

Supporting People Re-Inspection

Cheshire County Council

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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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 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

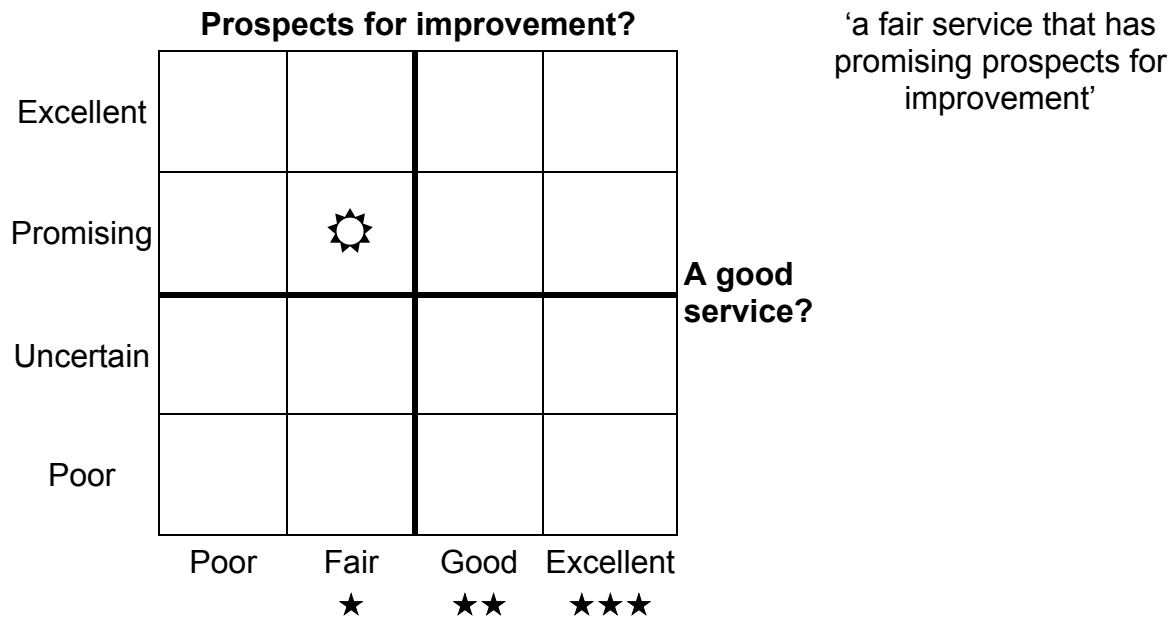
Summary

- 1 Cheshire County Council is located in the north west of England. The population is 680,000 of which 1.6 per cent are from minority ethnic groups.
- 2 The Council is led by a leader and cabinet model of governance. Of the 51 elected members the Conservative party holds 26 seats, Labour 16, the Liberal Democrats 8 and Independents 1.
- 3 The Council has a revenue budget of £643 million for 2005/06. It employs 10,984 full-time equivalent staff across all services, excluding those funded through individual school budgets.
- 4 Cheshire County Council acts as the administering authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with the six district councils of Chester, Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Macclesfield and Vale Royal, the four primary care trusts (PCTs) of East Cheshire, Central Cheshire, Cheshire West and Ellesmere Port and Neston and the Cheshire Probation Area Service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 5 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2005/06 is £21,116,586, a reduction of £1,259,393 on the previous year. In addition, the Council receives an administration grant of £579,729 to fulfil its role as the ALA.
- 6 Cheshire County Council was one of a number of high cost ALAs identified by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). As a result, in 2004, it was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme. Although costs have been reduced, the current highest cost service is £892.38 per person per week and the lowest is £0.78. These have been appropriately addressed through service reviews.
- 7 The inspection in 2004 found that the Council was providing a 'poor' service and had 'uncertain' prospects for improvement. This led to a mandatory re-inspection of the Supporting People programme.

Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed Cheshire County Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has 'promising' 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.

- 9 During our re-inspection we identified the following strengths in the way the Supporting People programme has been administered. These represent real improvements and demonstrate the progress that has been made since the original inspection of 2004.
- Delays in the service review programme have been addressed and it is now on track for completion by 31 March 2006. Service user's views are given a high priority during the review process and most services receive a visit rather than a desk top review.
 - The quality of service provided in the schemes which the inspectors visited is high and following reviews, some services that were of poor quality have been de-commissioned, improved or replaced.
 - Governance of the programme has improved as has increased the involvement of partners at senior levels.
 - The capacity of the Supporting People team has been increased and is now at full strength. It is dedicated, trained and contains a good range of relevant skills and expertise.
 - There is sound financial management of the programme.
- 10 However, there are a number of areas where past performance has been weak and still needs to be improved.
- The involvement of providers and service users in the development of services is weak.
 - Not all partners and key stakeholders are effectively engaged in the programme. This means that the benefits of the programme are not reaching all vulnerable people.
 - The five-year strategy is not based on a full understanding of need. As the needs of some groups of diverse and vulnerable people are not fully understood and therefore not addressed by the strategy.
 - Some areas of governance remain weak; the links between the commissioning body and the core strategy group are not effective and some partners are not clear as to how the Supporting People governance structure works and who does what.
 - Value for money has not been fully demonstrated across all services because the Council is not in possession of sufficient information about needs and the outcomes it wants to achieve.

11 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement.

- The Council can demonstrate that it has overcome many of the weaknesses identified in the original inspection and has implemented most of the recommendations.
- The corporate commitment to the programme is evident and at a strategic level there is a shared understanding of how Supporting People can contribute to the objectives of statutory and voluntary services to provide a comprehensive, integrated network of support for vulnerable people.
- The Council is aware of the areas it needs to address such as service user consultation, contract monitoring, improvement planning, performance management and the capacity of the Supporting People team as it they embark on the next stage of implementation. Work has begun on these areas but they are not yet fully completed or implemented.
- The Council, its partners and the Supporting People team have commitment, skill and enthusiasm. The challenge will be to ensure that everyone is involved in agreeing how to take the programme forward.

12 There are however, areas that need to be addressed.

- Following service reviews only eight providers have received contracts; this makes it difficult for providers to plan the delivery of services with confidence and maintain a stable market.
- Housing and housing-related support strategies for older people and offenders do not yet exist on a county-wide basis. Strategies for some other groups, such as those with learning disabilities are out of date and do not reflect current or future need. The Supporting People strategy has therefore not been able to demonstrate how it will deliver improved outcomes for these vulnerable groups.
- Arrangements for the performance management of the programme are not robust and need to be developed with partners.

Recommendations

- 13 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate 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 The commissioning body should strengthen governance of the programme by:

- *reviewing the links between the groups that comprise the governance arrangements, ensuring that partners, providers and stakeholders all understand the arrangements and roles;*
- *clearly specifying the work that it expects the core strategy group to undertake; and*
- *ensuring providers and service users are represented and effectively engaged.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- that the combined efforts, the ‘golden thread,’ that links governance and commissioning will deliver an effective programme.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by September 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 Develop an accurate understanding of need across Cheshire for housing-related support services. Then use this to address priorities. To do this the commissioning body and the core strategy group should:

- *develop and publicise a co-ordinated and systematic approach to identifying need, using information already held by partners; and that which is being captured within agencies and the outcomes of the Supporting People strategic reviews;*
- *ensuring that the needs of traditionally socially excluded groups, including those represented by probation are addressed;*
- *ensure that support which facilitates independence, such as floating support and move-on accommodation, are actively considered when planning new services; and*
- *use this information to update the five-year strategy.*

14 The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the needs of all vulnerable people will be understood and priorities for future investment will be determined, based on robust information; and
- a wide range of improved outcomes for people who are in most need.

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

Recommendation

R3 Agree a performance management framework for delivering and monitoring progress, identifying any slippage and evidencing performance against key indicators. To do this the Council and the commissioning body should:

- *agree with all stakeholders a detailed, published action plan for the delivery of the five-year strategy; and*
- *develop critical outcome measures that can demonstrate that the programme is making a difference to service users and to the achievement of the Council's priorities and to those shared with the district councils, health and probation.*

15 The expected benefits of this recommendation are that:

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

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

Recommendation

R4 Complete all the outstanding recommendations from the previous inspection.

16 The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the full engagement of PCTs;
- effective use of the district council Supporting People liaison officers;
- an action plan that will deliver corporate and community objectives;
- a website that informs service users, carers, providers and partners;
- a consultation strategy that involves users, carers and advocates in the future direction of the Supporting People programme; and
- a comprehensive understanding of the housing support needs of minority groups.

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

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

Dates of inspection: on-site dates: 16 to 24 January 2005

Regional contact details

Audit Commission
 Kernel House
 Killingbeck Drive
 Killingbeck
 Leeds, LS14 6UF
 Telephone: 0113 251 7130
 Fax: 0113 251 7131
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Report

Context

The locality

- 18 Cheshire Council is a county council in the north west of England, lying south of the Greater Manchester conurbation and on the north eastern borders of Wales. The population is 680,000 of whom 1.6 per cent are from minority ethnic groups which is considerably lower than the England average of 10.44 per cent.
- 19 Residents aged 65 years and older are growing in number and comprise 19.9 per cent of the population as compared to an England average of 18.5 per cent.
- 20 In terms of deprivation, Cheshire ranks 179 out of 354 areas of England using the average of the super output areas (SOA) score. However, 11 super output areas are in the top 10 per cent most multiply deprived. In 2004, one district council, Ellesmere Port and Neston was the 141st most deprived council.
- 21 House prices have increased significantly in Cheshire in recent years and although unemployment is low at 1.4 per cent, compared to a national average of 2.4 per cent, this raises issues of affordability for low paid local residents. The main areas of employment are in agriculture, chemicals, distribution, public sector work, banking, finance and insurance.

The Council

- 22 The Council's revenue budget for 2005/06 is £643 million. Of this, £160 million, including an additional £1.3 million for people over the age of 85 years and £1.3 million for young people with special needs, is allocated to social services. The Council employs 10,984 full-time equivalent staff across all services, excluding those funded through individual school budgets.
- 23 The Council's vision for Cheshire is 'to work in partnership with others to improve the quality of life for the people and communities of Cheshire'. To achieve this the Council has identified five key aims which include helping people to:
 - learn and develop throughout their lives;
 - have jobs and a good standard of living;
 - be safe, stay healthy and get help when in need;
 - care for their communities and the environment; and
 - a well-managed authority.

The service

- 24** Cheshire County Council acts as the administering authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with the six district councils of Chester, Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Macclesfield and Vale Royal, the four PCTs of East Cheshire, Central Cheshire, Cheshire West and Ellesmere Port and Neston and the Cheshire Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 25** The service is located in the newly formed community services department under the county manager for community wellbeing and consists of 16.5 full-time equivalent staff, of which 13.5 are based within the Council and three across the six district councils. The Supporting People team includes a manager, review officers, a business information manager, a finance officer and administrative support officers. The team's functions include management, service review, finance, administration, information technology and communications. Contract management, information technology and accountancy support are also provided to the team.
- 26** Cheshire received a slightly lower Supporting People grant per head of population in 2005/06 than the regional and national average. Overall, unit costs for the services that are commissioned are below average per head of population but higher per unit when community alarms and sheltered housing are excluded. The highest cost service is £892.38 per person per week for a learning disability service and the lowest is £0.78 for a sheltered housing service, however, these have been appropriately addressed through service reviews.
- 27** The pattern of expenditure is characterised by:
- high levels of expenditure on services for older people, almost 9,500 units compared to 2,000 units for all other groups;
 - an over reliance on accommodation-based support rather than floating support for older people;
 - no specific provision for travellers or people with HIV/Aids; and
 - a mixed economy of provision between private providers, registered social landlords, the councils and charitable organisations.

