

Supporting People Inspection Report

May 2006



Supporting People Inspection

Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council

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Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has published a number of consultation papers on the developing programme and a work plan setting out what local authorities and their partners will need to achieve in order to deliver the programme effectively. All the relevant papers for Supporting People can be found on the Supporting People k-web that can be accessed through the Supporting People website: www.spkweb.org.uk

Summary

- 1 Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council is in the north east of England. Over one in five of its 191,300 population is aged over 65 years. Less than 2 per cent are from minority ethnic communities. The area has high levels of deprivation.
- 2 The Council is Labour controlled, holding 43 of the 66 available seats. Under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005 - The Harder Test, council performance was assessed as three-star (out of a possible four).
- 3 Excluding schools, the Council employs around 9,000 staff.
- 4 Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with the Gateshead Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Northumbria Probation Service.
- 5 Supporting People funding available in 2005/06 is £5.8 million, (a reduction of £229,317 or 3.8 per cent on the previous year). To fulfil its role as the administering authority the Council received an administration grant of £217,465.
- 6 In total the programme funds 218 contracts providing:
 - 2,958 units of accommodation based support;
 - 2,237 units of floating support; and
 - 4,400 community alarm services.

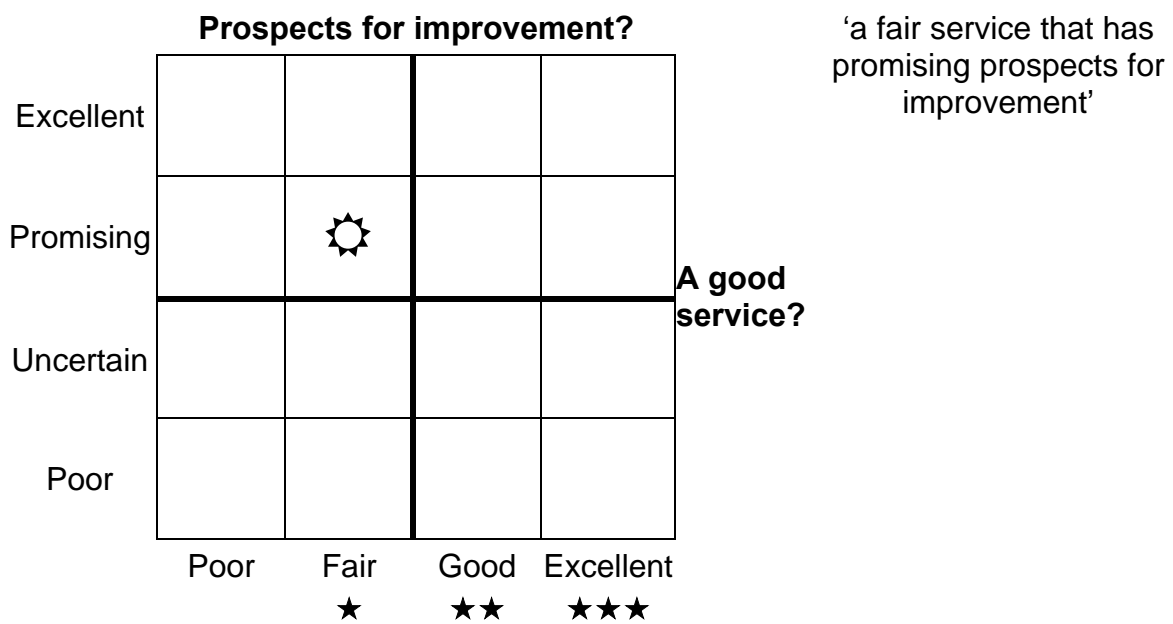
Unmet housing related support needs identified in the five-year strategy include services for people with mental health problems, offenders, people with learning disabilities, homeless people, people with drug and/or alcohol problems, and people suffering from HIV/AIDs. The highest cost service at £674.06 per unit per week is an accommodation based service for a person with learning disabilities. The lowest cost services are £1.20 per unit per week for community alarm services.

- 7 Gateshead Council was inspected in the third year of the programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money offered by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed Gateshead Metropolitan Borough 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.

Table 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

- 9 The Supporting People programme has a number of strengths including:
- effective engagement of service users through the Inclusive forum, Speaking Up - the service user forum, and as part of service reviews;
 - improving the amount and range of services provided to vulnerable groups in Gateshead which are beginning to cover previous gaps in service delivery;
 - leveraging in some additional funding to enable an expansion of the housing and support options for vulnerable people;
 - public information is well presented and easy to understand with some 'easy read' pictorial versions aimed specifically at people who have difficulty understanding complex documents. The council's website provides a lot of information for service users and service providers;

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.

- collating up to date and reliable information on the housing related support needs of the diverse vulnerable groups in the community;
- a skilled and motivated team to administer the programme;
- making good progress with reviewing legacy services to ensure they are strategically relevant and meet quality standards;
- reducing duplication for larger cross authority service providers by accepting accreditation and passporting arrangements assessed by other councils; and
- establishing good relations with service providers underpinned by robust payment systems.

10 Less positive areas of the programme include:

- the performance management framework is not being used effectively to identify clear objectives and targets to measure success by. Outcomes for service users are not captured and being used for future improvements;
- little monitoring of compliance with contracts so the council are not aware if corrective action is required to ensure the quality of service to customers is maintained;
- terms of reference for the Gateshead partnerships do not document voting arrangements and detail how conflicts of interest and conflicts between partners will be managed;
- the Core Strategy Group does not yet include effective representation of service provider and service user views;
- the lack of an agreed approach to assessing value for money which shows how cost and quality will be balanced;
- the lack of clear plans to protect services for vulnerable people where Supporting People funding is to be withdrawn following service review; and
- ineffective promotion of Fairer Charging arrangements.

11 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for delivering improvements. We found the following strengths.

- The Supporting People programme has a solid track record of:
 - delivering an increased amount and range of services for vulnerable people; and
 - engaging service users to develop the programme.
- Individual staff performance is linked into developing the programme and is routinely managed.
- Mechanisms are in place to continue to capture best practice and learn from others.
- A competent team with the necessary skills is in place with corporate support to administer the programme.

8 Supporting People Inspection | Summary

- The constraint of a low level of grant is being addressed by leveraging in additional funding.
- There is a solid knowledge base of housing related support needs to inform strategic decision-making.
- Sound procurement policies and procedures have been developed to procure value for money services in the future.

12 However there remains some significant barriers to improvement which include the following.

- The performance management system does not effectively measure what the programme is delivering for service users and the community.
- Resources to support the delivery of improvement plans are not fully identified.
- Some policies such as local eligibility criteria have been late in being put in place. Others, such as the approach to assessing value for money, are not set out clearly. The promotion of Fairer charging arrangements is late.
- The lack of an agreed approach to assessing value for money means that the programme will continue to have difficulty in delivering and demonstrating this.
- There is little evidence of workforce planning looking into the future to estimate changes in the skills and capacity needed to deliver the Supporting People programme in the medium to longer term.

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 Improve the governance of the programme by the following.

- *Establishing clear terms of reference for the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group and a memorandum of understanding. These need to include:*
 - *voting arrangements;*
 - *how conflicts of interest will be managed; and*
 - *how conflicts between partners will be addressed.*
- *Effectively engaging service users in the strategic policy and decision-making arrangements for the programme.*
- *Ensuring regular and fair representation of external service provider views.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- disputes will be minimised;
- policy development will be sustainable; and
- external service providers will have more influence and understanding.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 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 Clarify the policies to be followed by the programme by the following.

- *Setting out how the programme will assess whether a service is delivering value for money:
 - including how cost and quality considerations will be balanced; and
 - agreeing the approach with service providers.*
- *Establishing fair and transparent quality assurance arrangements for service reviews.*
- *Detailing procedures to be followed in circumstances where a service is to be decommissioned or Supporting People funding withdrawn.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- assessments and quality assurance will be more consistent;
- the approach will be transparent and better understood by service providers;
- responsibilities are clearly assigned and there will be a proper audit trail;
- services will be able to demonstrate that they are value for money; and
- services provided will be withdrawn in a planned way that protects the interests of service users.

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

Recommendation

R3 Improve communication and widen understanding of the programme by the following.

- *Updating the local directory of services to include information on cultural sensitivity and ease of access.*
- *Introducing a standard of adding translated straplines (information is available in other languages or formats on request) to all Supporting People literature in other languages in common use locally.*
- *Establishing structured plans to:
 - promote Fairer charging arrangements; and
 - ensure all front line staff are aware of the services provided through the programme and how service users can access them.*
- *Routinely evaluating the effectiveness of communications and understanding of the programme.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- better information is available to potential service users;
- service users with communication problems know that information is available in a language or format they can more easily understand;

- service information is widely available;
- all front line staff are equipped to deal with enquiries from vulnerable people; and
- the effectiveness of arrangements is monitored.

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

Recommendation

R4 Improve performance management arrangements for the Supporting People programme by the following.

- *Clarifying:*
 - *the high level objectives of the Supporting People Five-Year strategy; and*
 - *the objectives in related strategies that the Supporting People programme is expected to contribute towards.*
- *Establishing and monitoring:*
 - *indicators that will measure the outcomes and benefits for service users and the community;*
 - *indicators that will measure progress against the objectives of the Supporting People Five-Year Strategy and related strategies; and*
 - *the amount and source of resources to deliver improvement plans.*
- *Tracking:*
 - *indicators that the programme shares with its partners in Health and Probation;*
 - *contributions to other local programme objectives including the Youth Offending Team, Drug Action Team; and*
 - *progress on government commitments and local government targets such as reducing emergency bed days and preventing homelessness.*

14 The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the programme will know how it is progressing;
- the programme will know the contribution it is making to wider objectives;
- poor performance will be easier and quicker to spot;
- investment decisions will be better informed; and
- plans will be deliverable.

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

- 15 We would like to thank the staff of Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 28 November - 2 December 2005

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Report

Context

The locality

- 16 Gateshead council is situated in the north east of England. The borough stretches 13 miles along the south bank of the river Tyne. Although by area a mixture of rural and urban, most of the 191,300 population live in its urban centre. Gateshead, Felling, Dunston and Blaydon are the main population centres.
- 17 Gateshead has a high proportion of elderly residents and high levels of disability. More than one in five (20.3 per cent) of the population are above 65 years old (18.5 per cent in England) and three out of every ten (30.7 per cent) of Gateshead's 85,000 households contains someone with a disability (15 per cent in England). A high number of local people (19.7 per cent) claim key state benefits compared to the national average (11.7 per cent in England). Less than two per cent (1.6 per cent) of the population are from minority ethnic communities (10.44 per cent in England).
- 18 The area has high levels of deprivation. It ranks as the 30th most deprived council out of the 354 in the country as a whole. At 2.9 per cent, unemployment is at its lowest level for some time, although still higher than the national average of 2.4 per cent. Public administration, education and health are the largest employment sector.

The Council

- 19 The Council is Labour controlled, with 43 of the 66 available seats. Of the remainder, the Liberal Democrats hold 22 and one is held by a Liberal. A leader and cabinet govern the business of the Council.
- 20 The Council's annual revenue budget for 2004/05 was £243 million net, which includes £65 million net for Social Services and £85 million net for Housing (£46 million net for non Housing Revenue Account activity and £39 million net for the Housing Revenue Account). The Council is managed by the Chief Executive and a team of eight Group and Strategic Directors. Excluding schools, it employs almost 9,000 staff. Under the 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment - the Harder Test, council performance was assessed as three stars (out of a possible four), improving well and rated two (out of a possible four) for its use of resources.
- 21 The council and the local strategic partnership have agreed the Gateshead community strategy which set out ten themed priorities. These are mirrored in the council's own long term vision 'Toward 2010'. Of particular relevance to the Supporting People programme are:
 - Children and Young People - ... are empowered and supported to develop to their full potential;

- Community Safety - A safe, free and tolerant community;
- Health - Local people living longer and healthier lives;
- Housing - ... live in good quality, affordable homes which meet their needs; and
- Social Care - ... supported by a network of care service appropriate to their needs ...

22 The council has a strong record of providing good services to customers. Under the Corporate Performance Assessment, the council has been rated as 'Excellent' in assessments from 2002 to 2004 and three stars (out of a possible four) in 2005. The Gateshead Housing company (an arms length management organisation established in 2004) manages the Council's housing stock. In a recent inspection the service was rated as good with excellent prospects for improvement. The Council's housing strategy has been assessed as 'fit for purpose'. Social service provision, both adult and children's services, has recently been assessed as three-star, 'serving most people well with excellent capacity to improve'.

