are in the main already undertaking this role, the Council has not mapped all the existing groups and consequently does not know which service users are, or are not, being reached by this mechanism.
- 108** Service user involvement through the service reviews has been positive. Individual service reviews have involved service users and the larger client-based reviews have used a number of methods to engage with users such as focus groups and the use of external consultants. The service reviews of mental health services also used user groups to send out questionnaires on behalf of the Council.
- 109** Feedback from service users obtained as part of the service review has been used to effect improvements in the delivery of services. Examples of this include professional supervision of staff at one hostel to help them understand and deal with the issues that residents face when dealing with drug issues. This will create a more complete service with the aim of ensuring better outcomes for service users. Similarly, consultation with mental health service users has led to discussions being held with floating support service providers about contracts being based on a number of hours, rather than a number of people being supported. This would mean that the services can be more flexible to respond to the different levels of support that service users need at different times.

Access to services and information

- 110** This is an area of weakness. There is limited information either in hard copy or electronically. Some of the information that is available is out-of-date and contains telephone numbers that are no longer in use. Signposting to supported housing services is, at best, inconsistent.
- 111** The Supporting People team does not have a system for systematically checking the accessibility of services or information. It is not aware of the difficulties that can be experienced by a service user or potential service user in trying to access supported housing services.
- 112** Limited information is available for service users and the general public. During our visits to council offices, we only found one leaflet specifically about Supporting People. This was dated 2003 and was targeted at older people in sheltered housing. It would be easy for people to draw the conclusion from this that Supporting People only offered services to older people.
- 113** Information on the Council's website is inconsistent. There is a general leaflet on the programme and a link to the national directory of services which is located on the SPKweb. There is also a list of local providers but this does not contain any information about what services these providers offer or contact details. More information is available on housing support for adults with a disability although not for other groups of service users who would be eligible to access services. The Council acknowledges that this site does not contain a full range of information and it is currently under development.
- 114** In June 2000, it became a requirement for councils and certain other public bodies to produce a local charter entitled 'Better Care: Higher Standards', setting out how assistance is provided for anyone aged 18 or over in England having difficulties associated with old age, long-term illness or disability and for carers who support people in these circumstances. The charter sets out standards for services in health, housing and social services and indicates what to do if these expectations are not met. This is a key document designed to empower users and give authorities a benchmark against which they can monitor performance based on the experience of users and carers.
- 115** In Cambridgeshire, Better Care: Higher Standards does not contain any reference to Supporting People. This booklet, published in 2002/03 is issued separately for each of the five district council areas. It is in urgent need of updating as it contains out-of-date telephone numbers. The Council is aware of this but is not planning to reproduce these documents until 2006 to link in with the reconfiguration of the PCTs. While stocks of these booklets have not been replenished, they are still available and are not helpful to people seeking up-to-date information. This currently represents a lost opportunity to improve the accessibility of public services.

- 116 By contrast, information on fairer charging is available and is easy to understand. A charging policy has been in place since the start of the programme. Assessments are carried out by a team based within the County Council. The Supporting People team will refer service users for an assessment if they make an unsuccessful claim for housing benefit. However, the leaflet 'fairer charging, what it means' does not include contact details for the fairer charging team or information on how to go about requesting a fairer charging assessment. It is not clear from this if people are able to make a direct referral for a fairer charging assessment.
- 117 Information provided by the Council indicates that it is available in either different languages or different formats such as Braille or large print. However, this is printed at the end of leaflets, in small type and not in any community languages.
- 118 Each service provided through the Supporting People programme has its own referral arrangements. Access to the majority of services is usually through a joint allocations panel and these processes are known to the statutory agencies that make the majority of referrals.
- 119 Signposting to services is poor. As part of the inspection we made a number of phone calls to agencies listed in Better Care: Higher Standards. While all the staff we spoke to were polite and tried to be helpful, very few of them mentioned the support available through the Supporting People programme or sign posted us to someone who could provide more detailed information. This means that potential service users and enquirers are likely to receive an inconsistent service depending on their point of contact which will affect their ease of accessing Supporting People services.

Diversity

- 120 This is an area that where weaknesses outweigh strengths. Services are available for the majority of groups and research has taken place into the needs of specific groups. However, there is no diversity strategy shaping the programme as yet. There is a commitment within the Council to equalities and diversity but this has not yet been sufficiently mainstreamed to have produced significant outcomes.
- 121 Services are available for the majority of groups of service users. However, currently there are no specialist housing-related support services for people with HIV/Aids and refugees and the needs of these groups will be researched during 2005/06. People with HIV/Aids can access non-specialist services funded through Supporting People. The Supporting People team has already commissioned work on other groups and research has been undertaken on people at risk of domestic violence, travellers, and substance misusers. Supporting People is working with the drug and alcohol action team (DAAT) on the development of services to meet this user groups needs as well as addressing issues about how service users access services.

- 122** Services for culturally diverse groups have been improved through the Supporting People programme. One culturally specific service is available for Vietnamese elders. The County Council's research group is able to supply a range of data on the local population and the Supporting People team has used the information on race and religion to shape the discussions at the providers forum on ensuring services are accessible to all groups. A number of providers have invested in training for staff to improve their cultural awareness and others have adopted a needs-based approach due to the limited number of diverse groups in their locality.
- 123** Consultation with hard-to-reach groups is variable. The Council admits that it has not done enough to consult in sufficient detail with some hard-to-reach groups and is currently developing a diversity strategy to address this. Until this is in place the views and requirements of the full range of service users will not be known or be used to influence the programme.
- 124** There is a commitment in the Council to the equalities and diversity agenda but this is still in its infancy and has not yet produced significant outcomes that will impact on all groups in the local populations. For example, the County Council is still only at level 1 of the equalities standard for local government and there are still a number of Council premises that are not DDA compliant.
- 125** Work has just started across the Council on equality impact assessments. The Supporting People programme will be one of the first areas to be assessed in the adult support services division. Until this has been undertaken the programme cannot demonstrate that measures are in place to ensure equality in the provision of services.