How good is the service?

28 Our assessment is based on the following key issues:

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

Governance

29 Governance of the Supporting People programme has improved and now complies with grant conditions. Corporate commitment and ownership, leadership and involvement by partners at a strategic level have all been strengthened. Serious weaknesses in ownership and governance of the programme previously identified in the original inspection have been rectified.

30 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.
- Supporting People team – delivers the local programme.

31 The inspection in 2004 found that there was lack of clarity over the respective responsibilities and roles of the ALA, the accountable officer, the commissioning body and the core strategy group. Corporate ownership was limited, as was the profile of Supporting People programme within social services, the district councils were not fully engaged and local eligibility criteria had not been agreed. There was also a conflict of interest with the accountable officer being both an internal provider and chair of the commissioning body.

- 32 A number of actions have been implemented by the Council and its partners in the probation and health services over the last year to address these issues. In particular, revised terms of reference, including a memorandum of understanding, for the commissioning body were agreed by all partners in March 2005. It specifies:
- the decision-making structure for Supporting People, including the links to elected members and board members;
 - membership, responsibilities and voting arrangements for the commissioning body;
 - arrangements for dispute resolution and conflicts of interest;
 - that the meeting shall be chaired by the Director of Adult and Community Services, Cheshire County Council – now the Director of Community Services; and
 - the arrangements for the member steering group.
- 33 The terms of reference ensure that governance arrangements comply with ODPM guidance but they lack detail to ensure clarity about the component parts of the governance structure.
- 34 The terms of reference of the commissioning body do not include the membership and responsibilities of the core strategy group, the respective responsibilities of the ALA, the Council's Executive, the Accountable Officer or the Lead Officer.
- 35 The terms of reference for the core strategy group are contained in a separate document approved by the commissioning body in March 2005 and include details of roles and responsibilities but do not refer to the accountable officer.
- 36 Terms of reference for both bodies include responsibilities for the annual plan, performance management and the involvement of service users in developing and delivering services, but progress on these areas has been poor and is covered in more detail later in this report.

Supporting People steering group

- 37 The Council has established a sound political platform for the county-wide Supporting People structure. The Council and its partners established a member steering group in January 2005 to oversee and provide political input to the Supporting People programme. Among other things it has so far assessed the five-year strategy and the annual plan. Membership of the steering group is appropriate and includes the executive member for adult social services, the chair of the older people's board, the chair and spokesman of the social services' strategic panel, an elected member for each district council, a representative of the PCTs, and two representatives of the probation service. The members of the group have been selected on the basis of their experience, to ensure they have some understanding of Supporting People. The steering group is cross-party and cross-authority with direct reporting to the executive member responsible for Supporting People.

- 38 The role of this group is to ensure political involvement in overseeing the work of the commissioning body and promoting the work of Supporting People. However, members involved in the steering group have not had any formal training on Supporting People which would have ensured they all shared a common understanding of the issues.
- 39 In addition, the two portfolio holders are regularly briefed by officers on progress and one chairs the steering group. This ensures there is political engagement with the programme by the Council, the district councils, partners and statutory agencies.

Commissioning body

- 40 The commissioning body has been strengthened considerably since the previous inspection and is working well. It now comprises director level voting members representing the Council, each district housing authority, the chief executive of each PCT and the assistant chief probation officer; plus a number of officers from the Supporting People team, who attend in an advisory capacity without voting rights. The commissioning body meets monthly and through its service review subgroups is an effective decision-making body in terms of determining action as a result of service reviews. However, it is not fully effective because it did not develop an annual plan to deliver the five-year strategy and is only now developing outcome measures that will demonstrate that the programme is making a difference and contributing to both the Council's priorities and to those shared with its partners.
- 41 Membership of the commissioning body has improved over the last year. Minutes show that attendance by existing members has been consistently good throughout the year, enabling them to build trust and effective working relationships. The Probation service is changing its representation, the new representative has been actively engaged with developments related to Supporting People and the handover is being undertaken effectively.
- 42 Although each PCT is represented on the commissioning body their engagement has been poor. Shortly before the inspection the PCTs increased their levels of attendance and engagement but some of the representatives we met indicated a lack of knowledge about the governance arrangements and the existence of the core strategy group. Induction training has been offered and will be provided in the near future. Although positive developments these efforts have not yet resulted in the development of shared strategies and the identification of local performance indicators are still at an early stage of development.

- 43 A multi-agency public protection arrangement (MAPPAs) is in place but the arrangements require further improvement to ensure the full inclusion of providers who provide services for offenders. Supporting People provider organisations are not included in the cross agency protocol which means they are not recognised as agencies able to raise cases at MAPPAs and could be omitted from training and development opportunities. There is also a need for organisations involved in delivering Supporting People services to be able to train, develop and support their staff in this area of work as part of their business development plans. A formal partnership with MAPPAs would offer an essential link as part of this process but is not being utilised to the full.
- 44 The commissioning body has received regular and informative updates on the progress made against the recommendations of the previous inspection. They have also received regular financial progress reports. The delegation of decision-making powers to commissioning body subgroups, to consider the outcomes of service reviews has ensured that commissioning body meetings can address a wide range of business, rather than having to devote disproportionate amounts of time to considering service review reports.
- 45 Although the commissioning body is working hard and can demonstrate closer management of Supporting People, the link with the core strategy group is unclear. Commissioning body agendas are extensive and some aspects of work should be addressed first by the core strategy group and then passed to the commissioning body for approval. For example, an improvement plan and performance measures were presented to the commissioning body before being passed to the core strategy group for consideration, rather than the core strategy group jointly developing these initiatives and submitting them to the commissioning body for approval. As a result there is insufficient ownership of the future development of the programme across the governance structure and this is discussed in the second part of this report.

Core strategy group

- 46 The core strategy group has improved since the previous inspection but it is not functioning effectively. The main responsibilities of the core strategy group are to facilitate joint working across Cheshire to deliver more effective outcomes for service users; to ensure that the needs of service users and carers are at the heart of the programme, and are included in the strategy development process; to join up relevant strategies across Cheshire, and contribute to the development of key strategies, both locally and nationally; to ensure that the services developed are based on identified need; to ensure providers are fully engaged in the development of strategies and the programme and produce and monitor the delivery of the annual action plan from the five-year strategy.

- 47 The core strategy group supports the commissioning body and is productive in some areas. For example, information is reported on a number of issues such as reviews; the submission of performance indicators from providers; the issuing of contracts; payments to providers and the work of the district council Supporting People liaison officers. The core strategy group has created new arrangements to assist it in delivering its responsibilities such as the recently established client specific subgroups to gather information on need and information on all these aspects has been regularly reported to the commissioning body which has ensured it has been kept informed of key issues.
- 48 Despite the improvements in the core strategy group there are some areas of weakness.
- The commissioning body has not agreed a detailed work programme for the core strategy group and the work flow between the two groups is not always clear or appropriate.
 - There is no induction for core strategy group members in taking up their role with the programme. This means that they will take longer to become fully effective in their role and in addition, some PCT representatives on the commissioning body are unaware of the core strategy group.
 - The extent and role of provider involvement in the core strategy group is unclear. Some providers are involved but how these were appointed, which service or areas they are expected to represent, and how they raise the views of other providers and feedback to the core strategy group is unclear and not fully understood by other providers.
 - The involvement of service users has been through service reviews rather than in strategic developments.

Delivery arrangements

- 49 Resources have been substantially strengthened since the previous inspection. The administration grant will be fully committed this year, as opposed to being previously underspent. Additional resources from the corporate centre in terms of contracting, service reviews, finance and IT have all increased capacity to ensure the Supporting People programme meets grant conditions.

Supporting People team

- 50 The inspection in 2004 highlighted significant failings in resourcing the programme and a lack of corporate commitment to ensuring it could deliver positive outcomes for people who use the services. These resourcing problems have been overcome. The capacity of the team is sufficient, skills are appropriate and there is good support from other areas of the Council.

- 51** Following the previous inspection, the Council and its partners recognised that increased resources and support were needed to ensure that an inadequate Supporting People team was brought up to strength and managed effectively to deliver the essential tasks for which it was created. To support this development the Council has supplemented the administration grant by £210,000. This has been used to provide external consultants to negotiate new contracts, support the re-inspection and undertake a review of services for older people. In addition, social services have seconded a member of staff to the review team to add capacity and specialist knowledge and £50,000 of ODPM funding has been accessed to provide additional support for service reviews and develop home improvement agencies.
- 52** The range of skills and capacity in the Supporting People team has been increased by support from other departments in the Council. For example, the team is now able to call on legal advice and financial support and the social services contracts unit undertake contract negotiations and contract monitoring on behalf of Supporting People.
- 53** The result of the increased investment is that the Council and its partners can demonstrate substantial progress against the recommendations of the previous inspection. In particular:
- local eligibility criteria have been agreed and used in all service reviews;
 - risks to the programme have been identified and logged;
 - the review programme should be completed on time by 31 March 2006;
 - actions following service reviews have resulted in the de-commissioning of six services and the re-negotiation of a number of contracts with providers;
 - the five-year strategy has been written; submitted to the ODPM on time and launched;
 - constructive relationships have been maintained with providers
 - interim contracts were all signed by September 2004; and
 - Supporting People liaison officers are in place at each district council.
- 54** Cheshire is making good progress against the ODPM milestones which measure key aspects of development of the programme. The ODPM November milestone report shows Cheshire's performance to be above average.
- 55** There are, however, some areas where progress has fallen short of expectations and further work will be needed in order to complete the recovery and deliver improved outcomes for people who use services. In particular, there are weaknesses in the new strategy that are highlighted below.

District Council Supporting People liaison officers

- 56 As part of the Supporting People delivery arrangement a half-time Supporting People liaison officer post has been established in each district council. Staffing changes have meant that only one officer who was in post at the time of the previous inspection is still in post and although the remaining vacancies have now been filled the gaps created difficulties in maintaining a consistent service.
- 57 The Supporting People liaison officers sit on the core strategy group and their role is to raise the profile of Supporting People in the partnerships they attend in their districts, lead on one of the five-year strategies key objectives relating to move on accommodation and in driving up the performance of providers in completing their PI returns as performance in this area has been poor.
- 58 Although overall, the Supporting People liaison officers work well together, having strong links in terms of their work across the county and sharing experiences and ideas; their effectiveness in delivering against their objectives is only just developing. Their role is not widely known or understood by providers or PCTs and their links to the Supporting People team based within the county Council are not effective, resulting in them being under utilised. It is, therefore, unclear whether the ALA is obtaining value for money for the £90,000 it commits to resourcing the posts.
- 59 There is a shared recognition that the role of the Supporting People liaison officers needs to be improved. Meetings between the Supporting People manager and the Supporting People liaison officers have recently started to take place and an examination of their role is part of a review of Supporting People arrangements that had just begun at the time of our inspection.

Five-year strategy

- 60 The five-year strategy was produced on time but it is weak. Although it includes priorities and an annual plan, needs mapping and analysis is weak for some groups of vulnerable people including those with physical disabilities, those people with learning disabilities who live outside Cheshire, offenders and people from ethnic minority groups. This constrains forward planning and the development of outcome measures.
- 61 A conscious decision was made not to follow the ODPM's general structure for the five-year strategy. The annual plan was not published with the strategy, although a spreadsheet which has been described as the annual plan for 2005/06 was produced, for use within the partnership. It was not populated with critical information; for example, a summary of intended spend and unit provision by client group and service type or details of how key priorities of the strategy will actually be delivered and progress and outcomes will be measured.
- 62 The five-year strategy was approved by the commissioning body and partner organisations in March 2005 and submitted to ODPM by the deadline of 31 March. It includes three priorities that reflect areas that need to be addressed in the county, these are services for older people, move-on accommodation and housing-related support for people with complex and chaotic lifestyles.

