

Supporting People Inspection

Bedfordshire County Council

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Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summary

- 1 Bedfordshire County Council is situated in the eastern region of England. The population is 381,571 of which 11 per cent are from black and minority ethnic community groups.
- 2 The Council is Conservative led and uses the leader and cabinet model of governance. There are a total of 52 councillors; the Conservatives hold 36 seats, Liberal Democrats 9 and Labour 7.
- 3 The Council has a revenue budget of £391.3 million for 2005/06. It employs approximately 2,877 staff across all services.
- 4 Bedfordshire County Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with two primary care trusts (PCTs) - Bedfordshire Heartlands and Bedford - together with the Bedfordshire Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 5 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2005/06 is £7,234,472. The Council also receives £327,362 in administration grant towards its role as the administering authority. The highest cost service is £381.74 per person per week providing housing related support to people with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £0.93 per person per week providing a community alarm service to older people with support needs.
- 6 Bedfordshire was inspected during the third year of the Supporting People programme. This report, therefore, reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

Scoring the service

- 7 We have assessed Bedfordshire County Council as providing a 'poor', no-star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Table 1 Scoring chart¹

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

Source: Audit Commission

- 8 We have scored the Council's administration of Supporting People as a poor, no-star programme because:
- the programme has not consistently engaged with service users or with user, carer and advocacy groups and service users have not been engaged in the strategic development of the programme;
 - information on the programme is limited and information that is available on the Council's web site does not show how to obtain this in other languages or formats;
 - engagement in the programme had not been positive from all partners and it is only in the last year that this has started to be addressed and governance arrangements reviewed to make them more effective;

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.

- the Supporting People team suffered from a high turnover of staff during the first two years of the programme and as a result lacks knowledge and experience;
 - the five-year strategy that the Council submitted to the ODPM in March 2005 was inadequate and not fully endorsed by all members of the commissioning body and has still not been fully revised;
 - there has been no strategic review of services and there is inconsistency in both the application and quality assurance processes of individual service reviews; and
 - the approach to addressing value for money is still being developed and currently focuses solely on costs and does not take into account issues of quality or outcomes for service users.
- 9 However, there were also a number of strengths in the operation of the programme. These include:
- a number of new schemes were developed prior to the implementation of the programme in 2003 and other new schemes came into operation after 2003 as a result of 'pipeline' funding;
 - relationships with providers have started to improve over the past six months; and
 - savings of just over one million pounds being realised from the service review programme.
- 10 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has uncertain prospects for improvement. This is because:
- the Council is not able to demonstrate a consistent track record over time in delivering improvements to the Supporting People programme, including the revision of the five-year strategy and the expansion of the home improvement agency service;
 - the planned relocation of the Supporting People team to the commissioning and planning unit within adult social care had not happened at the time of our inspection and it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of, and outcomes from this;
 - performance management of the programme is not well developed and without this the Council is not able to measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of the programme;
 - there are no clear targets for improving value for money and there is not as yet a comprehensive suite of performance reports and targets which can be used as a basis for future decision making; and
 - the Supporting People programme is not consistently linked into County Council and other partner's strategies.

11 However, we identified the following strengths in relation to the prospects for improvement.

- The commissioning body is reviewing the governance structures of the programme to ensure that they operate more effectively.
- Leadership of the programme is improving and the revised governance structures will improve the capacity of the programme.
- Corporately, the Council is able to demonstrate a track record of delivering improvements which has been evidenced by the removal of formal monitoring by the ODPM. The Council has also increased senior management capacity.

Recommendations

- 12 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs² and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with customers, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improve the accessibility of services by:

- *ensuring that front line staff who are signposting customers are aware of the availability of housing related support services offered through the programme; and*
- *ensuring that front line staff who are signposting customers are aware of the services available for vulnerable people, including those suffering domestic violence.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- ease and consistency of access for service users, potential service users, carers and advocates to good quality information and sign posting.

