

Supporting People Inspection Report

May 2006

Supporting People Inspection

Bolton 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 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.

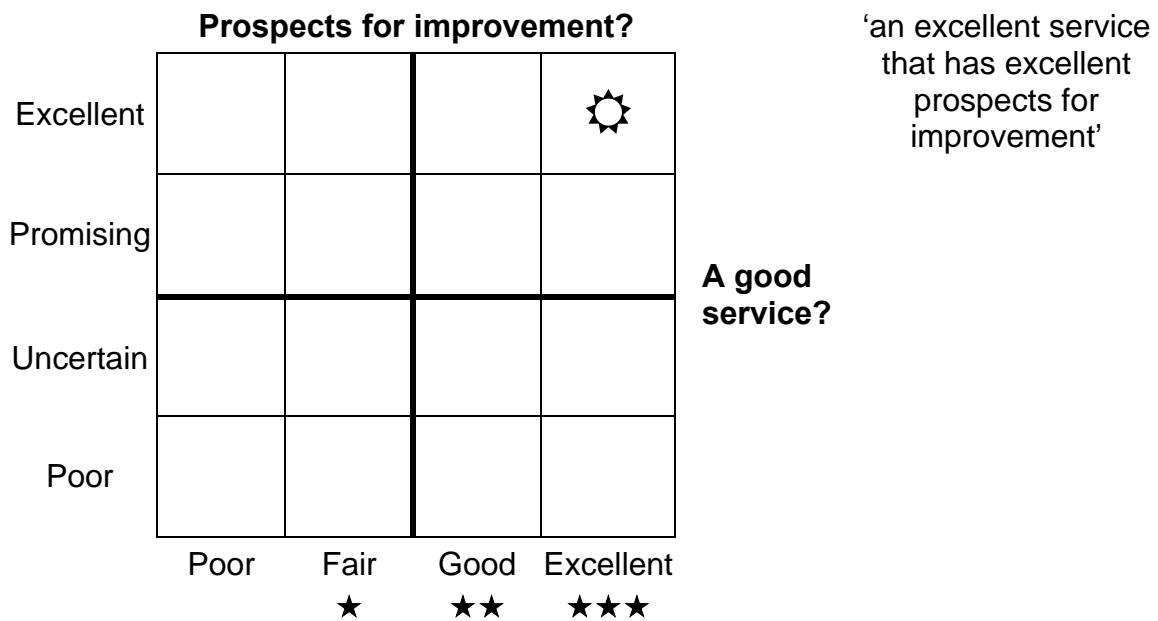
Summary

- 1 Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council is in the North West of England. Over 17 per cent of the 264,800 population are aged 65 or over. Eleven per cent are from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, mainly of Indian and Pakistani heritage. The area has high levels of deprivation.
- 2 The Council is Liberal Democrat-led, holding 21 of the 60 available seats. Under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2005 - The Harder Test, the Council's performance was assessed as four stars (out of a possible four).
- 3 Excluding schools, the Council employs around 7,500 staff.
- 4 Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with Bolton Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Greater Manchester Probation Service.
- 5 Supporting People funding available in 2005/06 is £9.21 million, (a reduction of £488,478 or 5 per cent on the previous year). To fulfil its role as the administering authority the Council received an administration grant of £199,558.
- 6 Twenty-eight service providers deliver a total of 95 supported housing schemes including a Home Improvement Agency. In total the programme funds 6,513 units of housing-related support. The highest cost service at £456.62 per unit per week is an accommodation-based service for people with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £0.17 a week for a community alarm service which is being decommissioned from April 2006.
- 7 Unmet housing-related support needs identified in the five-year strategy includes services for people experiencing drug and/or alcohol problems. There is under-provision of services for offenders, frail older people needing extra care, and homeless families.

Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council as providing an 'excellent', three-star service that has excellent 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

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

- 9 The Supporting People programme is making excellent progress because of the following.
- The shape of housing-related support provision is changing to increase choice. A wider range of services are being provided to fill gaps and enable people to remain in their own homes.
 - Service user engagement is meaningful, imaginative and inclusive. In addition to shaping policies and strategies, service users are involved in assessing the quality of information about the programme and determining supplementary user-focused quality standards for future reviews.
 - There is good quality information about the Supporting People programme and funded services.
 - The Council has good baseline housing-related support information on Bolton's communities, including black and minority ethnic groups.
 - Diversity issues are well-addressed in the development and delivery of the programme. The needs of BME groups have been considered in the development of the five-year strategy and effective communication channels are in place. Service reviews have examined the cultural sensitivity of all existing services.
 - Governance arrangements are effective and inclusive, with councillors closely involved in the development of the programme.
 - Effective partnerships including probation, the PCT, service providers, service users and other stakeholders are driving the programme forward.
 - The administration of the programme has been strategically led by senior managers. It is well-reflected in the Council's and key partners' plans for the delivery of support to vulnerable people and in the majority of key commissioning strategies. The Supporting People five-year strategy is well-integrated with the Council's corporate plan.
 - There is a stable, skilled and well-established Supporting People team to oversee delivery of the programme and ensure priorities are addressed.
 - Relationships with service providers are productive with good two-way communication, trust and close involvement.
 - A five-year strategy, which was agreed following extensive consultation with stakeholders, has set out clear commissioning and service priorities to shape the further development of the programme.
 - Robust service reviews have been carried out on all legacy services to ensure they are strategically relevant, meet required quality standards and offer good value for money.
 - A transparent and fair approach to value for money assessments has resulted in improvements to the quality of grant funded services and in £1.6 million of efficiency savings.

8 Supporting People Inspection | Scoring the service

- Thirty-seven, steady state, five-year contracts have been agreed with service providers and a further 30 are under consideration, bringing confidence and stability to the supported housing sector.
- Contracts are closely monitored with six-monthly visits to service providers.
- Bolton has played a lead role in regional joint working, helping to ensure that there are standard approaches to key areas of work and more effective use of resources.
- Risks to the programme have been clearly identified and are well-managed.

10 Less positive areas of the programme include the following.

- The Council is not yet fully capturing the outcomes that the programme delivers for service users and the community.
- The quality of housing-related support plans for individual service users are mixed, with a small number falling short of good standards.
- New services to address gaps and priorities have been relatively slow to develop. Services for people with alcohol problems are being procured but will not be in place until June 2006. The needs of other groups, such as frail older people needing extra care, are not fully provided for.

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

- The programme has a positive track record of delivering improvements.
- Service reviews have been completed ahead of schedule and significant value for money improvements have been achieved.
- In some areas, such as service user engagement and contract management, Bolton can demonstrate high levels of performance.
- To further align and provide a co-ordinated package of health, care and support services, a wider partnership review process is being drawn up for 2006/07 concentrating on linked services for three client groups.
- Bolton is a lead participant in benchmarking and peer review with Greater Manchester administering authorities.
- Bolton is strategically well-aligned in policy development, management of the programme and financial planning with other council services.
- Financial management shows a tight management of resources.
- Human resource planning is strong. The Supporting People team have ample opportunities for training and there are examples of learning from others which have led to improvements in programme delivery.
- Leadership has ambition and show innovation in the development of new services, such as an anti-social behaviour families' project.
- Partnership working is strong. The Commissioning Body and the core strategy group take clear responsibility for managing the programme.

- The change agenda for older persons is being managed in partnership with major local service providers. Proposals have been agreed to pilot the remodelling of some services to move away from a heavily concentrated accommodation-based service to floating support.
 - Planning for improved domestic violence services has included a local housing association and the Housing Corporation to increase provision in a new build and to remove shared facilities.
 - Work with providers has increased their learning and capacity by one to one coaching from the Supporting People team to meet the stringent requirements required by the administering authority.
 - Proposed procurement arrangements, in the main, are sound and IT support is reliable.
 - Some success has been achieved in leveraging in additional resources from other funding streams.
 - Some provision currently funded by neighbourhood renewal grant is being extended with support from the Supporting People programme.
 - The Supporting People strategy has led the Council and partners to develop a Supported Housing strategy for Bolton which brings opportunities to explore further joint funding and working arrangements to part and non-Supported People funded services.
 - Integrated plans are in place to deliver both strategic and operational improvements and address the right areas.
- 12** However, current performance management arrangements are not sufficiently developed.
- Bolton is not measuring the important outcomes that the programme delivers for service users.
 - Assessed outcomes are not yet being used as a tool to drive service improvement.
- 13** Improvements to the performance management system are planned. However, this deficiency will act as a barrier to improvement in the short-term.

Recommendations

- 14 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 Address the main priority client groups identified in the Supporting People strategy by:

- *including in plans details of how services will be expanded for:*
 - *people with drug problems;*
 - *frail elderly in need of extra care; and*
 - *homeless families with support needs;*
- *identify the nature and extent of housing-related support to be provided, the cost, and target dates for delivery; and*
- *take steps to seek out and maximise additional sources of funding.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- effort is focused on priorities;
- there is a clear deadline for delivery; and
- services will be delivered to meet priority needs.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by March 2007.

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 cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R2 Continue to develop systematic and continuous data collection methods on housing-related support needs to inform priorities and strategy development.

- *Ensure all agencies - probation, health and others such as the Youth Offending Team - are required to produce regular updates on the housing-related support needs of their vulnerable client groups.*
- *Systematically involve service providers and service users in the process of updating needs data.*
- *Analyse data periodically and identify changing needs and emerging issues.*
- *Review and report on the overall picture at least six-monthly to the Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- information on housing-related support needs will become more sophisticated;
- changing needs and emerging issues will be identified early; and
- improved information on the needs of vulnerable individuals with challenging behaviour who are transient by nature and have links to several agencies.

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

Recommendation

R3 Improve performance management arrangements for the Supporting People programme by:

- *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;*
 - *the amount and source of resources to deliver improvement plans; and*
- *tracking:*
 - *indicators that the programme shares with its partners in Health and Probation;*
 - *contributions to other local programme objectives including those of the Youth Offending Team and Drug Action Team; and*
 - *progress on government commitments and local government targets, such as reducing emergency bed days and preventing homelessness;*
 - *benchmarking the progress of Bolton against other administering authorities locally and nationally; and*
- *reporting*
 - *report performance at regular interval to appropriate bodies, as a minimum of quarterly to the Core Strategic Group, six-monthly to the Commissioning Body and annually to the Elected Members Forum.*

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 to spot and remedial action can be in place quicker;
- 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 November 2006.

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

Dates of inspection: 27 February 2006 to 3 March 2006

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Report

Context

The locality

- 16 Bolton is situated in the North West of England. It is one of ten metropolitan councils in Greater Manchester and comprises eight townships, each with a distinct socio-economic profile. It is one of the largest boroughs in the country covering 54 square miles, 45 per cent of which is urban.
- 17 Over 17 per cent of the 264,800 population are aged 65 or over, slightly less than the national average of 18.5 per cent. Eleven per cent are from black and minority ethnic communities (BME), mainly of Indian and Pakistani heritage, compared to the national average of 10.4 per cent.
- 18 The area has high levels of deprivation. Bolton is rated as the 52nd most deprived council of the 354 councils nationally. Thirty-eight of Bolton's 175 super output areas³ are in the top 10 per cent most multiply deprived. About one-third of the population live in these areas. Unemployment levels have fallen consistently over the past 20 years. At 2.6 per cent, the current rate is slightly higher than the national average.
- 19 The borough suffers from poor health outcomes, with life expectancy for both sexes well below the national average. Coronary heart disease and teenage pregnancy rates are both high. Incomes are low. Despite a significant drop in recent years, crime remains a major concern for Bolton residents.
- 20 Of the 116,000 homes in the borough, 70 per cent are owner occupied and 22 per cent are in the social housing sector, split 18 per cent and 4 per cent between Council ownership and housing associations respectively. Privately rented homes account for the remaining 8 per cent of Bolton's housing stock.

The Council

- 21 The Council has a political structure of leader with a cabinet - called the executive. It is Liberal Democrat-led, although political representation is finely balanced between the three political parties: Liberal Democrats hold 21 seats, Labour have 20, and the Conservatives have 19.
- 22 The borough has a well-established local strategic partnership, the Vision Partnership. With a wide range of partners, the partnership has developed a community strategy 2003 to 2012 to provide a vision for the future of Bolton. Its main aim is to regenerate communities.

³ Super output areas (SOAs) are a new geographic hierarchy designed to improve the reporting of small area statistics in England and Wales. Introduced in 2004, the 32,482 lower layer SOAs in England have a minimum population of 1000 replacing measurement by electoral ward boundaries which varied markedly in size.

- 23 In support of the community strategy, the Council has agreed six strategic aims.
- Regenerating deprived communities.
 - Improving health, care and support for people to live in the community.
 - Improving homes and the environment.
 - Strengthening the economy and improving skills, image and culture.
 - Combating crime, the fear of crime and substance misuse.
 - Improving achievement and outcomes for children and young people.
- 24 Excluding schools staff, the Council employs around 7,500 full-time equivalent staff to plan and deliver its services. In 2005/06 the Council has a revenue budget of £332 million, of which £54 million is allocated to Adult Services.
- 25 A major transformational project - Shaping Future Services - is in its early stages and aims to improve the way the Council delivers its services. It will focus on three main areas: access channels, access points and shared services.
- 26 In previous assessments, both Council and service performance has rated highly. For example:
- under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 2003, the Council's performance was assessed as excellent;
 - under CPA - the Harder Test 2005, the direction of travel was assessed as improving well and the Council achieved a four star rating for overall performance, the highest rating;
 - in 2005, Adults Social Services were assessed as serving all people well with excellent capacity for improvement;
 - in 2005, Children's Social Services were rated as serving most people well with excellent capacity for improvement; and
 - in 2005 the Council's housing arm's length management organisation - Bolton at Home was judged to be providing an excellent service with promising prospects for improvement.
- 27 In addition, the Council has been awarded beacon status in 2003/4 for preventing homelessness, in 2004/05 for private sector renewal and in 2005/06 for improving services through tenancy involvement.