- 63 A key weakness in the five-year strategy is the lack of robust needs information and analysis of all service users with housing-related support needs including older people, travellers, young offenders, young people at risk, and people with physical and sensory impairment. Needs data is comprised of primary data only and lacks the inclusion of secondary and background data.
- 64 This is not surprising because at the time of the first inspection almost no work had taken place on the preparation of the strategy and there was insufficient understanding of need in the county.
- 65 To address the shortfall in the understanding of need several pieces of work have been commissioned from consultants by Supporting People. These include a two-year project to look at the needs of people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, and projects to look specifically at the needs of older people and of travellers.

Finance and contracting

- 66 The quality of financial information presented to the commissioning body is robust. Reports include financial projections and are updated to reflect contracting decisions that are made by the commissioning body and the impact these will have in future years. Financial management is sound and decisions taken by the commissioning body to terminate or re-negotiate contracts are reducing expenditure.
- 67 At the time of the previous inspection it was clear that the level of expenditure on Supporting People services was not using the entire annual grant awarded to the Council from ODPM. At the end of 2004/05, an underspend of £940,548 was recorded.
- 68 At the end of 2005/06 an over spend of £40,840 is projected, which will be carried forward. The position for 2006/07 is that an over spend of £121,191 is projected, this figure taking account of the savings achieved through service reviews.
- 69 In addition, the commissioning decisions that have been taken and implemented part way through this year will continue to have an impact in subsequent years. Overall there is a financial gain, even allowing for the inflation uplift of 2 per cent agreed for providers during 2005/06.
- 70 The financial situation in respect of the administration grant is that at the end of 2004/05 the grant was under spent by £174,840 which accounts for the previously under-resourced team. By the end of 2005/06 the underspend was reduced to £25,711 and it is anticipated that this will be reduced to match the level of the grant by the end of 2007.

- 71 Work on ineligible funding has been undertaken and the medium-term financial strategy and a report to the executive set out how care costs will be transferred back to social services and health in phases over three years. A contingency fund of £0.5 million has been established for 2005/06 to ensure that where reviews identify Supporting People funding of a service is inappropriate, the costs can be transferred immediately. There has not yet been a need to access the funding this year, but it is likely to be required in 2006/07.

Performance management

- 72 There has been effective performance management of the recovery and improvement plan that was agreed following the first inspection. Information on key aspects of the administration of the programme are regularly reported but there are as yet no outcome performance measures to indicate how the programme is making a difference to service users and information from providers has been poor.
- 73 In addition to performance managing the financial aspects of the programme the commissioning body, the Council also monitor progress against the recovery and improvement plan that was agreed following the first inspection. There are six-monthly reports to the Performance and Overview Committee and some aspects of performance are regularly reported to the commissioning body and the steering group. These include progress on service reviews, progress on the service improvement plan, and ODPM milestone comparisons.
- 74 However, key performance indicators are not currently reported and there are as yet no local performance indicators to show how the programme is performing against its stated objectives. The return of performance information from providers, which is submitted as part of the quarterly ODPM Extract, has been poor so the key performance indicators have not had a sound evidence base. Important information is therefore missing on the progress of the programme and what it is delivering. Some providers have struggled to both deliver services and complete the returns and some said they were frustrated by the lack of feedback from the Supporting People team when they did provide information. They felt that receiving feedback would have improved their understanding of the process and led to improvements more quickly.
- 75 Efforts by the Supporting People liaison officers, to improve the quality and amount of the PI returns, by providing training and individual support had not led to improvements until recently. During our inspection the level of returns in the previous month increased from 38 per cent to over 80 per cent. It is important that this improvement is sustained to secure accurate information.

Providers

- 76 The Supporting People team has established professional and constructive working relationships with the majority of service providers. Training and information is made available to providers and specific help has been directed at small providers who lack the administrative infrastructure and resources available to larger providers. As a result, the good relations essential to effective delivery of services through third parties has been largely established.

- 77 Supporting People has adapted and adopted the Council's Participation Promise, made to users of adult and community services, as a basis for a Promise to Providers. This includes regularly holding provider forums; providing training events; publishing a provider newsletter; reminding providers of key dates and processes; signposting training opportunities; inviting providers to share good practice and new initiatives and maintaining a free phone service 24 hours a day so that employees can contact the team in confidence with concerns or complaints.
- 78 Responses from the providers we met, and who responded to our survey, were mixed. Some providers had a lot of confidence in the Supporting People team; and described good relationships, effective communication and efficient administration and an overall improvement, following the previous inspection.
- 79 Other providers were less positive. They acknowledged that training is made available but thought it was inconsistently provided, that places are limited, and not all providers were invited. Several providers were unaware of the support available from the Supporting People liaison officers and of those that were aware some said they had not received any assistance.
- 80 The involvement of providers through forums is inconsistent and not representative of the whole spectrum of services. Although forums have been set up in three districts and one is entirely provider led, only one is well established and some providers were not aware of a forum in their area. Of those that attended a forum some said the information was not provided in an easily understood way. Overall, there was a view that Supporting People had not involved providers in the strategic development of the programme through the five-year strategy or used their specialist knowledge of the housing support needs of the specific groups with whom they work.

Service reviews

- 81 The service review process is a strength; they are being undertaken thoroughly and have led to improvements. The service review programme should be completed by March 2006. This is a significant achievement and demonstrates the commitment and resources that have been deployed to address the failings that were apparent during the previous inspection.
- 82 In November 2004, the Supporting People team had not undertaken any reviews. Review staff were only just in place, the original timetable had stalled and needed to be revised and there was a widespread lack of understanding about service reviews in general, by providers and partners. As a result, services that were of poor quality, high cost or were not strategically relevant had not been assessed.

- 83 This has changed. The Supporting People team has been maintained at full strength, with capacity supplemented by a grant from ODPM and secondments from social services, providers and a partner agency and all review officers have been trained and have a good range of skills and experience. Most service reviews to date have been visited rather than undertaken by desk top reviews. Although reviews are rigorous, the providers visited during the course of the re-inspection commented on the sensitivity and knowledge of the review officers and the overall positive experience.
- 84 Reviews of all high cost services have been completed along with those that had raised concerns over their quality or strategic relevance. By January 2006, out of a total of 322 reviews to be undertaken, 154 had been completed, 49 were in progress and 119 were being covered by the strategic review of services for older people. As a result of the reviews, six services have been de-commissioned and others have had cost reductions negotiated or the number of units increased for the same overall cost. Savings of approximately £2,489,000 have been made in 2005/06 which equates to an increase of 53 units; this level of saving is anticipated to increase to an overall figure of 10 per cent of the budget.
- 85 The full version of all service review reports, rather than summary reports, are considered by sub-committees of the commissioning body. The reports outline performance against the quality assessment framework (QAF), the strategic relevance of the service; highlight cost comparisons and value for money. Reports are detailed and not circulated before the meetings however, the information is provided in a consistent framework and people who sat on the sub committees said they were able to access and understand the information sufficiently well to be able to make informed decisions. PCT representatives we spoke to thought the review methodology was effective and comprehensively considered value for money and quality. They also considered there was consistency between the reports produced by different officers.
- 86 Before the reviews go to the commissioning body sub-committees they are subjected to internal moderation to ensure they are of a consistent standard. In the first instance they are moderated by the reviewer's peers, and this is then supplemented by a further level of moderation by the manager. This process ensures that reviews are robust and consistent.
- 87 Action plans following the reviews are regularly followed up by review officers and an assessment of risk is completed at the conclusion of the review. The Council has decided that after April 2006, when all reviews will be completed, it will, in addition to standard contract monitoring, monitor services by undertaking follow-up action that is proportionate to the risk posed by the service and will undertake a number of cross-cutting strategic reviews of services. This will ensure an effective use of resources in future.

- 88 Following service reviews the Council has issued only two steady state contracts, although it had set itself a target of agreeing these three months after the review. This delay is due to a lack of capacity in the contracting unit and has had a negative impact on the programme because although interim contract terms allow up to 12 months for the conclusion of re-negotiations, thereby ensuring continued contract monitoring, service continuity, service quality and provider viability, the cost reductions cannot be recovered for the budget. As a result, there is a short-term residual cost impact until the steady state contracts have been issued and this position will not be reached until later in 2006/07. Although some cost reductions and efficiency savings have been agreed with providers outside the service review process as part of a phased cost reduction over time, the issuing of steady state contracts is important for provider confidence and their long-term planning and the stability of the market. In recognition of this, shortly before the inspection, a firm of consultants had been appointed to accelerate the negotiation of contracts and ensure that all steady state contracts are issued by April 2007.
- 89 There are some areas of service reviews that could be improved.
- Value for money is weak; there has been a focus on cost and a limited use of benchmarking. The understanding of need and therefore what outcomes need to be achieved, is poor.
 - Reviews are not benefiting from the fullest range of information that is readily available. Before the reviews a stakeholder's questionnaire is sent to partners to give them an opportunity to highlight issues but the response rate is poor.
 - Partners with specialist knowledge of services are not directly involved in reviews; Supporting People liaison officers have no involvement and reviews are not routinely undertaken with other ALAs who use the same provider.
 - The outcome of service reviews is not always fed back to service users. Only a summary of user's views is routinely fed back and providers are expected to feed back the full outcome, but findings from a recent SITRA survey show that only 50 per cent of providers said they did this. Without feedback, service users cannot see how their contribution has been taken into account and what has changed as a result.
 - It is not clear how learning, for example the identification of hidden demand, feeds into the development of the strategy as there is no systematic way of capturing issues from individual service reviews to feed into strategic developments. This is a missed opportunity to keep information on housing-related support needs up-to-date and learn from good practice.

90 In addition to the individual service reviews covered above, a strategic review of services for older people is being undertaken by consultants. The remit of the review is to inform the future direction of services for older people, based on existing services. The review began in June 2005 and will be reported to the commissioning body in March 2006. It is looking at the whole range of existing services for older people including home improvement agencies (HIAs) and considering the development of alternatives to accommodation based support. To ensure consistency the consultants are using Cheshire County Council's review methodology with the additional elements of a dependency profile of service users. Emerging issues are the wide variety of costs for similar services in the county and variations in the way support costs are allocated, these issues will be addressed by the Council to secure value for money.

Value for money

How do costs compare?

- 91 Comparisons of unit costs with England and the north west are set out in the data appendix. These are largely based on the 'platinum cut' data submitted to the ODPM in July 2003, which is the most up-to-date comparison available. These figures will not reflect the full range of work undertaken by the Council to tackle high costs, but we have taken this into account in reaching our judgements.
- 92 Overall in 2003/04 the Council had higher unit costs in comparison with other Councils when community alarms and sheltered housing were excluded. At the time of the platinum cut twelve services had unit costs that exceeded £673 per week.
- 93 Cost profiles for individual client groups at the 'platinum cut' also reveal some high cost areas.
- The average unit costs of supported accommodation for offenders, people with physical and sensory impairment and older people with support needs were within the highest 25 per cent for all Council's in England.
 - The average unit costs of floating support services for women fleeing domestic violence, for people with mental health problems and offenders were also within the top 25 per cent.