The programme

- 23** The Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in the area. The Council received a Supporting People grant of £5.8 million for 2005/06, which is a reduction of £229,317 or 3.8 per cent on the previous year's allocation. The Council also received an administration grant of £217,465 which is a 2.3 per cent reduction on the previous year.
- 24** The service is located within the Community Based Services Directorate which encompasses adults' services, housing, community safety, health co-ordination and culture. Administration of the programme is delivered by a team of eight staff.
- 25** The highest cost service at £674.06 per unit per week is an accommodation based service for a person with learning disabilities. The lowest cost services are £1.20 per unit per week for community alarm services.
- 26** In total the programme funds 218 contracts providing:
- 2,958 units of accommodation based support;
 - 2,237 units of floating support; and
 - 4,400 community alarm services.
- 27** A breakdown of current service provision detailed in the five-year strategy shows:
- a high level of expenditure on services for older people;
 - a strong balance of floating support to accommodation based provision across client groups;
 - unmet needs for a number of client groups including people with mental health problems, offenders, people with learning disabilities, homeless people, people with drug and/or alcohol problems; and

- people suffering from HIV/AIDs.
- 28** The following vulnerable groups have been identified as immediate priorities for the programme:
- people with drug and alcohol problems;
 - people with learning disabilities;
 - people suffering from mental health problems;
 - offenders; and
 - homeless people.
- 29** Gateshead Council was inspected in the third year of the programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money offered by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

How good is the service?

- 30** There is a balance between weaknesses and strengths with governance arrangements in Gateshead. Structures are well established and operating effectively. A particular strength is the good integration of Supporting People into the council's and its partners' strategies and operations. Weaknesses include the lack of documented terms of reference that are specific to Gateshead which show how voting, conflicts of interest, and conflicts between partners will be dealt with. Although immediate priorities are clear, there are no key objectives for the programme in the five-year strategy and how they are to be monitored. Improvements are needed to the Core Strategy Group to ensure external service providers have an adequate and equal voice.
- 31** The ODPM set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process;
 - Inclusive Forum: consults with service providers and service users;
 - Core Strategy Development Group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme;
 - Commissioning Body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme;
 - Councillors: approve key decisions of the commissioning body; and
 - Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.

Governance

- 32 The ALA has a clear understanding of its role. The location of the Supporting People team within the council's structure has enabled good links to be made with housing and social care and close integration with mainstream activities of the council. The Supporting People programme is regarded as a facilitator of the many other strategies to which it provides funding support, such as the Older Person Strategy. Strategies are well aligned. This means that the approach to planning and delivering services to vulnerable people is joined up.
- 33 Councillors are not directly involved in the programme. However, they are kept up to date with developments and consider important elements of the programme such as strategy development and performance monitoring. Updates on development are provided to the three cabinet members whose portfolios cut across the programme. Monthly councillor seminars include items on Supporting People development, councillors attend the Inclusive Forum, and there are periodic reports to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Group and Cabinet.

Commissioning body

- 34 Commitment from the three partner agencies is good and all consider that an effective partnership has developed. Established in 2002, the group meets bi-monthly. There are high levels of attendance from each of the partner agencies with senior management representation. The Probation Service is effectively engaged at a strategic level and the partnership has successfully engaged the health communities. There is clear evidence of solid partnership arrangements and joint working with mental health and housing managers. Effective partnership working and understanding of respective agendas are reflected in the integration of Supporting People into wider strategies and plans.
- 35 Terms of reference, memorandum of understanding and protocols on conflicts of interest are not adequately established and documented for the partnerships. The council has adopted a document from the ODPM guidance which sets out the roles and responsibilities for all elements within the programme structure. However it does not document voting rights for the Commissioning Body in Gateshead nor set out how conflicts will be resolved or establish protocols to manage conflicts of interest. No memorandum of understanding has been developed. To date, this deficiency has not impacted upon the effectiveness of the Commissioning Body but without clarity over these elements there is a danger that decisions may be taken when the meeting is not quorate or that disputed decisions may escalate without a clear agreed process to resolve matters.
- 36 Performance management arrangements are underdeveloped. The five-year strategy does not identify high level objectives for the programme. The council argue that the programme is intended to deliver the objectives which are set out in related strategies, such as the Housing Strategy. However, although links are made to these strategies, their objectives are not clearly captured within the Supporting People five-year strategy to show clearly what the programme is aiming to achieve. Nor is there a system in place to capture progress against these objectives and report to the Commissioning Body to inform strategic decision-making.

Core Strategy Group

- 37 There are strengths and weaknesses with the way the Core Strategy Group is organised. The group has a wide representation including an advocacy group and the ALMO representatives and meets regularly. However, it currently does not have clear service user input or adequate external service providers' representation. An elected external service provider representative does attend on behalf of the service provider forum but few providers knew who the representative is or had received any feedback from the Core Strategy Group meetings. This raises questions over how well informed service providers are, and mechanisms for service providers' input and feedback. Wide and effective representation is required to ensure that the programme is influenced by the community and appropriate professionals.
- 38 The Core Strategy Group does not have a protocol in place to manage conflicts of interest. This is important because the Core Strategy Group consider all aspects of completed service reviews including the financial aspects of the value for money assessment. Attendees who may be representing a particular area of the council but who may also be involved with service provision have access to confidential information which may put them at a competitive advantage.

Accountable officer

- 39 The Accountable officer role is being effectively delivered. It successfully promotes links between Supporting People and other council and partner areas and ensures the programme's day to day activities are adequately resourced. Good links are made with other areas of the council, for example through management team meetings, and with other partnership groups such as Gateshead Strategic Partnership. The programme is adequately resourced, meeting ODPM milestones and securing additional resources to meet the demands of the service review programme. This ensures that the programme makes effective progress and its contribution is integrated into wider plans.

Cross authority partnership working

- 40 Gateshead is active amongst the cross authority group and the regional implementation group. It takes the lead in some areas, such as profiling users of existing services and identifying barriers to access for minority groups. The group are developing benchmarking data to support value for money assessments as part of service reviews and have set a baseline level for cross authority movement. Passporting arrangements have been agreed and there is a sharing of good local practices and helping each other with training.

Links with the voluntary sector and MAPPA

- 41 There are good links with the voluntary sector and regular opportunities for feedback with voluntary sector organisations. The voluntary sector is well developed in Gateshead and a number of partnership groups exist which engage with the voluntary sector. Gateshead is capacity building amongst some voluntary organisations to allow them to develop additional services, for example the Jewish community organisation developing a new service for older people with Supporting People short term revenue funding.
- 42 Gateshead council is closely involved in local Multi Agency Public Protection³ Arrangements (MAPPA) led by the Probation Service. Strong links with the Supporting People programme are achieved through the Head of Housing Services who attends both MAPPA and Commissioning Body meetings. This ensures that housing related support is considered in the management of high risk offenders.

Delivery arrangements

- 43 Strengths and weaknesses are in balance. A competent team is in place to deliver the programme supported by appropriate management arrangements. Interim contracts are in place and payments are being made on time with reliable IT support. Good relations have been developed with service providers and there is a well attended forum to aid communication and their involvement. Information on housing related support need is good and strong links have been made with related strategies. However, the five-year strategy and annual plan have a number of weaknesses. Performance and risk management is underdeveloped. Fairer Charging has not been promoted and contracts are not being monitored on an ongoing basis other than through the service review process.
- 44 The council has demonstrated its commitment to the delivery of the programme through an adequately resourced team. The team and management have appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver the programme including previous experience in providing services to people with learning disabilities, contract monitoring, finance and in consulting community groups. To enhance capacity to assist with the peak of work caused by service reviews an additional two staff have been seconded to the section, one part funded by mainstream resources.
- 45 Team members are enthusiastic and well motivated. Additional support and training is provided when a need is identified. Specialist assistance can be called upon from departmental or corporate resources. For example, an officer specialising in user engagement assists with the organisation of the Inclusive Forum, or the group accountant can be approached to help interpret service provider accounts.

³ MAPPA were set up in England and Wales in 2001. Police and Probation take the leading role with other agencies such as housing, health and social services. Agencies share information to ensure accurate assessments of risk are made about potentially dangerous offenders and plans put in place to robustly manage those risks.

- 46 A soundly based team plan is in place to control and progress key operational elements of the programme although it does not identify the resources required or make use of specific targets. These include progress on the service review programme, developing user involvement, and monitoring payments to providers. The plan identifies who is responsible for each component, timescales for completion, measures and expected outcomes. In most cases, however, measurable targets are not established. Without these it is not clear how successful actions have been.
- 47 Robust management and reporting mechanisms are in place for staff. They have six weekly supervision meetings, annual development appraisals and individual work programmes. These ensure that staff know how they contribute, what contribution is expected of them and that they develop the necessary skills to deliver.
- 48 Interim contracts are all in place and payments are being made on time. Service providers are generally satisfied with arrangements, although changes have been requested to the timing of schedules issued for subsidy payments to reduce the need for retrospective adjustments. Changes are being introduced.
- 49 In general procurement has been robust. Some new services have been subjected to robust contract procurement procedure, including service users in the selection interviews of potential providers. Expert assistance is obtained to develop the specification and contracting of new services which includes the quality of services required and what the service is expected to deliver. Three temporary services were exceptions to this general rule with specific arrangements being put in place to procure three short term contracts quickly. Local, specialist, service providers were invited to tender for specific services for a limited duration through the Core Strategy Group but it is not clear how the council ensured temporary provision was good value for money from the outset.
- 50 Joint commissioning is in its early stages of development. One service, the Home Improvement Agency, has been jointly commissioned with a neighbouring council. Joint commissioning offers the opportunity to secure better value for money and more viable services where demand for particularly specialist services may be low.
- 51 Gateshead has an effective provider forum which meets regularly and allows service providers the opportunity to share concerns and raise issues. The forum meets quarterly and is chaired by nominated service providers. Service providers felt well informed and able to discuss issues. There are good working relations between service providers and the Supporting People programme. Service providers were positive about their relationship with the Supporting People team. They found them to be helpful and approachable and provided good quality information particularly in comparison with other local authorities providers worked with.

- 52 Information on housing related support needs is good and improving. Where information is not robust action is being taken. There is also a good joining up of information and strategies to ensure the overall approach are co-ordinated. For example, the council is updating its information on housing need within the borough. The planned housing needs survey makes specific reference to the identification of households who will require support through the supporting people programme, alongside a number of other vulnerable groups. Action is being taken to plug the remaining gaps in housing related support information for travellers and offenders. Additional data has been collected on service users currently using services and gaps or shortages in provision highlighted. The housing support needs of offenders have been addressed and there is evidence that the needs of drug mis-users are being taken into account. Good information on the housing related support needs of the community provide a solid base on which to plan and deliver improvements and ensure resources are targeted at appropriate priorities.
- 53 Strong links have been made between the Supporting People strategy and a number of other related strategies which deal with the needs of the same client groups, such as homeless people, older people, people with learning disabilities and young people at risk. The community strategy and housing strategy make clear reference to the need to support vulnerable people and increase their accommodation and support options. There are targets to develop and secure additional accommodation and support services within the housing strategy which is consistent with the Supporting People strategy. The Homelessness strategy makes reference to how Supporting People will help deliver some of the homelessness key objectives as a result of joint working, additional funding and quality assurance processes for homelessness services. Links are made from the housing strategy for older people to the Supporting People strategy. Clear reference is made as to how Supporting People will help deliver some of the key objectives as a result of joint working and additional funding.
- 54 Weaknesses outweigh the strengths of the five-year strategy. It is clear which client groups are an immediate priority. It is also clear about how competing priorities will be assessed. A separate pictorial easy to read version is available for service users who have reading or learning difficulties which will improve accessibility and understanding of the document for service users. Weaknesses include:
- a lack of explicit objectives for Supporting People in Gateshead;
 - the needs/supply analysis is incomplete and inconsistent;
 - there is no information on how value for money will be achieved;
 - a lack of information on charging; and
 - no detail on performance management arrangements.

These weaknesses impact upon the successful delivery of the programme by failing to make clear where the programme expects to get to, how it will know how it is progressing and how important elements of the programme will be developed.