The service

- 28 Bolton MBC acts as the administering authority (accountable local authority - ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area. The Council received a Supporting People grant of £9.21 million for 2005/06, which is a reduction of £488,478 or 5 per cent on the previous year's allocation. Despite grant reductions, between 2003/4 and 2004/05 the Council accumulated £915,220 in under-spent grant. The Council also received an administration grant of £199,558, which is a 20 per cent reduction on the previous year. This was supplemented from mainstream funding to give the service an overall administration budget of £342,358 for 2005/06.

- 29 The service is located within the Adults Services Department. The Supporting People team consists of eight staff made up of:
- Lead Officer;
 - Finance Manager;
 - Project Officer – two posts;
 - Contract Officer – two posts;
 - Management Support Officer; and
 - Team Clerk.
- 30 Twenty-eight service providers deliver a total of 95 schemes including a Home Improvement Agency. In total, the programme funds 6,513 units of housing-related support. Initially, 96 per cent of the support was accommodation-based units of provision compared with 4 per cent of floating support.
- 31 A breakdown of spending in 2004/05 shows:
- 32 per cent of the budget is allocated to people with a learning disability;
 - 20 per cent of the budget is spent on older people with support needs; and
 - 12 per cent of the budget is allocated to services for single homeless people with support needs.
- 32 There is no provision for people experiencing drug and/or alcohol problems. There is under-provision of services for offenders, frail older people needing extra care, and homeless families.
- 33 The highest cost service at £456.62 per unit per week is an accommodation-based service for people with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £0.17 a week for a community alarm service which is being decommissioned from April 2006.
- 34 Strategic aims are set out in the Council's recently launched five-year strategy as:
- improving safety, reducing crime and tackling drugs;
 - improving health, wellbeing and the quality of life; and
 - ensuring vulnerable people live in good quality housing.

How good is the service?

Governance

- 35** Governance arrangements in Bolton are excellent. The Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group are well-connected and are working effectively. Probation and primary care trust partners are well-engaged in planning and delivery, as are representatives of service providers, service users and other key stakeholders. Terms of reference and memorandum of understanding have been updated and deal with conflicts of interest and potential conflicts between partners. Councillors are closely involved in the development of the programme and there is a widespread understanding of its objectives. Bolton also plays a leading role in regional and sub-regional Supporting People structures. Performance management for the programme is, however, underdeveloped
- 36** The ODPM set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
 - Inclusive Forum: consults with service providers and service users.
 - Core Strategy Development Group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
 - Commissioning Body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
 - Councillors: approve key decisions of the Commissioning Body.
 - Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.

Corporate commitment

- 37** There is a strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme both in terms of resources and time from officers and councillors. Additional funding has been allocated to the administration of the programme to ensure it has the resources to implement arrangements effectively. Additional groups have been established, such as the Executive Management sub-set and the Elected Member Forum, to ensure that there are good links between the programme and both the Council and its political representatives.

Commissioning Body

- 38** The Commissioning Body is well-established, involves all statutory partners and is providing clear leadership. All key partners are regular attendees and there is a list of designated officers to attend in case of absence. Regular attendance provides consistency and continuity in approach and decision-making.

- 39 There is evidence of clear decision-making by the Commissioning Body. Links are made to corporate and strategic priorities and those of partner agencies. Attention is regularly drawn to significant changes which may impact on the programme. The lead officer keeps the group well-informed about changes in policy and the Commissioning Body regularly records action to be taken following reports. The willingness of the Commissioning Body to make difficult decision is recognised by staff and they feel that this has helped to keep the programme on track. Examples include the decommissioning of a service following service review and the insistence of additional health and safety requirements above passported standards of service. The approach to service user involvement has demonstrated Bolton's willingness to innovate and trial more high risk approaches, such as cross client group forums.
- 40 Clear terms of reference are in place for all the governance groups with an updated memorandum of understanding effectively addressing the relationship between the Commissioning Body and the Council. These documents have been updated recently to ensure they remain fit for purpose and set out the role and membership of each group. All partners have signed to confirm their agreement. Documents address action to be taken to deal with conflicts of interests and spell out how any conflict between partners will be managed.
- 41 Meetings and agendas are particularly well-planned in advance. Dates are set in advance for the meetings of the Commissioning Body for the forthcoming year with standing agenda items already added. These are available, along with minutes of meetings, on the Council's website. Good diary planning contributes to good attendance at meetings and easy access to agendas for meetings nurtures understanding and trust.
- 42 Performance management for the programme is, however, underdeveloped. While there is regular reporting on progress against improvement plans, finance, ODPM milestones and service reviews, there is little reporting on outcomes for service users or progress against the programme's overarching aims. The Commissioning Body accept that more needs to be done in this area and plans have been put in place. Without suitable measures in place and regular reporting, it is difficult to determine what outcomes the programme is achieving for vulnerable people and to systematically address areas of under-performance.

Core Strategy Group

- 43 Wide membership and regular attendance make this an effective group which provides the necessary support for the Commissioning Body. The group has wide membership including Probation, the Primary Care Trust (PCT), Housing, Adults Services, Children's and Families Services, Community Safety, the Drug Action Team, a representative of service providers and two service user advocates. Widespread membership ensures that there is a broad base for policy development and that most points of view are represented.

- 44 The Youth Offending Team is, however, less well-engaged in the governance arrangements. They are not part of the group nor are there established routes through which their views are put forward. Service users are not exclusive to one agency and it may be argued that others adequately represent their views. Steps should be taken to facilitate clear links and formalise arrangements between the Youth Offending Team and Supporting People to ensure they are not overlooked.
- 45 There is a clear structure in place for service provider and service user representation. An elected service provider attends the meetings to provide the service provider perspective, and two advocates who work with the service user Community Expert Panel attend on their behalf. Representatives put forward the views of their respective groups and feed back. This arrangement provides an important link between both service user and service provider groups whose views are vital to the development of practical and sustainable policies.
- 46 Providers feel that current governance structures allow them adequate opportunity to shape the Supporting People agenda. For example, the provider reference groups allows providers to consider what issues to raise at the wider provider forum meeting, helping to ensure that meetings reflect their concerns and priorities. Although providers have not always liked decisions taken by the governance forums, they welcome the transparency of the decision-making process and feel that certain developments (such as the establishment of a hardship fund⁴ to support providers who have struggled to absorb non-inflationary uplifts) reflects a willingness to act on their feedback.
- 47 While terms of reference have been updated for the Core Strategy Group, the update has overlooked mention of service users and service providers. We are satisfied that they are effectively engaged in practice but the documentation needs to reflect their involvement and the contribution they are expected to make.
- 48 The Core Strategy Group is well-informed about the Supporting People programme and progress. The group receives detailed reports on service reviews and regular updates on issues affecting Supporting People locally, regionally and nationally. The group do not have a specific programme of work although it is evident that action points are followed-up effectively. For significant issues, the Core Strategic Group sets up working sub-groups, for example on performance management, to develop detailed proposals before presenting a report for wider discussion. This ensures that issues are captured and progressed efficiently. Its work is wide ranging and includes the development of policies such as the eligibility criteria and the complaints policy; leading on the development of new service specifications; assessment of the options on inflation to inform the Commissioning Body and assures the quality of service reviews with discussion over proposed outcomes.

⁴ A risk assessment of the financial stability of service providers was undertaken in December 2004; as a result the Commissioning Body agreed to bring in a hardship fund of £25,000.

- 49 A clear process is in place to separate discussions which can take place with full member attendance and those which need to remain confidential. Conflict of interest protocols are also in place for other members who need to abstain from particular discussions. There is evidence to confirm that disclosures are being adhered to. Management of conflicts of interest is necessary to avoid competitive advantage and develop trust.

Accountable Officer

- 50 The Accountable Officer is of sufficient seniority to raise the profile of the programme and to ensure there are adequate resources to implement it effectively. The Accountable Officer is Head of Adults Services. In addition to chairing the Core Strategy Group, he attends the Commissioning Body in an advisory capacity and provides the link between the programme and the Executive Management Team subset and the Elected Member Forum.
- 51 There is a widespread understanding of the programme with links into virtually all relevant planning groups within the Council, the local strategic partnership and partner agencies. This is achieved in part by links made by those officers and councillors involved in the Supporting People programme who are also involved in other planning groups. For example, one Elected Member Forum councillor is also a member of the Health and Well Being Partnership of the local strategic partnership and part of the BSafe Community safety initiative. In addition, there are clear strategic links between the Council's and its partners' key planning documents, such as the homelessness strategy. This helps to ensure effective co-ordination of Supporting People and mainstream services and promote maximum impact in terms of positive outcomes for service users.

Councillor involvement

- 52 Councillors in Bolton are closely involved with the SP programme. There is a dedicated cross party Supporting People panel of six councillors, including the portfolio-holder. This meets regularly to consider Supporting People issues, receive monthly briefings, progress reports and other strategic and policy proposals. Awareness is further raised by a programme of visits to service providers where councillors talk to service users and providers.
- 53 The portfolio-holder has close and regular contact with the SP programme. Updates on Supporting People are included as part of his weekly meeting with the Departmental Management Team. Supporting People panel councillors are also members of the Council's scrutiny system and this promotes a good, up-to-date understanding of Supporting People issues. This group provides an essential link between the Supporting People programme and wider political decision-making arrangements.

Cross-authority partnership working

- 54 The Bolton Supporting People partnership has played a lead role in regional joint working, helping to ensure that there are standard approaches to key areas of work and more effective use of resources. Bolton's lead officer has held the chair of the Greater Manchester Forum and is currently chairing the regional group. The contribution that Bolton has made is valued by partners across the Greater Manchester region. Cross-authority working has delivered a number of benefits, including passporting, training for providers, joint development of steady state contracts and a standardised approach to reviews of sheltered housing services.

Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements

- 55 MAPPA⁵ arrangements in Bolton are working effectively. There are good working relationships with housing providers and other accommodation services through MAPPA.

Delivery arrangements

- 56 Strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses. The programme is being properly resourced and delivered by a stable and competent team. Robust eligibility criteria are in place. Supported housing needs have been effectively mapped and are being kept up-to-date. Relations with service providers are very good and cross-authority working is delivering important benefits. Finances are being closely and prudently managed. The five-year strategy sets out clear aims and priorities. However, planning and performance management arrangements need to be strengthened.

Corporate commitment

- 57 Corporate commitment to the delivery of the programme is strong. Additional finances have been provided to support the administration of the programme and the Supporting People team can call upon a range of corporate expertise, such as legal, health and safety, and risk management. There has also been a commitment to integrate the Supporting People programme into the Council's wider planning groups which has been successfully promoted a good understanding of the programme and the benefits it offers.

Supporting People team

- 58 There is a stable, skilled and well-established Supporting People team to oversee delivery of the programme. The team has a range of key skills, including experience of supported housing, finance and contract management, with all key staff in post for at least 18 months. Links with a range of existing forums, including those covering domestic violence, offenders, young people and people with learning disabilities, have allowed staff to develop their understanding of different client groups.

⁵ Multi Agency Protection Panels (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.

- 59 Staff within the Supporting Team (including the Lead Officer) are appropriately supervised and have regular appraisals and supervision meetings. We saw evidence that all staff have a full annual appraisal with their line manager, together with monthly supervision meetings. Action plans drawn up as a result, are SMART, enabling the team to make effective use of staff resources.
- 60 Close links have been established between the Supporting People programme and housing benefit (HB) to ensure effective exchange of information. There are regular meetings at manager and operational level, and the Supporting People team have view only access to HB information. Consent to view records is obtained through the housing benefit application process. However, since the upgrade of the HB computer system, Supporting People staff no longer automatically get to know when a claimant is awarded HB or when entitlement ends. A request to rectify this deficiency has been made to the software supplier. Good links providing prompt information when housing benefit has been awarded or has ended help housing-related support to be quickly and accurately established and to prevent overpayments. The receipt of housing benefit entitles the recipient to full Supporting People subsidy.
- 61 Membership of other planning groups has positive benefits for service delivery. For example, the Supporting People lead officer's membership of the strategic rehabilitation group for mental health has ensured effective linkages between the Supporting People programme and wider mental health priorities. The draft five-year Supporting People strategy was presented to the group for consideration and there has been joint work to develop new services, such as a six-bed rehabilitation house, and undertake a strategic review of rehabilitation services for people with mental health problems. There is a shared focus on the development of community-based services for people with mental health problems.

Grant conditions and eligibility

- 62 Sound eligibility criteria are in place developed in consultation with stakeholders including service providers. These are necessary to provide clarity to officers and service providers about activities that can be properly funded by the grant. The Council is fully complying with grant conditions laid down by ODPM.
- 63 Contracts are being monitored closely. Workbook returns are chased up promptly and the Council ensures a 100 per cent submission by service providers. This ensures that information is available to monitor contract compliance. In addition, six-monthly contract management visits are undertaken to discuss issues with providers and monitor the position on the ground.

Work planning

- 64 In line with corporate requirements, there is a clear service improvement plan in place to improve operational aspects of the Supporting People programme. The plan covers key tasks such as developing understanding of need, contract monitoring and performance management, and communication. However, the actions in the improvement plan do not make effective links to outcomes. Entries relate to outputs. Without measurable outcomes, it is difficult to know whether actions have any impact.
- 65 A challenging Annual Plan is in place to deliver the five-year strategy, but measurable user-focused outcomes are not always in place and resources are not always clearly identified. The plan includes 25 actions, some of which have measurable outcomes but not all. For example Task 06 identifies an outcome of improved access to people with drug and alcohol problems but does not identify a measure or a target. The area responsible for resourcing each action is identified but not the estimated cost. Clear identification of the estimated costs and SMART outcomes are necessary to ensure that the plan will be delivered and have impact.
- 66 It is not clear how new services are being commissioned to ensure they deliver value for money. A corporate procurement strategy is in place to guide action and this is robust. It requires commissioners to consider a variety of options. However, a new alcohol service was proposed to the Commissioning Body which as a welfare service was granted exemption from the Council's standing orders and usual procurement procedures. Services are to be procured from a specialist local provider. However, it is not clear how the Council will ensure that this contract represents good value for money.
- 67 In addition to the new alcohol service, other services have been supported financially to maintain provision when short-term funding has come to an end. Examples include an anti-social behaviour project developed with Neighbourhood Renewal Funding which is coming to an end and a high risk floating support scheme in a similar position. This ensures that services that meet strategy objectives continue when they may otherwise have closed or reduced capacity.