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

Recommendation

R2 Improve the accessibility of information by:

- *improving the availability of leaflets and information both electronically and in hard copy;*
- *updating Better Care: Higher Standards to include information on the Supporting People programme; and*
- *improving information for service users on the web site.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

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

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

² Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high costs is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R3 Improve the management of the programme by:

- *producing a comprehensive strategy for the programme that includes the following:*
 - *plans for how service users will be included in all aspects of the programme;*
 - *plans for how needs of all service user groups will be assessed and refreshed through the life of the strategy;*
 - *plans for how services will be assessed and developed to meet identified needs across the whole county;*
 - *plans for how services will be accessible to service users on an equitable basis;*
 - *plans for how the programme will tackle inequalities and diversity;*
 - *plans for how the performance of the programme will be measured and monitored;*
 - *plans for how service users can move on to permanent accommodation once they have gained skills in independent living; and*
 - *plans for how the governance of the programme can be improved to share involvement and responsibility.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- a better understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme by all partners and stakeholders;
- better co-ordination of the development of the programme;
- greater involvement in the programme by service users, their carers and advocates.

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

Recommendation

R4 Improve the value for money offered by services by:

- *developing an approach to a value for money assessment that takes into account service cost, quality and outcomes for service users and ensuring its application to all services.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services for vulnerable people will be able to demonstrate how they achieve value for money;
- the quality of the services provided will be important in an assessment as well as cost; and

- outcomes for service users will be part of an assessment.

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

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

Dates of inspection: 27 February - 3 March 2006

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Report

Context

The locality

- 14 Bedfordshire is sited on the northern fringe of London and is one of the smallest counties in England, with a population of just under 382,000. It is part of the Eastern Region although its location places it 'on the edge' of other regional groupings such the East Midlands, South East and Eastern regions.
- 15 The county has a local airport (Luton) and good north to south road and rail links (the A1 and M1 go through the county), but east to west travel is more difficult, and there is concern that the county is seen as a place to travel through or commute from, rather than to stay and work in.
- 16 Recent population growth has put pressure on transport infrastructure and the county is directly affected by the Communities' Plan which proposes a 35 per cent increase in the number of homes across the Milton Keynes – South Midlands area by 2031.
- 17 Bedfordshire is diverse. Although it is largely rural, 60 per cent of the population lives in larger towns such as Bedford and Dunstable. Over 11 per cent of people are from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. This ranges across the county with 19 per cent in Bedford to five per cent in Mid Beds. There are around 49 different spoken languages with the largest BME groups being of Asian and Italian descent.
- 18 The area is relatively affluent and the County Council ranks 131st out of 149 counties and unitary authorities where 1 is the most deprived. However, this score masks the wide variation across the county. Mid Beds is one of the least deprived areas at 327 out of 354 but Bedford has a more average level of deprivation, ranking 165 out of 354.
- 19 Bedfordshire has areas of outstanding natural beauty but years of extracting clay for brickworks have left the county with large land-fill sites and major financial commitments for restoration.

The Council

- 20 Bedfordshire County Council has been conservative led since 1997. There are 36 Conservative councillors, nine Liberal Democrat and seven Labour. A new leader was confirmed at full Council on 26 May 2005. The Council has a cabinet of nine Councillors, including the leader and deputy leader, and five select committees.
- 21 The corporate management board comprises six strategic directors. This includes a Director of Finance and a new Director of Culture Change and Customer Service. Ten new Assistant Directors have now been recruited. The council's 2005/06 revenue budget is £391.3 million and its capital budget £42.17 million.

- 22 At a special meeting of the Council's Executive, councillors supported a recommendation from directors that the 12-year £250 million strategic partnership contract with Hyder Business services (HBS), signed in June 2001, should be terminated. This decision was taken after full consideration of the options open to the Council who had been in negotiation with HBS since autumn 2004 as part of a fundamental review of the services provided by them.
- 23 Five hundred and forty seven staff providing services formerly run by HBS Bedfordshire (including individual schools) transferred to the Council at midnight on 14 August 2005 together with assets and systems. This was secured by a settlement of a one-off sum of £6.75 million.
- 24 The council has been monitored by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since 2002 when it received a CA rating of 'poor'. Formal monitoring ceased at the end of March 2006 in recognition of the progress that Bedfordshire has made. During 2002, children's services were put into special measures but this has also now ceased. Following a Corporate Assessment review in December 2004 the Council improved to a CPA rating of 'weak'.
- 25 The Council's vision is
'Making Bedfordshire Thrive'.
- 26 The vision is supported by the four objectives which are:
- build strong, prosperous and sustainable communities;
 - help those who need our support most;
 - help children and young people achieve their full potential; and
 - transform Bedfordshire County Council into a high achieving council.
- 27 The Council has a number of short, medium and long term priorities. The Supporting People programme can make a contribution to a number of these, including delivering stronger partnership working, improving management of performance, improving customer satisfaction and improving communication with the public.