- 55 Resources to support the delivery of the Action Plan are not fully identified and therefore less achievable. The Annual Plan is split into two parts, a part that will be delivered with no extra funding and a second part showing the next layer of priorities that will be delivered if extra funding is received. It does not make sense to have an Annual Plan with a series of actions to be delivered if extra ODPM funding is received when allocations for the year in question are already known. Funding to implement the first part of the Annual Plan has not been fully identified. Some of the actions in the first year's implementation of the strategy are therefore unlikely to be achieved.
- 56 Sound eligibility criteria were agreed at the commissioning body meeting in November 2005 after consultation with service providers and discussion with wider stakeholders at the Core Strategy Group. This policy although late in being approved formalises, enhances and clarifies existing interpretations, for example the ineligibility of funding 24-hour cover. Little back tracking is necessary as the council identified a clear process for determining eligibility of services as part of the Transitional Housing Benefit (THB) process. The guidelines from the DWP were closely followed when determining new and existing services eligibility for THB. Meetings took place with providers and Supporting People staff to ensure services were strategically relevant, meeting local needs and were eligible. Costs were also benchmarked with other local authority providers. This has led to few services being found to be ineligible as part of service reviews.
- 57 The approach to fairer charging has not been effectively implemented in relation to Supporting People. The existing domestic social care services fairer charging policy was updated in 2002 by cabinet for Supporting People purposes. An appropriate updated policy with an easy to understand promotional leaflet are in their final stages of development. However promotion of the policy to service providers or service users has been inadequate resulting in a limited take-up of fairer charging assessments with only 27 requests for assessment so far.
- 58 Performance management arrangements are underdeveloped. There is neither measurement of the outcomes the programme is delivering for service users nor any assessment of the contribution it makes towards the achievement of other strategy objectives. There are no established shared targets with partner agencies. Statutory performance indicators relating to Supporting People and quarterly service provider returns are monitored and routinely reported as is progress against plans, for example the Supporting People Annual Plan. However without information on outcomes and progress against identified objectives, the programme cannot demonstrate what is achieving and use that information to inform strategic decisions.
- 59 Monitoring of contract compliance is ineffective. Checks and follow up action is taken when providers fail to submit their quarterly returns. There are systems in place to ensure the timely collection of performance information from providers but it is not being analysed to identify underperformance or to provide general feedback on the quality of services provided.

Without appropriate analysis the ALA is not identifying where services fall below contracted levels, underperformance is going unchallenged and corrective action is not being taken.

- 60 In contrast, financial management arrangements for the SP programme are well developed and in line with a corporate approach. Regular and useful budget monitoring information is provided both to the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group on both the administration grant and the overall Supporting People grant. It forecasts over or under spends and allows informed decisions to be made in relation to financial matters relating to Supporting People. In addition regular financial reports go to departmental senior management team and quarterly to councillors.
- 61 The IT system supporting the delivery of the Supporting People programme is reliable and robust. Quarterly uploads of SPLS information for the ODPM are undertaken successfully and on time. Sound contingency plans are in place to protect the programme from the loss of data. Data is regularly backed up in line with council policy for other computer systems. Contingency arrangements are in place to ensure payments to providers can continue in the event of a software or hardware failure. Continuing payments to service providers ensure that services to vulnerable people will continue in an emergency.
- 62 Existing Housing Benefit (HB) IT systems do not however assist the speedy administration of supporting people payments. The move to a new HB IT system removed the ability to place flags on the system detailing receipt of a service user disclaimer allowing access to HB information by service providers and the Supporting People team. The Supporting People team would then be notified automatically when HB stopped or circumstances changed. There is an agreement in place for HB to respond quickly to enquiries from the Supporting People team. However, this relies upon the change being notified to the team by the service provider. If it does not occur, there may be delays in implementing changes to subsidy arrangements.
- 63 The approach to the management of risks in relation to Supporting People funded services has some weaknesses. For example accreditation of service providers is identified as an action taken to reduce the risk of provider failure whereas accreditation activity is only just taking place for some providers and for some has yet to be completed. Services therefore remain at risk.

Service reviews

- 64 Performance is fair with some strengths and some weaknesses. Overall there is a clear rationale to the service review programme and good progress is being made. The process is delivering improvements, some of which are evident to service users. A competent and experienced team is in place with the capacity to complete service reviews by April 2006. Bureaucracy is being minimised by working together with other councils to accept accreditation and passporting. However there are some shortcomings with service reviews. These include the lack of agreed quality assurance arrangements. Control over the implementation of improvement plans is weak and funding withdrawal arrangements are not clearly set out.

- 65 Overall the service review programme is based on a clear rationale. High cost, services suspected of being not strategically relevant and low cost services were programmed to be reviewed first. Service reviews are being adequately prioritised in most cases. Services have been brought forward for review on the basis of concerns over ineligibility and cost. For example a scheme which was suspected of providing ineligible care services was brought forward for an early review and de-commissioned as a result which led to savings being achieved.
- 66 However there are exceptions to this approach. There are examples where the review of high cost services has not taken place early in the service review programme. A small number of services or service activities appear to be ineligible and overlapping but have yet to be prioritised for review. Little use has been made of voluntary Quality Assessment Framework self assessment to help inform the service review programme. These exceptions mean that a number of potentially ineligible services or tasks continue to be funded.
- 67 Good procedures have been developed and agreed with service providers although improvements can be made. The service review process is well documented, engages service users and has been shared with providers and service users. Service providers received a presentation on the review process at the provider forum and service users have had the opportunity to discuss the process at an inclusive forum. A three stage appeal process has been agreed for those service providers who disagree with the outcome of their service review. Providers are positive about the service review process and the information they receive. Clear procedures help all parties understand the process and ensure reviews progress smoothly.
- 68 The review procedure does, however, have a number of deficiencies and areas where service providers were unclear about arrangements.
- Providers are not clear about the approach to value for money being adopted as part of service reviews.
 - There is no system to capture and co-ordinate feedback from service providers following service review. Without it the council is unable to capture, co-ordinate and learn lessons on what is working well/not well.
- 69 The council is minimising bureaucracy by accepting work carried out in other authorities on providers who provide services in more than one council area. It has agreed to accept accreditation and Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) assessments from other councils. Thirteen accreditation assessments and two QAF assessments have been accepted. These arrangements have the dual benefit of preventing duplication for the service provider and reducing the span of work required for the service review.
- 70 Outcomes of service reviews are reported to the Commissioning Body for approval. Details are provided on strategic relevance, performance, value for money and recommendations. Final decisions are therefore always taken by the overarching governing body. Improvement plans are included in draft reports and agreed with providers. These are discussed with providers and reported to the Commissioning Body via the draft report. Deadlines for improvements are determined.

- 71 Funding withdrawal arrangements are not however clearly set out. There are examples of services where funding has been or is the process of being withdrawn. In these cases the council are involved in discussions with the service provider to decide on the best way forward. However, the approach is not clearly set out and agreed with service providers in advance. Without a clearly defined approach to withdrawal, actions may be inconsistent or not taken, the service provider does not know what to expect and there is an increased danger of service users losing services that they continue to need.
- 72 Monitoring of improvement planning following service review is limited. At least two services checked as part of a reality check of files had a number of actions to complete. There were no notes on the files to suggest actions have been followed up or that review officers are satisfied with progress being made by agreed deadlines. Improvement plans are discussed and agreed with providers and included in draft reports. However services which fall below minimum level C standards of the Quality Assessment Framework continue to receive Supporting People funding and yet robust systems are not currently in place to ensure improvement activity is undertaken promptly.
- 73 The Supporting People team has the capacity to deliver the service review programme. In addition to its dedicated resources, the team has been able to access additional skills and capacity to assist in carrying out service reviews. Staff have received assistance from social services commissioning staff where services are jointly funded. Finance staff have assisted in relation to accreditation purposes, and other staff within the council have assisted in providing improvement information for providers and checklists for reviews on issues such as protection from abuse. This additional capacity has assisted the team in carrying out service reviews effectively.
- 74 Good progress is being made with the service review programme and all are likely to be completed by March 2006. The position on 7 December 2005 was 227 separate services to review:
- completed - 153 (67 per cent);
 - in progress - 27 (12 per cent); and
 - to start - 47 (21 per cent).
- Those not yet started include a substantial number of services for older people which are expected to be relatively straightforward.
- 75 Quality assurance arrangements are not formalised within the service review process to ensure equal treatment and rigour. The Core Strategy Group examine reports on all service reviews to ensure that they are thorough, complete and fair. However this is not documented as a requirement of the service review process and there is no record kept to ensure that all aspects are considered and approved. A final check and balance is offered by the Commissioning Body when the report is presented to them for sign off and they do scrutinise reviews closely before approval.

However, no external validation of service review standards is carried out, nor are service providers aware that service reviews are presented to the Core Strategy Group. This is a particular concern as there are no documented requirements to manage conflicts of interest. Without agreed quality assurance arrangements in place there is a danger that standards are not applied consistently.

- 76 There is evidence of service improvements as a result of the service review process. For example providers are improving the quality of their services following the voluntary use of the quality assessment framework. This is checked as part of the service review process. Providers have received training in how to use the QAF and in some cases smaller providers have received additional assistance to ensure they are able to meet the standards.
- 77 Some improvements following service review are visible to service users. Service users can point to improvements in services following service review. For example, a service user was able to request a more outcome focussed support plan be developed to reflect his wishes and aspirations in relation to the housing related support he required.
- 78 The ALA demonstrates a willingness to learn from others and share experiences. Opportunities are being taken to share expertise with neighbouring councils. A cross authority group of service review officers has been established to meet periodically, share information on procedures and cross authority providers. Neighbouring councils have also helped each other with the training and development of staff. Some of Gateshead's service review officers have shadowed service reviews of neighbouring councils and vice versa. Close working helps to bring a consistency of treatment, sharing of good practice and adds capacity.
- 79 However there is no joint concurrent review of the care and support elements of some services. An example includes reviews of some deregistered services where some Supporting People funded activities were found to relate to care services. Whilst a review of the care element is prompted by the Supporting People service review and follows shortly afterwards, the outcome of the housing related support review cannot be concluded until there is a clear assessment of the care element. In such cases it is necessary to establish the balance of care and support required as an overall package, whether both elements are value for money and where the funding will come from. Without a joint review or approach, decisions on the outcome of the review can be delayed.
- 80 Although in general, the quality of service reviews appears adequate, some aspects are not always tackled as comprehensively or set out clearly in the report as we would expect. Exclusions are not always being effectively challenged as part of service reviews. One example we identified was an older persons' service that excluded offenders on the original contract schedule. In addition service review reports do not show how services are explored to ensure they are collecting appropriate information and are eliminating barriers to groups who may require services to be more culturally appropriate.

Service user involvement

- 81 Service user involvement with the Supporting People programme in Gateshead is good and improving. There is a strong corporate commitment to engage with service users and effective Inclusive and Service User forums have been established to influence programme developments.. Specialist assistance is provided to the programme to develop involvement and there are clear examples of changes as a result of service user involvement. Service users are closely involved with service reviews to evaluate and improve individual schemes. Routine evaluation of the effectiveness of activities is not however carried out and service users do not receive full feedback on service reviews.
- 82 There is a strong commitment to involve service users in the development of the programme. This is consistently expressed throughout the council's policies, from the 'Towards 2010' vision, through corporate and departmental policies, and included in Supporting People annual service user involvement policy statement. This public commitment ensures that the council can be held to account.
- 83 This commitment is translated into actions. It is council practice to involve service users in partnership groups. For example service users are involved with the thematic groups established as part of the Local Strategic Partnership. The inclusion of service users in partnership groups and sub groups is a forward step in ensuring that service development is user driven.
- 84 The council has mapped existing partnerships and established links with the Supporting People programme. For example, links have been established with the Learning Disability Partnership board and the Mental Health Partnership Board on which service users are represented. This ensures the programme is taking full advantage of existing connections and that planning for individual client groups is co-ordinated.
- 85 The engagement of Travellers is patchy. Until they are adequately engaged, a complete understanding of their housing related support needs will remain unknown and go unfulfilled. Plans are in place to engage Travellers and update information.
- 86 Some good strategies are in place to co-ordinate and develop service user involvement. There are a hierarchy of strategies developed by the council to co-ordinate and engage service users including the Involvement Strategy, the Tenant and Resident Involvement Strategy, and the Supporting People user involvement statement. This ensures there is a structured and deliberate approach to improve service user involvement.
- 87 The Inclusive Forum is successful in getting a large number of stakeholders involved with the programme. In April 2005, 123 people attended the Inclusive Forum including 39 service users. There is a clear record of the day, the main points raised and the actions proposed to meet them. Reports capture the detail of the meeting and are available both as a source of feedback to participants and as a check that issues raised are taken forward.

Action has been taken and reports were made widely available in hard copy through the council offices and on the council website. Involvement ensures the programme is developed to meet the needs of local stakeholders and that they feel able to influence the direction of the programme.