Table 1 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)³

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Cheshire	£0.64	£22.87	£22.93	£104.29
North West	£0.86	£33.04	£39.06	£91.57
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 when it becomes available and this will then be used.

- 94 Although there are difficulties in making up-to-date comparisons, an analysis of the Council's current average weekly support costs across different client groups shows that the average cost of services, excluding sheltered accommodation, has now fall below the median weekly support costs for the North West and England identified at the platinum cut.

How is value for money managed?

- 95 Value for money is being addressed in some areas. Since the previous inspection eligibility criteria have been agreed, value for money guidance has been agreed and high and ineligible costs are being challenged through the service review process and delivering savings. There are some comparisons with other service costs and as a result a reduction in the unit costs of some services has been achieved. However, value for money is not simply a matter of cost and until the Council has a fuller understanding of need and the outcomes it wants to achieve value for money will remain a weak area.
- 96 The use of eligibility criteria has been effective in increasing an understanding of value amongst providers and they have described the criteria as a valuable tool. Banding has been introduced and services are put into an appropriate band regardless of the cost rather than services being banded according to type. This ensures that people with challenging and complex needs are not denied the services they require.

³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003.

- 97 Service reviews have explored the reasons for service costs above the regional upper quartile or high in comparison to other local provision. Before service reviews were undertaken, service costs were reduced by effective administration and management. Costs were verified to ensure only services that met the grant conditions were being funded and that providers were using all the funding they received. It is estimated that £400,000 was saved through this process.
- 98 Firm action, using cost comparisons against Cheshire eligibility criteria and the ODPM VFM tables, has been taken in reviews to re-negotiate contracts and bring costs down. Unit costs are reported to the commissioning body through the service review reports considered by the sub-committees but it is not clear whether this includes comparisons with other ALAs. The Council has been careful to retain a range of providers for the future by stabilising small providers and this will ensure competition keeps costs down and a range of provision is available.
- 99 The Council is of the opinion that benchmarking has limited value although it uses the unit cost information from the ODPM to compare costs, contacts other regional providers and has developed cost comparisons for Cheshire providers. The Council has also recently entered into a liaison with another ALA of a similar profile, to undertake some benchmarking by comparing costs and quality. It also encourages providers to contribute to the benchmarking information being gathered by SITRA so that over time a comprehensive range of information will be available nationally.

Service user involvement

- 100 A service user involvement policy is in place for Supporting People but success in involving users has been inconsistent and the Council recognises there is more to do to engage them in the programme. Users are consulted during the reviews of the services they receive, but their involvement in governance arrangements and the development of the strategic direction of the programme has been limited.
- 101 The Council does not have a structured approach that ensures all client groups are engaged with the Supporting People programme. An expectation is placed on providers to devolve Supporting People information to their users but the effectiveness of this is not evaluated.
- 102 Service reviews give a high priority to obtaining the views of people who use the services. A small selection of service review files were examined during the re-inspection and confirmed that service user's views are being recorded, supplemented by information from a postal questionnaire, which had been developed with a group of ten service users, and focus groups, to obtain their views on the quality and nature of the services they receive. The pre-site review visit checks whether the Council's questionnaire to carers and family members has been passed on by the provider.
- 103 A Cheshire-wide inclusive forum was held in February 2005 to consult service users on the five-year strategy and led to a number of changes in the final document.

- 104 However, channels to routinely engage all client groups have not been established; there are for example no standing arrangements to routinely engage with offenders. Without meaningful engagement, the needs of some groups may be overshadowed.

Access to services and information

- 105 The quality of information provided by the Council on Supporting People is effective but needs to be made available in a wider range of formats and different languages, in conjunction with service users. Gaining access to services by some users is however, still problematic due to a shortfall in move-on accommodation and a lack of low level floating support.
- 106 Providers confirmed that newsletters relating to Supporting People are produced quarterly for providers and twice a year for service users and the editions we saw were attractive and interesting.
- 107 The Council's website has limited value for service users and is under developed. Although information is organised into sections for service users, for service providers, and for partner agencies the amount of information is limited. The website does not include links that would, for example lead a service user with mental health problems searching for available services, to the housing-related support section. In addition, information provided in the local directory of services is basic and is aimed at providers rather than service users. No details of what each service offers are included. Some service users may therefore take longer to find their way to the housing-related support that is available locally although the website notes that a wider range of information is available on Cheshire's services through the ODPM website for Supporting People.
- 108 The Council does not routinely include information, in other languages, on how other versions of documents can be obtained. It has not used media developments to inform service users, such as video, text, or IT but has commissioned a DVD on Supporting People which will be used in a variety of ways to raise awareness of the programme. Providing information in different formats can assist people with disabilities to access information more easily and ensures they are not disadvantaged.
- 109 Some people are not benefiting from Supporting People. There are no specific services for travellers or people with HIV and Aids. Probation staff are working with a limited range of providers, mainly those who previously contracted with probation before Supporting People began. This indicates that the full benefits of the programme are not being fully exploited on behalf of the people in need of services and there is a higher potential for failure of those referred or placed.

- 110 Despite effective commissioning improvements in culture and practice have not been consistently secured as yet. Barriers to access are being challenged through service reviews however the improvements to policies and procedures required following reviews have not yet led to consistent improvement in the accessibility of services for offenders and those with chaotic and complex lifestyles. The continuing and potentially indefensible practice of service user exclusions by some providers limits the use of the programme for offenders and people at risk of offending and impacts on the accessibility of services from this user group.
- 111 The lack of move on accommodation and the predominance of accommodation based support for older people are also negative factors in enabling access.

Diversity

- 112 The previous inspection identified that diversity was an extremely weak area for the Council and it has tried to address some long-standing issues. The Council recognises that it still has insufficient information on the needs of minority groups, that overall its position on diversity is weak and progress has been slow. For example, in 2003 the Council set a target to achieve level three of the equality standard by March 2005 but it did not achieve this and remains at level two.
- 113 The Supporting People five-year strategy identified a lack of understanding of the needs of minority groups and work has begun, by both the corporate centre and Supporting People, to address this.
- 114 Action is being taken to improve the Council's corporate approach to diversity. It has completed a corporate equality plan based on four areas, service improvement and delivery, employment, communication and culture and improving access to services. An action plan to deliver and monitor the strategy is to be agreed. In addition, work is being undertaken to gather together all the research work being undertaken, the extent of service user involvement and how effectively this information is being used. The needs of travellers and gypsies have been identified as a particular issue and the Council has drafted a policy for this minority group and appointed a gypsy and traveller liaison officer.
- 115 In Supporting People some good quality research has been commissioned to improve understanding of need. In 2005, following the endorsement of the five-year strategy and in recognition of the deficit of information on minority groups, the Supporting People team, in partnership with the Cheshire Housing Alliance, commissioned a two-year project called Engagement for Empowerment to identify socially excluded communities and their needs, including their need for tenancy support. The project is using a group of consultants, and having undertaken outreach work to identify individuals and community groups it is concluding its year one mapping work and will report the outcome to the commissioning body. The cost of the project is £45,000 per annum, split equally between Supporting People and the Cheshire Housing Alliance. The progress of the project is monitored effectively through a steering group, which meets quarterly and has representatives from both agencies.

- 116** The project is producing positive outcomes for the Supporting People programme. In addition to identifying BME communities, such as an emerging Afro-Caribbean community in Crewe, it is also identifying volunteers to be involved in governance structures, has engaged asylum seekers in consultation and started to engage travelling communities. One of the early recommendations being made by the project is that information should be made widely available in appropriate languages or through translation services. Other outcomes will improve communication and marketing, by promoting services through support networks.
- 117** In addition to the Engagement for Empowerment project, diversity is being addressed through service reviews and validation visits, to assess provider's equal opportunities policies, DDA compliance, access to aids and adaptation and the diversity profile of staff. Providers have also been sent a questionnaire to identify their knowledge and monitoring of access by minority groups.
- 118** Recognising the importance of the Supporting People team being fully aware of diversity issues, so that they can address these with providers, staff have been made aware of diversity issues through internal training and will attend specialist diversity training in March 2006.
- 119** Although a comprehensive understanding of the needs of minority groups is still incomplete, we saw some good services in operation during our inspection. These included a housing support services for refugees with leave to remain, floating support for care leavers and a specialist service for people with a hearing impairment. Our discussions with providers indicated that they recognised the needs of minority groups and would avail themselves of translation services and advice if the need arose.
- 120** However, the needs of some of the most marginalised groups in Cheshire are not being met. Baseline information is scant on the needs of people from minority groups and the five-year strategy is, therefore, unable to point to specific action other than to research being needed. The housing support needs of people with sensory impairment, physical disabilities, travellers, gypsies, and people with HIV/Aids, young people and to some extent offenders are still not accurately known and until they are, plans cannot be developed.

Outcomes for service users

- 121** Outcomes for service users have improved since the original inspection, poor services have been closed or improved and the 17 services visited during the re-inspection were found to be of a high standard. Service users were able to tell inspectors how they were being supported and that they understood their opportunities to participate in service improvements. Good individualised support plans provided a structured approach to achieving greater independence.

- 122** The quality of support and accommodation in the services we visited are of a high standard. The services we visited demonstrated a range of opportunities for residents to be involved in decisions about how services are delivered. Users had been able to comment on policies and practices and this had led to changes. All service users had support plans and there were some imaginative ways of recording these for people with learning disabilities. Service users felt they were being supported in developing the skills that would enable them to live more independently and we heard of examples of people moving into employment and their own homes.
- 123** Agencies were also positive about the contribution Supporting People has made. One of the district councils was positive about how it had worked with the Supporting People team to secure pipeline funding for housing support for some service users which until then had been unavailable in the district. This included floating tenancy support for its own tenants, crisis assessment accommodation for vulnerable young people, linked to training, mother and baby accommodation, and a women's refuge. There was also evidence of multi-agency working in several areas, including transition and employment for young disabled people, and the housing needs of care leavers and other young people.
- 124** There is a home improvement agency in each district which ensures support is available for people in private accommodation to assist them in remaining in their own homes. These agencies are provided by four different providers and there is scope for reviewing whether the multiple central costs of this arrangement provide value. However, on the ground the services operate through an access agreement to ensure that the level of service is consistent.
- 125** However, the needs of some long-standing groups are still not being addressed. Probation staff we spoke to said they found it difficult to raise the issues of offenders in events put on by the Supporting People team. Exclusion policies in Supporting People services and in move-on accommodation are also in operation and discriminate against offenders or those at risk of offending. This practice has serious implications for the programme's ability to respond to hard to reach groups, often present within the offenders and people at risk of offending service user group, and for the community safety, public protection and crime reduction dimensions of the Supporting People programme. The Council has not had a Supported Lodging scheme for young care leavers, although this is being developed and the youth offending team is accessing accommodation for young people via probation accommodation services rather than being placed and supported by a specialist team for young people.
- 126** Unless these issues and those of move-on accommodation and floating support are addressed and more work undertaken to quantify outcomes, the needs of traditionally excluded groups of people will not be met and the positive outcomes that have been achieved will not be sustained. Services need to be able to demonstrate that they really are preventing hospital admission, re-offending or institutional care. The need for work in this area has been recognised but is at a formative stage.

- 127 The five-year strategy provided an opportunity for the Council and its partners to agree shared goals and outcomes but it is weak in this area and lacks specific action plans and anticipated outcomes for each client group. Without these the Council and its partners will be unable to demonstrate that the £21 million pounds invested in Supporting People services is delivering the maximum impact.