The programme

- 28 The Supporting People programme is designed to meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable people, including homeless people, older people with support needs, people with a learning disability, people with mental health problems, those with substance abuse problems, refugees, travellers and offenders.
- 29 The total amount of Supporting People grant made available to the Council in 2004/05 was £7,627,643 which reduced to £7,234,472 for 2005/06. This was a reduction in grant of just over 5 per cent. The Council also received an administration grant of £317,827 during 2004/05 to fulfil its role as the administering authority. This grant was increased to £327,362 in 2005/06.

- 30 The highest cost Supporting People service supported by the grant is £381.74 per person per week for people with a learning disability. The lowest cost service is £0.93 per person per week for older people with support needs.
- 31 Bedfordshire County Council was inspected in the third year of the Supporting People programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

How good is the programme?

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

32 The assessment was based on the following key issues:

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

Governance

33 This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. Governance structures are in place but have not been operating in the most effective way to drive and develop the programme.

34 The ODPM has 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 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.

- 35 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. In two tier areas each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the administering local authority has a veto where there is a demonstrable financial risk to the administering local authority.
- 36 Engagement in the programme had not been positive from all partners. The commissioning body was established in 2002, prior to the implementation of the programme. It has had senior representation from all partners and attendance at meetings has been good. It has only been in the last year that the board has started to examine the role it should be playing in determining the strategy and driving the programme and really working together. This situation is not unique as the County Council did not have a reputation for effectively working in partnerships. It has only been in the last two years that Council as a whole has started to invest in partnership working.
- 37 The PCTs have been consistently represented but have struggled with engagement in terms of the relevance the programme has on health priorities and targets. The probation service has had similar issues in terms of changes in staff and consistent engagement. The current representative is leaving and will be replaced by the Director of Operations. Representation from the County Council has changed since the board was established. These changes have also contributed to the slowness of the board in understanding its role and responsibilities.
- 38 A new chair, from a district council, was elected in mid-2005. He has encouraged more engagement in the programme and this has led to a greater commitment on behalf of district councils and 'buy in' to the new Supporting People strategy.
- 39 This engagement has been built on by the commissioning body working with an advisor from the Neighbourhood Renewal Team of the ODPM. The advisor is looking at how partnership working can be developed further and reviewing the governance structures of the programme to ensure that they operate more effectively. As part of this, the commissioning body will also be looking at how work can be shared more equitably across all partners rather than resting with the chair and the accountable officer.
- 40 We observed a meeting of the commissioning body as part of the inspection. The meeting was attended by all partners who were engaged in appropriate debate on the agenda items. The meeting was well chaired and strategic decisions were made that demonstrate how the commissioning body is looking to drive the programme forwards.
- 41 The core strategy group has not been effective. It lacked membership from all the relevant partners and there was confusion about its role and responsibilities. Because of the lack of commitment to this group, there was an inappropriate division of work among those who did attend.