- 88 The council is listening to what service users have to say. One particular example stems from the April 2005 Inclusive Forum where service users requested to have a discussion forum of their own. The first service user forum 'Speaking Up' held in October 2005 covered a range of relevant issues including charging, the website, and service reviews. Working groups are being set up. Their involvement ensures that the programme at a strategic level develops in a way that will best meet their needs.
- 89 Specialists are being used to help the Supporting People programme develop their links with service users. A dedicated corporate user involvement officer supported the development of the Inclusive Forum and Speaking Up events. This ensures that there is a joined up approach across the council and that the events are well planned and clear benefits are secured.
- 90 There are some good examples of service users being involved with the programme. These include involvement in recruitment, commissioning new services, developing a video, and developing special feedback arrangements for people with Learning Disabilities. Involvement helps service users take a sense of ownership of the programme, help shape its development and understand the benefits the programme has to offer.
- 91 Feedback to service users following service review is limited. All service users receive a copy of feedback raised by service users as part of the review. However they are not informed of the outcomes of the service review or any potential impact of the service review outcome. This means they cannot see the contribution they have made to the overall process and what improvements they can expect to see.
- 92 The overall impact of activities to improve service user involvement is not currently assessed by the programme through the Core Strategy Group. Although there are a range of activities carried out, some of which are high quality and individually evaluated, there is neither periodic programme wide, evaluation of their impact nor any reporting of progress. There are proposals to include service users as part of the Core Strategy Group and to introduce satisfaction surveys. However without periodic evaluation, the programme cannot know how effective its activities are in reaching its service users and what it needs to do to improve further.

Access to services and information

- 93 Service strengths and weaknesses are equally balanced. Information is well presented, accessible and easy to understand. The council's website is good. It provides easy access to a considerable amount of information for both service users, service providers and other staff. Leaflets are well written and some easy read literature has been produced specifically for people with difficulties understanding complex documents. Literature is available in other languages and formats on request although a translated strapline to alert people to this is not always present. A good local directory of Supporting People services is available which shows clear access routes although it does not show which services are accessible to people with mobility problems or are culturally sensitive. Not all front line staff know about the directory and the Supporting People programme.
- 94 The council website is good and provides a lot of information on Supporting People for both service providers and service users. It includes the five-year strategy, relevant policies, meeting dates and minutes of past meetings (including Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group) and includes a comprehensive local directory of existing services and how to access them. Easily accessible information will ensure the programme is better understood.
- 95 Regular information is provided to service providers and service users. Regular newsletters are sent to service providers with additional copies for service users to ensure that people are kept up to date with developments in the Supporting People programme. Information is well set out and easy to read. A regular stream of information helps to keep people informed about developments and understand what the programme is about.
- 96 A general purpose Supporting People leaflet is available in Council offices open to the public. The Supporting People leaflet is easy to read, with contact details and a strap line to say it's available in other formats on request. It explains the Supporting People programme and who can benefit from the service. Potential and existing service users will be able to understand whether they are entitled to receive support.
- 97 In response to service user requests, some information is provided in easy to read formats. This includes the five-year Supporting People strategy. Providing easily understood information in this way helps those service users, such as people with learning disabilities, to understand what the Supporting People programme is all about.
- 98 Good information on the housing related support services is available in Gateshead. The main source of information is the local directory of services which expands on service information available through the ODPM's national directory of Supporting People services. The directory includes details of what services each provider offers, how to access the services and details of any exclusions that apply. The local directory does not include details of which services are accessible to people with mobility problems or offer culturally sensitive services. The council hold this information on their Supporting People database and plan to update information in the next release.

Information for adults is also available through Gateshead's local Better Care: Higher standards documentation which has been updated to incorporate Supporting People services. Good, easily accessible information provides service users with increased choice over the type of housing related support appropriate to them and who provides services.

- 99** Information on Fairer Charging for housing related support is not available in local council offices. A leaflet is in its final stages of development but has not yet been distributed around the council's offices. The proposed leaflet sets out information on what Fairer Charging is and how to apply clearly and succinctly for service users. It does not however signpost readers to the place where they can find definitive information. For example, if a service user wanted to know what benefits or earnings count as income, they would need to look at the Charging policy. The leaflet does not tell readers this. Ease of understanding can contribute to the take up entitlement.
- 100** Although printed literature is offered on request in other formats and languages, contact details and the strapline is only printed in English. This will make it difficult for potential service users who have difficulty reading English gain access to information they can understand.
- 101** Access arrangements are in place but are inconsistent and vary across services. Enquiries to the council revealed a mixed performance in signposting to appropriate services. Staff were knowledgeable, polite, courteous and sensitive when answering telephone enquiries. However, information is not always easily accessible from publicly accessible customer service points. Some front line staff were unclear about the Supporting People programme or the directory of services provided even though there were leaflets available in the offices. Service users will find inconsistency in the quality of advice they receive.
- 102** Activities to keep front line staff up to date with programme developments are not fully effective. Quarterly briefings are carried out to, keep front line staff including receptionists, social workers and health visitors informed and up to date about the Supporting People programme. Reception staff were given a specific briefing when the Directory of Services went live. Although there is a reasonable level of understanding of the programme across operational staff in the council and its partners, there are pockets of staff without. A lack of awareness or lack of understanding amongst staff can present a barrier to a vulnerable gaining access to appropriate services.

Diversity

- 103** Diversity is a strength of the Supporting People programme. Information is good on the housing related support needs of the diverse communities in Gateshead. More is being done to address specific gaps in information. Good links have been established between the programme and existing council forums which engage with many minority groups. New services have been introduced to plug previous gaps in provision. Knowledge of the cultural sensitivity of existing services is good although this information is not yet available to potential service users.

104 The council is taking steps to ensure the services funded through Supporting People are being delivered to a variety of diverse groups. An Equalities and Diversity survey was undertaken with providers to assess how well services provided meet a range of people's needs including those service users from ethnic communities or who may have specific language or cultural requirements. In addition, a Race Equality Impact Assessment of Supporting People services has identified a number of unmet service needs including:

- a need for culturally sensitive provision of services to women fleeing domestic violence; and
- information to be available in different community languages and formats.

This improved information is helping to inform future planning and commissioning. One positive example was the council's proactive approach to find out why people in Jewish communities were not taking up services. These are being addressed through the development of a separate housing related support service for older, Jewish people funded through Supporting People. Contracts were changed as a result of the impact assessment ensuring the inclusion of clauses to cover equality and diversity issues such as requiring service providers to give appropriate consideration to service users race, nationality, cultural or ethnic background.

105 However, this good information on the housing related support needs of black and minority ethnic groups has recently been developed and is not adequately presented in the five-year strategy. Other than services to refugees, the strategy does not address the current and future needs of ethnic communities and compare them against current supply. However, it was recognised that more needed to be done. As this is a major council public planning document, the good work is not captured to inform readers and raise awareness of what has been carried out.

106 To plug gaps in information the council is taking action, for example on the needs of travellers. A site is already in existence which receives a range of comprehensive non Supporting People funded support through staff and an on site warden. There is also a commitment to develop an additional transit site for travellers in the city. Some staff have had awareness training in relation to the needs of travellers and consultation is taking place with travellers with an event planned for December to progress a policy in relation to travellers.

107 The council is taking steps to consult with and engage with harder to reach groups. A diversity forum with representatives from diverse communities of faith, culture, ethnic community youth groups and refugees links into the Local Strategic Partnership and has appointed champions within each department in relation to diversity. They also have taken steps to engage with young people through the establishment of a black and minority ethnic youth forum and other initiatives to engage with local Jewish young people.

- 108** Supporting People have made good links with other existing and new forums to engage with diverse groups in the community. These include Supporting People's Inclusive and Service User forums, and corporate forums such as the Community Care Forum and Gateshead Domestic Violence Partnership. Strong links with minority communities help to break down barriers to access and ensure changes to service provision are designed to better meet their needs.
- 109** Supporting People has made good use of corporate capacity to assist in identifying the needs of local black and minority ethnic communities. The department employ a liaison officer specifically to develop and improve links with minority and hard to reach communities. There is now good quality baseline demographic information from which to work from. They have produced a community profile following consultation with a range of different groups. This profile information is being utilised to inform future service provision and to assist in ensuring services can become more culturally appropriate in the future.
- 110** Comprehensive information is held on which services can cater for service users with particular religious, language or access requirements. This recently collected information is currently held centrally and is intended to be made available to service users in the next update of the local directory of services. Service users from minority community groups will then be able to see which services are sensitive to meeting their particular cultural or language needs.
- 111** Some services could be more culturally diverse and reflect the black and minority ethnic community. This would facilitate better take-up of services according to black and minority ethnic groups. For example with the workforce of service providers better reflecting the black and minority ethnic population in order to encourage better take up of services. This is something that the council are aware of and are taking steps to address this with a clear action plan and initiatives to share good practice in relation to recruitment initiatives and staff retention.
- 112** Some specific services are being provided to diverse groups and more is being developed. These include existing services for women fleeing domestic violence, services for refugees including help to move on and offenders. New services have been introduced, for example for older people from Jewish communities and people living with HIV/AIDs. The changing profile of provision is beginning to address the range of housing related support needs of Gateshead's diverse communities.

Outcomes for service users

- 113** Positive outcomes for service users outweigh areas of concern. New services have been developed and existing ones reconfigured to meet the identified needs of vulnerable people in Gateshead. Additional funding has been levered in and a range of measures introduced to improve choice and access to accommodation. Support planning is robust and service users are involved in their development. As the review programme is not complete, not all services are focussed on meeting priority needs.

Decommissioning plans are not well developed to adequately protect the service user from the loss of their service and give them peace of mind. Performance management systems are not in place to fully capture outcomes that the programme delivers for service users.

114 A number of new services have been introduced by the programme and the amount of provision expanded through the service review process. Pipeline schemes have been delivered including:

- three schemes delivering 11 units of additional support for people with learning disabilities;
- two schemes delivering 80 units of support to frail older people;
- a scheme delivering 10 units of support for older people; and
- a scheme delivering 6 units of support for people with mental health problems.

Funding released from service reviews has enabled the development of temporary services for older people from Jewish communities, people suffering from HIV/AIDs and older people services. These are all priority areas for the programme locally. A number of other services have been developed or reconfigured including services for people with visual impairment, women fleeing domestic violence, homeless people and people suffering from drug and alcohol problems. Some services have expanded capacity as a result of service review, for example expanding existing services available to women fleeing domestic violence. More services mean more people who need housing related support services are able to access support to help them back to living independently in the community.

115 The council has been successful in attracting and leveraging in additional funding to enable an expansion of the housing and support options for vulnerable people. For example a domestic abuse rapid response service has been developed following funding through the private sector and Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme bids have been made to provide additional housing for vulnerable groups.

116 A range of measures have been put in place to improve choice and access to a range of accommodation these include:

- access to the private rented sector is being improved through an accredited Landlord and bond scheme;
- the council is making use of nomination arrangements to maximise access of Registered Social Landlord accommodation; and
- empty homes are being prioritised to ensure opportunities for accommodating vulnerable households are utilised.

All of these initiatives extend the accommodation options available and assist in providing access to move-on accommodation from Supported People funded services.

- 117** Robust support plans are in place in the services visited as part of this inspection. With individual exceptions, support plans are agreed with service users and reviewed regularly. It is through individual support plans that service users receive a service tailored to meet their personal housing related support needs. Having a copy of the plan is important as it shows the service user what service they are entitled to expect.
- 118** Performance management systems do not fully capture outcomes that the programme delivers for service users. National key performance indicators and indicators on service provider performance are collected and reported to the council's Overview and Scrutiny committee. However, there are no local indicators that identify the outcomes by individual client group and may contribute to related strategies, for example older people. Without such a system it is difficult for the programme to break down information by client group to monitor trends, quality, measure achievement or progress towards objectives or take informed decisions on priorities or remedial action.
- 119** Not all services have been assessed as yet to determine if they are strategically relevant or meeting local needs. The cleaning service for example is not offered to older people who need assistance with cleaning in order to maintain their own homes. Instead these services are targeted at certain sheltered schemes in order to ensure they are financially viable which inevitably means services are less likely to be offered to those most in need. This does not represent best use of finite resources.
- 120** Although not a major issue, plans have not been put in place for the withdrawal of Supporting People funding to ensure no disruption to service users. There is no guidance on the approach to be taken following de-commissioning. There are two examples of cases where funding has been withdrawn and in practice discussions have taken place to ensure that services continue. However, the absence of a detailed plan for withdrawal of the service, developed in conjunction with the service provider and service user places the service user at greater risk and provides no assurance that services will continue.
- 121** Adequate complaints and compliments procedures are in place although procedures to complain to the council are not well publicised to vulnerable service users. Service users in the first instance are expected to raise complaints with their service provider. All service providers are expected to maintain a complaints procedure and this is satisfactorily examined as part of the service review. Should a service user want to raise their complaint or compliment to a higher level or complain about the service provider, a complaint would be made through the council's corporate complaints process. Information is available on the council website and leaflets are available in council offices. However, it is not clear how the higher level council procedure is brought to the attention of vulnerable service users. Few complaints have been received. Unless the procedure is known and accessible, service deficiencies may remain undetected.

- 122** Service users told us how the support they are receiving is helping to improve their quality of life and their life chances. These include the following extracts from case studies.