Needs mapping and analysis review

- 68 Gaps in provision for client groups eligible for housing-related support in Bolton have been clearly identified. A piece of research was commissioned to identify existing provision and highlight any gaps in services or barriers to services for all client groups eligible for support under the Supporting People programme. This information was available in time to inform the Supporting People five-year strategy.
- 69 Robust mapping of the housing and support needs for BME communities within Bolton has taken place. Research undertaken has highlighted housing needs of the BME population in Bolton. The comprehensive survey highlighted a range of housing and support needs for different sections of the BME communities. This ensured there was up-to-date relevant information in order to inform the five-year strategy.

- 70 Service providers were consulted about their views in relation to housing and support needs within Bolton in order to inform the five-year strategy. A questionnaire was completed by 21 per cent of service providers highlighting areas of need in their views supplemented by further discussion through the provider forum. This information was collected in order to inform the five-year strategy.
- 71 Although there is a good range of information about most key Supporting People client groups, more work is required to understand the supported housing needs of groups, such as refugees and offenders with mental health problems. Plans are in place to address these gaps.
- 72 Needs information is kept up-to-date. Information from service reviews is fed into a commissioning and planning group. An update on client needs is collated each year, the latest being November 2005, from nominated commissioners to ensure that data is current. Information informs strategic decision-making and strategic priorities.

Five-year strategy

- 73 The five-year strategy is clear about what it is trying to achieve and its priorities. The strategy includes three strategic aims and a vision that includes prevention, supporting independence, choice and access. Stakeholders including partner agencies, service providers, councillors and service users were involved in the development of the five-year strategy. Meetings were held to allow service providers to discuss key priorities for different client groups. The strategy was submitted to ODPM by the deadline date. Clarity over direction is important for effective delivery.
- 74 Strong links are made with other Council strategies. The five-year strategy makes clear links with other strategies, such as the housing strategy and the homelessness strategy to show how the two are interrelated. Coordination is vital to having maximum impact.

Performance monitoring and management

- 75 A number of performance measures are being collated on the Quality Performance Management system, supported by targets and performance reporting. These include relevant BVPI⁶, PAF⁷, and Supporting People specific indicators, as well as progress on the service improvement action plan. They include finance, contracts, service reviews and service user involvement. Capturing and collating performance enable the Supporting People governing bodies to understand what progress it is making and where it may be under-performing.

⁶ Best value performance indicators measuring local council performance.

⁷ Performance Assessment Framework Indicators measuring performance in delivering social services.

- 76 There is a good understanding of the finance of the programme, with future projections taking account of estimated savings through service reviews. Careful and prudent management is minimising disruption to services in the face of a shrinking and uncertain future budget. A cumulative under-spend of over £900,000 from the first two years of the programme is being invested in a 2.5 per cent inflationary increase for service providers in April 2006 and a contingency fund for unforeseen events. Carrying over the residue after a small amount set aside for new development will allow the existing level of services to be maintained until 2007/08 when decommissioning may be necessary. Good management of the programme's resources ensures continuity of service provision and maximises services for vulnerable people.
- 77 The financial side of the programme is regularly and closely monitored. A Supporting People financial sub-group made up of members of the Supporting People team and corporate accountants meet every six to eight weeks to monitor both the programme grant and administration grant spend against profiled budgets. Future projections show when the programme will go into deficit. Good awareness of the financial position of the programme ensures that plans can be made to adjust the delivery of the programme to ensure that disruption to provision is kept to a minimum.

Fairer charging

- 78 A clear fairer charging policy is in place for the Supporting People programme. It sets out the basis on which charges will be applied and those groups of people who are eligible for charging. The policy is reviewed annually. Arrangements are in place to process applications quickly and efficiently. To address the apparent low take up, the team has taken action to ensure that leaflets and forms are widely available in all the Council's offices, in service provider premises, reminded service providers to encourage service users to apply and undertaken a targeted mail shot to leaseholders.

Relationships with providers

- 79 There is an excellent relationship with service providers. Providers who attended our focus group were very positive about the management of Supporting People programme in Bolton. Those working across other authorities rated Bolton's approach more highly than elsewhere, with effective communication, partnership working and arrangements for sharing good practice cited as particular strengths. A satisfaction survey of service providers found very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the programme. In 10 out of 13 areas, 100 per cent of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied.
- 80 Service providers rate the Supporting People team highly. They feel that the team is accessible and easy to contact and is particularly good at providing timely and comprehensive information about key local and national developments. The quality of the information provided has enabled some providers to challenge less positive practice in other local authorities they work with. The team has also helped service providers to address particular issues - for example, presentations on choice-based lettings have been organised for providers experiencing difficulties moving clients on.

- 81** Effective arrangements are in place to involve service providers and keep them informed. A well-attended provider forum meets periodically for all of Bolton's internal and external service providers. A smaller group - the provider reference group - with representatives of all the main client groups, meets more frequently to discuss detailed policy proposals. An elected representative of this group sits on the Core Strategy Group to put forward service provider views and provide feedback to the main forum. This coherent and workable structure has contributed to the excellent working relationships within the programme.
- 82** A strong history of effective partnership working in key service areas, such as homelessness, has contributed to the effective delivery of the programme. However, service providers consider the Supporting People team to have played a pivotal role in further embedding partnership working in key areas, such as referral arrangements for teenage pregnancy services.

Cross-authority working

- 83** Bolton plays a leading role in regional and sub-regional Supporting People groups. The neighbouring councils are working closely together to develop procedures that reduce bureaucracy, such as passporting, promote learning and spread good practice. Five-year contracts and peer reviews are examples of outcomes from this work. Work is continuing on new tools for the future, such as a contract/service user review framework from April 2006 and outcome measures.

Risk management

- 84** Sound arrangements are in place to manage risks to the programme. Supporting People has adopted a risk management protocol and developed a comprehensive risk register which is to be formally reviewed annually. The Supporting People Finance Group and the corporate Risk Management Group meet regularly to monitor risks and report to the Core Strategy Group. Contingency plans are in place for major risks, including a list of contingency service providers that can be drawn upon in the event of a sudden service closure. Effective management of risks and contingency planning protects the programme from disruption.

ODPM SPLS data upload

- 85** Accurate uploads are submitted to ODPM each quarter on time with few queries. This ensures that Bolton is making a full contribution to the national picture of the Supporting People programme being collated by ODPM.

Service reviews

- 86 Bolton has made intelligent and rigorous use of service reviews to drive up quality standards and ensure that Supporting People grant only funds strategically relevant and eligible services. All services have been assessed ahead of the required deadline. A fair, transparent and rigorous process has delivered clear benefits for the programme. Stakeholders, including service users and service providers, have been well-engaged. There are high levels of satisfaction amongst service providers. Sound quality assurance arrangements are in place ensuring consistent and equal treatment of internal and external service providers. More strategic client-based reviews with supplementary user-focused standards are being planned for 2006/07 onwards. Contract management is particularly good, with long-term steady state contracts, six-monthly contract management visits and joint contract monitoring arrangements where appropriate.
- 87 The service review programme was logical. Initially based on high cost, vulnerability, stability and quality, the approach was modified in April 2004 in consultation with service providers to take a more thematic approach. The thematic approach was more strategic and made it easier to make comparisons between service providers. This ensured that ineligible services were targeted early in the programme.
- 88 Impressively, reviews of all 95 services have been completed and approved by the Commissioning Body by January 2006. This is well ahead of the March 2006 ODPM deadline. In addition, four follow-up service reviews have been carried out to ensure that quality improvements have been delivered. Our examination of a sample of service review files found the reviews to be searching, fair and thorough. Early completion meant that quality standards were raised quickly and efficiency savings achieved earlier
- 89 Less intensive reviews have been carried out in appropriate circumstances minimising bureaucracy. Desktop reviews have been carried out on 12 community alarm services and two cross-authority services where only a small number of units are within the Bolton area. A light touch Quality Assessment Framework developed by the Greater Manchester Forum for sheltered housing and community alarms have been applied to those services in Bolton.
- 90 The approach to service reviews was soundly-based and developed in consultation with service providers. It involved a meeting of relevant stakeholders, including Probation and the PCT, at the outset of the review and in drawing up conclusions. Service user advocates and specialist consultancy support has been used when appropriate. Feedback on the validation visit is provided quickly as is the final decision of the Commissioning Body. Service providers express high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the service review process.

91 Results were as follows.

Percentage satisfied or very satisfied

- Arrangements for service review	100%
- Involving users and stakeholders in service reviews	100%
- Approach to strategic relevance	100%
- Approach to value for money	86%
- Contract negotiations	100%
- Outcome of service review	95%

92 Service users have been well-engaged in the review process. A leaflet, available in a range of formats and languages, has been developed to explain the process to them and to include them from the outset. Engagement can take a variety of forms: one- to-one interviews, focus groups or questionnaire depending on the communication needs of the service users. From the start of the themed reviews in the second year of the review programme, review officers went back to services after the validation visit to feedback to service users. This was usually done at house meetings. Good engagement has meant that service user views have informed the assessment process and helped to identify areas for improvement.

93 Service reviews and their results are regularly reported to the Commissioning Body for their approval, and to providers for their agreement. Files demonstrate a clear mechanism for reporting this information to all relevant parties, and show no significant delays. As such, providers are able to implement improvements at a pace that will benefit their service users.

94 There are clear examples of learning and continuous improvement. The service review process has been changed over time to address concerns raised by service providers. For example, the initial focus on preparing lengthy review reports led to long delays in reporting outcomes to service providers. This led to some dissatisfaction among providers, and as a result, the review team introduced a target to provide feedback on the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) ratings and visit within five working days. Feedback to service users was another development. These changes have helped to promote good working relationships with providers.

- 95 In some services, service reviews have not identified support plans that did not reach minimum QAF standards. Our examination of support plans at a sample of services found support plans to be of a mixed quality. One provider that had been inspected in 2003 was using support plans that were not appropriate, despite having been assessed at Level B against the QAF. However, at the time there were only four Core Objectives (support planning was not one of them) and as such this grade was copied across from another of the older Core Objectives. Five other schemes involving a maximum of 37 service users may be similarly affected. Other examples of support plans were found to be adequate or better. Inadequate support plans will not deliver the benefits for individuals expected of the Supporting People programme.
- 96 Bolton is continuing to drive improvements in service standards. Strategic reviews of services are planned for 2006/07 examining the services provided to the ODPM three service groups. Additional local supplementary QAF standards are being developed in conjunction with the service user Community Expert Panel. These are expected to include user consultation and living environment and will ensure that the things that matter most to service users are subject to scrutiny to drive improvement.
- 97 Good quality assurance arrangements are in place ensuring consistent and equal treatment of internal and external service providers. Service reviews are quality assured by the Core Strategy Group against a checklist of requirements. A document is signed by the chair to indicate their approval before submission to the Commissioning Body for a final decision. Peer assessment has been carried out by a neighbouring council on validation visits to confirm that the standards being applied to QAF assessments in Bolton are not easier or tougher than the home authority. In particular, the peer review process covered internal council provided services to confirm they had been objectively and consistently assessed. These arrangements help to achieve a consistent approach and confirm the objectivity of assessment which service providers can have confidence in.
- 98 Bolton has contributed to the development of an accreditation process for service providers for use by councils in the North West. Bolton has agreed to passport on the North West process, although additional checks are carried out for example in relation to health and safety practices. This reduces the workload involved for councils and saves duplication for service providers.
- 99 A transparent and independent appeals process is in place. A panel is made up of three independent members, one from the Council's legal services, one from the Probation Service and one from the PCT. Five appeals have been received of which two failed to meet the appeals criteria. A fair and transparent appeals process gives service providers' confidence that decisions are reliable and objective.

- 100** Outcomes from the service review process are clear and include:
- 28 action plans have been issued to raise quality standards;
 - all services are now at a minimum QAF level C quality standard;
 - 46 amendments have been made to contracts on price;
 - 17 amendments have been made to service capacity;
 - 1 service has been decommissioned;
 - £1.6 million efficiency savings have been identified; and
 - additional support is being provided to help two projects sustain strategically relevant services where other short-term funding has run out.
- 101** Through these outcomes Bolton is able to continue in the short-term to commission similar levels of strategically relevant, quality services that are value for money despite budget cuts and no inflationary award.

Contracting

- 102** Contract management is robust. 37 steady state contracts have been agreed with service providers for a period of five years with an option to extend for a further two. Another 30 are under consideration by service providers. Long-term contracting brings confidence and stability to the sector.
- 103** Service providers are satisfied with the Council's approach to contract management, with the issuing of five-year contracts helping to promote stability and service development/investment in the supported housing sector. The approach to contract management, supported by regular meetings, is valued by providers. Again 100 per cent of service provider respondents to our survey expressed satisfaction with the difficult area of contract negotiations. Providers who attended our focus group also confirmed that all payments are timely and accurate.
- 104** Where appropriate, joint contract monitoring arrangements have been put in place to co-ordinate effort and minimise the burden on service providers. The Supporting People team have worked with the mental health community rehabilitation team to develop joint contract monitoring arrangements for shared services, including joint contract review meetings. Co-location assists in ensuring contract reviews of providers of care and housing-related support services are considered together and not in isolation. This means that some providers benefit from a more streamlined approach and less duplication.
- 105** A number of contracts are being changed to decrease the amount of administration required and provide greater certainty over the amount of grant to be paid. Changing a number of contracts from block subsidy to block gross reduces the amount of administration for service providers and the Supporting People team. The service provider is clear about how much funding they will get each consecutive month regardless of how many service users are in the service and it allows them to plan and manage risk more easily. The Supporting People team are able to plan more effectively as they are clearer about their contractual commitments.