- 42 This issue has started to be tackled and a new core strategy group was launched in January 2006. This includes representation from all partners as well as representatives from a wider group of stakeholders such as the domestic violence co-ordinator. However, there are still some omissions from this group such as a representative from the Leaving Care Team and the Youth Offending Team. Action was taken to resolve this during the inspection to rectify these omissions. The group has only had one meeting so far so it is too early to see how effectively it will manage its contribution to the programme although one new member felt the first meeting was successful and enabled the group to have a clear understanding of the whole process.
- 43 The chair of the providers' forum has been a member of the core strategy group. As part of the new core strategy group, representation has been increased to five providers with clear terms of reference about how the representation works.
- 44 The current accountable officer is in a senior role in the authority and has used this effectively in raising the profile of the programme. He has adopted a proactive approach to developing partnership working and represents the programme in other forums where he is a member. These include regular meetings with the strategic health authority, district councils and in the development of the local area agreement (LAA) which will strengthen the authority's efforts to improve the quality of its partnerships. He regularly attends the commissioning body meetings where he is accountable for the performance of the programme.
- 45 Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to ensure that high risk offenders receive co-ordinated services, including housing support are in place and are effective. Partners confirmed that these arrangements were operating as required. Although there is a general shortage of accommodation in the area, high risk offenders have been accommodated. This enables the effective resettlement of offenders and contributes to public protection.
- 46 Engagement with the voluntary sector including advocacy groups that operate across Bedfordshire needs further development. There has been some consultation with voluntary groups over the five-year strategy and some have been invited to provider forums, as they are providers, but as yet there are few measurable outcomes. The Supporting People team are looking at how advocacy groups can be more engaged with the programme at all levels, but this has not taken place as yet.

Delivery arrangements

- 47 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in terms of service delivery arrangements. Corporate commitment has improved but the team has suffered from problems with recruitment and retention and lacks the knowledge and experience it needs as a result of this. Despite working on a redraft of the five-year strategy for nearly a year this, is still not available. Eligibility criteria and Fairer Charging are both in place and providers are paid on time. Relationships with providers are starting to improve but this is still relatively recent.

- 48 Corporate commitment to the programme has improved. Bedfordshire had been identified as a failing authority for a number of years but in the last two years there has been a change of chief officers including a new chief executive, director of social services and assistant director of social services. These new post holders have brought more strategic direction, supervision and commitment to the programme. Previously the programme had been allowed to develop in an idiosyncratic way. For example, the team had been isolated within the social services department and as a result had failed to form the strategic links it needed to ensure the effective delivery of the programme. This has changed over the last year and there are now plans in place to mainstream the programme by moving it to be part of social services commissioning and planning.
- 49 The Supporting People team has suffered from a lack of knowledge and experience. There have been major staffing issues in the team which have now been largely resolved. These issues have included a high turnover of staff during the first two years of the programme. It has been more stable since the appointment of two new operational managers in 2005 but has suffered from a lack of knowledge and experience because of these changes.
- 50 Direct leadership of the team is uncertain. The team lacks a lead officer and the Council is currently considering if there is a need for this post with the move into commissioning and planning. This role has been covered by an interim manager and these arrangements will continue for the immediate future. Without a post with clear responsibility for the team and the programme it is possible that opportunities for future service improvements will be missed.
- 51 The work of the team is covered by a work plan that has clear objectives and time-scales and identifies who is responsible for the action. This plan links to a work plan for both the commissioning body and the core strategy group.
- 52 The five-year strategy that the Council submitted to the ODPM in March 2005 was inadequate and was not fully endorsed by all members of the commissioning body. The strategy was lacking in a number of key areas including no clear priorities and direction for the future and no annual plan. It was a position statement rather than a strategy and was the first indication that the commissioning body had that the team was not working effectively. There had been very limited consultation on the document and the commissioning body acknowledged that it needed to be developed further and re-written after submission.
- 53 The commissioning body appointed a consultant to re-write the strategy, ensuring that it was complete and included a needs analysis for each client group and clear priorities to drive the programme.
- 54 It is a major weakness that at the time of our inspection in March 2006, the programme still did not have a revised strategy. While we were on site, the commissioning body agreed that the latest draft of the strategy still needed further work following comments from partners, service providers and other stakeholders. The latest draft still lacked critical detail and a strategic vision for the programme. The commissioning body is anticipating signing the strategy off in June 2006.