Case study 1

Mr X has learning disabilities and lived in a residential home for a number of years, before moving into flat with two other service users. When living in the home he never went out, always had to ask permission from staff before doing anything and lacked self confidence. Now able to live independently in his own flat with housing related support, his quality of life has improved considerably. He has taken up hobbies and now enjoys photography as well as being in a position to make decisions himself about his life.

Case study 2

Mr Y is a young man with learning disabilities who lived at home with his father. Unfortunately his father became ill and had to go into long term care. Mr Y moved into a flat with two other young people. Housing related support has helped him develop the life skills and confidence he needs to look after himself and maintain his own home. He is now waiting to move on into a flat of his own. He is attending college doing a cookery course and has a work placement at a local church serving lunch twice a week.

Value for money

- 123** Strengths in delivering value for money improvements are constrained by a lack of clarity over the approach to quality. Action is being taken to ensure the administration grant is closely monitored and delivers value for money. Costs are low in comparison to other councils and good progress has been made in reviewing the costs of existing services. However the approach has not been agreed in advance with providers, the detail is not set out in a widely available policy document, nor is it clear how a balance between cost, quality and outcomes is achieved. New procurement follows robust standards although these have slipped for temporary services procured quickly.

How do costs compare?

- 124** The average cost of Supporting People services is below both national and regional averages. However, without being linked to the quality of services provided, financial comparisons alone are limited in an assessment of value for money. As shown in Appendix 1 at the end of the report, the cost of Supporting People services is low both per unit overall and per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing. The cost per unit (at £11.93 a week) is less than half the national average (at £28.30 a week) reflecting the high number of low cost services for older people that make up the bulk of provision in Gateshead. However even excluding community alarm and sheltered housing services, the unit cost of services in Gateshead is £57.54 a week compared to a national average of £76.37. Again this reflects the high number of floating support services which generally are lower cost than accommodation based services.

How is value for money managed?

- 125** There are a number of measures in place to ensure that administrative arrangements are value for money. Team size and salary levels are compared with other sub regional councils, there is tight monitoring and regular reporting of all aspects of the administration budget, and the requirement for new positions need to be justified to the council's Establishment and Vacancy panel. These measures ensure that there is close monitoring of the costs of administration and proper accountability.
- 126** Clear efficiency targets have been set for the programme. The five-year strategy identifies a clear 3.5 per cent efficiency improvement required for the current year. Progress is monitored by the Commissioning Body and is on track to be achieved in the current year. This means that managers know exactly what they are expected to achieve and can monitor progress towards achievement.
- 127** The council is attempting to maximise the use of Supporting People funding to ensure needs are being met. There is a robust challenge to services where costs are deemed to be high or ineligible. There are a number of examples where service costs have been challenged due to their ineligibility or higher than benchmark cost and providers have been asked to secure savings and grants have been reduced as a result. Savings are therefore made for re-investment in priorities.
- 128** Savings have been achieved enabling services to continue against a shrinking grant allocation and additional funding unlocked to procure new services. Reductions in grant allocation of £300,000 have been managed through savings generated by the service review programme. An additional £60,000 unlocked from legacy services has been re-invested in priority areas, such as services for people with HIV/AIDs, and extra care services for frail older people. Other examples of improved value for money include the reconfiguration of services following service review to provide a greater number of units of support for the same cost.
- 129** Some opportunities to benchmark costs locally are being utilised although it is not clear how the quality of services features in these comparisons. Costs are being compared with the regional and local cost indicators from the ODPM but also some services have being compared on a sub regional basis to compare similar services and their associated costs following a detailed assessment of costs from providers. The quality of services is not taken into account. Gateshead are part of the North East benchmarking club which is drawing together regional data on cost, best practice and service improvement. This ensures services are realistically benchmarked against reliable local cost data although no allowance is made for different quality standards.
- 130** Sound eligibility criteria are in place. The criteria have been late in being developed to clarify what constitutes housing related support and the boundaries between support, care, and housing management. However the criteria which have been discussed and agreed with service providers do now provide this clarity and will assist in service reviews and developing new services in future.

- 131 There are however weaknesses with current provision. A small number of potentially ineligible services or service activities continue to be funded from the grant. Admittedly these services are part of the 30 per cent of services still to be reviewed. However this ineligibility has not been identified at an early stage and these services prioritised for service review. The consequences are that the release of funding for re-investment in priorities is delayed.
- 132 The approach to value for money as part of service reviews is not clearly determined in order to ensure a consistent and transparent approach. There is little written guidance for staff and providers receive little information on which to challenge value for money assessments. Little detail is provided in the service review procedure on how value for money is to be assessed. It does not for example set out whether hourly rates are to be used as a comparison, how overheads will be considered, what arrangements will be made for specialist or intensive services, or how a balance between cost and quality will be achieved. In practice, staff take service providers through the detail of a value for money questionnaire which is used to break down costs and establish a unit cost of services provided in advance of their specific service review. Responses from service providers show little dissatisfaction. However the procedure is not documented and agreed in advance. Without this detail, service providers cannot see how the assessment will be carried out and have confidence in being treated fairly and consistently.
- 133 Some new schemes have been robustly procured in line with commissioning principles. A number of services, including Southview - an accommodation based service for people with learning disabilities, have been procured following a tender exercise and robust selection process which involved stakeholders and service users. These procedures ensure that procurement meets legal requirements and deliver good quality, value for money services by specifying standards to be achieved and considering a range of procurement options.
- 134 Short term Supporting People services have not been procured in the same open and transparent way. Existing procurement or commissioning guidelines were not followed. Instead specialist, local services known to be the only providers in the area were invited to bring bids and these were then prioritised and recommended to the Commissioning Body for approval. The funding for the short term services was limited at £58,000 overall for a 12 month period and included agreement that the service would be subject to service review. However the selection process was not open and transparent and does not demonstrate how value for money has been achieved at the outset.
- 135 There are few examples of joint procurement to contract services that are better value for money. In partnership with Newcastle, Gateshead have jointly developed one service, a Home Improvement Agency to provide services to those eligible and in need in both boroughs. Joint procurement if done well allows councils working together to secure better value for money and develop viable specialist services.

Summary

- 136** Overall we judge that Gateshead is making fair progress with the Supporting People programme.
- 137** Service user involvement is achieving clear benefits for vulnerable people. There is a strong commitment from the council to place users at the heart of developments and specialist corporate assistance is being provided to the programme. A service user forum has been established and service users are effectively engaged in service reviews. Diversity is another area making good progress. Again the Supporting People programme has benefited from corporate support to establish good links with existing forums and map out the diverse needs of the community. Provision is beginning to change to meet those needs.
- 138** Progress has been made with service reviews with almost 70 per cent of the programme completed. However there are questions over how quality features in the value for money assessment and how well improvement plans are followed up. A competent team of officers carry out reviews which are delivering improvements and unlocking funding from legacy services. Bureaucracy is being reduced by accepting accreditation and pass-porting arrangements from neighbouring councils. More services have been developed and additional resources levered in improving the capacity, choice and access that the Supporting People programme offers. Services are low cost and robust procurement arrangements are in place.
- 139** Areas in need of further development include a comprehensive performance management system to show what the programme is delivering particularly in terms of outcomes for service users. Policy weaknesses include:
- a lack of key objectives in the five-year strategy;
 - terms of reference showing how voting arrangements, conflicts of interest and conflicts between partners will be addressed in Gateshead. There is no memorandum of understanding agreed between the council and the commissioning body;
 - quality assurance arrangements for service reviews;
 - the approach to achieving value for money and particularly how quality will be balanced against cost; and
 - when necessary, how funding will be withdrawn to protect the service user from any negative impact.

Risk management is underdeveloped and Fairer Charging to ensure a single means tested assessment for all care and support services is late in being promoted.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 140** Gateshead has a positive track record in delivering improved housing related support services for its vulnerable residents. There is clear evidence of improvements in the quantity and range of services being delivered. Gaps are beginning to be filled. Progress is being made against improvement plans. A solid framework is in place to support the delivery of the programme through partnership working and effective user involvement. Some policies, however, have been slow to be put in place and Fairer charging arrangements have not been adequately promoted.
- 141** The council can demonstrate a track record of improving services for vulnerable groups. They have been successful in increasing the range of housing and support options for vulnerable groups including people with learning disabilities, three additional extra care schemes for older people, two housing and support co-ordinators to facilitate access to supported housing and provision for young offenders. Additional provision or capacity has been developed for a number of priority groups including for people with visual impairment, women fleeing domestic violence, homeless people and people suffering from drug and alcohol problems. All address identified unmet need and are in line with priorities.
- 142** Progress has been made with the service review programme. Almost three quarters of the service review programme is completed and the council is well on track to complete the review programme by March 2006. Service reviews are yielding benefits including the release of funding to match year on year reductions in ODPM grant, additional funding to develop temporary schemes where there are gaps in services for example in services to people suffering from HIV/AIDs. Some services have expanded capacity as a result of service review, for example expanding existing services available to women fleeing domestic violence. Improvement plans are being put in place to control the delivery of actions to improve the quality of services being delivered. Progress is enabling actions to reshape Supporting People services to better match the identified housing related support needs of the diverse communities in Gateshead.
- 143** Many of the priorities of the shadow strategy have been delivered and others carried forward into the five-year strategy. For example in relation to teenage parents one priority was to establish a core of five supported placements in the Sure Start area. This was achieved. Some have been achieved with Supporting People funding and others with mainstream funding such as improving the range and choice of accommodation to people with acquired brain injury. The range of support available to vulnerable people in Gateshead is increasing.

- 144** Progress is being made on the Supporting People Annual Action Plan. In the part of the plan requiring no additional ODPM funding three items are already achieved, two are on track and three are making progress but showing slippage. In the second part of the plan based on actions proposed if additional funding from ODPM was available, two items have been achieved, two part achieved, two are progressing with mainstream funding, and four have not progressed due to the lack of available funding. These items are directly relevant to the provision of new or expanded services in priority areas or efficiency improvement. The majority of actions identified are on track showing that the programme is delivering changes.
- 145** Overall a sound framework has been put in place to deliver the programme. The partnership groups are in place, links have been made with service user groups, a team is in place to support the administration of the programme, contracts are all in place and accurate payments are being made.
- 146** The Supporting People programme is showing improvements in value for money. It is delivering an increased number of services for less overall grant. Assessment of the quality of these services is almost three quarters complete, and improvement plans are in place to drive up quality standards where they have fallen short of the level required.
- 147** In other areas the council has been slow to put policies and procedures in place. Local eligibility criteria have been slow to be put in place. The approach to assessing value for money is still not documented. Fairer Charging arrangements, although agreed in 2002, and confirmed only recently as it was not seen as a priority, have not been adequately promoted other than through service providers.
- 148** On a wider level, the Supporting People programme is clearly contributing to the achievement of other strategy objectives. For example, since the Housing Strategy was published a further 16 people with learning disabilities are supported in independent living. The number of milestones achieved on target since the older people strategy was approved by the council is remarkable and Supporting People is helping to make the change programme a success. This is clear evidence that the programme is effectively integrated into mainstream service delivery.
- 149** The council also has a track record of improving service delivery. Significant improvements have been made to environmental services and social care over the past year. Under the Audit Commission - Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005: The Harder Test - Gateshead have been assessed as improving well against their duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvements. This demonstrates a track record that goes beyond the Supporting People programme itself to show how well the council as a whole is performing.

How does the service manage performance?

- 150** Two significant weaknesses outweigh the strengths in managing performance. The performance management framework for the programme is not sufficiently developed to be able to demonstrate progress against objectives or outcomes for service users. An integrated set of improvement plans is let down by the lack of identified resources to deliver the actions identified. Effective systems are in place to manage individual performance linked to programme objectives, capture best practice and learn from what works well.
- 151** High level aims or objectives for the Supporting People programme are not clear. The five-year strategy does not highlight clearly what it is trying to achieve. It does set out the detail of the programme and makes clear links to other strategies that it supports. It also identifies areas where there is unmet need and establishes a scored system of determining priorities. The Council say that the Supporting People strategy does not have high level aims that are distinct to the other strategies that exist for individual client groups, such as older people or people with learning disabilities. If this is the case, then the Supporting People strategy does not make this clear. It does not draw together these objectives into the strategy to enable progress to be monitored.
- 152** Improvement plans address most of the key areas in need of development but are not sufficiently SMART or resourced. Plans are addressing the right things. New or expanded services are the focus of the 2005/6 Action Plan. It is outcome focused and prioritised, although as stated in paragraph 154 below it is not funded. The plan is structured around the development of new services by client group in the priority determined by their agreed approach. This provides clarity for officers to focus effort around the development of new services and hold them accountable.
- 153** Most operational issues are identified for development through the team plan although it is not as SMART as it needs to be. It identifies action to improve on areas such as:
- service user involvement;
 - improve ICT systems; and
 - improve service user awareness of charging arrangements.
- There are also plans to develop the diary system to closer control follow up action on post review action plans. Efforts are therefore being focused in the right areas.
- 154** Some important elements are not included in improvement plans. The five-year strategy makes no mention of improving access, and this is not identified as an action in the 2005/06 Annual Action Plan nor is the requirement to develop the performance management system. Those items not identified are unlikely to receive attention and improve.