Summary

- 128 The Council's administration of the Supporting People programme in Cheshire is fair. This is a significant improvement on the original inspection due to corporate commitment to support improvement and the hard work of the Supporting People team and improvements in significant aspects of the programme.
- 129 There are now clear strengths in the programme. The Supporting People team is dedicated and well managed with an appropriate range of skills. Service reviews, which are essential to maintaining and supporting the quality of services, are being undertaken thoroughly and the review programme is now on track for completion by March 2006. Diversity is recognised as a significant issue and is being addressed.
- 130 Performance in some areas is mixed and in a number of areas it is still weak. In particular, local need is not well understood which means the five-year strategy is not a document that will deliver demonstrable improvements. Plans to gather together what is known and to fill the gaps in knowledge, are only now being developed through service user subgroups and some of these subgroups are not fully functioning as yet.
- 131 The role of the district council Supporting People Liaison Officers is under-utilised and not delivering all it could, providers and service users are not yet fully engaged in the development of the programme and service users are not part of the governance arrangements. As a result, the programme has some distance to go before it develops from being a grant to becoming a commissioning opportunity.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 132 The Council can demonstrate how improvements to the management of the Supporting People programme have overcome many of the weaknesses identified during the inspection of 2004 and implemented the majority of the recommendations that were agreed in response to the report. A considerable amount of effort and resources have been committed to making up lost ground. However, in so doing, less emphasis has been placed, until recently, on the future delivery of the programme or some of the outward facing aspects such as consultation and user involvement.

- 133** Following the previous inspection, the Council acted quickly to agree a service improvement plan, accompanied by performance reporting arrangements to monitor its implementation. The plan covered all the recommendations made in the inspection report and other areas where the Council identified the need to improve. This plan was approved by the commissioning body following the inspection.
- 134** The preceding section of this report shows just how far the Council and its partners have come in approximately 18 months. Providers and partners told inspectors that much progress had been made. District councils commented that there are now clear channels for enquiries, such as finance and reviews, and that the district council Supporting People liaison officers had recently been utilised more effectively to begin to identify the need for move-on accommodation. There was widespread recognition of the progress made in delivering the service review timetable and providers cited payments, communication and review progress as particular features of the improvement.

Table 2 Progress against the 2004 action plan

Recommendations	Progress
R1 Establish mechanisms for the active engagement of district and county elected members and representatives of primary care trust boards in the Supporting People programme by December 2004.	Completed – member steering group established and functioning effectively.
R2 Submit further requests to primary care trust chief executives for senior officer representation at the core strategy group and commissioning body by November 2004. Follow these up with representation from the Council’s Chief Executive.	Completed – PCT engagement at commissioning body and core strategy improved but some uncertainty about future commitment due to forthcoming changes in PCTs.
R3 Determine the probity and conflict of interest of the role of the Accountable Officer as both a commissioner and provider of Supporting People funded services and the role of the chair of the commissioning body by December 2004.	Completed – situation resolved, Accountable Officer no longer commissioner or chair of commissioning body.

Recommendations	Progress
R4 Agree actions to respond to the recommendations from the Council's performance improvement service with regard to the chairing of the commissioning body by December 2004.	Completed – chair of commissioning body now Director of Community Services.
R5 Review the role of the district council Supporting People liaison officers to determine their effectiveness in the delivery of the programme and report the findings and recommendations to the commissioning body by February 2005.	Partially completed – review undertaken and reported – further review commenced 2006.
R6 Establish a mechanism to ensure district Supporting People liaison officers will deliver their duties in accordance with the direction of the Supporting People programme across the county. Joint supervision between the Supporting People manager based within the county and the district line manager should be implemented.	Partially completed – further work being undertaken as part of review mentioned above.
R7 Manage and monitor the tight timetable for the delivery of the five-year strategy by the end of March 2005 and ensure the production of the strategy is resourced sufficiently.	Completed – five-year strategy delivered on time.
R8 Develop the Supporting People action plan to ensure the plan is centred on achieving corporate and community objectives.	Partially completed – service improvement plan delivered recommendations of previous inspection. Annual plan ineffective, now being re-drafted as commissioning plan for deliver of year two of five-year strategy (2006/07).

Recommendations	Progress
R9 Develop the Supporting People action plan to ensure timetables for action are realistic and that appropriate resources are allocated to the achievement of tasks.	Completed – service improvement plan supported delivery of Supporting People programme with additional ODPM and corporate resources.
R10 Identify corporate responsibilities for delivery and performance monitoring of key areas of the action plan.	Completed – service improvement plan effectively delivered and monitored.
R11 Submit the revised action plan to the Audit Commission by November 2004.	Completed
R12 Ensure that the commissioning body request for regular financial updates on the full Supporting People grant and the administration grant is delivered in time for the next programmed meeting.	Completed
R13 Finalise all contracts for Supporting People services by September 2004.	Completed
R14 Roll-out further training to providers on the existence of the Supporting People charging assessments and ensure that this training is updated at regular intervals. This process is to be in place by December 2004.	Completed
R15 Develop a model for the potential redistribution of funding subsequent to Supporting People service reviews to ensure alternative resources are available to fund essential services as appropriate by February 2005.	Completed-contingency fund agreed for 2005/06 and redistribution part of medium-term financial strategy.

Recommendations	Progress
R16 Prioritise reviews urgently according to cost and risk and submit the revised review programme for approval to the next commissioning body meeting.	Completed
R17 Analyse the results of the pilot of the service review programme and amend the process for future service reviews accordingly and ensure that the commissioning body considers and approves this at the next meeting.	Completed
R18 Initiate the service review programme at the earliest opportunity and no later than 1 November 2005.	Completed
R19 Implement a recovery plan which ensures that all services will be reviewed before the end of March 2006.	Completed- service review timetable on track for completion by 31 March 2006.
R20 Report, manage and monitor the delivery of the review process through both the core strategy group and commissioning body to ensure the timetable is being achieved and sufficient resources are available.	Completed.
R21 Consider findings from the review process to not only effect change within individual services but also to spread best practice across the county.	Partially completed – some sharing of good practice between providers – more could be done.
R22 Deliver eligibility criteria for Supporting People services, following consultation with neighbouring local authorities, providers, partners and other stakeholders in Cheshire in time for officers involved in the service review process to have clear guidance on this issue and no later than 1 November 2004.	Completed

Recommendations	Progress
R23 Challenge all providers where ineligible services are being funded and negotiate a reconfiguration of services and their charges to the appropriate funding streams by December 2004.	Completed – see 15 above.
R24 Deliver reports regarding the services involved in the pilot of the review process to provide feedback to service users and providers by November 2004.	Completed
R25 Determine with providers and district Supporting People liaison officers the most effective routes for communication, training and consultation across the county to ensure a consistency of approach. Including consideration of provider representation on the core strategy group being by election through a constituted provider forum.	Completed but further work needs to be undertaken to engage providers in the governance arrangements.
R26 Agree a consultation strategy to ensure the involvement of users, carers and advocates in an appropriate manner in the future direction of the Supporting People programme. Integrate the proposals required by the consultation strategy into the action plan for the Supporting People service so that resources, outputs and deadlines to support consultation are clarified.	Completed – consultation statement developed – further work needs to be undertaken on this recommendation.
R27 Develop the tools for informing users and potential users of Supporting People services by December 2004. Consider best practice in the production of leaflets for users and the potential for developing the Supporting People element of the Council's website.	Partially completed – some improvement and a DVD planned but further work needed to produce information in different formats and languages and improve content of the website.

Recommendations	Progress
R28 Develop an understanding of the Supporting People programme within the social services workforce and explain the mechanisms for engaging with the programme to frontline staff by October 2004.	Completed-evidence of improved knowledge of Supporting People identified during re-inspection.
R29 Develop research into the housing and support needs of black and minority ethnic communities and ensure that any findings are included in discussions over the priorities for future developments.	Partially completed – two-year project commissioned, Engage to Empower. At time of re-inspection year one completed and about to report.
R30 Having established the full complement of staff in the Supporting People team devote resources to developing cross authority working in particular over issues of joint interest, for example eligibility criteria, shared approaches to service reviews and common accreditation systems for providers.	Partially completed – some evidence of benefits of cross authority working, for example on an accreditation process and consultation on some reviews evident in re-inspection, some work beginning with local authority with similar profile.

- 135** The Probation service commented on the progress made by the Council in addressing governance and increasing the pace of change in the programme development, including service reviews, as reasons to be positive about the future potential of the programme.
- 136** Action has been taken to improve services. Those that were poor or failing to meet standards have been addressed and de-commissioned where necessary. This gives social workers confidence that the Supporting People team and the process of service reviews are protecting vulnerable people.
- 137** The level of services provided has increased in-line with the priorities of the five-year strategy, the numbers of older people helped to live at home is increasing and four extra care housing schemes are now up and running.
- 138** Work has begun on improving value for money. Through the use of eligibility criteria, service reviews and negotiations outside reviews, unit costs have been reduced. The current profile shows that eleven of the 12 services have agreed to reduce costs to under £350 per week with most of these providing services for people with learning difficulties.

Table 3 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2004/05 (£ per week)

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing	
Cheshire	£0.56	£24.83	£35.15	£139.56	Achieved through realignment.
Cheshire 2004/05 with identified cost reductions	£0.48	£21.44	£32.28	£116.65	Figures incorporate per annum cost reductions identified to date.
North West	£0.86	£33.04	£39.06	£91.57	
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37	

- 139 There is, however, an acknowledgement that the programme is still catching up and had started its improvement from a very low base. Some comments from partners indicated that not all services have benefited from Supporting People. For example, the Probation service is still operating in the same way that it did before Supporting People, such as servicing an accommodation forum, monitoring bed spaces and obtaining service user's views. This approach limits the extent of integration with the Supporting People programme and needs to be more fully included into the Council's operations before increased benefits from the programme can be achieved.
- 140 The achievements highlighted above demonstrate that the Council and its partners have taken action to address the most urgent and immediate areas of failing performance. In so doing it has successfully improved services for many of the people who were using them when the first inspection took place. However, for some of the most vulnerable service users, services have not yet been developed to meet their needs. The Council is fully aware of the further work that is required but there is a lack of clarity about how these gaps in service provision will be addressed, prioritised and delivered.

How does the service manage performance?

- 141 The Council has effectively managed the implementation of the recommendations from the previous inspection and shares with its partners an understanding that they must jointly continue to build on the progress they have made to ensure the programme is delivering improvements to vulnerable people. Several initiatives have recently begun but these are at an early stage and will take time to come to fruition.

Strategic priorities

- 142 The Supporting People five-year strategy is the overarching document which should set out the priorities for the programme in Cheshire in the medium-term. To do this effectively the strategy must be backed up by reliable evidence and demonstrate how it will deliver real improvements for vulnerable people. The Council's Supporting People strategy is currently unable to fully evidence how the improvements will be sustained as the strategy is not supported by an effective implementation plan or the involvement of all stakeholders.

143 Following the previous inspection, it was evident that there was insufficient time to undertake preparatory work to inform the five-year strategy and that much work would have to be undertaken after its publication. Some of this work has begun and includes the following.