Outcomes for service users

- 126** Strengths outweigh weaknesses with regard to service user outcomes. The Supporting People programme has led to better outcomes for some people in Cambridgeshire since its introduction in April 2003. The services we visited as part of the inspection were promoting greater independence for service users. However, the Council has not addressed the arrangements for accessing move on accommodation and the programme lacks a comprehensive set of outcome measures by which achievements can be assessed.
- 127** A number of new schemes were developed prior to the implementation of the programme in April 2003. Cambridgeshire also identified funding for a range of pipeline schemes which have further added to the services in the county. So far, 19 new schemes have become operational since the programme went live in April 2003. For example, 2 schemes opened earlier this year providing a total of 34 places for young people at risk and a further scheme is due to open in 2006 that will provide 6 places for people with alcohol problems who are still drinking. A number of these schemes are accommodation-based and have been delayed through planning processes and appeals. However, the programme has persevered with these developments as they will improve and increase the services available to unpopular and disadvantaged groups.

- 128** In addition to these pipeline schemes, the Council has used part of the underspend of the main grant on two temporary schemes. These have been set up in partnership with the Drug Intervention Programme (DIP) and will provide floating support that will help the resettlement of offenders. These are a priority group for the programme and these schemes will help address the gaps in provision for this group of service users. However, the cautious approach that the council has taken in using the underspend has meant that other potential service users have not been able to benefit from new or additional services.
- 129** Examples of good outcomes being achieved for service users include the following.
- A man who had been in a psychiatric hospital for seven years moved into a supported placement where he was worked with to develop budget and daily living skills. This included supporting him in learning how to fill in benefit forms independently and in his understanding of the terms of his tenancy agreement and the necessity of paying rent on time. He became more independent and self-reliant and successfully moved into a flat, with weekly support that will be gradually withdrawn after six months.
 - A woman with a history of drug misuse, offending and former tenancy arrears was helped to address her drug issues. She was supported in gaining living skills including paying her rent and setting up a repayment agreement to clear her arrears. She has recently moved into her own accommodation and will receive ongoing support from her new landlord. She remains drug free and has not offended for two years.
- 130** Support plans are being used effectively. Since the introduction of the programme support plans have been more formally documented and reviewed, giving a clearer indication to providers and users of how the route to independence is being achieved. In the projects we visited service users are provided with clear support plans which have been agreed with them and which are reviewed on a regular basis. Staff in the projects could demonstrate how the use of the support plan enabled users to become more independent as time went on.
- 131** At one provider we visited, we saw examples of support plans being used in an inclusive way with service users who had a learning disability. The plans were very detailed about the service users own thoughts, feelings, fears and preferences. Photographs were used to illustrate the plans. The service users we met were very proud of these as records of their achievements and of their aspirations for the future.

- 132** The Council does not have a strategy to identify and resolve the difficulties of accessing move on accommodation. Accommodation in Cambridgeshire is limited and in great demand. Although the district councils have mechanisms in place to assist service users applying for general needs housing, this was the area that providers were most concerned about and dissatisfied with. Providers who work across districts need to understand the different arrangements and the Supporting People team need to understand more fully what the issues are that have led to this level of dissatisfaction. Unless service users are able to access move on accommodation, they will eventually 'silt up' provision which will result in them using services they no longer require and new service users will be unable to access services they need.
- 133** The Council, in conjunction with its partners, has not yet developed a comprehensive set of outcome measures through which the success of the programme can be assessed. Without these, the commissioning body does not know if the outcomes that are being achieved for service users are those which they are aspiring to in the vision and objectives for the programme and is not able to assess the value for money of the services.

Summary

- 134** We have judged the Council's management of the Supporting People programme to be fair.
- 135** Governance arrangements are in place but have not driven the programme as partners have not maintained strategic commitment or involvement. Although there are good operational networks looking at housing-related support issues, these are not co-ordinated or managed by the core strategy group.
- 136** The five-year strategy has quickly become out-of-date and is in the process of being revised. This is an opportunity to address issues about the lack of information on needs and services that there is in the current strategy.
- 137** The service reviews have been well-managed and have effectively involved service users. This is in contrast to the lack of involvement of service users in other areas of the programme. Signposting to services is poor and there is a lack of information available on the programme.
- 138** There were few high costs service established as a result of the good working relationships with the district councils. The commissioning body has now agreed costing principles but this is not yet fully addressing value for money as it does not look at quality and outcomes. Financial management and reporting has been weak although this is starting to improve.
- 139** There have though been positive outcomes for some service users including an increased range of services and the introduction of support plans that have helped focus working with users to increase their independence but the lack of a strategy to address the issue of move-on means that access to services can be delayed.

What are the prospects for improvement?

What is the track record in delivering improvement?