Value for money

- 106** The Council has a very good approach to achieving value for money. The approach used through service reviews has been transparent, agreed with service providers and applied consistently, leading to cost and quality improvements. A sound policy has been developed to clarify which activities are ineligible and existing provision has been rigorously challenged. Administration costs are closely monitored to ensure they are value for money. No use has been made of efficiency targets and procurement policies do not show how value for money is achieved when exemptions to normal procurement routes apply.

How do costs compare?

- 107** Based on figures supplied to the ODPM for the Platinum Cut in 2003, the average unit cost in Bolton was below average. However, when community alarms and sheltered housing are both excluded the unit cost is significantly above average. These figures precede work carried out by the Council through their service review programme.

Table 2

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Bolton	£ 0.70	£ 25.17	£ 27.53	£ 112.62
North West	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

- 108** The Supporting People team question the current validity of figures on which this comparison is based and have produced alternative figures shown below. Year-on-year improvements can clearly be seen in the unit cost.

Table 3

	Golden Cut	Platinum Cut 2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/7
Units excluding Older People Services	1,150	1,150	1,154	1,061	1,061
Annual contract value excluding Older People Services	6,593,745	7,904,188	7,721,604	6,482,642	6,356,586
Average unit cost	109.96	131.81	128.32	117.18	114.90

How is value for money managed?

- 109** The Council has adopted a sound approach to value for money assessments in service reviews which takes account of performance, quality and cost. Although detail is not included in the five-year strategy, the methodology, developed in consultation with service providers, is set out clearly in a policy paper developed in December 2004 and revised as the Council learned from its experiences. The assessment includes a matrix balancing cost and quality to inform re-commissioning decisions following reviews. Practice also allowed flexibility to pay above average rates for better quality or specialist services, for example where staff are highly trained.
- 110** Service providers were satisfied with the approach to assessing whether services were value for money. It was considered to be rigorous but fair. Over 86 per cent of providers surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with the Council's approach. Involvement and clarity have helped to deliver value for money improvements.
- 111** Value for money outcomes are being achieved from the service review programme. Increases in quality standards as measured by the QAF have been achieved alongside efficiency savings of £1.6 million. The grant is securing better quality services for less money.
- 112** Staff involved in service reviews have a good understanding of value for money. Review staff have worked with other Greater Manchester authorities to establish the methodology and develop benchmark ratios for staff salary costs. There is clear recognition of the need to consider a wide range of variables, such as hourly staff costs, benchmarking data, performance indicators and quality.

- 113** Clear eligibility criteria are in place. Eligibility criteria have been developed with partners, service providers and service users. These have helped stakeholders understand which activities are eligible for grant funding and which are not. Time analyses have also been carried out in some cases, for example of staff working in Supporting People funded services for people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, to ensure that a correct balance was established between care and support. This has helped to ensure that support is both eligible and appropriate to the needs of service users.
- 114** Ineligible services and activities are being challenged and Supporting People funding is being withdrawn where appropriate. One of the main examples is the removal of ineligible care activities in services provided to people with a learning disability. The overall amount involved has been established and there is agreement to a three-year phased transfer of funding back to Adults Services. This avoids destabilising budgets and the transferred sums have already been built into medium-term financial plans. Grant is therefore only funding eligible services and service users are being protected in the transitional period.
- 115** Achievement of efficiency improvements is not closely managed. Supporting People plans do not include efficiency targets. It is clear that Supporting People is expected to make efficiency savings that contribute towards the Council's Gershon targets and is delivering efficiency savings through service reviews. However, the amount that Supporting People is expected to contribute is not identified in plans and the actions that will be taken to achieve them are not spelt out. As a result, the team cannot know whether they have made sufficient efficiency savings and the Council will not know if it can rely on a specific contribution.
- 116** Appropriate comparisons have been carried out to establish reliable benchmarked costs. Costs have been benchmarked against other services within Bolton, service costs in Greater Manchester and regional and national comparators. Thematic reviews assisted in drawing comparisons across a particular sector.
- 117** Administration costs are monitored closely. Comparisons are made with neighbours and family group councils to ensure that the size of the team is comparable and salary levels are competitive, helping to retain experienced and competent staff. Spending is monitored every six to eight weeks by the Supporting People financial sub-group which includes the Finance Officer and a corporate accountant to keep budgets on track that expenditure is necessary and kept to a minimum. A detailed review of expenditure is carried out each year which includes salary, on costs and all aspects of expenditure involved in building the budget from a zero base each year. In this way the budget is set at the amount needed to deliver the administration of the programme.

- 118 Procurement policies do not show how value for money is to be achieved when services are exempted from the usual tendering process. The Council has a clear procurement policy in place which sets out how services should be procured in an open and transparent manner in order to ensure best value. It is supported by a departmental paper on procurement of social care services. However, no guidance is given on how to secure best value when exemptions apply. Supporting People quite sensibly propose to apply their value for money assessment criteria to the procurement of the new alcohol service. Without being formally adopted, there is no guarantee that future exemptions will follow the same route.
- 119 Joint working with other authorities in Greater Manchester has helped to minimise development costs for some areas of work. For example, the ten authorities jointly commissioned consultants to carry out supply mapping across the Greater Manchester area to inform the five-year strategies. The Councils have worked together to develop the format for steady state contracts and approach to service reviews. Joint and common approaches share the cost of development and can also help to minimise demands on providers.

Service user involvement

- 120 Service user involvement is a particular strength in Bolton. The recently established community expert panel is imaginative and inclusive. It is providing meaningful engagement that is bringing demonstrable benefits to the programme. Links have been made with established service user groups. Consultation exercises are joined up with others to provide a more efficient and complete approach. Service users have been central to the service review process. The Council recognise that more needs to be done to ensure all groups are equally involved and there is a rolling programme to improve involvement with a number of groups including offenders, refugees and people with alcohol problems.
- 121 The Supporting People team has developed some innovative approaches to promote service user involvement, including the use of service user advocates and a community expert panel. The Community Expert Panel brings together people from across a range of client groups to comment on aspects of the programme and is developing very vulnerable people's skills so they can participate in service reviews in future. They have also commented on service reviews. Advocates work intensively with the group to develop their skills, confidence and capacity to carry out these assignments. The service user advocates who run the group have also involved an ex-drug user with a record of offending, who now facilitates art and music workshops for a living, in running the panel. This has helped to build credibility with some of the younger participants who can relate more readily to his life experiences.

- 122** Service users are being involved in meaningful ways to improve delivery of the programme. The Council use advocates to develop the capacity of the Community Expert Panel, involving service users in a variety of issues. These include reviewing Supporting People literature, the accessibility of website information, mystery shopping, supplementary quality measures for future service reviews and service user involvement techniques to be used from April 2006. Community Experts are to be used to assist with peer reviews. Changes are being made in response to their feedback which makes the programme more relevant and therefore more effective.
- 123** There are plans to increase membership of the Community Expert Panel to ensure all client groups are represented. At present, no BME representatives are involved in the community expert panel, which means that the views of these service users would not be represented in any feedback from the group. This is recognised as an area of development with consultation with BME Forum scheduled for future months. Additional client groups are being added incrementally to the panel to ensure all groups are included without destabilising the existing group. Some requirements may be overlooked in the short-term if all groups are not involved.
- 124** The development of the Community Expert Panel has brought important personal benefits to participants. For example, three of the young people involved in the group are now training as peer consultants for the Arts Council, representing Bolton across the Greater Manchester region. Participants also pointed to increased confidence through their membership of the group and said that it had helped to break down barriers across different client groups.
- 125** Service users have been asked about how wish to be consulted, helping to promote more effective approaches. In March 2005, two Supporting People service user consultation days, involving a range of participant techniques such as drama workshops, explored how different groups wanted to be consulted, with over 50 attendees. Feedback indicated that most would prefer to be consulted on a client group basis. This has informed future work, with service user advocates now conducting a rolling programme of consultation across client groups. A small grant was secured through a bid to Housing's Percent for Art scheme which funded the two Supporting People consultation days in March 2005 and some outreach workshops for young people.
- 126** Links have been established with existing service users groups and groups on which service users are represented. For example, Bolton Affiliated Tenants and Residents Association, representing 5,500 service users have ongoing involvement with the programme. Members have contributed to policy and service developments such as the eligibility criteria, the development of the five- year strategy and service reviews on sheltered housing and community alarms. The mental health service user who chairs the Patients' Council (a local voluntary group for people with mental health problems) and sits on the mental health strategic rehabilitation group is also involved in the community expert panel, helping to maximise service user expertise and feedback from the wider body of mental health service users.

- 127 The Council recognise that some hard-to-reach groups need to be more engaged. The independent advocates have a rolling programme of work to involve offenders, mentally disordered offenders, BME groups, refugees and people with alcohol problems. Salford University undertook research into the housing-related support needs of BME communities and also trained local community members to become community interviewers which helped overcome barriers to involvement. This work will ensure that all groups have the opportunity to influence service development.
- 128 Supporting People is joining up with others to ensure consultation is efficient and addresses a wider range of services. Recent consultation with the gypsy and traveller community was undertaken in partnership with the Council's Strategic Housing Unit and Bolton Community Homes, with support from the mainstream gypsy liaison service. Service user advocates led this consultation with gypsy and traveller community to determine how they feel they should access services.
- 129 Service users have been appropriately involved in service reviews. Different techniques have been used depending on the particular circumstances and the communication abilities of individuals. These include one to one interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires and may involve specialist support. Service providers have helped to inform the best approach and are very satisfied with the way that their service users were involved and engaged. As shown in paragraph 103 above, 100 per cent of service providers responding to our survey were satisfied with the approach to consulting service users. Service user views have therefore been central to the review process.
- 130 There are a number of outcomes that relate to service user involvement. Examples include the identification and description of eligible tasks in the eligibility criteria, colour, language and photographs used in the local directory and Supporting People leaflet, and the timing of questionnaires sent as part of service reviews. A significant example is illustrated by the development of two supplementary QAF objectives - the living environment and consulting and involving service users - to be used as quality of life indicators in future service reviews.
- 131 The Council has clearly set out its overall approach and the principles involved in a service user consultation strategy. The strategy does not, however, include details of how the approach will be evaluated or how success will be measured to gauge what changes may be necessary.
- 132 There is a strong focus on consultation at the corporate level, with activity overseen by a corporate consultation group and recorded on a corporate consultation database. Examples of corporate consultation initiatives include: a Citizen's Panel; Young People's Panel; annual general BVPI survey; bi-annual ethnic minority survey and eight weekly meetings of area forums. Supporting People are linked in to corporate arrangements.

- 133 User involvement has been promoted at a regional level to inform strategy development. For example, the councils in Greater Manchester recently held a joint user event (attended by around 100 service users) to consider the ODPM's strategy consultation paper. Feedback from the event has been captured on a DVD which was submitted to ODPM along with the Greater Manchester Supporting People Forum's formal response.

Access to services and information

- 134 Supporting People literature is easy to understand and readily available in the Council's offices and on the website. Information is available in other languages and formats. A well-presented, succinct local directory has been produced providing comprehensive information on services provided by the programme. Information on the website is not easily navigated by people who are not already familiar with Supporting People. The Council are proactive in testing out their access arrangements with a view to making improvements.
- 135 A wide range of information is available in different languages and formats. Easy to read leaflets are available covering general Supporting People information and Fairer Charging. The general purpose leaflet is being simplified further on the advice of the Community Expert Panel. Some information is available in the other main community languages (Urdu and Gujarati). An easy read version of the five- year strategy has been produced and translated. Other material is available in other languages or formats on request. A strapline offering this facility is included on Supporting People literature in the other main community languages. These all help service users understand the Supporting People programme and the housing-related support services available.
- 136 Information within services relating to Supporting People is accessible, readily available, and succinctly written. On visiting services and offices (Access Bolton), there was a wide range of available literature, including information on abuse and complaints. Service users and those interested in accessing services ought to find relevant information easy to come by.
- 137 The Better Care: Higher Standards charter is accessible and includes up-to-date information about Supporting People. The charter is straplined in different languages and makes reference to the Supporting People programme. It gives contact details of where to find additional information, including the telephone numbers and website details for Supporting People.
- 138 Referral routes to services are clear and fair. An easy to read directory of services is available to staff and service users, showing what services are available and how to access them. A revised version has been produced in consultation with service providers and service users for distribution around the Council's public contact points. The directory lists support services available, an outline of what the service offers, how to access the service and contact details. It also includes services, for example services available to people with drug or alcohol problems that may not be directly funded through Supporting People grant. Through this the directory provides good information to enable vulnerable service users wishing to access services to exercise choice.

- 139 Random reality checks at several Council offices found Supporting People literature to be widely available. Mystery shopper enquiries in person and by telephone were well-handled. In each case, the response was quick and sympathetic with accurate referral to appropriate access points. Both contribute to easy access to services.
- 140 The Supporting People helpline offers quick and direct access to the team. The helpline number, email and web address and team address are widely publicised on Supporting People literature and posters. This facility offers direct access to expert advice on the Supporting People programme in Bolton to the whole community.
- 141 The Council's website holds a lot of information about Supporting People for service providers, partners and service users. It is well-organised and offers a range of information that is useful to the different audiences, such as available services, policies and procedures, meeting dates and minutes of previous meetings. Making information easily accessible contributes to the effective administration and the operation of the programme.
- 142 The website does not, however, help vulnerable people without prior knowledge of Supporting People to easily find information on services. For example, a general enquiry from people with learning disabilities, mental health problems, or teenage parents is not redirected through to the local directory which tells them what housing-related support services are available. This may make it harder for people to access services.
- 143 An informative newsletter is produced to keep stakeholders up-to-date with developments. The newsletter is produced quarterly and distributed around Supporting People stakeholders including service users. It is also available on the website.
- 144 In recognition of a low take up of Fairer Charging assessments, additional promotion has been carried out. For example, Fairer Charging leaflets are available in service provider premises, long-term service providers are reminded of the need to encourage service users to apply, and a targeted mail shot to leaseholders was carried out. Service users have been given the opportunity to apply for a Fairer Charging assessment although few have taken up the opportunity.
- 145 Access is clearly important to the Council. It has recently introduced its own mystery shopper arrangements using the Community Expert panel to comment on access to information through the website and make enquiries in person and by telephone in the Council's offices. Results were generally positive and will be reported to the Commissioning Body and Core Strategic Group in due course with a recommendation to develop training.