- A strategic review of services for older people. This review was almost completed by the time of our inspection and its findings will inform work on the needs of older people, commissioned by district councils and provide comprehensive, county-wide information on need and resources.
- The Engagement for Empowerment project which has completed the first year of its two year project is identifying opportunities to improve outcomes for those people from minority groups who would benefit from Supporting People.
- The establishment of subgroups focusing on the needs of specific service users to gather information on need.
- Agreement on a draft framework for capturing the full range of needs information generated across the county.
- the development of strategic links to ensure Supporting People is integrated in mainstream service areas inside the Council and with partners. Developments include a Cheshire homelessness strategy group chaired by Shelter that includes representatives from probation, health and Supporting People.
- Work with a local care forum to develop the involvement of service users. The forum has a membership of over 700 including voluntary agencies, Council staff, service users and carers. It provides information and practical support and signposts people to other service user forums, such as mental health and learning disabilities. It is setting up an independent service called Cheshire Community Voice and Supporting People will use it consult service users from April 2006.
- A project to assess the housing needs of travellers and gypsies is to be funded jointly with the district councils, at the time of the inspection it was in the process of procuring a consultant to carry out the work.
- A joint commissioning group has been established to explore the links between local authority services and Supporting People and the phasing of inappropriately funded service costs back to appropriate budgets.

144 Recognising that Supporting People is entering a new phase the Council is also reviewing the role and capacity of the Supporting People team including the Supporting People liaison officers and the service review staff. This is an appropriate approach that will ensure best use is made of the administration grant and the future development of the programme.

Plans and performance management

- 145** There is a clear commitment to, and understanding of, the Supporting People programme at senior levels in the Council and measures were put in place to monitor improvements following the previous inspection. However, despite evidence of progress the implementation of the first year of the five-year strategy was not effectively monitored and processes to monitor future developments are at an early stage of development.
- 146** Performance management of the Supporting People recovery plan was robust and included appropriate levels of scrutiny. Following the previous inspection, the Council's corporate performance improvement team undertook independent monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations and the service improvement plan and presented reports on progress to members and senior corporate management. This has been effective in maintaining a focus and momentum for the programme.
- 147** The absence of an effective Annual Plan to deliver year one of the five-year strategy was a recognised weakness and work has begun on a plan to deliver the second year of the strategy. This delivery plan, called the commissioning plan, is in its early stage of development but it is accompanied by a timetable to ensure it is completed in time to support the delivery of the strategy in 2006/07. During our inspection the plan was agreed by the commissioning body, and discussed at the core strategy group. The next stage is for consultation and further work to be undertaken.
- 148** The plan is linked to the delivery of the three most fundamental issues for Cheshire, services for older people, move-on accommodation and services for people with chaotic lifestyles. However, the content indicates just how much more preparatory work has still to be undertaken. Under the heading 'How will we deliver the strategic priorities?' two of the three key tasks involve undertaking reviews rather than implementing services. The document is at an early draft stage, demonstrates an awareness of the need to structure sustainable improvement and contains a more detailed section. At the time of our inspection the plan lacked measurable outcomes for service users, completion dates or resources and needed much more work to make it fit for purpose. The Council is addressing these weaknesses.
- 149** The commissioning body has regularly received information on aspects of performance including the completion of reviews, budget monitoring, ODPM milestones, the production of PIs by providers, the issuing of contracts, the performance of the district council Supporting People liaison officers and the service improvement plan. This has enabled poor performance to be identified and action put in place to address it.

- 150 It has not, however, regularly received information on the contribution of Supporting People to corporate priorities or those shared with partners and it is several months before it will be in a position to do so. During our inspection an interim report on the development of a framework for assessing this contribution was presented to the commissioning body. It sets out to capture the links between Supporting People and performance indicators already monitored by partners in health, district councils and social services and links Supporting People to the Council's comprehensive performance assessment, BVPIs and the LPSA and proposed indicators to measure performance against the key priorities of the five-year strategy. This is a comprehensive framework but the content has not yet been agreed with stakeholders, the Council acknowledge that further work is required and will be reported on in June 2006.

Leadership

- 151 At a corporate level, the Council has demonstrated its commitment to the programme and councillors demonstrate an effective understanding of Supporting People and its potential. They are knowledgeable about its aims, clear about the challenges that face Cheshire in managing the programme and receive and act on regular information about the programme. The Chief Executive, the Director of Community Services, who chairs the commissioning body, councillors who have the programme within their portfolios and the accountable officer were all able to demonstrate an active involvement in promoting Supporting People and forging links with strategies within the Council's own services and with those of its partners. Supporting People is seen as a significant contributor to three key priorities in the local area agreement.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 152 The Council has the capacity in terms of staff and skills within the Supporting People team, its corporate infrastructure, management support and resources to deliver improvements. Maintaining the progress of the last year and focusing on the areas of weakness identified during this inspection are essential if it is to ensure that it delivers effective services for people who need them.
- 153 This report provides evidence of the corporate investment made by the Council to address the serious deficiencies identified in the previous inspection. It has introduced new services, reduced costs and increased levels of provision. Its medium-term financial plan indicates that it will manage the budget effectively and be able to invest in some additional services.
- 154 In terms of commitment, skills, optimism and dedication the Council has the appropriate resources to make progress. Officers within the Supporting People team are well managed, have relevant experience, access to training and a formal development and appraisal framework. The Council is already anticipating the changes that the next phase of the programme will bring and in preparation for the end of the service review programme, a review of future staffing requirements is underway and will be completed early in 2006.

- 155** IT systems work well and the Council is developing the use of a system held by Oxfordshire called SPOCC which will hold and collate information on need and performance, when fully functioning this has positive potential for managing information on the programme.
- 156** Changes in the arrangements for PCTs will present a considerable challenge to the maintenance of links with Supporting People but the local area agreement will provide an opportunity to make good use of the contribution it can make.

Summary

- 157** The service has promising prospects for improvement. The Council has a track record of responding to inspection and has implemented many of the recommendations of the previous inspection, it is ambitious and willing to learn from others and much has been achieved in addressing serious weaknesses. There is evidence of considerable commitment from the Council and its partners, strong leadership and a well resourced and skilled team. Some areas of performance management are strong and value for money is being addressed with reduced costs being addressed through contract negotiations.
- 158** However, not all the recommendations of the previous inspection have been fully implemented and will have to be addressed in the coming year. Work has begun to gather information on need to inform and support the delivery of the five-year strategy but it will take time to produce this information and the delivery of improvements will be delayed.
- 159** The Council is aware of the areas that need to be addressed and can evidence progress in these areas. These include weak improvement planning and the need to expedite work to establish performance measures based on outcomes for service users. Partner strategies both within and outside the Council are not yet fully aligned in addition, the engagement of the PCTs is recent and may be affected by re-organisation and developments in health.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

Measure	Cheshire	England
Population (mid-2004) ⁴	680,000	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	19.9	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than white-British 2004)	1.6	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁵	1.4	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁶	179 (Chester)	-

⁴ Source: Mid-year population estimates (2004).

⁵ Source: Claimant count with rates and proportions (October 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

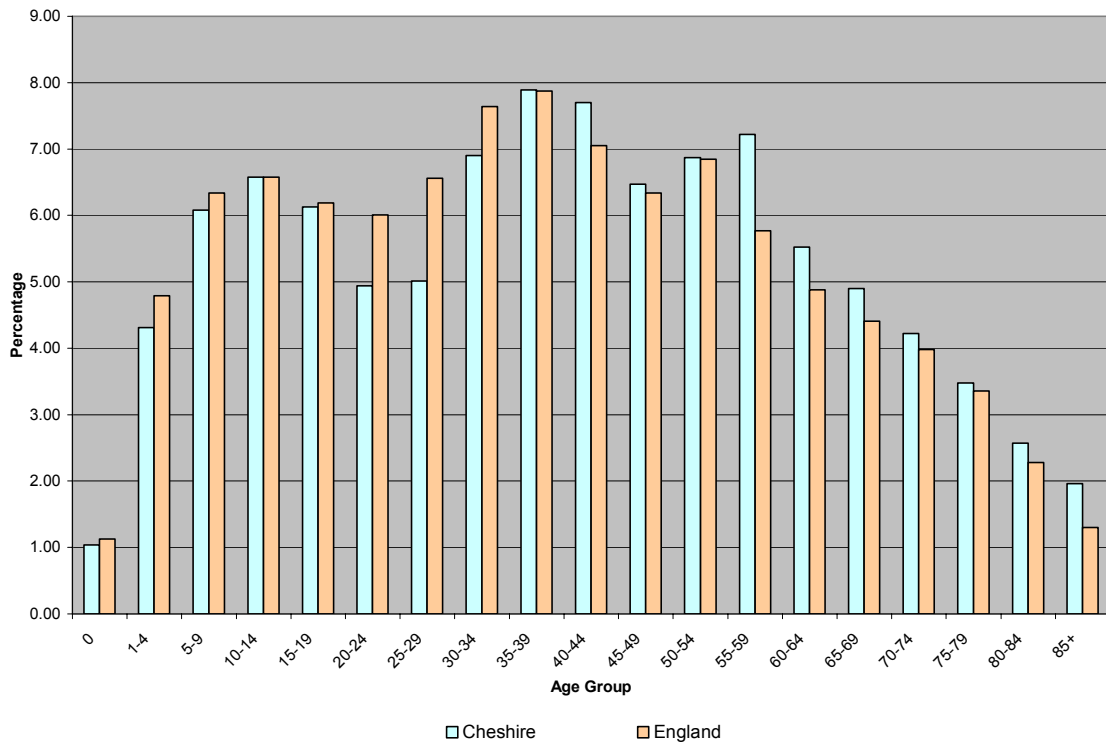
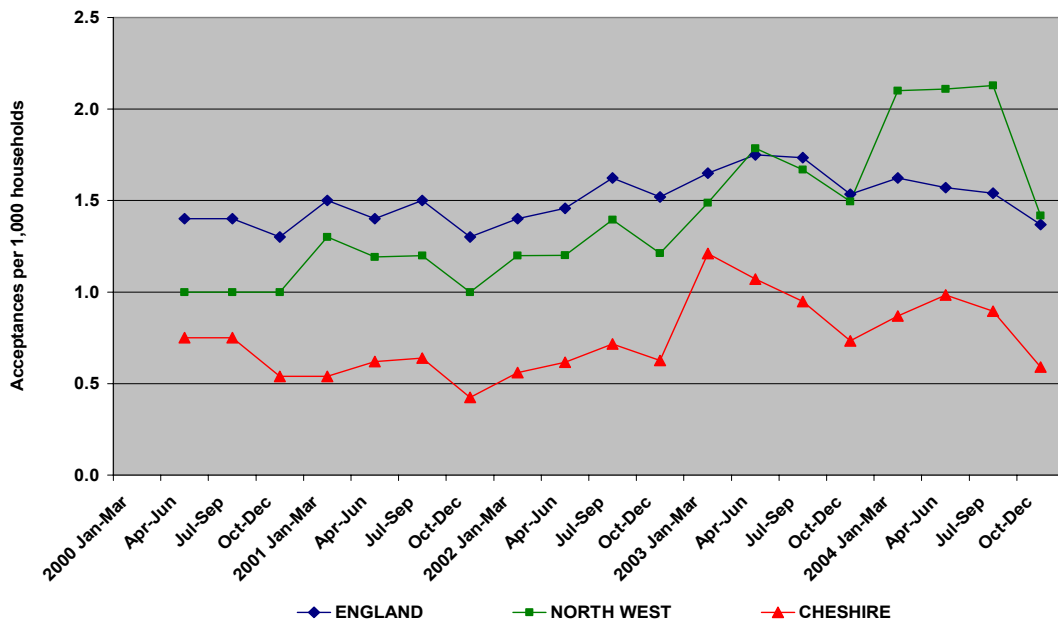