- 140** This is an area with a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The Supporting People programme has a record of sustained improvements over time. New services have been developed and improvements and savings achieved through the service reviews. However, the programme's track record of implementing the recommendations of a previous inspection is weak. Corporately, inspection assessments were recently refreshed in respect of the Council's corporate performance and in social services, both of which resulted in reduced scores.
- 141** There are a number of areas in which the Supporting People programme is able to demonstrate progress:
- ODPM implementation milestones were met with both the shadow and five-year strategies submitted on time;
 - a number of schemes were developed using transitional housing benefit, pipeline and other funding including very sheltered housing, homelessness projects and provision for people with learning difficulties;
 - positive day-to-day relationships have been established and maintained with service providers;
 - savings have been made from service reviews; and
 - some services have been remodelled or decommissioned.
- 142** New and 'pipeline' services have been introduced. Pipeline services are those which were being planned prior to the commencement of the programme but where not operational by April 2003. The ODPM agreed to fund these. As well as these, the Council has supported a number of new services funded through the main grant. These include:
- five new services that opened in 2003 providing support for older people with support needs, frail elderly, people with a learning disability and single homeless people;
 - 12 new services that opened in 2004 providing support for older people with support needs, frail elderly, people with a learning disability, young people at risk, homeless families and offenders; and
 - four new services in 2005 providing support for young people at risk, people with a physical disability and women fleeing domestic violence.
- 143** However, as there is no strategy to identify and resolve the difficulties of accessing move-on accommodation, this remains a potential barrier to achieving effective throughput in some support services. Providers have identified this as the area of the programme they are most concerned about. The result of this is that some service users are remaining in services they no longer need and potential service users are not able to access support they do need.

- 144** The Supporting People team has successfully managed the service reviews programme. It is on track to complete all reviews within the ODPM's deadline of 31 March 2006. The Council has reviewed services around client groups and through this has been able to address issues of strategic relevance for the whole service area. It has used a project management approach to the larger reviews due to the size and complexity of the group of services. For example, the review of older people's services was combined with a county-wide best value review of sheltered accommodation which was an effective and inclusive way of managing the work.
- 145** The Council's progress in managing the programme has been weak. The Council failed to ensure that the commissioning body meetings were adequately chaired and did not address the risks that this then presented. This, and the lack of engagement of the PCTs in the governance arrangements, led to an absence of strategic ownership across partners. The result was that the commissioning body did not lead and direct and the programme after its implementation and has only started to address this since April 2005.
- 146** There is evidence that the Council learns from others. For example, there has been significant sharing and learning from other administering authorities through SPERG. Cambridgeshire is actively involved in work that will be adopted across the region, for example, the work that is currently being undertaken on a value for money methodology. The group has already delivered on other projects such as a regionally agreed 'Steady State' contract.
- 147** Within the Council, the investment in workshops for managers has raised awareness of cross cutting and common agendas, in a way that supports shared learning and the promotion of best practice. For example, the Supporting People lead officer ran a diversity workshop, the input from which has helped to improve the robustness of the draft Supporting People diversity strategy.
- 148** The Council saw this inspection as an opportunity to improve services. Staff we met were open and honest and understood their weaknesses. They were keen to learn about different ways of working and had already spent time with other authorities to look at best practice.
- 149** Corporately, the Council is not able to demonstrate an improving track record. Cambridgeshire was judged as a three-star council that is improving well in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of December 2005. Although the 2005 assessment has changed to be a 'Harder Test', this still represents a change from the previous assessment of 'excellent'.
- 150** In terms of social care services, the Council has just received a one-star rating from the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate. This is a downgrading from 2004 when it was awarded two stars. The Commission for Social Care Inspectorate rated both adults' and children's services as having uncertain prospects for improvement. In 2004, both services were judged as having promising prospects for improvement.

How is performance managed?

- 151** This is an area with a number of weaknesses but action is being taken to address these. The Supporting People team will soon be able to produce reports on a range of aspects of the working of the programme which will inform decision-making. Leadership for the programme has improved through the guidance of the accountable officer. Performance management across the Council is only just becoming embedded following the reorganisation when it was recognised that there were weaknesses in how this was operating.
- 152** The vision for the programme provides a number of drivers. It keeps the programme focused on improving the quality of life for vulnerable people, continuing to ensure the support that is needed is available and that partners and stakeholders work together to realise these aims. While there have been achievements, such as the development of new services, it is not so clear how well the programme has been managed or reported on.
- 153** There is not a complete suite of performance indicators. So far, PIs have been developed for the home improvement agencies to demonstrate the contribution this service makes to reducing falls but there are no other measures that link to health priorities or outcomes. Nor are there any joined up targets across the criminal justice services which relate to offender need, although there are examples of joint working. Without these, the commissioning body and the Council as the administering authority are not yet able to clearly measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of Supporting People programme delivery.
- 154** Performance management of the programme is not well-developed. There are concerns over the quality of some data being submitted by providers and the Council has yet to develop a robust suite of reports upon which to base future decision-making. A number of new report specifications have been drawn up that will enable the team and the commissioning body to respond to these issues but these reports have yet to be produced. Agreement has now been reached with DIT for the team to have the necessary training and software access to start this work. In the meantime, various spreadsheets have been created to enable a degree of performance reporting, for example through the service reviews.
- 155** High-quality reporting capability is becoming increasingly important as the team completes the programme of service reviews and moves to a contract monitoring role. In order to drive improvement, performance data from providers will be analysed and reported on in a way that highlights exceptions which prompt remedial action.
- 156** The work of the Supporting People team on a day-to-day operational basis is well planned and co-ordinated. There is a well structured and SMART team plan which lasts to July 2006. This will be reviewed early in 2006 to identify priorities and tasks up to 2007. Similarly, the team is well-managed. There are regular meetings with managers and progress against the team plan is monitored as well as progress against targets set for individual members of staff through the annual appraisal process.

- 157** Leadership for the programme is improving. The commissioning body has started to take a clear role in directing the programme under the guidance of the new accountable officer. This can be seen through the work that it has produced on setting a three-year programme of hourly rates and number of hours per service user. Representation on the commissioning body from the PCTs has just been confirmed and will ensure that all partners are taking the necessary decisions and agreeing strategic priorities.
- 158** A culture of performance management is in the process of being embedded across the Council. The recent restructuring has highlighted issues where this was not previously working effectively. This has been addressed and will be further improved through the new process for service planning which will ensure that all plans are anchored in the corporate priorities.
- 159** Supporting People has not been clearly linked into corporate, probation or health strategies. A number of strategies in adults services are being 'refreshed' rather than rewritten to ensure they fit with overall council objectives. This is the opportunity to ensure that the contribution that programme can make in a number of service areas is documented and clear linkages are made across strategies. However, this does not address that lack of linkages in strategies for children's services.