- 146** A structured complaints procedure is in place but it does not make clear that complaints can be made direct to the Supporting People team in certain circumstances. Quite rightly the first point of complaint is to the service provider. There are circumstances however, such as instances of abuse, when the complainant will wish to go direct to the Supporting People team and this is not made clear in the leaflet. Complaints leaflets are widely available. Examination of records shows that complaints are handled promptly and satisfactorily although file records are not always complete. As a result, it is more difficult to track action and see outcomes.

Diversity

- 147** The Council's approach to diversity is strong. There are a range of mechanisms in place to engage the diverse communities of the borough and baseline data is good. Service reviews have addressed diversity issues and further training is provided to service providers. Some BME specific services are available and the directory of services identifies other services that accommodate specific cultural, religious or disability needs. There is scope to strengthen consultation in some areas.
- 148** The Council has a clear commitment to diversity at a corporate level. It has already achieved Level 3 of the local government equality standard and aims to achieve Level 4 in 2006/07. There is also a policy of carrying out relevance reviews for all major policy and service developments. These help to ensure that new initiatives reflect the needs of different communities.
- 149** The Council and the local strategic partnership have well-established links with minority communities in Bolton to inform policy and service development. A number of full-time posts are funded through grants such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund specifically to develop this framework and ensure strong channels of communication are established. Housing-related support needs can be identified through these channels.
- 150** There are a range of mechanisms in place to consult with BME communities. These include: the Refugee Forum (an umbrella group for refugee groups run by Bolton race equality council); community events funded through the Percent for Art Scheme; an Asian elders' group; ASHA (a forum for Bolton at Homes' Asian tenants in sheltered accommodation); and Asian groups for people with mental health problems. This provides opportunities for the Supporting People team to utilise existing structures to obtain feedback.

- 151** The Council has good baseline data on the housing-related support needs of Bolton's diverse communities. It sought to increase its understanding of BME housing and support needs through specifically commissioned research from Salford University and Acadamee Delta. The research was carried out by community researchers recruited from BME communities and assessed the use of existing services and the amount of unmet need. Information from partners, including probation and service providers and specific consultation exercises, for example with young people, has contributed to the overall picture. Gaps in knowledge are being filled, for example through recent research with gypsy and traveller communities. Good baseline data has provided a solid platform for determining strategic priorities.
- 152** A clear framework for addressing BME housing needs is provided by the BME housing and related support strategy. The strategy identifies eight objectives, including enabling independent living. The strategy links with the Supporting People programme and includes targets to review the potential to develop floating support and supported accommodation for BME elders.
- 153** The Supporting People programme is helping to increase access to services for Asian elders. Asian Community Support Officers are employed to deliver the sheltered service to Asian tenants who speak the same language. The service now supports 60 customers, with 51 funded through Supporting People.
- 154** Information in different languages helps to promote access to services. Free interpreter services and chargeable translation services are available within the Council. Service users also have access to Language Line for interpreter services. The Council has provided information cards outlining domestic violence services in a range of languages, helping to promote services across different community groups. These assist in addressing barriers to accessing services for people who do not speak English well.
- 155** The Council holds annual service days for recent arrivals to Bolton at the Victoria Hall, helping to increase access to services for refugees. The event includes promotion of the work of the Supporting People team, welfare rights service, credit unions, affordable warmth service and housing. It is promoted through refugee community organisations; flyers are produced in up to 15 community languages and displayed in doctors' surgeries and local schools. This helps new arrivals understand the range of support that is available.
- 156** Services have been developed locally that are culturally relevant and sensitive to the needs of diverse groups. Diversity issues were addressed as part of service reviews and further training is being provided. For example, one scheme for teenage parents updated its handbook to include information about temples and mosques following its review, helping service users to access appropriate places of worship. Schemes that we visited on-site were able to demonstrate high levels of awareness of diversity, local need and demography. Furthermore, there were some BME specific services available with close links into those designed for the wider community. This cohesive approach should mean that service provision is suitable for all members of the community in Bolton.

- 157** The new housing-related support service directory is providing more information for people with sensory or physical disabilities to enable them to exercise choice over which services they wish to access. In addition to showing housing-related support services specifically for this client group, the directory includes hotel type symbols to indicate services that have the following facilities.

Table 4

Accessible entrance	Ramped access	Accessible lift
Accessible toilet	Facilities for visually impaired	Assistance dogs welcome
Sign language interpretation	Assistive listening systems	Loop system
Braille available		

- 158** People with special needs now have ready access to information on the facilities available.
- 159** Regional work is underway to develop the potential of service improvements through collaboration, information sharing and joint procurement, for high cost placements. This involves several North West councils and is linked to the North West Centre of Excellence. It is focusing on areas of learning and physical disability. The work encompasses expenditure by Supporting People, social care, PCTs and other associated sources.

Outcomes for service users

- 160** Service reviews have been well used to reshape existing provision to better meet the housing-related support needs of Bolton's communities. Quality improvements have been delivered and all service users have a personal housing-related support plan. However, these plans are of a mixed standard. Performance management systems are not sufficiently developed to fully capture outcomes that the programme delivers for service users.
- 161** Service users are benefiting from improvements in service quality. Service reviews have assessed all service providers against a range of quality measures including health and safety, protection from abuse, involvement in service delivery and recognition of diverse needs. Twenty-eight action plans have been issued to improve quality standards and all services are now assessed as meeting the minimum QAF level C which was not previously the case. Better quality services increase individual's quality of life and life chances.

- 162** All service users have a support plan although their quality is variable. Our examination of a sample of support plans showed them to be of mixed quality: some were very good with focused outcomes aimed at increasing or maintaining the independence of service users, while others were adequate and, in one case, poor. This particular support plan was weak in a number of respects; it had no clear statement of specific individual goals and desired outcomes, its format made progress difficult to identify, and it was not signed by the service user to indicate acceptance and agreement. Without good support plans, efforts are not focused on the needs of the individual.
- 163** There has been an increase in the units of housing-related support available to people in their own home. Sixteen per cent of total provision is now floating support compared to 4 per cent when the programme started. The majority, 14.3 per cent, is available to people living in the private sector. Floating support increases choice and flexibility of provision by enabling people to access housing-related support without moving home.
- 164** Reconfiguration as part of service review has been the main tool used to reshape provision to better meet local needs. For example, an increase of five floating support units were introduced following the review of single homeless services, along with two additional accommodation-based units for homeless families. Reviews have also helped existing services to deal with individuals with more complex problems. Existing homelessness services were linked to drugs and alcohol service development and offenders' service development to improve their capacity to deal with service users with more specialist support requirements. This helped to improve access to these services and move on arrangements.
- 165** A significant number of strategically relevant services were developed under transitional housing benefit in advance of Supporting People. These included:
- floating support for families at risk of homelessness through anti-social behaviour;
 - support for homeless individuals;
 - floating support for teenage parents; and
 - support for high risk offenders.
- 166** While little new provision has been commissioned since the programme went live, additional financial support has been provided to sustain existing strategically relevant existing services whose short-term funding has run out. This included support for a project preventing homelessness and floating support for high risk offenders. In line with priorities, a new Supporting People funded service for people with alcohol problems is in development and due to open in June 2006.
- 167** The programme is delivering other benefits for service users. These include a reduced length of stay and greater planned move-on from single homeless services and an increased turnover enabling access to a greater number of service users. Turnover is important to ensure people have access to services at the time that they need support.

- 168** Gaps in services remain for some client groups. Services for people with alcohol problems are being procured but will not be in place until June 2006. There are no Supporting People funded services for gypsies and travellers although there are mainstream funded services. The needs of other groups, such as frail older people needing extra care, and homeless families are not currently provided for.
- 169** An allocation panel for mental health is helping to promote better access to mental health services, including supported accommodation and floating support. The panel, which includes all local service providers and team leaders from Community Mental Health Teams, considers each referral and matches people with mental health problems to available, appropriate support. The panel has helped to streamline the allocation process and should help to reduce any void levels/under-utilisation in existing provision.
- 170** Joint work through the strategic rehabilitation group for mental health services has led to the development of a new four-bed scheme for people with mental health problems. Following the closure of an existing service, the Supporting People team raised the possibility of using the empty property for people with mental health problems at the group. Four suitable new service users were subsequently identified by the Salvation Army and re-housed following assessment, with ongoing housing-related support. This has allowed people to move from hostel accommodation into a successful long-term placement.
- 171** Good links between some Supporting People funded services and the homeless welfare unit are helping to promote effective move-on arrangements. For example, one teenage pregnancy service reported that they have a named liaison contact in the homeless welfare unit who helps with accommodation issues faced by their clients and holds inter-agency meetings prior to move on to assess ongoing needs. A flexible approach is taken when service users do not wish to bid for two properties each week under choice-based letting, helping to ensure that new housing better reflects their needs and aspirations. This approach increases the likelihood of successful resettlement.
- 172** On site in Bolton, we made visits to a range of service providers, including older people's services, a unit for teenage mothers, hostels for people with mental health issues, and many others. At each service, we heard stories about individual tenants, and enclose these as examples.
- Family A were faced with eviction and homelessness as a result of harassment. They had been served with a 'Notice Seeking Possession' for their behaviour, and the children were not engaging within the local school (truancy). The project supported the family in many ways, including liaising with the landlord concerned, providing counselling and mediation with their neighbours, and training in 'parenting skills'. As a result, Family A were able to stay in their house, the children attended school and no further complaints about their behaviour were received.

- At a meeting of service users facilitated by local advocates, we came into contact with a young man of 20, Mr B. He had by his own admission been in and out of trouble for most of his life and had lost touch with most of his family. Within the group and through the help of a local young persons' housing project, Mr B became able to hold down a tenancy successfully and was engaging with the group very well (including several older people). Further, he was doing some voluntary work in a group set up for ex-tenants.

173 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 Commissioning Body. However, there are no indicators that identify the outcomes by individual client group and those that may contribute to related strategies, for example, the strategy for 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.

Summary

- 174** Overall, we judge that Bolton is delivering an excellent Supporting People programme.
- 175** Governance arrangements are effective and inclusive. Strong partnerships, including those with probation and health, are driving the programme forward with the close involvement of service providers and service users. Councillors are well-engaged and there is a widespread understanding of the Supporting People programme. Delivery arrangements are strong; needs have been comprehensively mapped, contract management is particularly good, with long-term steady state contracts in place to bring stability and confidence to the sector. Relations with service providers are very good and cross authority working is delivering tangible benefits.
- 176** All services have been rigorously reviewed ahead of the required deadline. Improvements have been achieved in the quality of services and significant efficiency savings delivered. Housing-related support provision is being reshaped to provide greater flexibility and choice and better meet the needs of Bolton's communities. Service user involvement is a particular strength with meaningful engagement that is bringing demonstrable benefits, both to the Council and individual service users. Information and access routes are clear and widely publicised. The Council's approach to diversity is sound with good baseline data, information available in other formats and languages and included as part of the service review assessment.
- 177** There are some areas that require further development. Performance management systems are not, however, sufficiently well-developed to fully capture the outcomes that the programme delivers for service users. In addition, the standard of housing-related support plans is mixed with a small number falling below good practice standards.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 178** There is a positive track record of improvements being delivered by the Supporting People programme in Bolton. Service reviews have been completed ahead of schedule and significant value for money improvement has been achieved. The profile of housing-related support provision is changing and gaps in services are being filled. In some areas, Bolton is not just delivering but demonstrating exceptional performance, for example in service user involvement and in contract management.
- 179** The Supporting People programme has a good track record of delivery. ODPM milestones for the delivery of the programme have been met and exceeded. For example the requirement to complete reviews of all legacy services by the end of March 2006 has been completed ahead of schedule. A target to issues 10 steady state contracts in 2005/06 was exceeded, with 37 signed and a further 30 issued to date. This shows that the Supporting People programme can meet and exceed performance targets.
- 180** Value for money improvements are being delivered. As well as increasing the quality of services, £1.6 million of efficiency savings have been identified and the Council can demonstrate that the unit cost of better quality services is falling year-on-year. As a result, money is being released to sustain current levels of provision, with some available for re-investment.
- 181** Demonstrable improvements have flowed from service reviews. Quality standards have been improved with the issue of 28 action plans and all services are confirmed as a minimum at QAF level C. All service users now have personal support plans in place identifying personal objectives. This means that service delivery is now focused on improving or maintaining people's capacity to live independently.
- 182** The approach to service user involvement has demonstrated Bolton's willingness to innovate and trial more high risk approaches, such as cross client group forums. The development of the community expert panel has helped to ensure that some aspects of the programme, such as leaflets or the future approach to service reviews reflect service user priorities and contributed to the personal development of both its participants and Supporting People staff.
- 183** In some areas, the Supporting People team is developing good practice not just for the programme but for the Council as a whole. Long-term contract arrangements provide stability. Regular, close, and where appropriate, joined up contract monitoring ensure good compliance and understanding of issues. Vulnerable service users are for the first time working in a mixed group to test access to services and develop, and be involved in, better ways of working in future. Others will be able to benefit of the good practices being developed by the Supporting People team.