- 155** There are some weak elements in the plans including the Annual Plan which question how deliverable they are. The most significant of these relate to resources to deliver improvement actions. The Annual Plan, for example, does not identify where the resources needed to deliver all aspects of the plan will come from. The council agree that the latter part the plan is aspirational. Development is dependent on additional government grant, alternative funding sources or reconfiguration of service provision through the service review process. Plans are not likely to be delivered unless the amount and source of resources to fund proposed actions are clearly identified.
- 156** Other planning weaknesses include little use of targets and measurable outcomes. The annual plan does not include delivery dates for all the actions proposed, and the impact of the actions focuses on outputs (increased number of supported tenancies) rather than outcomes (the benefit those tenancies will bring to that particular client group). The team work plan identifies what is to be measured and what outcomes are expected but with no targets. Without targets, the council will be unable to assess how successful their actions have been.
- 157** Performance management for the programme is under developed. The programme does measure and report on the key national performance indicators for Supporting People and there is close monitoring of the budget both by the management and the Supporting People partnership groups. However it has not established measurable high level objectives, nor does it measure the contribution the programme is making to its related strategies and the outcomes the programme is delivering to individual client groups and the community. There is no collation of existing performance indicators that may be jointly owned with partners to show changing trends, for example on emergency psychiatric re-admissions or the number of drug users who successfully undergo a course of treatment. This information is vital to understand the impact of the programme locally and inform strategic investment decisions.
- 158** Progress on the Annual Plan and some aspects of performance are being regularly monitored. Progress on the Annual Action plan is reported to the Commissioning Body every six months. Performance on existing national indicators is routinely reported to management and the responsible scrutiny committee in line with corporate arrangements. There are corporate standards for service planning, performance management and monitoring. Effective monitoring processes are necessary to understand how well plans are being implemented and how effectively they are tackling local issues.
- 159** Systems are in place to effectively link individual performance into the Supporting People programme. Individual work programmes are in place to link individual performance with the objectives of the team, the programme and the department. Each individual member of staff has a work programme which lists their activity objectives, tasks and timescales for completion. These are not as SMART as they need to be, but do form a basis for measurement and provide clarity to the individual. Work programmes are regularly reviewed through staff supervision. Annual achievement and development reviews are in place to take a longer term view of achievement against objectives and identify development needs.

Again objectives are not SMART. The impact is that systems are in place to link individual performance with wider objectives and make clear the contribution expected of each individual. However, without measurable targets in place it is difficult to measure how successful they have been.

160 A number of effective mechanisms are in place to capture learning and best practice.

- The team have utilised opportunities to learn from its own experience and service user feedback to ensure continuous improvement. They have amended the SP review process in a number of ways following its use to ensure it is fit for purpose. There are examples of where information for service users has been produced in a more accessible format following feedback. The team have had and plan to have opportunities to review as a team how they are working and how things could be improved.
- Gateshead collaborates with their neighbours to learn what works well and train new staff. For example, contract review officers meet on a cross authority basis and share information and practices. Staff new in post have accompanied neighbouring council staff on service reviews. Review staff can obtain specialist finance expertise from within the council, a practice adopted from a neighbouring authority.
- The Supporting People team have regular team meetings and an annual development day to help them look at what they are doing, clarify priorities and seek ways to improve. At the last team awayday, they identified a need to become better known to service providers and put in place a series of visits to establish early relationships with service providers. Supporting People providers report good relations with the team.
- The community liaison team assist in spreading good practice in customer liaison around the council. For example, service users are involved in the recruitment of staff in some areas. Through the service user forum, this is proposed to be introduced into the Supporting People programme area and into service provider recruitment procedures.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

161 Strengths outweigh limitations on the council's capacity to improve. A skilled, adequately resourced team is in place to administer the programme supported by access to training and robust IT systems. Improved information on housing related support needs of vulnerable groups in Gateshead is available and service users are becoming increasingly involved in strategic developments. Some additional funding and new initiatives are being levered in to the programme to mitigate grant funding constraints. Improvements are needed in financial and workforce planning to ensure that the council has the capacity to deliver the programme into the future. The council approach to value for money is hampered by its failure to set out an agreed approach on how assessments will be carried out and how cost will be balanced against quality considerations.

- 162** The programme has access to the skills it needs to develop the programme and take it forward. A team of appropriately skilled staff is in place to deliver the programme. Staff have access to training to develop their skills and keep up to date. All have had training in Equality and Diversity, Protection of vulnerable adults, Microsoft project, and some have had individual training including housing returning prisoners, report writing, risk assessment. This equips staff to be better able to discharge their responsibilities.
- 163** Resources are insufficient to deliver all the day to day requirements of the programme. The team has been supplemented by two secondees to help it through the peak of work involved with service reviews. Additional specialist support from the council can be called upon when required, for example to improve arrangements to engage with service users. However some elements of the work, such as the ongoing monitoring of contracts, have fallen behind to allow staff resources to be focused on service reviews. Some aspects of the programme are therefore being neglected in the short term while available resources are prioritised to service reviews.
- 164** Service user involvement is becoming central to programme development. Good links have been established with service users and a service user forum has been established. Plans are in place to allow service user representatives to attend the Core Strategy Group and contribute to the strategic development of the Supporting People programme in Gateshead. Training is also to be provided to the service user representatives to ensure that they can understand and make a full contribution to discussions. Improving the ability of service users to contribute to strategic developments will increase the sustainability of the programme.
- 165** The IT system is reliable and offers good support to the administration of the programme. Projects are underway to continually improve the quality of support offered by IT systems. A data cleanse exercise is almost complete which has successfully removed errors from the quarterly runs and there are advanced proposals to transfer operations to a new software system which is better integrated with the wider department and further improving the efficiency of operations.
- 166** However the relationship with the Housing Benefit section is not helping Supporting People administration. There is some confusion over who seeks approval from service users to access Housing Benefit records and there is no agreed approach or protocol for the exchange of information. This may lead to delays in payment or overpayments if one section fails to tell the other promptly about a relevant change of circumstances.
- 167** Additional tools are being developed to assist in the assessment of value for money. On a cross authority basis work is being completed to establish more up to date local benchmarking information in relation to costs of services which should start to assist value for money assessments in the future.

- 168 However, the council's ability to deliver value for money will be impaired for as long as there is no agreed approach which sets out the approach to achieving value for money including how cost and quality relationships are balanced and what the council's approach is to joint commissioning. The council's approach is not documented in any of its policies or plans and there are no proposals to do so.
- 169 Improving information is available on housing related support needs to inform strategic decisions. Supporting People have made good use of corporate capacity to assist in identifying the needs of local black and minority ethnic communities. There is now good quality baseline demographic information from which to work from. They have produced a community profile following consultation with a range of different groups. This profile information can be utilised to inform future service provision and to assist in ensuring services can become more culturally appropriate in the future.
- 170 There is clear corporate commitment to identifying the needs of diverse groups and engaging them in service development which assists and compliments the work of the Supporting People programme. The establishment of a diversity forum which is chaired by the leader of the council and feeds directly into the Local Strategic Partnership is one example of this. There is also a corporate equalities group with representatives from each department to ensure equalities and diversity are integral to the work of the council and appropriate linkages are made.
- 171 Action is being taken to overcome the resource constraint imposed through a relatively low level of grant allocation. The Council is effectively working in partnership to assist in delivering key outcomes for older people in Gateshead. The Council has worked with its Housing Association partners on the delivery of extra care schemes in the borough to ensure the future housing care and support needs of older people are to be adequately met. The needs of offenders are being supported through the leveraging in of additional funding alongside Supporting People funded services. A rent deposit scheme for offenders is planned through funding from the Drug Action Team to provide a housing worker to provide support to offenders who have drug and alcohol problems.
- 172 Through the co-ordination of appropriate development bids to the housing corporation, the council is supporting the development of Supporting People services. Bids are co-ordinated and prioritised through a housing strategy group which has supported a successful bid for an extra care development and future bids to assist in dealing with bed blocking for vulnerable groups. The selection of partners has also been addressed through a co-ordinated approach with Supporting People staff being involved in that process.
- 173 The Council has been successful in leveraging alternative sources of funding to support the work with older people and people with a disability. The Council have been successful in accessing £250,000 ODPM funding for this year and next to pilot an approach to individual budgets for these groups. In addition to providing more funding for services, Gateshead residents will be amongst the first to benefit from this new approach to service delivery.

- 174** However the Council's capacity to improve is not assisted by its failure to clearly identify resources to deliver its main improvement plan. The annual plan for 2005/06 contained in the supporting people strategy is acknowledged as setting out a Council bid for additional funding under the new distribution formula or other sources rather than a realistic statement of service development via service review and budget profiling.
- 175** Procurement procedures are being improved. Services that have been commissioned from supporting people have followed robust corporate procurement guidelines rather than a social care approach to commissioning. There is a gap in relation to a commissioning strategy for housing related support but this is being progressed and a report with a draft sound policy is to be considered by Cabinet in December 2005. The Commission for Racial Equality code is being adopted in relation to procurement and commissioning principles. This will ensure in the future that services that are commissioned will clearly identify and seek to address diverse needs and ensure services are more culturally appropriate.
- 176** Workforce planning is not as forward looking as it needs to be. A human resource strategy has been developed for community based services to ensure effective human resource planning. The strategy sets out a number of tasks to support strategic objectives of having a well resourced and effective workforce. Systems are in place to ensure staff are developed and have access to training necessary to deliver the work. In addition flexibility has been built into team resourcing by appointing two people on temporary secondments. However there is little detail on how the programme is looking forward to identify its structure, resource requirements and what skills staff will need to have in the future.

Summary

- 177** On balance, the Supporting People programme in Gateshead has promising prospects for improvement.
- 178** The programme has a positive track record of delivering changes to the provision of housing related support services to the vulnerable people in Gateshead. The programme has increased the quantity and range of support provided. Previous gaps in provision are beginning to be filled. The programme is being developed through effective partnership working and close involvement of service users.
- 179** The Council has an integrated set of plans to deliver improvement aimed at delivering the right things. Individual staff members are well linked in to delivery and there are sound mechanisms in place to capture best practice and learning. Decisions can now be taken on an improved information base and the council is leveraging in additional funding to counter the constraint of a low grant per head of population.

- 180 Weaknesses in performance management and identifying resources to deliver improvement plans are the main barriers to improvement. Outcomes delivered to service users and the community are not being captured and there are insufficient resources to deliver the 2004/05 Annual Plan. Workforce planning is not as forward looking as it needs to be. The lack of an agreed approach to assessing value for money means that the programme will continue to have difficulty in delivering and demonstrating this.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

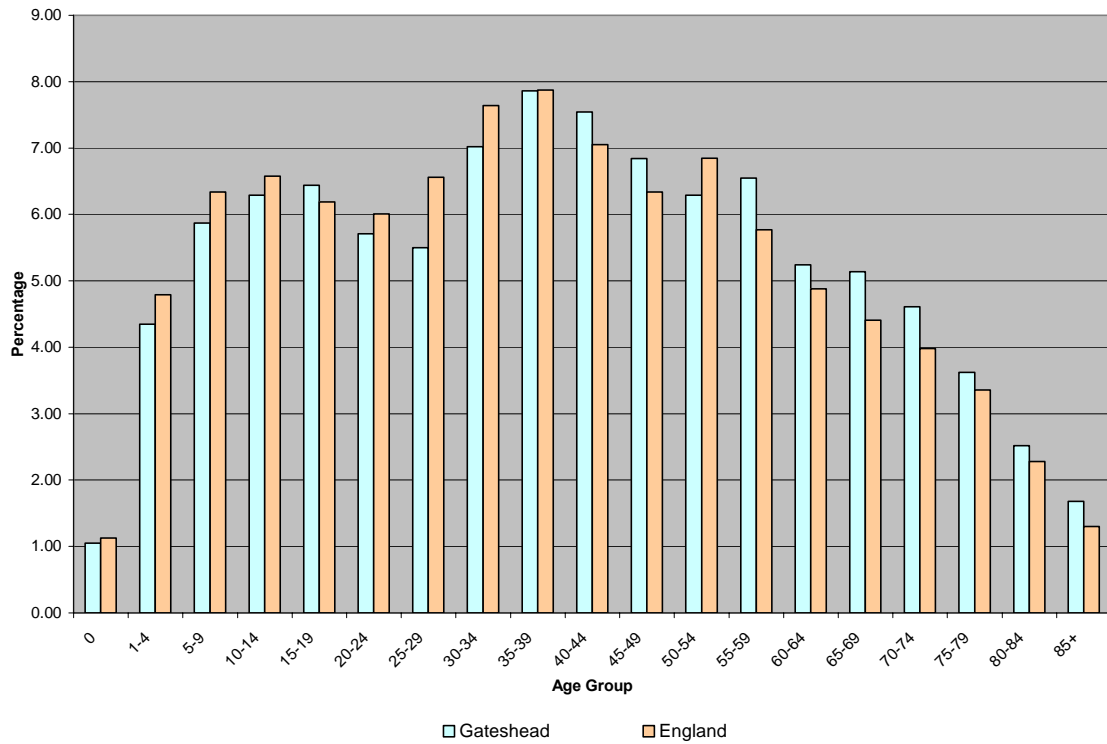
Measure	Gateshead	England
Population (mid-2004) ⁴	191,300	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2003)	20.3	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2003)	1.6	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁵	2.9	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁶	30	-