What is the capacity to improve?

- 160** This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. The Supporting People team has been expanded and this has resulted in additional capacity. Better use of the IT system has speeded up payment processes but it could be further developed to release more capacity on the team. Support from councillors is positive and partners have increased their capacity in relation to the governance of the programme.
- 161** The reorganisation in community and environmental services has been successful in bringing diverse groups of staff together who all have the common thread of working in an outward facing way with the community. This new structure has brought the Supporting People team closer to the rest of the department and the Council. The programme's lead officer is now a member of the adult support services senior management team and the programme is now included better in wider-council issues and agendas.
- 162** The Supporting People team is motivated and committed to the programme. Capacity issues, particularly during summer 2005, put significant pressure on the team. Although some initiatives were delayed in starting, such as the review of the five-year strategy, nothing of day-to-day major importance slipped; all submissions to ODPM were completed on time, for example.
- 163** Capacity in the team has improved. The development of automated payments to providers via the SWIFT IT system has freed up capacity. This is now being used to address weaker areas such as performance management, for example making better use of the performance information collected.

- 164 However, the use of the IT system has not been maximised to improve efficiency. Payment schedules issued to providers have to be keyed in manually as do monitoring returns received from them. Both these interfaces are capable of greater automation which could result in savings in staff time on both sides.
- 165 The high number of new councillors elected in June 2005 presented a significant challenge for the Council in terms of capacity building requirements. To address this, an induction programme was delivered which featured Supporting People among the seminars provided. Councillors have had a number of opportunities to learn about the programme and the impact it can have on council objectives and there are a range of different meetings that councillors and officers are involved in and where they can work together on issues. There is an effective briefing process between councillors and officers and positive relations between them.
- 166 New appointments have been made in the probation area and there are now staff to attend both the commissioning body and the core strategy group which will ensure that probation is able to effectively continue to contribute to the governance of the programme.
- 167 Health partners have resolved the issues that restricted their ability to be fully represented on the governance bodies. There are now identified post holders who will be taking a full role in the core strategy group and the commissioning body. A senior board member of one of the PCTs had also agreed to join the Joint members groups which will mean that all partners are also represented on this body.
- 168 As a member of SPERG, Cambridgeshire utilises the high degree of partnership work and networking opportunities offered. It has used these to improve capacity and information sharing in regard to performance and regional commissioning issues.

Summary

- 169 We have judged Cambridgeshire's prospects for improvement as being 'uncertain'. This is because although the Council has started to address many of the weaknesses in the programme, such as a strategy for user involvement, it is too early to see the outcomes of these interventions.
- 170 Leadership of the programme is improving and the capacity of the team has been increased through both new staff appointments and improved IT systems. Corporate support has increased and there is now an understanding of the IT needs of the programme that has been responded to by DIT. Improved reporting will help in providing better information on which to make decisions and manage performance but these are not in place yet.
- 171 However, the programme is not clearly linked into other strategies of the Council and although this is being addressed in adult services as these strategies are refreshed, this has not yet happened. Without these linkages being made explicit it is possible for the contribution that the programme makes in a number of areas to be overlooked.

- 172** Finally, although the Supporting People programme is able to demonstrate progress in a number of areas, there has been a decline in the overall performance of the Council and of the social care services. This means that there is not evidence of sustained improvements to services being supported corporately.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

Table 3

| Measure | Cambridgeshire | England |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| Population (mid-2003) ⁴ | 578,800 | 57,851,100 |
| Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2003) | 17.3 | 18.5 |
| Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than white British 2003) | 4.1 | 10.44 |
| Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁵ | 1.3 | 2.4 |
| Deprivation index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁶ | 230 (Cambridge) | - |

⁴ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

⁵ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (September 2005)