Figure 3 Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



⁷ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

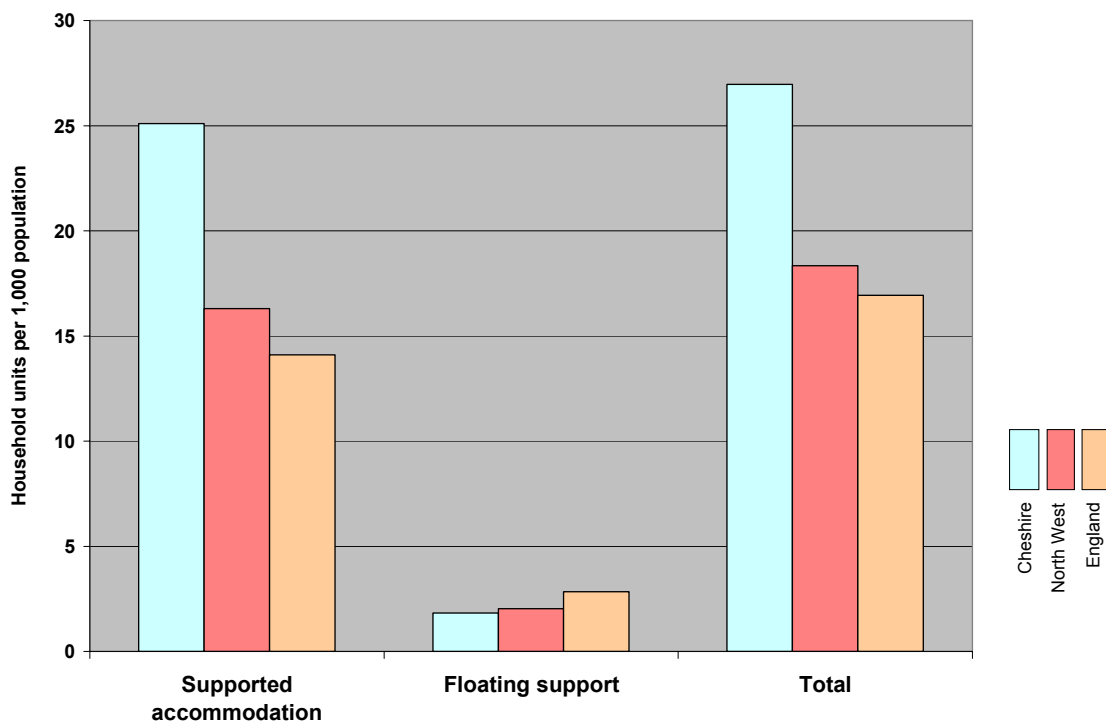
Performance information

2 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.

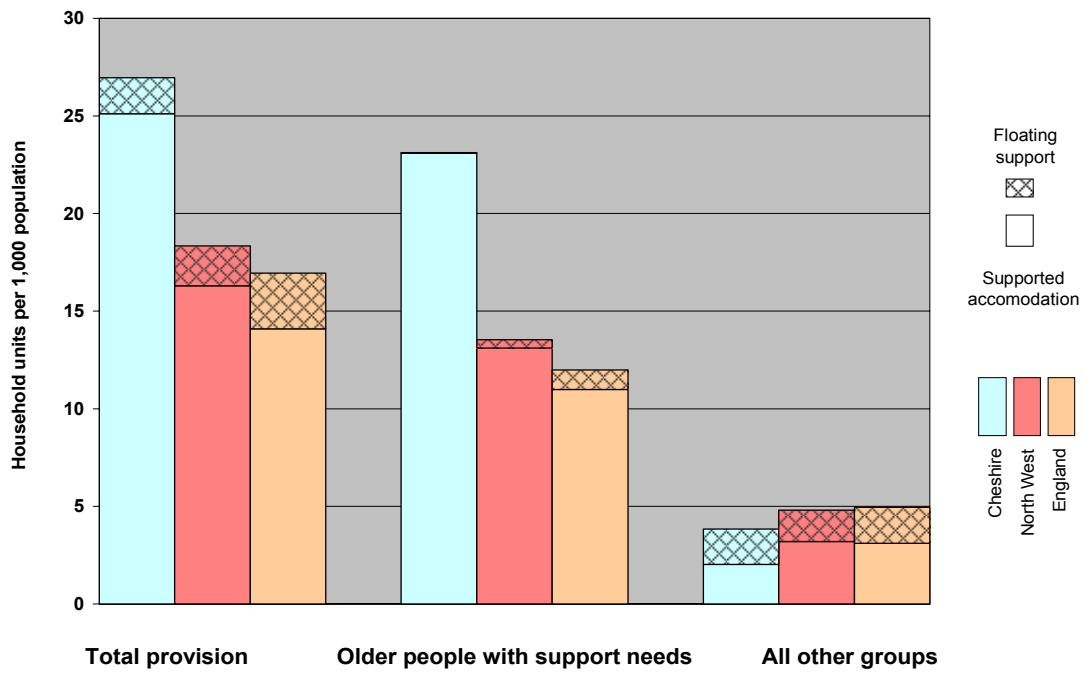
Supporting People data

Figure 4 Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁸



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

Figure 5 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁹



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

Figure 6 Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹⁰

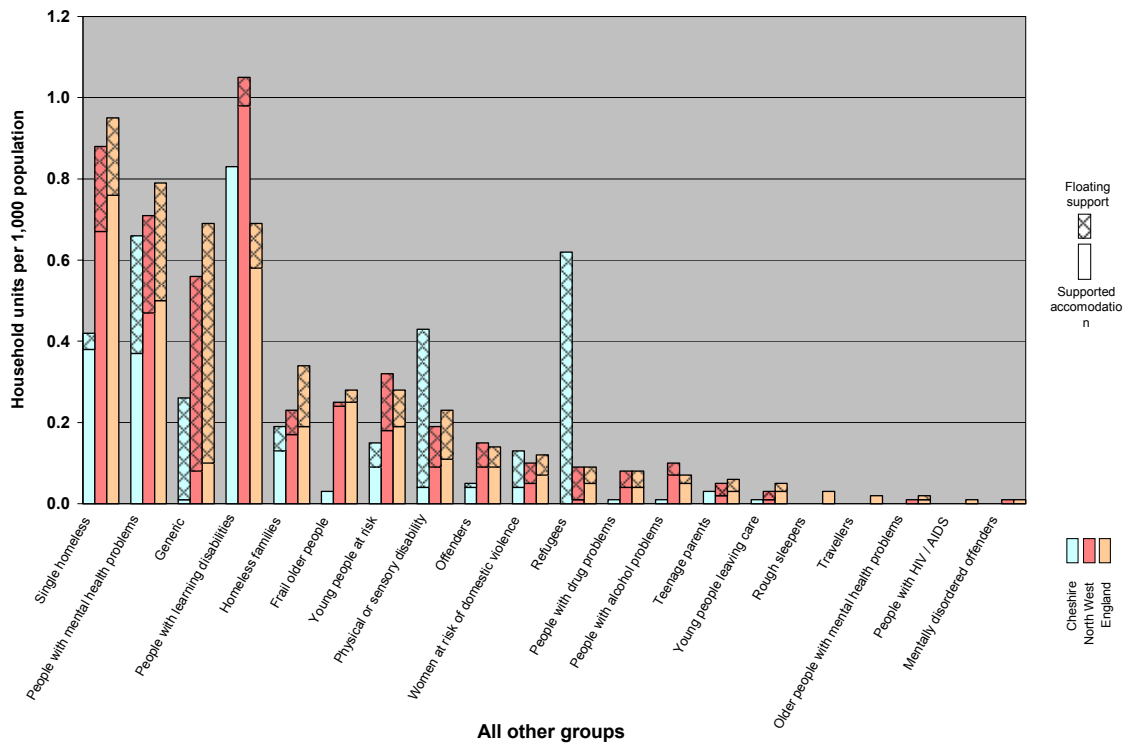


Table 4 Funding for Supporting People¹¹

Cheshire	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£22,577,071	£22,375,979	£21,116,586
Pipeline allocation	£295,258	£492,340	£-
Administration grant	£527,911	£562,844	£

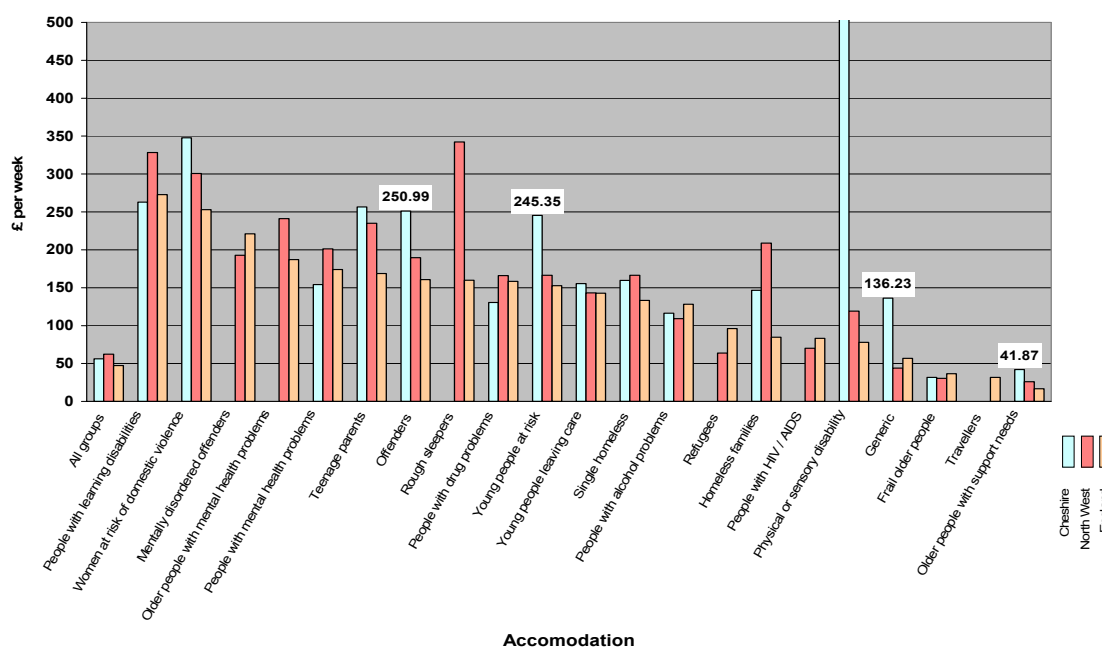
¹⁰ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹¹ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

Table 5 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹²

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Cheshire	£0.64	£22.87	£22.93	£104.29
North West	£0.86	£33.04	£39.06	£91.57
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 when it becomes available and this will then be used.