⁴ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

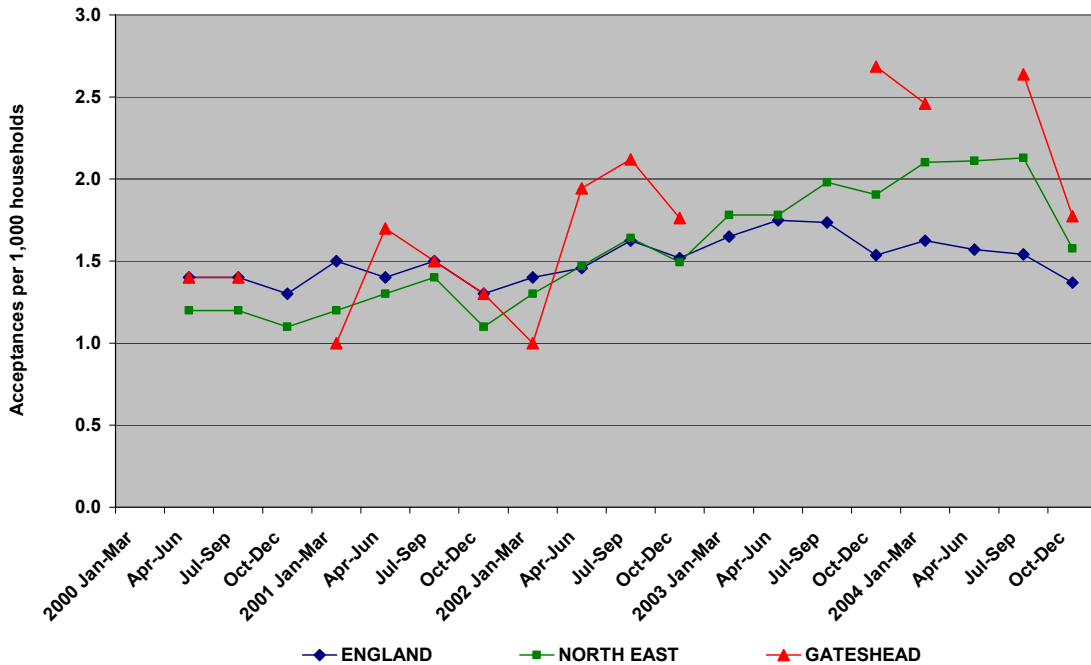
⁵ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (September 2005)

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

Percentage of the population⁷ in each age group compared with England



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



⁷ Source: midyear population estimates (2003)

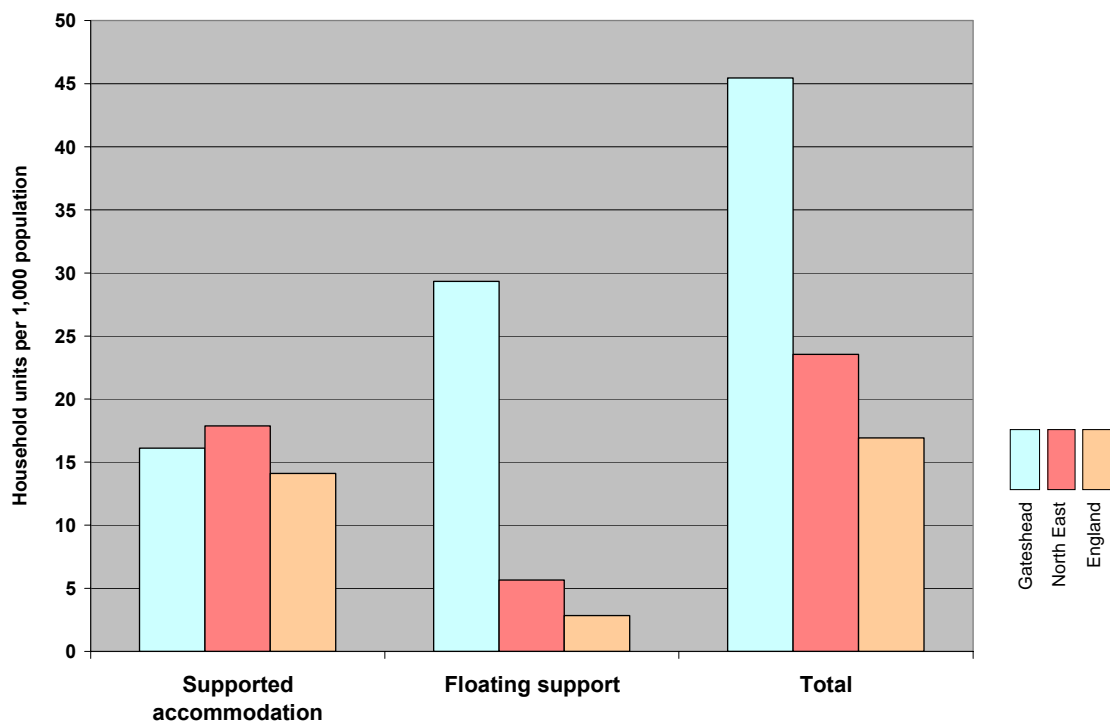
Performance information

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

- data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment scores;
- star ratings for social services;
- Performance Assessment Framework indicators for social services; and
- relevant best value performance indicators.

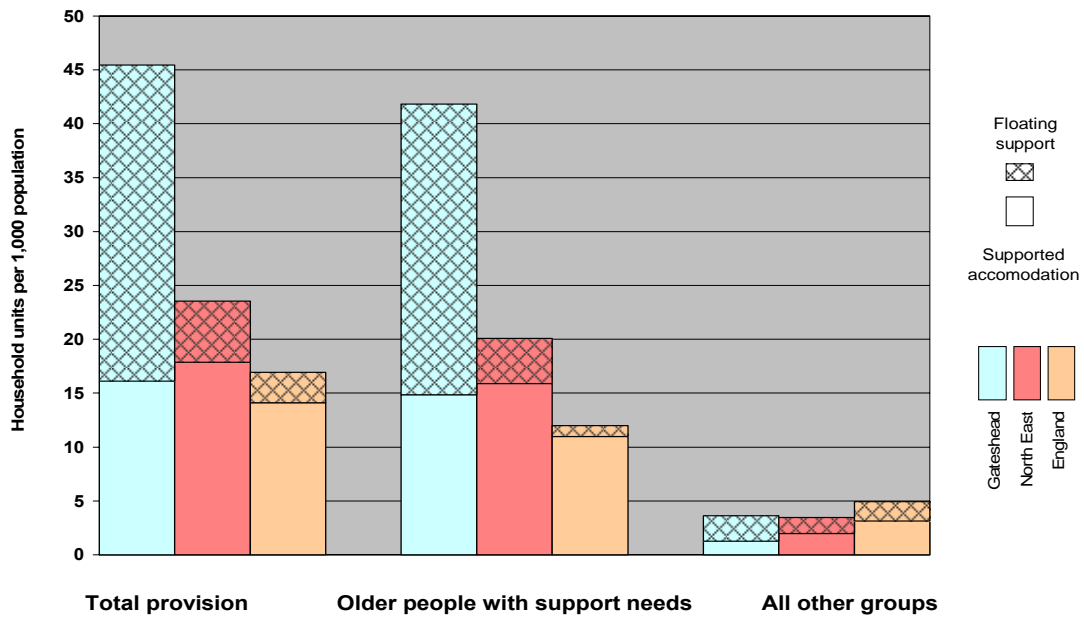
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁸

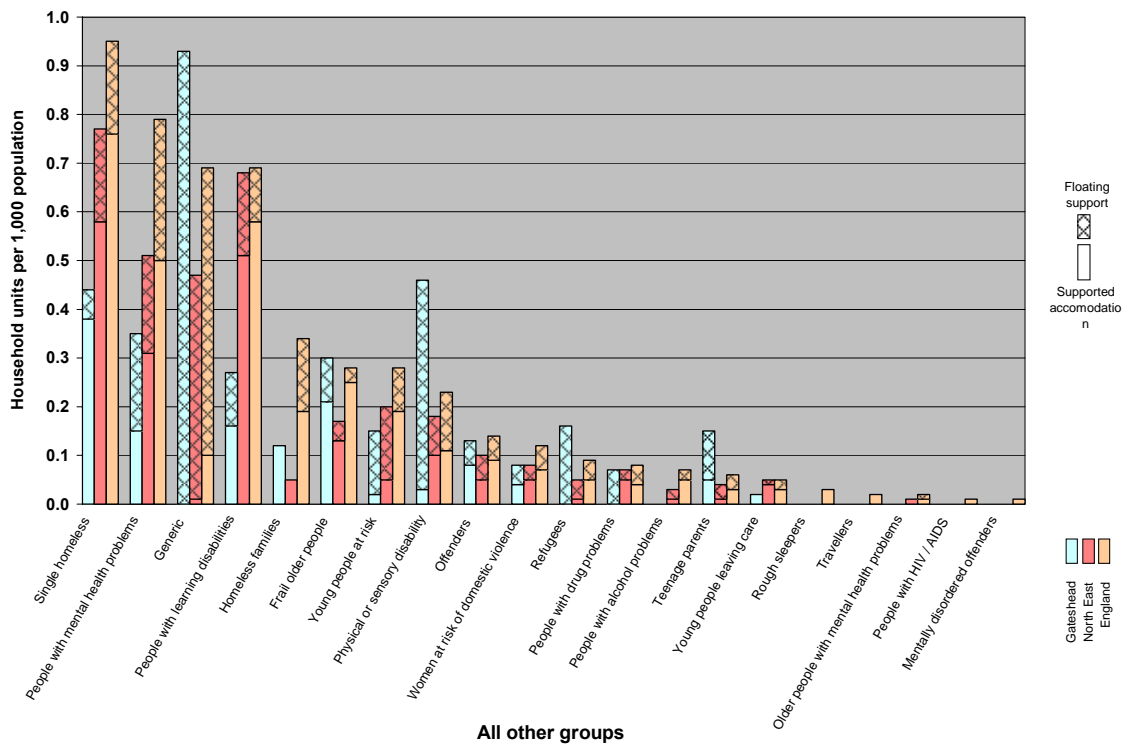


⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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



Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹⁰



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

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

Funding for Supporting People¹¹

Gateshead	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 6,031,615	£ 6,045,834	£ 5,816,517
Pipeline allocation	£ 92,191	£ 251,149	£ -
Administration grant	£ 235,354	£ 222,498	£ 217,465

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

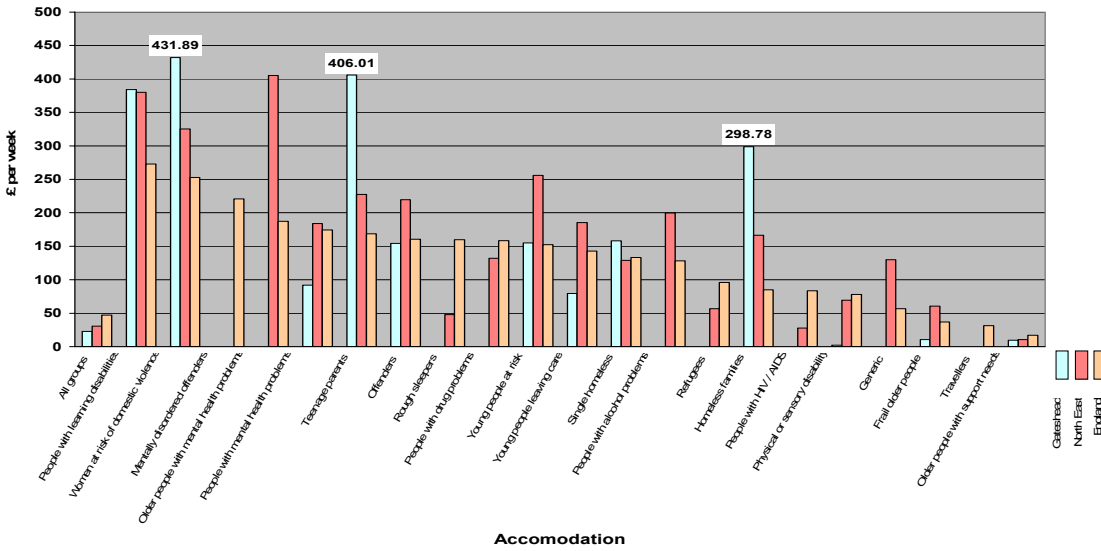
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Gateshead	£ 0.61	£ 11.93	£ 12.42	£ 57.54
North East	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

'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 from September 2005 and this will then be used.'