- 55 Quantitative needs data been completed for the majority of service user groups although it is still absent for offenders, gypsies and women fleeing domestic violence. Bedfordshire probation service has only recently started to use the probation offender assessment system (OASys) and it is too early to have any outputs. Neither does probation have an accommodation strategy and the lack of this information has impeded their ability to effectively contribute to the five-year strategy. The commissioning body has accepted that it is unlikely that all needs information will be available by June 2006 so data in the strategy will be indicative.
- 56 Eligibility criteria were not determined until August 2005. This was produced in consultation with providers and has been used to assess services as part of the service review process.
- 57 Financial management and reporting is now satisfactory and has improved since the appointment of the business manager to the Supporting People team. The grants have been spent to budget and financial reports are regularly presented to the core strategy group, the commissioning body and also to the adult social care senior management team. Summarised financial reports are also shared with elected members.
- 58 Payments are being made on time to providers. They also receive an electronic schedule that gives a breakdown of the remittance for all services users. This enables providers to easily reconcile the monies they are receiving. All interim contracts were signed in July 2003 as required by the ODPM.
- 59 Fairer Charging arrangements are in place and assessments are carried out through a service level agreement by the County Council's Welfare Rights team. This ensures that applicants are given advice on a range of benefits and support they may be entitled to. This service had not been widely advertised in the past. The Supporting People team designed a new leaflet in December 2005 to advertise this more widely and applications for an assessment increased considerably during January and February 2006.
- 60 Relationships with providers have started to improve over the past six months. There had previously been some friction between providers and the team. This arose partly through the frustration providers felt at not having meaningful dialogue with the team about the programme. One of the results of this friction was that the team only attended part of the forum and there were no clear channels for actioning issues or feeding back on discussions. However, since autumn 2005, following the appointment of the interim manager to the team, relationships have improved considerably. For example, the team now attend the whole of the providers meeting and the number of provider representatives on the core strategy group has increased.

- 61 Satisfaction with Bedfordshire's management of the programme is variable. We undertook a survey of providers as part of the inspection to assess satisfaction over a number of variables. Response rates were low but the same comments were made by providers we met during the inspection. The comments support changes that have been implemented such as the involvement in the new strategy development and the improvements in the service review process. Some elements scored highly, for example:
- advice and support available from the Supporting People team (80 per cent);
 - outcome of the service review (80 per cent); and
 - involvement in the re-draft of the five-year strategy (60 per cent).
- 62 The lowest satisfaction ratings were for:
- arrangements for accessing move on accommodation (67 per cent);
 - the service and user group priorities identified in the five-year strategy (60 per cent); and
 - the Council's approach to determining strategic relevance of services (60 per cent).
- 63 Bedfordshire works well with the regional group on Supporting People issues and developments. The Supporting People Eastern Region group (SPERG) is well attended by the East Anglian authorities and has produced a regionally agreed 'Steady State' contract. The group is currently working on value for money and accreditation, again to produce regionally agreed policies and processes that will improve cross authority working and benefit providers with services across the region.
- 64 The probation service is involved in a number of different forums where information on clients and the Supporting People programme is shared. For example, probation has worked with the Supporting People team in the Prolific and Other Priority Offenders (PPO) steering group and the drug action team (DAT) and identified that there is a cross over of clients within these services. The probation service has also merged three crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) into one and this has been effective in improving the co-ordination of information.

Service reviews

- 65 ODPM guidance requires Administering Local Authorities (ALAs) to review all services funded through Supporting People within three years, starting from 1 April 2003. ALAs are required to produce a service review timetable together with a rationale to explain how the reviews have been prioritised. Progress with the service review timetable is submitted to the ODPM as part of regular performance reviews.

- 66 Overall, weaknesses outweigh strengths in the performance on carrying out service reviews. The service review programme did not become fully operational until mid-2005 and although it should meet the deadline set by the ODPM, there has not been time to look at services strategically. The reviews have been well received by service providers but there is inconsistency in both the application and quality assurance processes of the programme.
- 67 Until the appointment of a new service review manager in early 2005, there was an absence of a clear methodology and risk assessment in the programme and only 25 reviews had been carried out. Up to that point, providers were very unhappy with the process and the time it was taking to complete the review and issue a report and an action plan. The team worked with the ODPM and re-set the timetable on a risk basis, introduced a simplified process and are now on target to complete the reviews by the end of March 2006.
- 68 The team has been successful in undertaking 168 reviews in a period of nine months. However, these have been done in isolation and have focussed primarily on the quality of each individual service being looked at. Consequently, a strategic review of services for each client group has not yet been done. It is scheduled to take place after April 2006 as part of the move of the programme to the social services commissioning and planning team. Additionally, services still need to be exposed to a robust value for money analysis that looks at costs, quality and outcomes for service users.
- 69 The capacity of the team was supplemented by both the County Council and a district council in order to complete the service reviews. However, because of the shortness of time to undertake the reviews, it was not planned how specialist workers could be included in the reviews of certain client groups. For example, staff from the probation service were not included in the reviews of services for offenders. Neither were staff working with young people who have been looked after by the Council engaged in reviews of services for these young people. With only limited services available for these groups of users, it is critical that workers are aware of the quality and of any issues with the services that are being used.
- 70 Overall service providers were overall positive about the process. They told us that for the reviews that have been undertaken since the process was streamlined in 2005, feedback was timely and that they received the report and any action plan within the timescales set by the team. The area where providers did express concern was in relation to the value for money assessment and this issue is covered in the following section of the report.
- 71 There have been positive outcomes from the process with some ineligible services being withdrawn and savings of just over one million pounds being realised. However, there are not yet agreed plans for how this money will be reinvested to fill gaps in provision or improve existing services.