⁶ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

Figure 2 Percentage of the population⁷ in each age group compared with England

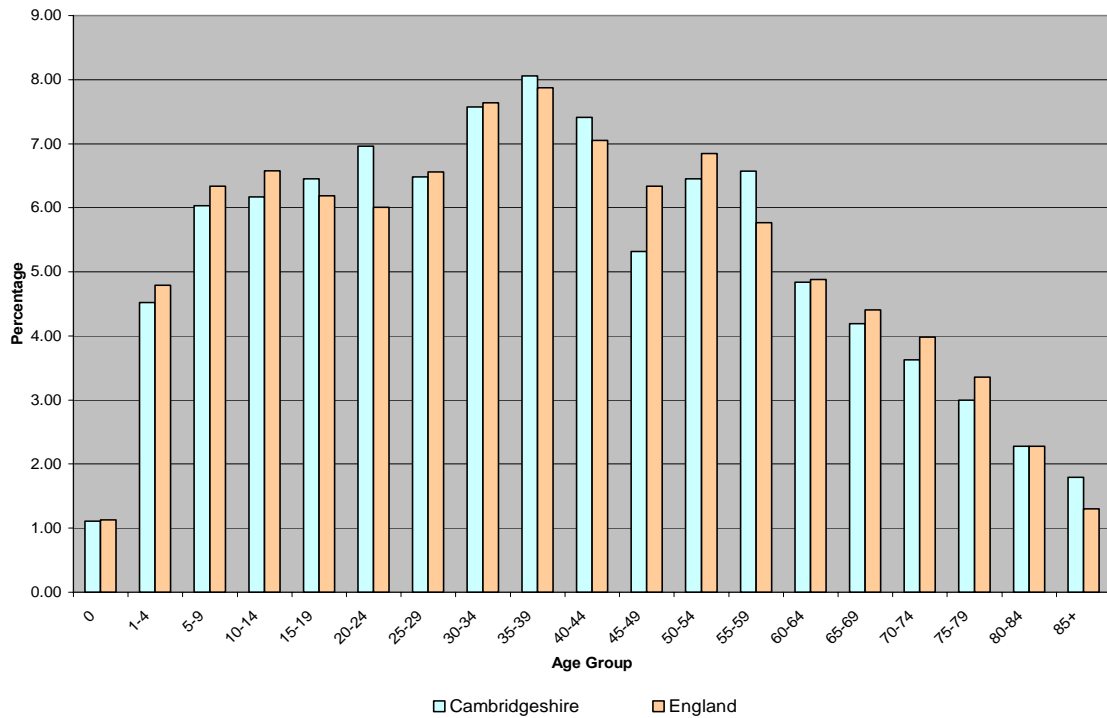
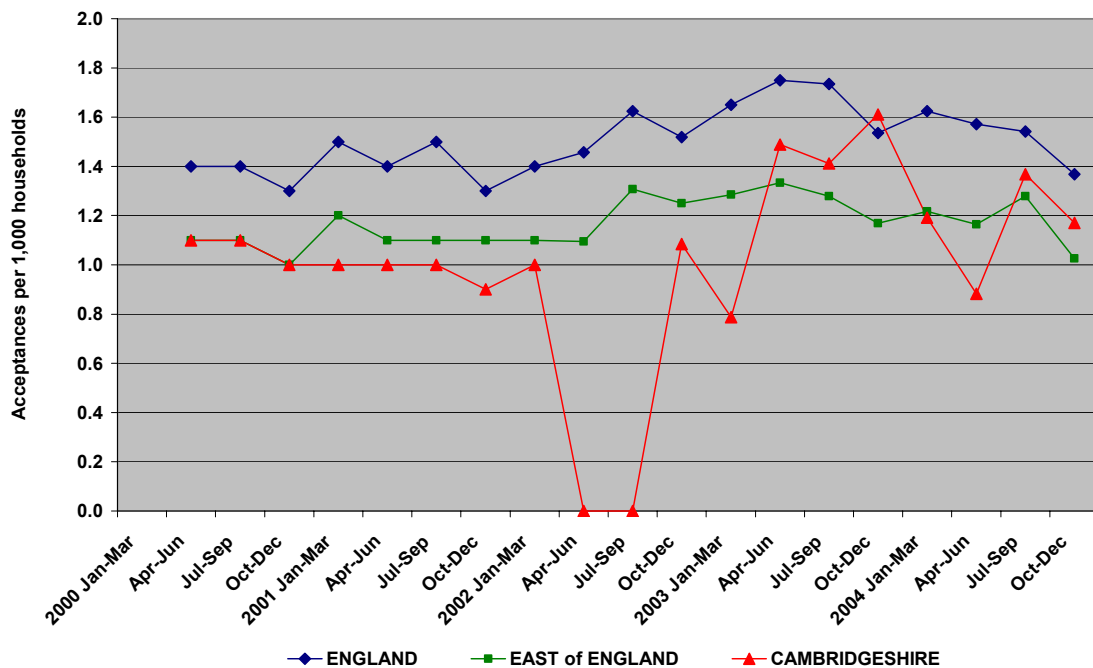


Figure 3 Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



⁷ Source: midyear population estimates (2003)

Performance information

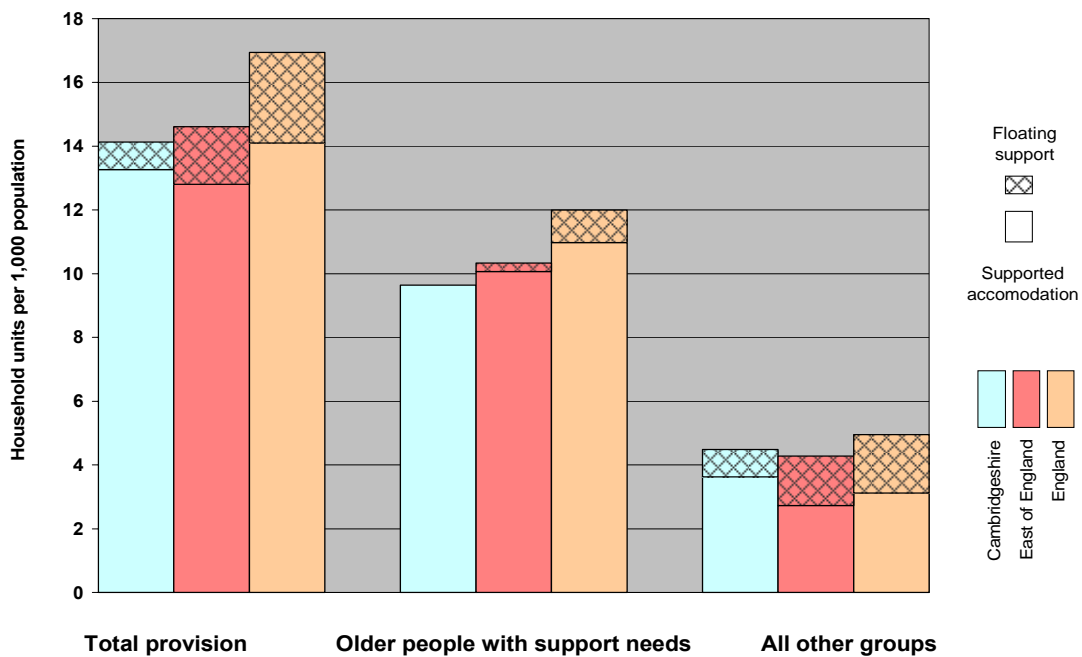
174 This section highlights strong and weak areas of the Council’s performance in services that are relevant to Supporting People. We have used the following information to help us reach our judgements:

- 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 People⁸

Figure 4 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁹



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

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

Table 4 Funding for Supporting People¹⁰

| Cambridgeshire | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Final Supporting People grant | £13,292,920 | £13,325,973 | £12,541,678 |
| Pipeline allocation | £271,180 | £611,957 | £- |
| Administration grant | £473,448 | £487,971 | £411,525 |

Table 5 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹¹

| | Per head of population | Per unit | Per unit excluding community alarms | Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| Cambridgeshire | £0.46 | £27.50 | £29.7 | £63.26 |
| East of England | £0.46 | £22.73 | £28.11 | £65.57 |
| 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.