Figure 7 Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹³

¹² Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

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

Figure 8 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁴

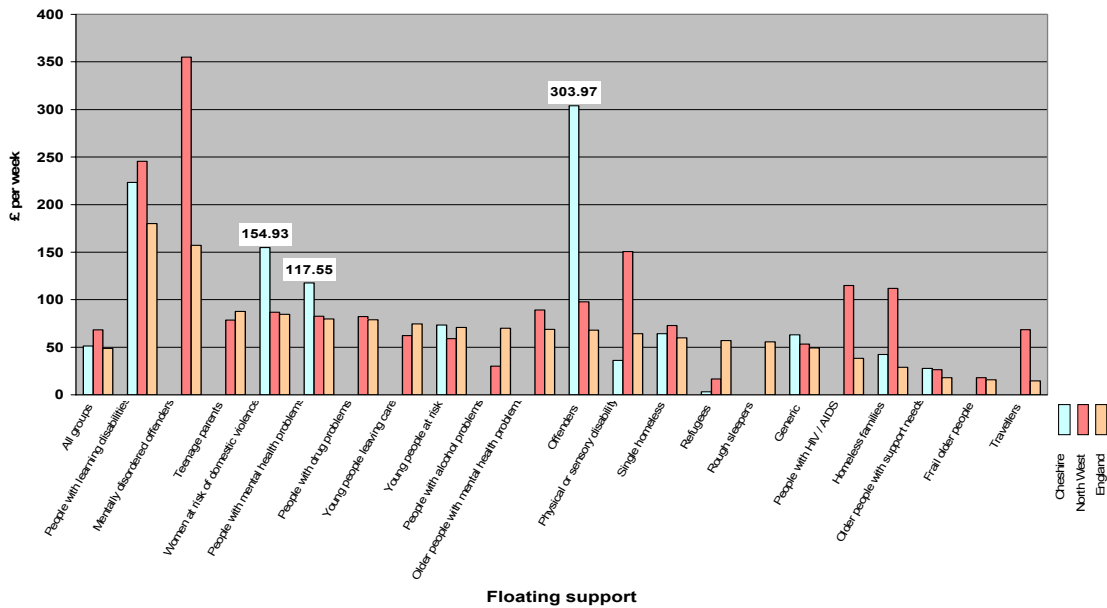
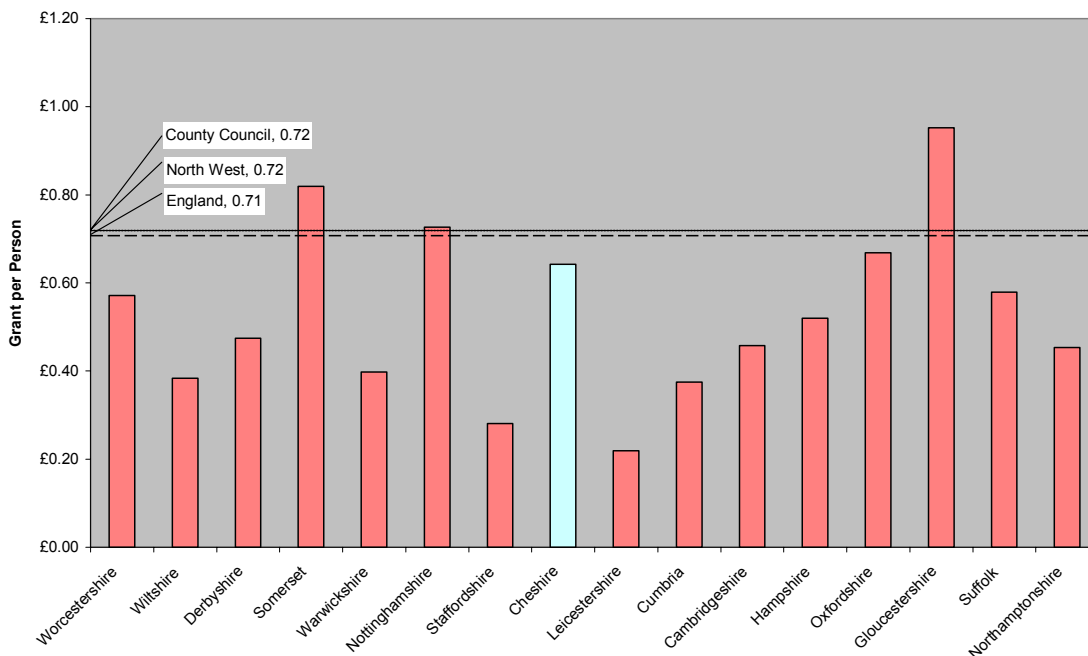


Figure 9 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁵, all county councils and all English councils (2004/05)



¹⁴ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹⁵ A comparator group of similar councils.

Figure 10 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹⁶, all county councils and all English councils

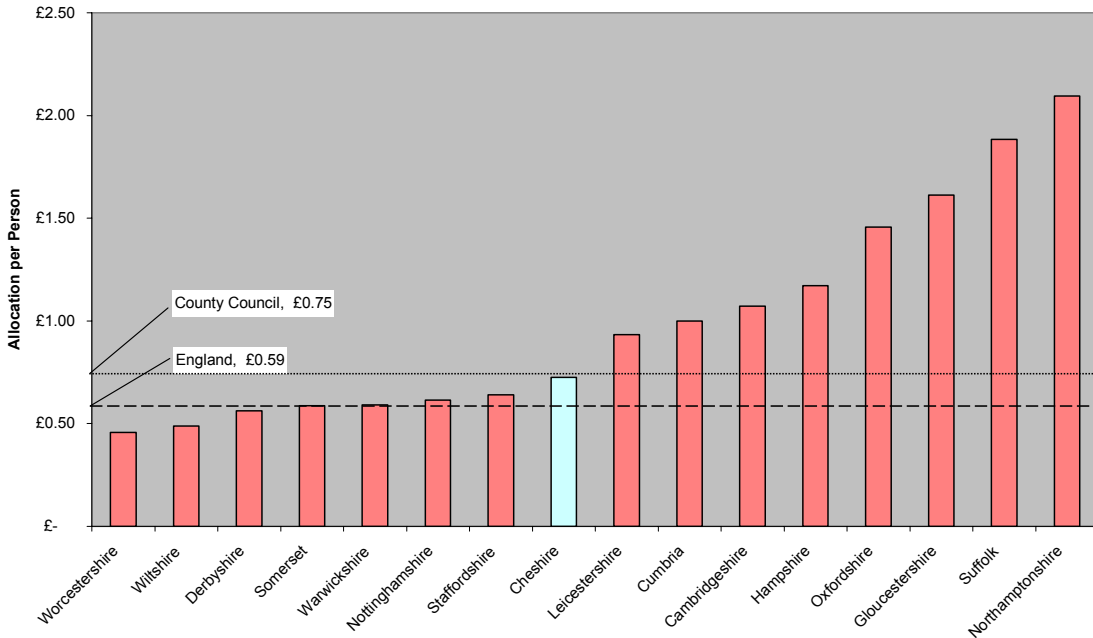
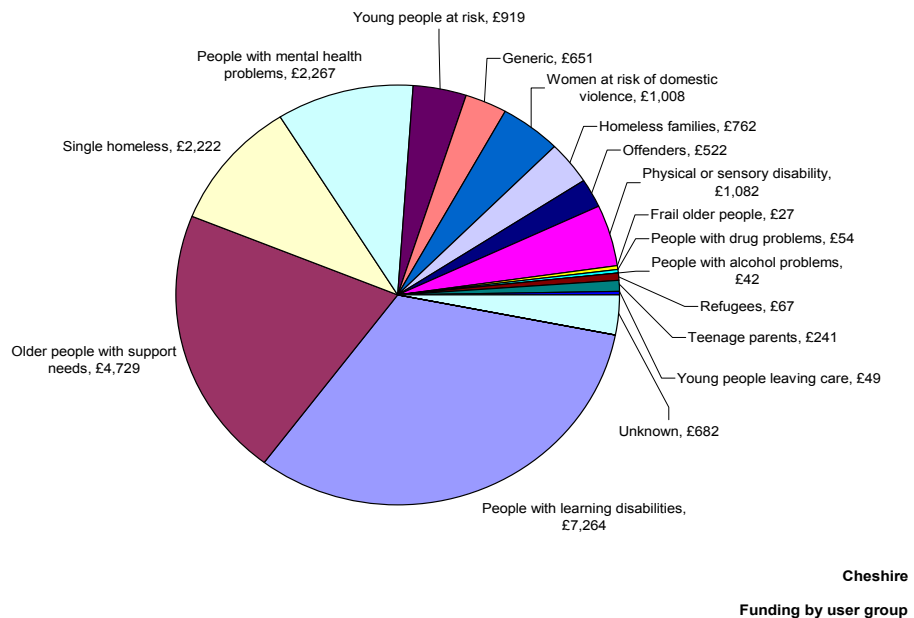


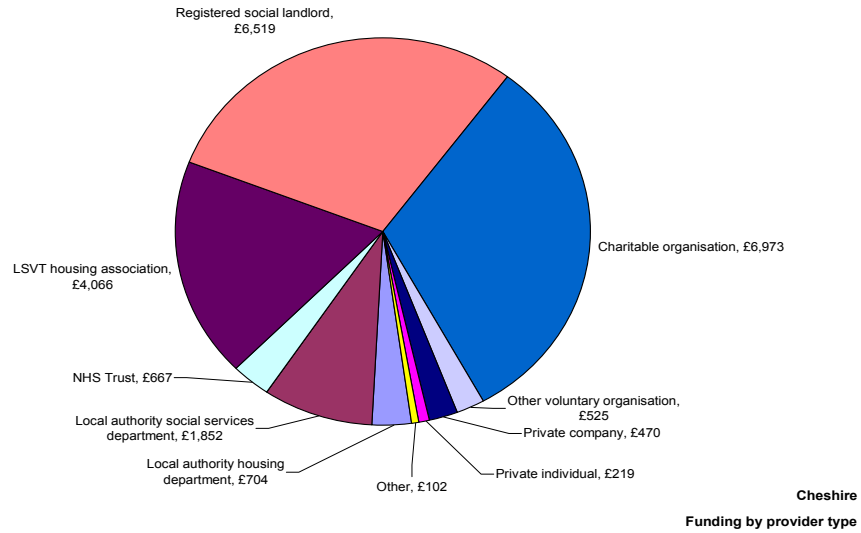
Figure 11 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)¹⁷



¹⁶ A comparator group of similar councils.

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

Figure 12 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)¹⁸



¹⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Table 6 Social Services star ratings November 2005

The table below shows the Commission for Social Care Inspection ratings of the Council's performance

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults' services	Most	Promising	★★★ (1)
Children's services	Most	Promising	

Social Services performance indicators

Table 7 Performance assessment framework indicators 2004/05

The table below shows how the Council's Social Services performed on indicators relevant to Supporting People

Cheshire	
Significantly above average (•••••)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31). Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30). Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4).
Above average (••••)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6). Admissions of supported residents aged 18 to 64 to residential/nursing care (C27). Admissions of older people to residential/ nursing care (C26). Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39). Delayed transfers of care (D41). Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54).
Average (•••)	Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51). Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40).
Below average (••)	Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29). Older people helped to live at home (C32).
Significantly below average (•)	None

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

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

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

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

Chester	
Within the best 25 per cent	Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63). Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b).
Average	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2). Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a). Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a).
Within the worst 25 per cent	Domestic violence refuge places (BV176).
Congleton	
Within the best 25 per cent	Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63). Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a).
Average	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2). Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b). Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a).
Within the worst 25 per cent	Domestic violence refuge places (BV176).

Crewe and Nantwich	
Within the best 25 per cent	Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63). Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a).
Average	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2). Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b). Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a).
Within the worst 25 per cent	Domestic violence refuge places (BV176).
Ellesmere Port	
Within the best 25 per cent	
Average	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2). Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63). Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a). Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b).
Within the worst 25 per cent	Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a). Domestic violence refuge places (BV176).
Macclesfield	
Within the best 25 per cent	Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a).
Average	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2). Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b). Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a). Domestic violence refuge places (BV176).
Within the worst 25 per cent	Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63).

Vale Royal	
Within the best 25 per cent	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2). Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63).
Average	Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a). Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b). Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a). Domestic violence refuge places (BV176).

Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 1 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

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - a questionnaire-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 17 contracted supported housing services, to talk to service users and frontline staff;
 - visits 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 County Council, the primary care trusts and the probation service;
 - interviews with the leader of the Council and with the relevant portfolio holder
 - staff focus group;
 - review of the website;
 - mystery shopping visits to housing and social services area offices;
 - desktop checks of procedure guides and service review files; and
 - observation of meetings of the Supporting People steering group, the commissioning body and the core strategy group.