- 72 There is an absence of robust quality assurance systems in place. Although the review procedure refers to a Validation Group to sign off reviews, this only exists on paper and has not met. All completed reviews are referred to the Service Review Manager for checking and approving. There is no external moderation of standards or independent validation of the process within Bedfordshire. Without these checks in the system consistency, transparency and confidence are missing from the process.
- 73 The appeal process needs to be revised. There are timescales for the appeal process but not currently for the time in which an appeal can be lodged, nor is there any mechanism for tracking cases where appeals have been made. This means that the team may be faced with having to deal with appeals from reviews which they had considered as completed some time ago.
- 74 Monitoring of action plans is ineffective. The performance management systems for monitoring the progress against action plans are cumbersome and laborious. There is no database and plans have to be monitored manually. It is not possible to easily produce progress reports against target times. This is a lost opportunity for being able to demonstrate the improvements that have come about through this process. Good practice is not collated so it is not possible to disseminate this information so that other providers can replicate it. Additionally, services that had scored at the lowest level (D) were not having their actions monitored on a regular basis, potentially leading to poor outcomes for service users.
- 75 The commissioning body has agreed 'Steady State' contracts but these have not yet been issued to providers. However, without the completion of the review of strategic relevance of services, there is no basis on which to determine those services which support the Council's priorities.

Value for money

- 76 This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. The approach to addressing value for money is still being developed and is currently focussed solely on costs. Savings, although not efficiency gains, have been made through the service reviews and providers will be paid an uplift in 2006/07. Benchmarking has been limited although this is being looked at regionally.

How do costs compare?

- 77 Comparison of unit costs with the east of England and England as a whole are set out in the data appendix at the end of this report. These are largely based on the 'platinum cut' data submitted to ODPM in July 2003, which is the most up-to-date comparison available. These figures contain some inaccuracies and will not reflect changes that have been made which have changed costs since April 2003.
- 78 Overall, the Council has higher unit costs (excluding community alarms and sheltered housing) in comparison with other similar councils, with unit costs totalling £83.51 compared to the region at £65.57 and the rest of England at £76.37.

For accommodation based services the Council shows in particular, higher costs for services for people with alcohol problems, offenders and young people leaving care. There are lower costs though for people with mental health problems and those with a physical or sensory disability.

- 79 For floating support the Council is showing above the national average costs for offenders and homeless families with support needs but with significantly lower costs for support for the single homeless.

How is value for money managed?