¹⁰ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

¹¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

Figure 5 Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹²

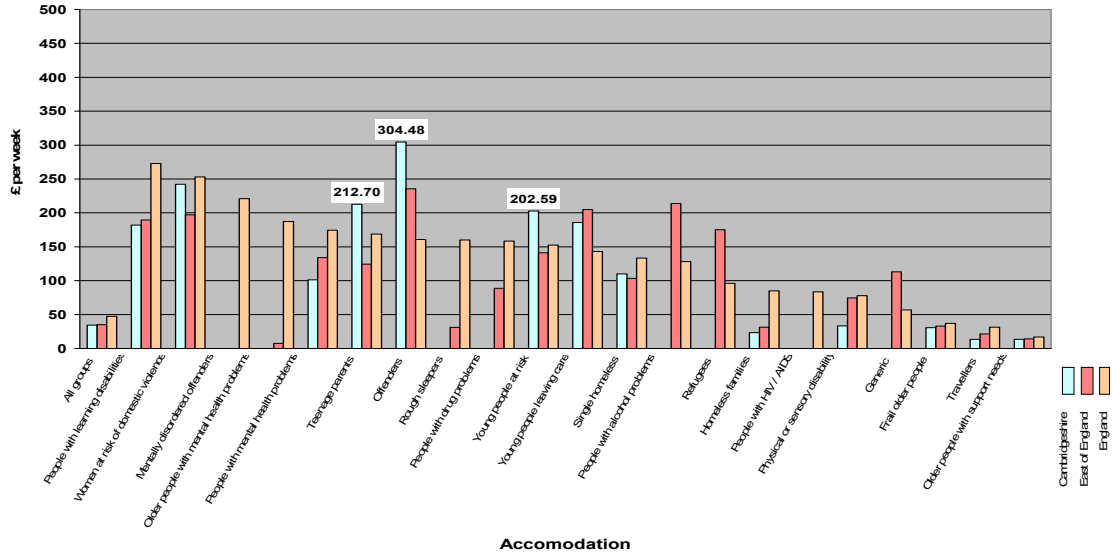
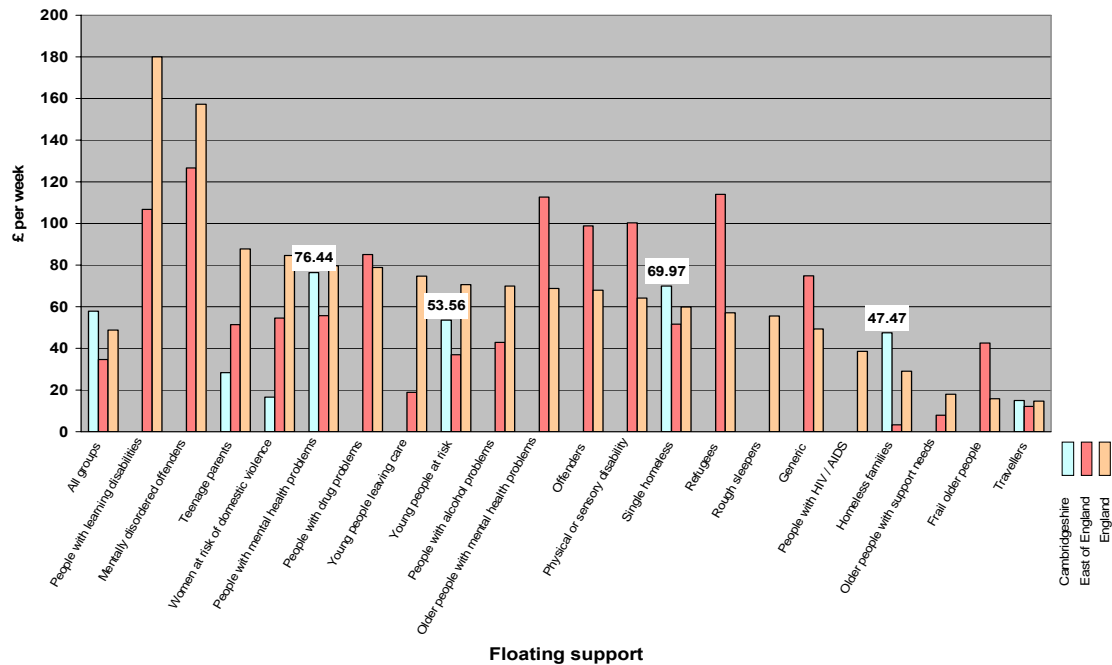