- 184** The profile of housing-related support provision is changing in Bolton to provide a wider range of services and access that is no longer based on tenure. Floating support provision has changed from 4 per cent of total provision to 16 per cent, with a view to achieving a balance of 40 per cent. Gaps in provision are beginning to be filled. For example, intensive accommodation-based support for families at risk of homelessness through anti-social behaviour, and additional floating support to provide move on services and continuing support for single homeless people. Performance indicators show that an increased number of people move on from services in a planned way. Service re-configuration and commissioning has increased support, improved access to support and promoted move-on opportunities for service users.
- 185** Bolton has played a lead role in regional joint working, helping to ensure that there are standard approaches to key areas of work and more effective use of resources. The contribution that Bolton has made is valued by partners across the Greater Manchester region.
- 186** Some policies or arrangements are late or recent and have not had time to fully impact on the programme. For example cross authority passporting was only formally agreed in November 2005, reporting around risk and contingency planning was approved in December 2005 and the complaints policy has only recently been approved. Late or recent developments have had little time to benefit the programme.
- 187** On a wider front both the Council and the Adults Service department have strong track records of delivering improvement. Under CPA 2005 - the Harder Test - the Council was assessed as improving well and Adults Social Services has excellent capacity for improvement. Expectations are high and the Supporting People programme operates in an environment of achievement.

How does the service manage performance?

- 188** The programme has clear overarching aims and priorities. Two integrated plans are in place to deliver both strategic and operational improvements. These plans address the right areas to move the programme forward and continue improvement. Learning features strongly in service delivery, both learning from others and spreading good practice. However, performance management arrangements do not yet fully capture outcomes that the programme delivers for service users. Nor is it yet being used as a tool to drive service improvement.
- 189** The five-year strategy provides a clear direction for the programme. It has established overarching aims and determined priority areas. These have been developed in consultation with partners, service providers and service users, and informed by good baseline data. As the result, the programme has a clear and ambitious direction.

- 190** Two integrated plans are in place to deliver the strategy and the programme. An annual plan is in place detailing what is to be achieved during 2005/06 and it is supported by a Service Improvement Action Plan which identifies the operational improvements needed for the programme, such as developing communication and performance management arrangements. Both plans are clear about tasks and actions required, allocate responsibilities and include target completion dates. Links to overarching aims are also clear. Clear, integrated plans will help to deliver improvement in key areas.
- 191** The plans do not always make effective links to outcomes for service users nor estimate the resources needed to deliver the plans. Some use is made of specific outputs such as 'Up to 15 new service units to be commissioned by 2006/07'. In other areas such as 'Improved access and service delivery to people with drug and alcohol problems' no measures or targets are identified. Plans identify the service area expected to resource the delivery of each action but not the estimated cost. For maximum impact it is necessary for the programme to link actions to measurable expected outcomes for service users. Failure to identify the estimated cost of planned actions increases the risk of them not being delivered.
- 192** Staff are clear about the priorities and focus of the Supporting People five-year strategy and the service improvement action plan. Supporting People staff contributed to the development of the five-year strategy through away days and are aware of the priorities for future development and how their work supports wider community and Council priorities. The practice of reviewing the service improvement action plan on an annual basis will ensure that strategy implementation reflects emerging priorities.
- 193** There are effective performance management arrangements in place for the Supporting People team. These include: weekly team meetings; four weekly one-to-one meetings with line managers; individual performance development reviews which focus on training and development needs, and key performance targets. This system has helped staff to identify development needs and promoted a strong focus on key tasks.
- 194** The performance management system needs to be developed further to drive service development and improvements. To date, performance indicators have been reported periodically but in an ad hoc way. Only from the February 2005 Core Strategy Group has it been agreed to report performance every quarter. Regular reporting is necessary to closely manage progress and use the system as a tool to drive improvement.
- 195** Targets are not used to drive efficiency improvements. No specific financial targets are set for efficiency improvements to be delivered by the programme, nor do plans show how the Supporting People programme is contributing towards the Council's Gershon efficiency savings. While the Supporting People programme has contributed to the Council's efficiency targets, this has not been in a sufficiently planned way.

- 196** Plans are in place to transfer the cost of ineligible services to their proper source. A three-year staged transfer of funding has been agreed between Supporting People and Adults Services to transfer the funding responsibility of ineligible care services. These additional costs have been built into the medium-term budget ensuring a smooth transition with minimum disruption for service users.
- 197** Risk management arrangements are good. Established arrangements identify key risks to the programme and actions required to reduce their likelihood or impact. Risks are being managed periodically by a group which includes corporate expertise. Contingency plans are in place for major risks. Good risk management reduces the chances of major disruption to the programme and its vulnerable service users.
- 198** The Council is aware of the areas it needs to develop and plans are in place to take the programme forward. Strategic reviews are to replace individual service reviews in 2006/07 and will include all services and funding streams for the three main client groups. A working group has been established to develop the performance management system further and determine relevant outcomes for each client group. This group will seek to bring together the ODPM outcome requirements, proposed Local Area Agreement outcomes and the approach proposed by Greater Manchester councils. An officer is actively working on the Greater Manchester pilot on outcome measures, looking at particular options and Bolton has worked with local providers to consider how outcomes for young people can be captured. These two initiatives will co-ordinate services further and address current weakness in outcome measurement.
- 199** The Council has a good approach to learning from others, capturing best practice and sharing information. Bolton's lead officer has been a major player in the regional and sub-regional groups established to develop Supporting People arrangements. Bolton is therefore well placed to capture and contribute towards good practice within the region. Examples include the steady state contract, the approach to assessing value for money and QAF light assessments for sheltered housing services. Bolton is also closely connected to regional procurement projects that are seeking to identify and share alternative procurement models and good practice. As a result, Bolton is able to benefit from collective effort and the experience of others.
- 200** Bolton is also actively engaged in spreading good practice. Service providers reported a positive approach to learning and sharing good practice. Examples cited included sharing good practice from service reviews and regular features on good practice in the Supporting People newsletter, both of which help to promote a learning culture across the whole housing-related support sector.
- 201** The Council is also aware of the dynamic nature of its minority communities. The Council is currently in the process of developing a strategy for new and emerging communities in Bolton, which will help to ascertain the needs of newer communities, including Kurdish, Iraqi and Somali groups. This will provide useful information for the Supporting People programme as it seeks to meet the future needs of its community.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 202** The programme has many of the features needed to demonstrate capacity to improve. A strong commitment from the Council and good integration of the programme into mainstream activity are evident. Financial and human resource planning is good. Partnership working is strong. Procurement arrangements, in the main, are sound and IT support is reliable. A stable, skilled team is in place with access to development and training. The team can also demonstrate some success in levering in additional funding, either directly from mainstream sources or indirectly by supporting service provider bids to other funding pots.
- 203** Most importantly, there is a strong commitment to the development of the programme from the Council. Structures have been put in place to integrate the programme with corporate arrangements including involving councillors directly. The administration budget is developed on the basis of what is necessary to effectively implement the programme rather than the size of the grant from ODPM. As a result, the Supporting People programme is well understood and well-aligned with relevant service planning groups.
- 204** Prudent financial management has left the Council well-placed to move the programme forward. Under-spends in 2003/4 and 2004/05 are being used sensibly. For example, a hardship fund was established for small providers struggling to cope without inflationary increases; a small contingency reserve has been set up for unforeseen events or challenges; an inflationary increase has been approved for April 2006 to enable service providers to sustain services; and a small allocation has been made for service development.
- 205** The Supporting People team is integrated into the Council's business planning and budget setting processes. As such it is required to look ahead, estimate workforce requirements, including skills, and draw up plans for the coming year. Projections show that based on a reducing budget, the programme will go in to deficit in 2007/08. Strategic reviews of services to particular client groups, for example older people, are planned to look across all funding streams for further efficiencies and a more complementary range of services. Good financial planning is essential to the long-term sustainability of services.
- 206** The Council has a stable and skilled Supporting People team. The approach to service user involvement and engagement is strengthening the consultation skills of Supporting People staff. An officer is actively involved in running the community expert panel, helping build expertise in consultation techniques. Other members of the Supporting People team have also attended meetings of the group to see how it works. This has helped to increase confidence of Supporting People staff when they carry out their own consultation with service users. It will also help to ensure that this model of engagement will be sustainable in the longer-term without external support.

- 207 A proposed re-structure of the Supporting People team will ensure that it is well-placed to meet future challenges. Although proposals have not yet been finalised, there are plans to combine the role of service review officers and contract officers, through the creation of three contract and service development posts. These post-holders will cover different client groups, allowing staff to develop client specific expertise and build strong working relationships with key commissioners and service providers.
- 208 The involvement of service users is strong and improving. The development of the community expert panel has helped to ensure that some aspects of the programme (leaflets, the approach to service reviews) reflect service user priorities and contributed to the personal development of both its participants and Supporting People staff.
- 209 Effective partnerships have been established for the governance and development of the Supporting People programme. The Council has a record of good partnership working having already developed joined commissioning of health and social care services for a range of client groups, including people who misuse substances, people with learning disabilities, and people with mental health problems. The change agenda for older persons is being managed in partnership with major local service providers. Proposals have been agreed to pilot the remodelling of some services to move away from a heavily concentrated accommodation-based service to floating support. Planning for improved domestic violence services has included a local housing association and the Housing Corporation to increase provision in a new build and to remove shared facilities. Good partnership working adds to the programme's capacity to deliver improvements.
- 210 The Supporting People programme is working closely with other mainstream Council services to develop co-ordinated strategies and a joined up approach to research. Housing managers are on the Commissioning Body and core strategy group, the Supporting People lead officer is closely involved in developing strategies such as the homelessness strategy and the BME strategy, and there are examples of jointly commissioning research, for example, research into the need for a borough-wide Home Improvement Agency.
- 211 Effective and well-established joint working across the Greater Manchester area will contribute to the further development of the programme. Bolton is particularly well-integrated into joint working forums through its leadership role and has already successfully worked with neighbouring authorities to develop joint approaches to service reviews, accreditation and contract development. There are plans to appoint a regional Supporting People co-ordinator to increase strategic capacity. Bolton has played a key role in shaping this proposal. A full-time co-ordinator will add to the capacity of the regional group to capture and spread good practice.

- 212** Supporting People is instrumental in expanding provision through support from mainstream funding and helping service providers attract additional grant funding. For example, an Asian women's domestic violence project is being developed with mainstream support to meet unmet need. In addition, the Council's domestic violence co-ordinator has worked with the Supporting People team, the current service provider and other stakeholders to develop plans for a new refuge and a related bid for Housing Corporation capital funding. There are other examples of the team supporting service provider bids to other funding pots, such as the private sector or Neighbourhood Renewal fund, to increase and improve provision.
- 213** IT support is reliable. Good records are being maintained and payments to providers are accurate and on time. Sound contingency plans are in place in the event of a system breakdown.
- 214** Procurement policies are sound. The main principles are set out in the corporate procurement strategy, which is supported by a paper dealing specifically with the procurement of social care and housing-related support. However, the agreed approach to procurement has not been applied yet for Supporting People services. The new service currently being procured is exempt from normal practice and a specialist local supplier is being asked to provide the service. As stated earlier, improvements need to be made to policies to ensure value for money is secured when exemptions apply.
- 215** There is a willingness to explore the potential for joint commissioning of services across Greater Manchester. Although no new Supporting People services have yet been jointly commissioned, Bolton and some of the other Greater Manchester authorities are currently considering the potential to develop specialist services for people with HIV/AIDs together. This will help to minimise both development costs and any under-utilisation.
- 216** Housing benefit is upgrading its computer system to provide a monthly report that lists changes to the entitlement of Supporting People service users. A request to upgrade reporting procedures has been submitted to the software provider. This will ensure changes are reported to the Supporting People team and speed up awards of Supporting People subsidy and help minimise overpayments.
- 217** Although still in its relatively early stages, Supporting People is linked in to the Council's major business transformational project through Adults Services. It is a long-term project that is expected to deliver more integrated services, improved customer choice and a joined up approach at a local level.

Summary

- 218 We consider that the Supporting People programme has excellent prospects for improving on the progress made so far.
- 219 The programme has a positive track record of delivering improvements. The profile of housing-related support provision is changing and gaps in services are being filled. Service reviews have been completed ahead of schedule and will secure further improvement. Significant value for money improvements have been achieved and there are improved outcomes for service users. In some areas, Bolton is leading the field.
- 220 The programme has clear overarching aims and priorities and integrated plans to deliver both strategic and operational improvements. These plans address the right areas and learning features strongly in service delivery. However, current performance management arrangements do not yet fully capture the outcomes that the programme delivers for service users. Nor is it yet being used as a tool to drive service improvement.
- 221 Many of the features needed to demonstrate capacity to improve are in place. Financial management and human resource planning is good. Partnership working is strong. Procurement arrangements, in the main, are sound and IT support is reliable. Some success has been achieved in leveraging in additional resources from other funding pots.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