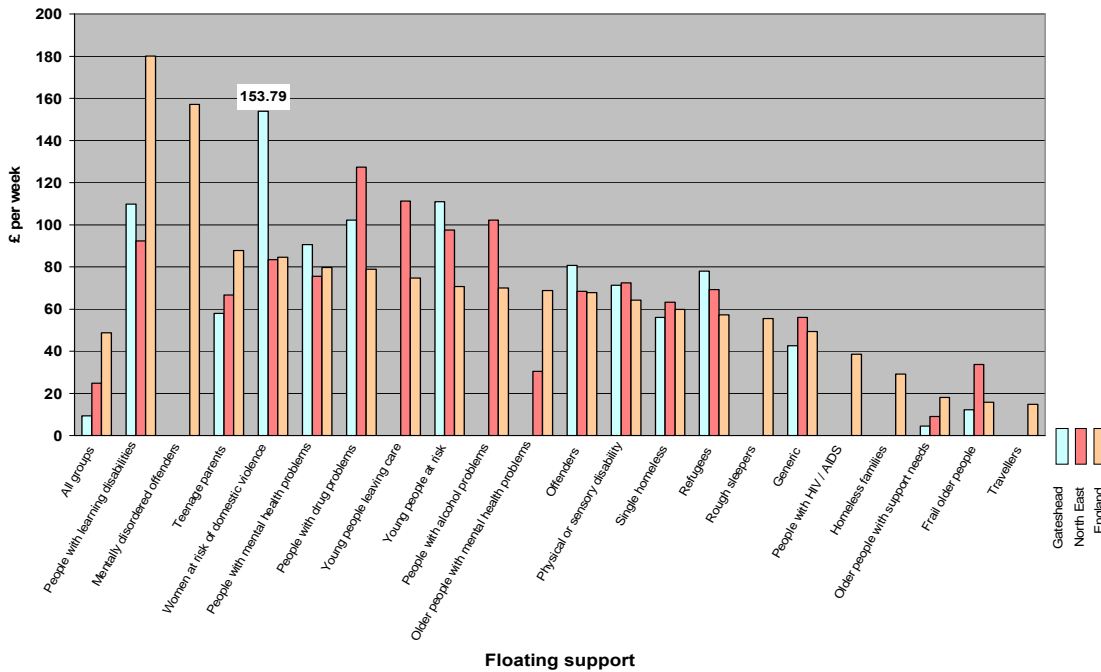
¹¹ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

¹² Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

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



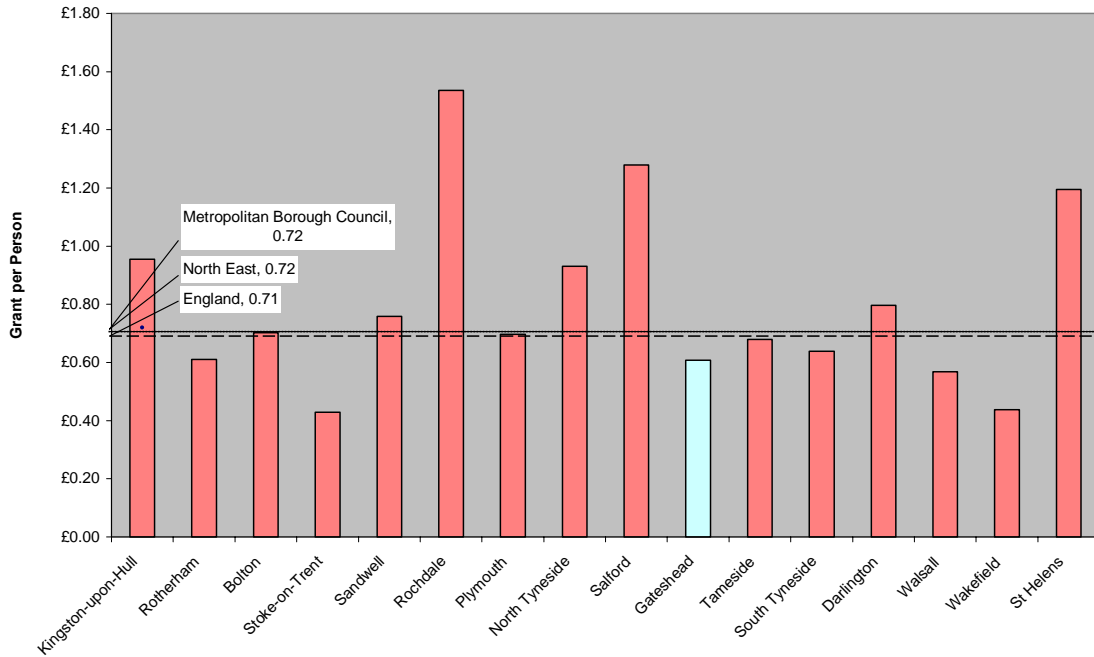
Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁴



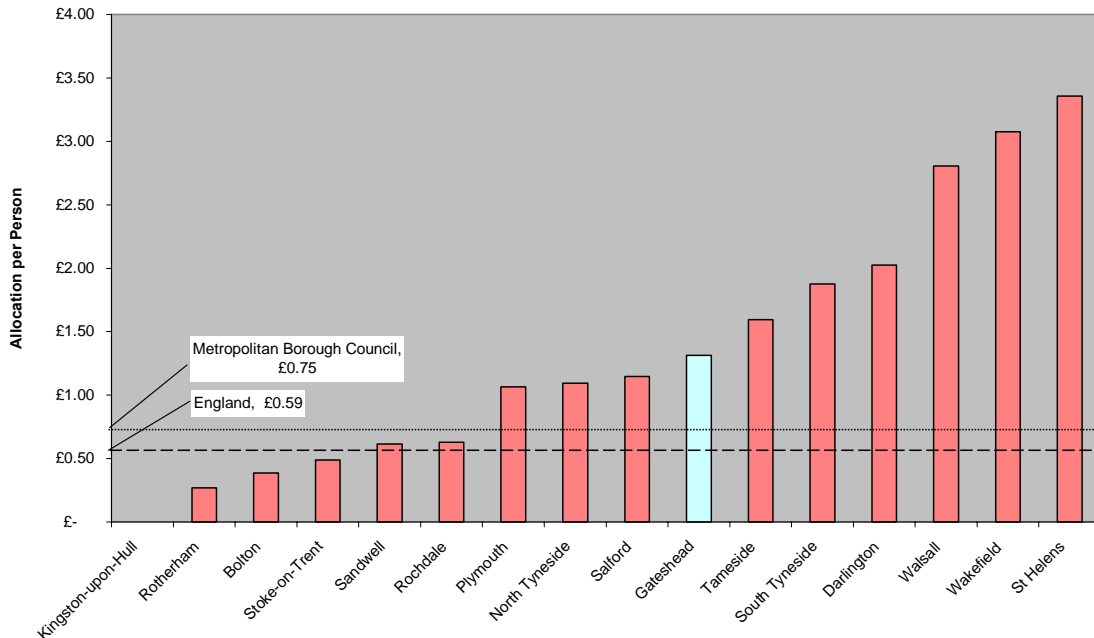
¹³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

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



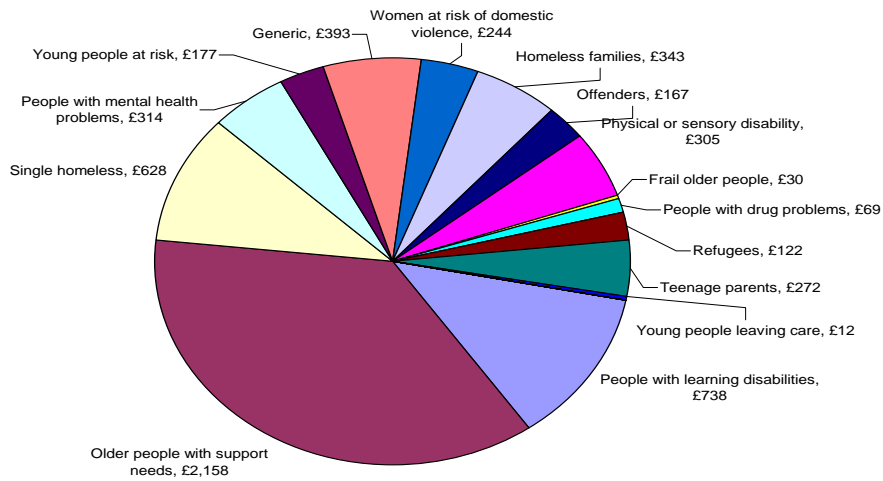
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹⁶, all metropolitan councils and all English councils.



¹⁵ A comparator group of similar councils.

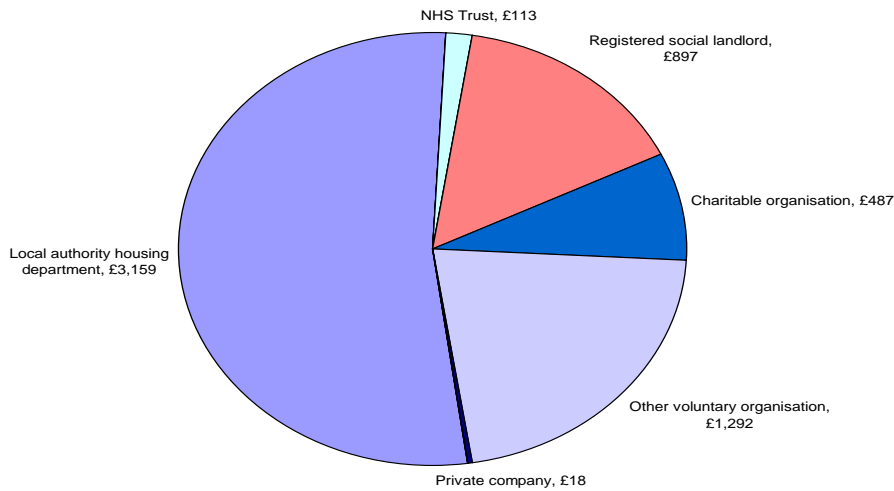
¹⁶ A comparator group of similar councils.

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



Gateshead
Funding by user group

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



Gateshead
Funding by provider type

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

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

Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

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

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

Gateshead	
Significantly above average (★★★★)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26) Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)
Above average (★★★)	Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)

Gateshead	
Average (•••)	Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51) Delayed transfers of care (D41)
Below average (••)	% change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5)
Significantly below average (•)	

Best value performance indicators

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

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

Gateshead	
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) Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63) Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b) Council homes which did not meet the decent homes standard (BV184a) Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a) Domestic violence refuge places (BV176)
Within the worst 25 per cent	

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 corporate strategies that impact upon Supporting People, including the strategic plan;
 - plans and strategies from partner agencies such as the Probation service that may impact on Supporting People;
 - needs research information, the five-year Supporting People strategy, the 2005/06 Annual plan, the section's team plan and the service review programme;
 - minutes of the commissioning body and core strategy group meetings; and
 - Supporting People advice leaflets.

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 survey which was sent to all providers of housing related support services;
 - focus groups for service providers and front line staff;
 - visits to supported housing schemes, to talk to service users, managers and front-line staff;
 - visits to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
 - observing a meeting of the Commissioning Body;
 - telephone calls to test how easy it is to access services; and
 - interviews with a wide-range of stakeholders, including the Leader of the Council, the Group Director of Community Based Services, the Accountable Officer, the Supporting People lead officer, managers and member of the Supporting People team, councillors, Social Services commissioning managers, representatives of the probation service and the primary care trusts, advocacy groups and the Youth Offending Team.

Appendix 4 – Positive practice

- 1 *'The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources'. (Seeing is Believing)*

Capturing the benefits of major seminars

In Gateshead a clear easy to read report is drafted of major meetings such as the Inclusive Forum or the Service User Forum. The report highlights changes to the programme that have been identified by attendees of the meeting. The report is circulated widely and made available on the council's website. Progress on actions taken is then reported at the next and following meetings.

This is good practice in that attendees - service users and service providers - can see that the issues raised have been captured, how their involvement shapes the programme and enables them to monitor progress.