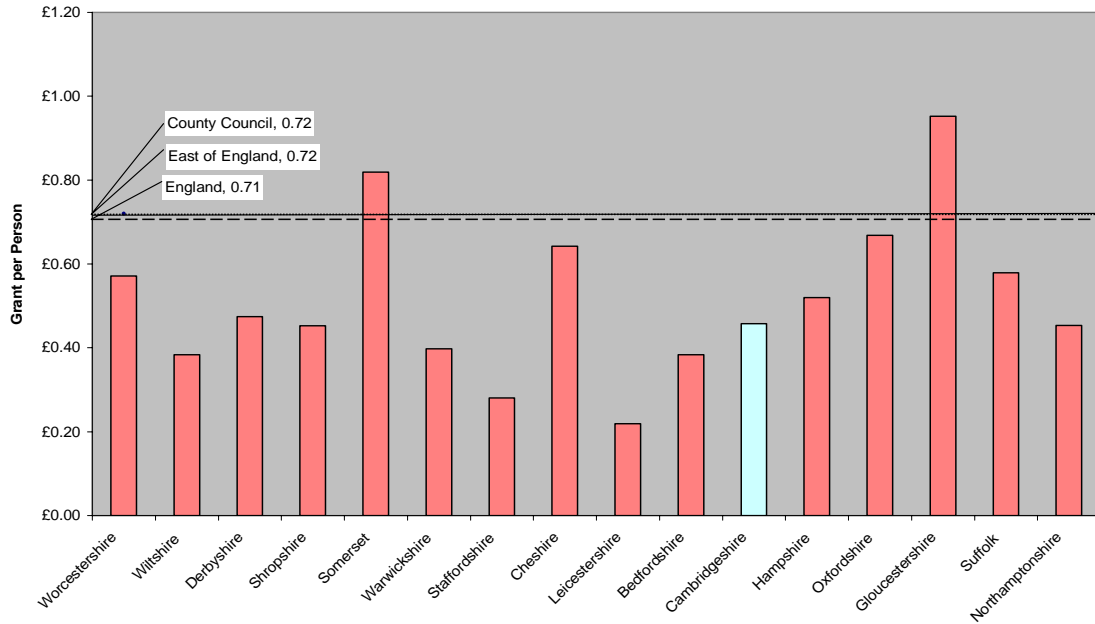
Figure 6 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹³



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

¹³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 7 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁴, all county councils and all English councils (2004/05)



¹⁴ A comparator group of similar councils.

Figure 8 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹⁵, all county council and all English council

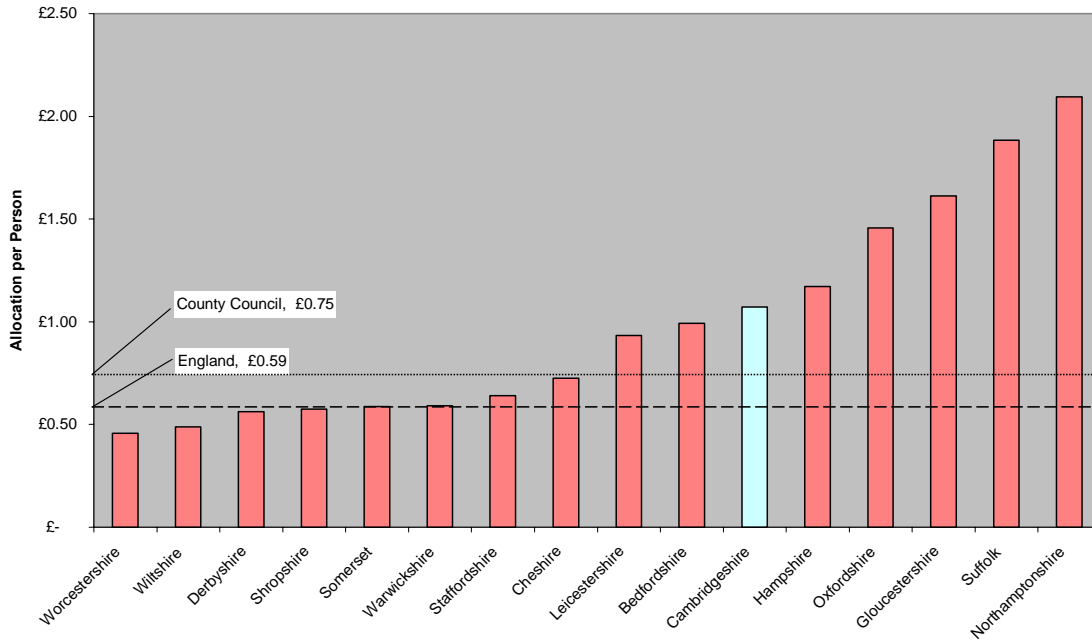
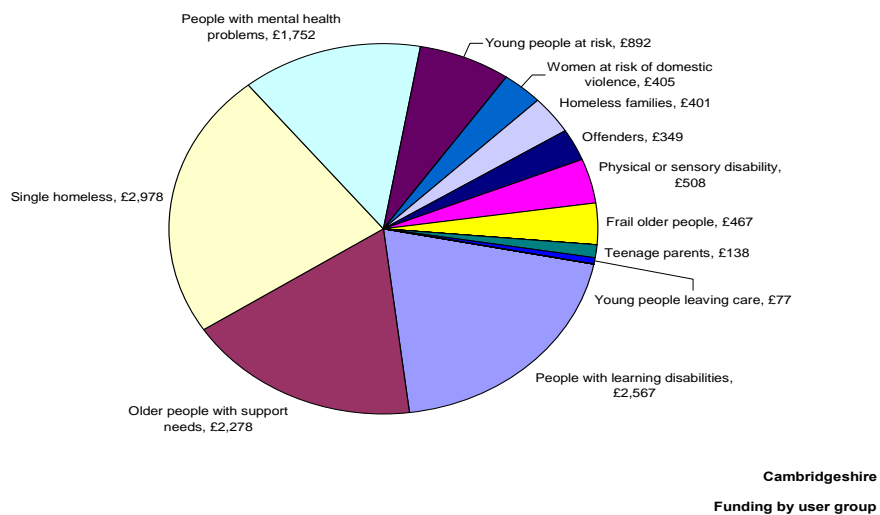


Figure 9 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)¹⁶



¹⁵ A comparator group of similar councils.