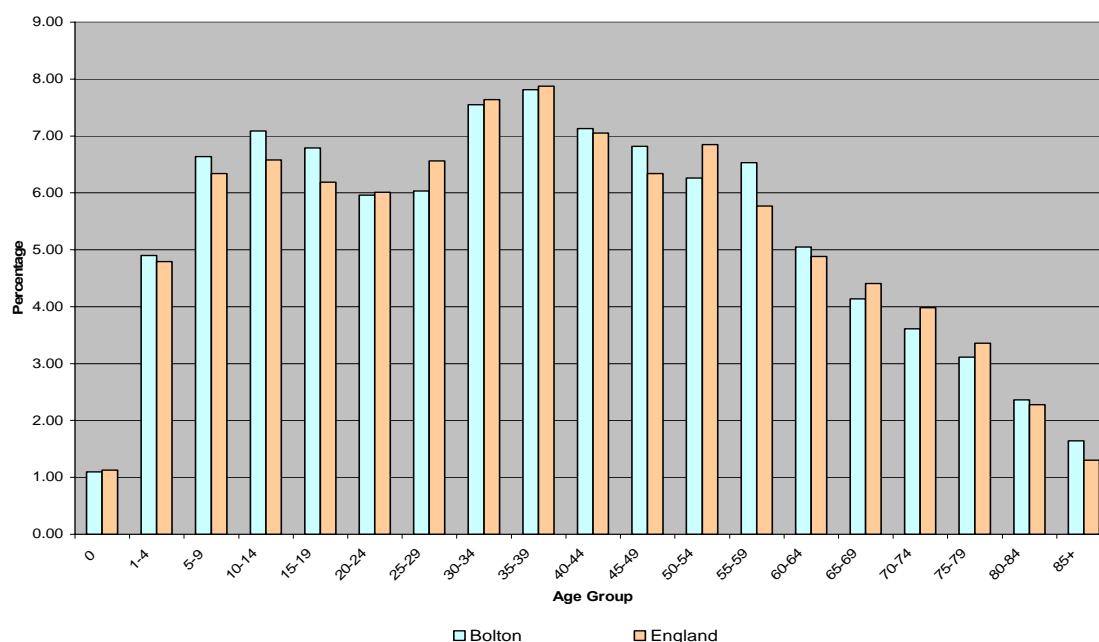
Demographic information

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

Table 5

Measure	Bolton	England
Population (mid-2004) ⁸	264,800	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	17.4	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than white-British 2004)	11.0	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁹	2.6	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ¹⁰	52	-

Figure 1 Percentage of the population¹¹ in each age group compared with England



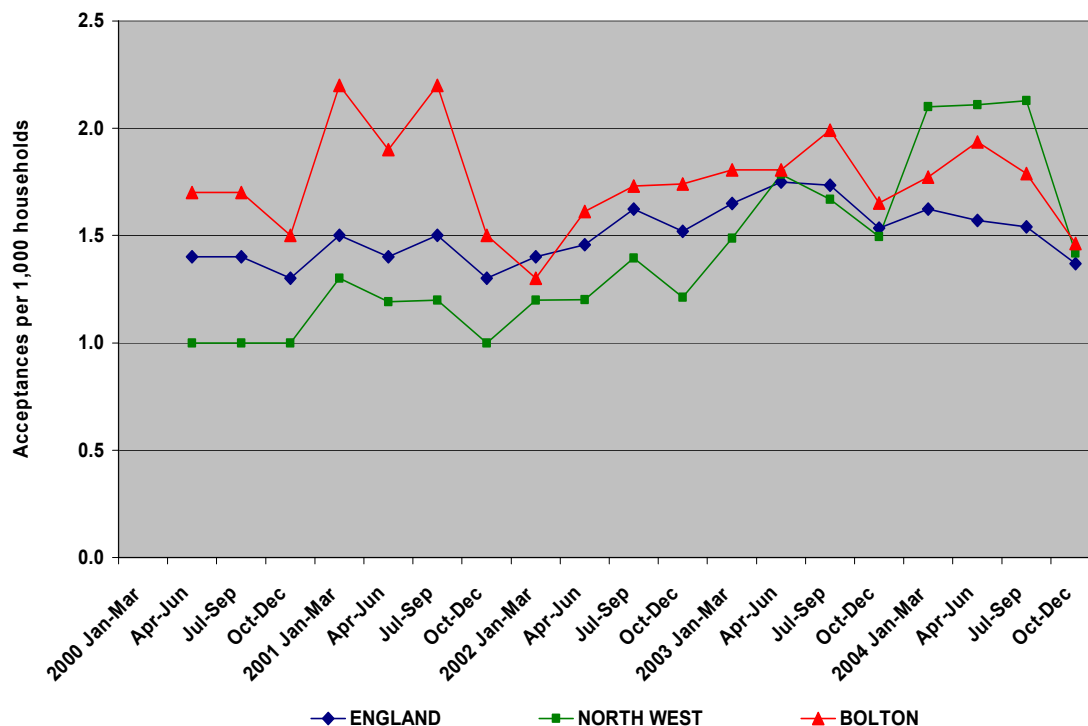
⁸ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

⁹ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (October 2005)

¹⁰ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority

¹¹ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

Figure 2 Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



Performance information

- 2 This section highlights strong and weak areas of the Council’s performance in services that are relevant to Supporting People. We have used the following information to help us reach our judgements:
- data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment scores;
 - star ratings for social services;
 - Performance Assessment Framework indicators for social services; and
 - relevant best value performance indicators.

Supporting People data

Figure 3 Total service provision funded through Supporting People¹²

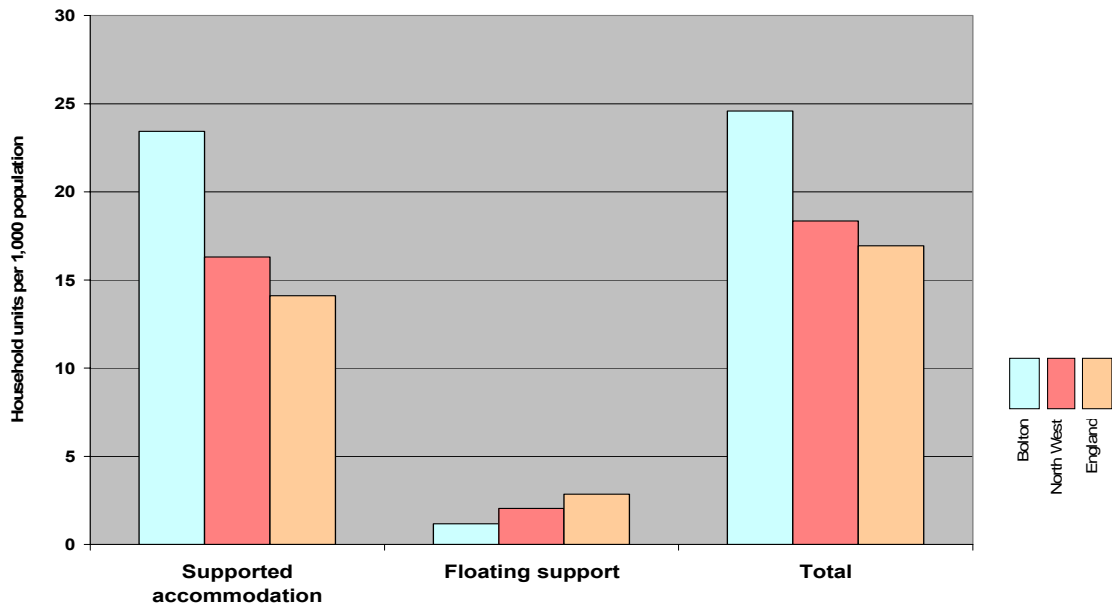
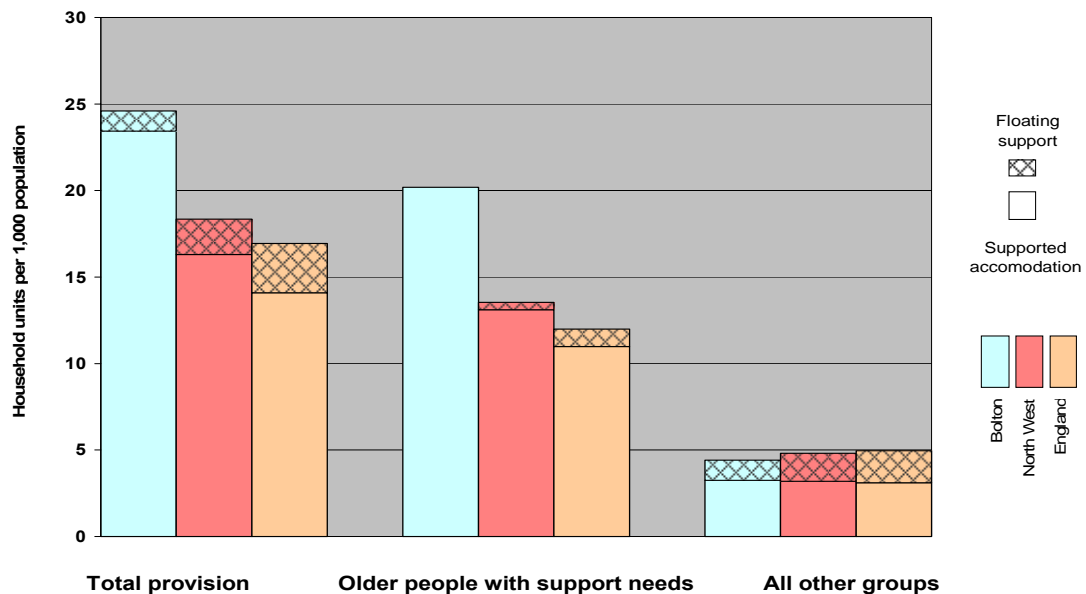


Figure 4 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹³



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

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

Figure 5 Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹⁴

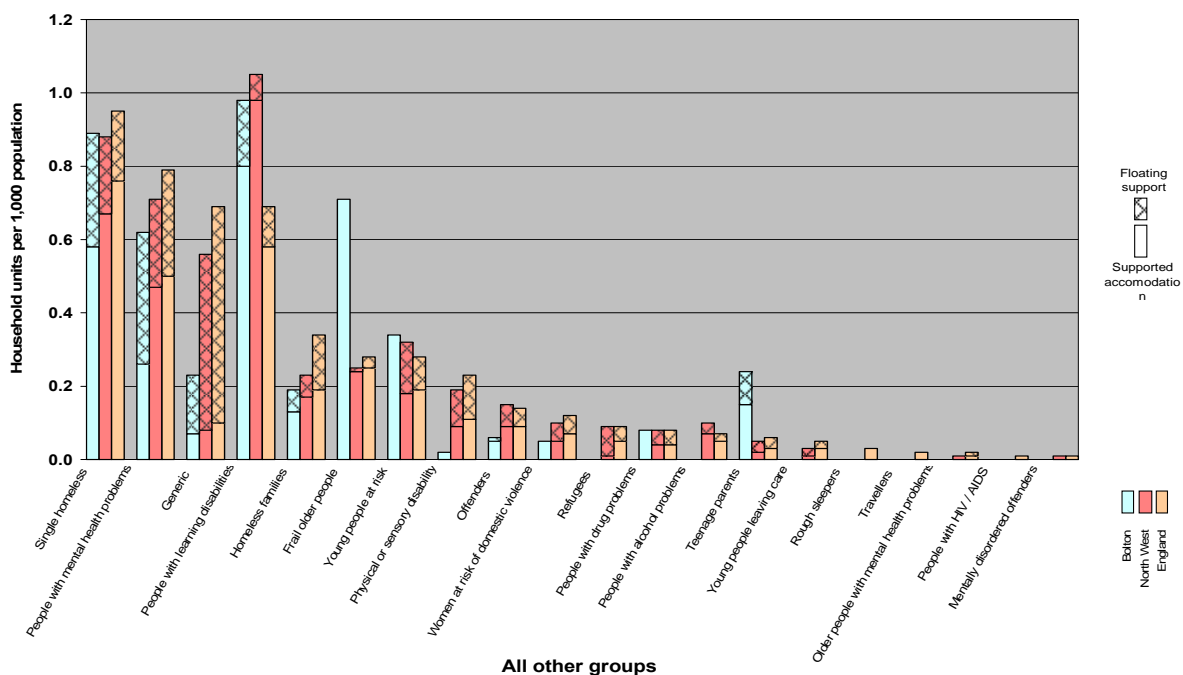


Table 6 Funding for Supporting People¹⁵

Bolton	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 9,862,734	£ 9,698,643	£ 9,210,165
Pipeline allocation	£ 17,565	£ 102,157	£ -
Administration grant	£ 263,110	£ 249,447	£ 199,558

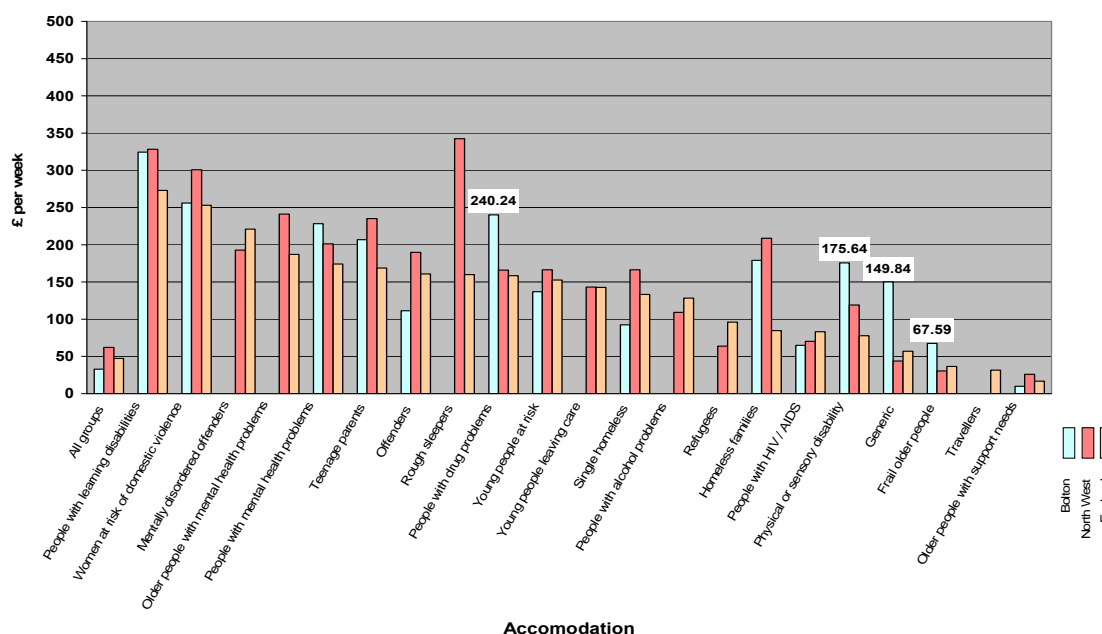
¹⁴ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services

¹⁵ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM

Table 7 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹⁶

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Bolton	£ 0.70	£ 25.17	£ 27.53	£ 112.62
North West	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