¹⁶ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 10 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)¹⁷

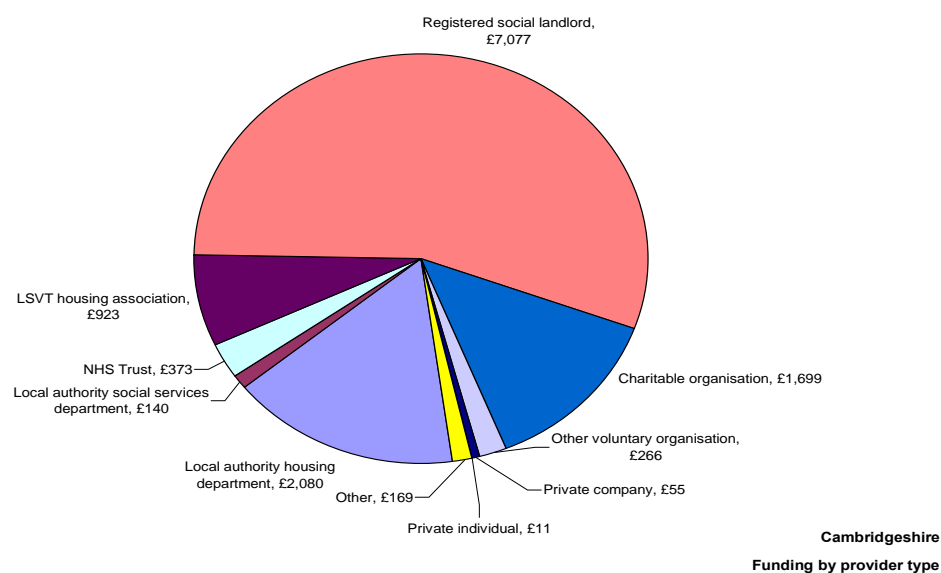


Table 6 Social services star ratings November 2004

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 | Promising | ★ ★ (2) |
| Children's services | Most | Promising | |

¹⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Social services performance indicators

Table 7 Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

| Cambridgeshire | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Significantly above average (•••••) | Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26). |
| Above average (••••) | Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57). Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58). |
| Average (•••) | Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6). Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31). Admissions of supported residents aged 18 to 64 to residential/nursing care (C27). Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29). Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30). Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51). Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4). Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54). |
| Below average (••) | Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40). Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39). Older people helped to live at home (C32). Delayed transfers of care (D41). |
| Significantly below average (•) | Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5). |

Best value performance indicators

Table 8 Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with county councils

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

| Cambridgeshire | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Within the best 25 per cent | Domestic violence refuge places (BV176) |
| Average | The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2) |

175

Table 9 District council performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04

The table below shows how district councils in Cambridgeshire performed on best value performance indicators relevant to Supporting People, compared with all district councils.

| Cambridge | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Within the best 25 per cent | |
| 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). Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a). |
| Within the worst 25 per cent | Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63). Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b). Council homes which did not meet the decent homes standard (BV184a). Domestic violence refuge places (BV176). |
| East Cambridgeshire | |
| Within the best 25 per cent | Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a). Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a). |

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

| Huntingdonshire | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Average | <p>The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2).</p> <p>Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a).</p> <p>Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b).</p> <p>Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a).</p> |
| Within the worst 25 per cent | Domestic violence refuge places (BV176). |

Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

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

- the Council's self-assessment;
- Supporting People five-year strategy;
- the Council's corporate strategies with impact upon Supporting People, including the strategic plan;
- plans and strategies from partner agencies that may impact on Supporting People;
- service documents including policies and procedures, information leaflets for users and providers, newsletters;
- service review timetable;
- Better Care, Higher Standards document;
- departmental and service improvement plans
- performance reports;
- terms of reference for key governing groups; and
- minutes of the commissioning body, core strategy group and other key meetings.

Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

177 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 programme 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-based survey sent to all providers of housing-related support services;
- focus groups with service providers and with carers, advocates and voluntary organisations;
- visits to 13 contracted supported housing services, to talk to service users and frontline staff;
- telephone calls to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
- interviews with key staff and stakeholders within the City Council, the primary care trusts and the probation service;
- interviews with the Leader of the Council and with the relevant portfolio holder;
- review of the website;
- mystery shopping visits to council offices;
- desktop checks of procedure guides and service review files; and
- observation of a meeting of the commissioning body.

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)

The involvement of district councils in the Supporting People programme

- 178 Cambridgeshire has a history of effective working with the district councils in the provision of housing-related support services. The Supporting People programme built on this and the district councils have been continually involved and engaged in the programme. This has continued despite a lack of leadership for the programme from the County Council. Now that the leadership has improved, the district councils are able to demonstrate the value they have brought to the programme through the number and range of new services that have been developed to support vulnerable people.

The involvement of elected members in the Supporting People programme

- 179 Cambridgeshire has a history of effective working with the district councils in the provision of housing-related support services. This involvement of both county and district councillors has been evident in this. The Supporting People programme has built on these relationships and established a Joint Members Groups as part of the governance arrangements. This has been developed further by the inclusion of a board member from the probation area and will also include a board member representing the PCTs. This involvement has enabled the spread of the programme in a wide range of other meetings and forums and helped in developing knowledge and understanding of its aims and objectives.

The service review programme

- 180 The Council's approach to service reviews has been consistent from the start of the programme and has been structures around client groups to ensure a strategic approach. Partners and stakeholders have been involved and service users have played a key role. Services have been grouped and economies of scale have been achieved through representative sampling for validation visit. The larger client-based reviews have been effectively co-ordinated by the establishment of a steering group that has directed and overseen the working of the process. The review of Supporting People services for older people was effectively combined with the county-wide review of sheltered housing that included all partners. This is a good example of partnership working and a holistic approach to services.

Support plans

- 181** Learning disability service providers are using effective methods to ensure that clients are actively involved in developing and using support plans. Examples of this approach include the use of photographs to illustrate the likes and dislikes of the service user as well as the identification of things that are important to them.