- 3 'The data quoted is taken from ODPM sourced material 2003/04. This is the only data currently available. ODPM will be able to provide updated data when it becomes available and this will then be used.' Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁷

Figure 6

¹⁶ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

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

Figure 7 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁸

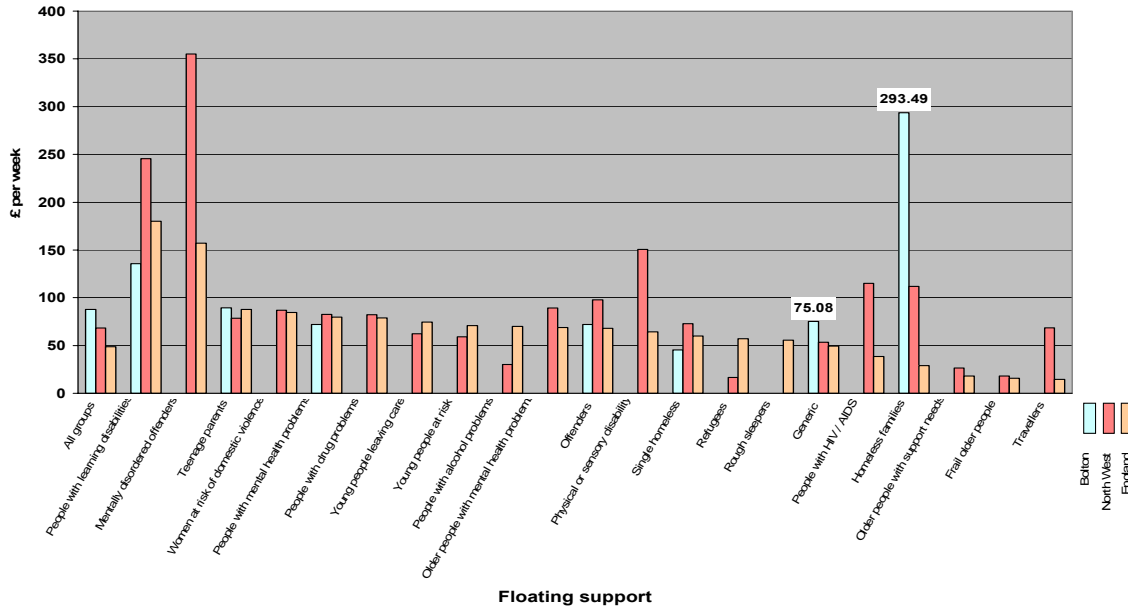
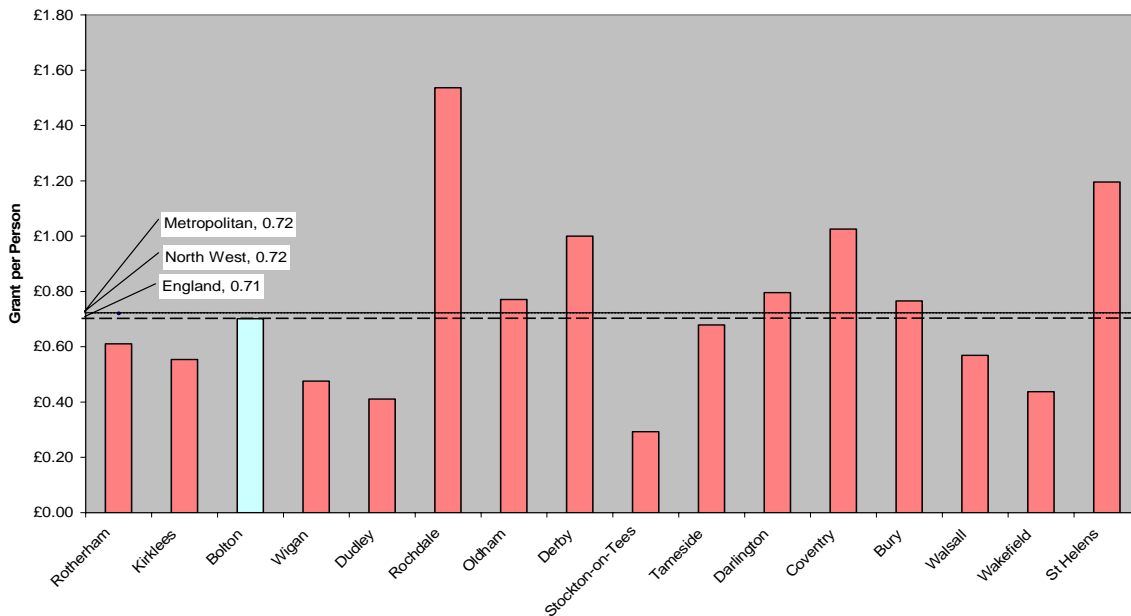


Figure 8 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours,¹⁹ all metropolitan councils and all English councils (2004/05)



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

¹⁹ A comparator group of similar councils

Figure 9 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours,²⁰ all metropolitan councils and all English councils

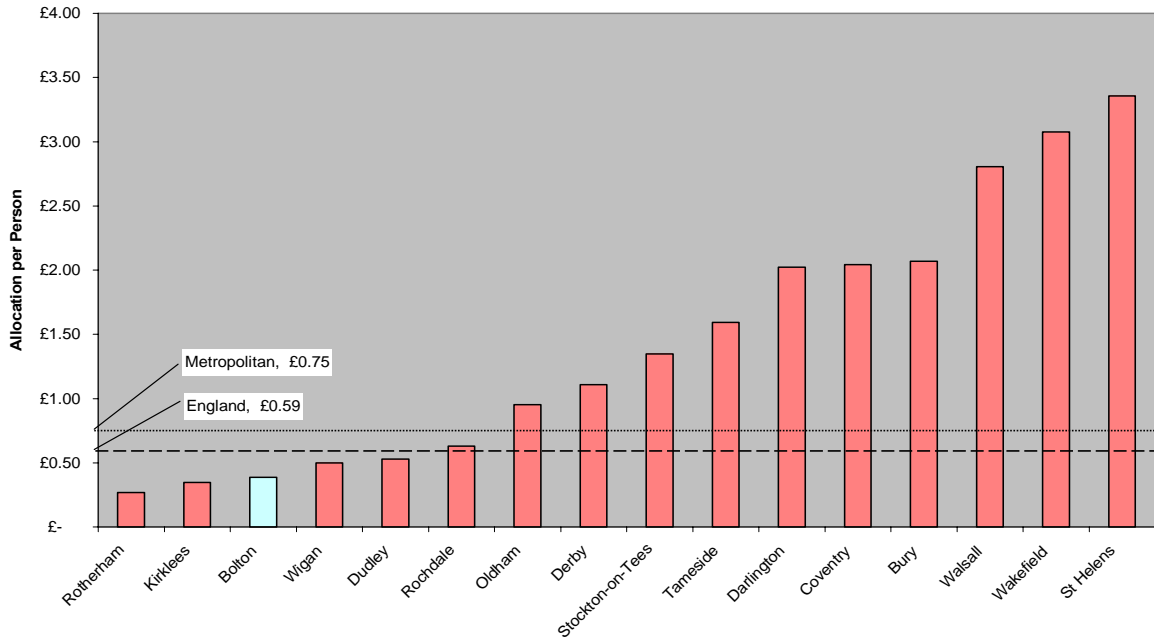
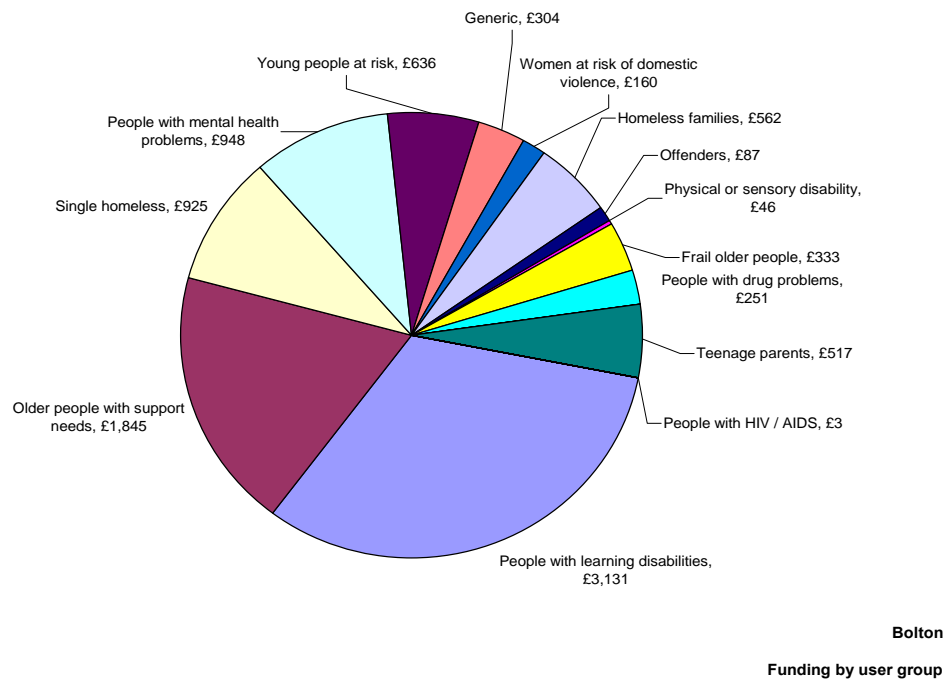


Figure 10 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)²¹



²⁰ A comparator group of similar councils

²¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services

Figure 11 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)²²

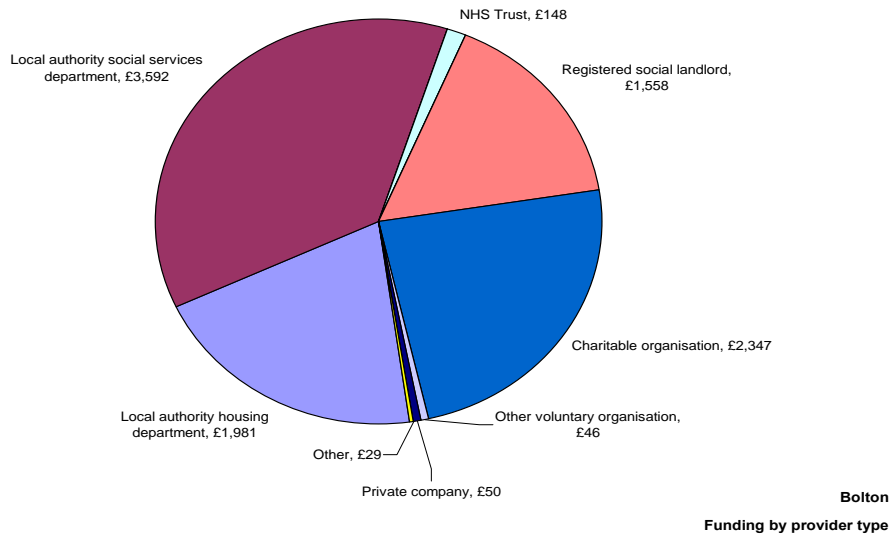


Table 8 Social Services star ratings November 2004

4 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	☆☆☆
Children's Services	Yes	Excellent	(3)

²² Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services

Social services performance indicators

Table 9 Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

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

Best value performance indicators

Table 10 Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with unitary councils

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

Bolton	
Within the best 25 per cent	The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2) Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b)
Average	Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV6)
Within the worst 25 per cent	Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a) Council homes which did not meet the decent homes standard (BV184a) Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a) Domestic violence refuge places (BV176)

Appendix 2 - Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on-site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
 - the Council's 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 service improvement action 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, frontline staff and neighbouring councils' Supporting People lead officers;
 - visits to supported housing schemes, to talk to service users, managers and frontline staff;
 - visits to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
 - observing meetings of the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group;
 - 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 Chief Executive, the acting Director of Adults Services, the Accountable Officer, the Supporting People lead officer, managers and members of the Supporting People team, councillors, social services commissioning managers, representatives of the probation service and the primary care trusts, advocacy groups and community safety.

Appendix 4 - Positive practice

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

Governance

- 1 Bolton has a cohesive structure of governance that involves all the necessary groups. These include:
 - Commissioning Body - Council, PCT, Probation;
 - Elected Members Forum - cross-party group of councillors who champion the Supporting People programme and spread understanding across strategic planning groups;
 - Executive Management Team sub-set - senior officers of the Council considering issues from the Supporting People programme and their impact on the Council;
 - Core Strategy Group - all relevant groups including service provider and service user representatives. Meetings are co-ordinated with the Commissioning Body;
 - service provider forum - run by service providers for all service providers;
 - service provider reference group - a smaller group who consider detailed policy proposals with representatives of service providers to each client group; and
 - a Community Expert Panel - a mixed service user group, supported by professional facilitators, to develop the capacity of individuals and the development of the group.

Service user involvement

- 2 The Council is developing a Community Expert Panel, which is a group of service user representatives who meet six-weekly to consider issues relevant to the programme. The group includes older people, young people, offenders, people with learning disabilities. It is the intention to incrementally expand the group to include all client groups.
- 3 Examples of the work they do include: the wording and presentation of leaflets; accessibility to information on the Council's website; mystery shopping at the Council's offices; developing supplementary, user-focused, quality standards for future strategic client-based reviews, and the development of individuals to participate in future reviews of services.

- 4 The group is facilitated by professional advocates. In addition to providing benefits to the Supporting People programme, this approach helps to develop the capacity and confidence of the individuals involved.

Contracts and contract management

- 5 Steady state contracts are agreed for a long-term period of five years with the option to extend for a further two years. This long-term commitment, which understandably is subject to change depending on grant allocation, provides the housing-related support sector with confidence and some degree of stability. With the confidence comes a greater willingness to invest and improve services in line with the strategic direction of the programme.
- 6 Six-monthly visits are made to service providers to ensure they are complying with contracted requirements. The visits provide the opportunity to discuss issues of concern to either party, remedy any problems and carry out spot checks on service quality.