- 80 Value for money is not managed effectively. The programme introduced a value for money methodology in August 2005 and has applied this to nearly all the services that have been reviewed. The methodology currently assesses value for money in terms of a maximum cost per hour and a maximum number of support hours depending on the needs of the service users. This methodology is based solely on costs and does not take into account issues of quality or outcomes for service users. The Council has acknowledged this and accepts that this has been a crude mechanism that needs further development.
- 81 The methodology was discussed with service providers but many of them have since complained about the process and appear not to have fully understood what they were agreeing to. The Council is aware of this and is planning to develop the methodology to make it more sensitive to client needs and quality issues and is currently mapping out how this will be done. It has set up a sub group of the commissioning body to take this work forwards.
- 82 Cost savings have been achieved through the service reviews and are currently estimated to be in the region of one million pounds on the 2005/06 budget. The commissioning body has agreed to use some of these savings to pay an uplift to providers as they have not received an award for inflation for the past three years. The balance of the savings will be used to fund new or increased services but the commissioning body has not agreed how this money will be allocated.
- 83 Efficiency savings have not routinely been made as a result of the service reviews. For example, services have not been reconfigured to provide more capacity for the same cost.
- 84 Benchmarking on value for money has been limited and no outcomes have been achieved so far. Bedfordshire is involved with SPERG in developing a value for money benchmarking process. Currently discussions are taking place to agree a regional technical document to ensure consistency of sharing data. The working group is also exploring the usage of SPLS data in like-for-like comparisons and are moving towards using this in conjunction with local look-up tables to produce the most suitable comparisons for each client group. This work will be implemented from April 2006.
- 85 There has been no assessment of value for money in the administration of the Supporting People programme. There has not been comparison of cost and quality outputs with other Supporting People teams.

Service user involvement

- 86 Service user involvement is an area of serious weakness. The Council has acknowledged this and has identified this as a priority area of work. There was limited involvement in the development of the five-year strategy but this was essentially a 'one off' exercise. The involvement that service users have had so far has been through the service review programme but there are no outcomes to date from this work.
- 87 The programme has not consistently engaged with service users or with user, carer and advocacy groups. There are a number of user, carer and advocacy groups across the county and although these have been involved with the County Council, the Supporting People team has not, until very recently, taken advantage of this engagement. The programme is now working with a user group that supports people with mental health problems but the exact nature of this involvement is still to be confirmed.
- 88 Service users are not involved in the strategic development of the programme. The Council is aware of this and the need to improve user involvement in other ways. There have been several attempts to produce a service user involvement strategy but these have not been successful due to the limited capacity of the team. The Council accepts that this is now a priority and a new post of user involvement officer will take this work forward. While this will improve the situation in the future, the lack of engagement to date means that service users have not been able to influence the direction of the programme.
- 89 Service users were involved during 2004 in the consultation of the five-year strategy. This work was facilitated by a local university and was through a focus group and one to one interviews but no clear outcomes could be demonstrated from this. Neither was this work followed up in any way and it has not been replicated during the consultations on the revised strategy which are currently taking place.
- 90 There has been limited involvement of service users through the service review process. At a number of schemes we visited as part of the inspection we were told about the service users' involvement in the service review. However, the feedback from individual services through this exercise has not been collated by the team and so has not been able to be used as a way of identifying and addressing common issues. Nor is it clear what improvements to services have come about through this work. Moreover, the team has relied on service providers to feedback the outcomes of the service reviews to users and it does not know the extent to which this has happened.
- 91 The Council has relied on service providers to be the main conduit for informing and involving service users. However, as the Council has not mapped all the existing groups and consequently does not know which service users are, or are not, being reached by this mechanism.

Access to services and information

- 92 This is an area of weakness. Signposting to supported housing services is weak. There is limited information available in hard copy and the information on the Council's web site is aimed at providers rather than service users. There is a directory of services on the web site that has been advertised locally.
- 93 Sign posting to services is poor. As part of our inspection we carried out a number of 'mystery shopping' exercises. The response to our telephone calls was disappointing. On one call we waited over five minutes for an answer. A call requesting information about domestic violence resulted in different answers. One operator told us that she did not have any information but would have this by the following week. Another operator told us that victims of domestic violence "usually go back to their husbands" and a third suggested that the victim goes to the police. This is a major failing in the provision of information. Such an unhelpful response could mean that further help or advice is not sought with possibly fatal consequences.
- 94 Limited information is available for service users and the general public. During our visits to council offices and various schemes, we did not see any information about the Supporting People programme although a leaflet is available at County Hall. There is an information leaflet about Supporting People for people living in sheltered housing schemes. This is not dated and has no information about its availability in other languages or formats.
- 95 The information available on the Council's web site is variable and except for a couple of leaflets is aimed at providers and other professionals rather than service users. Nor is it clear where the information is located. For example, the leaflet mentioned above is available on the site but is under a section called Supporting People News rather than the more expected section of Supporting People Information. This makes it hard for users to navigate the site and understand what is contained unless they look at everything.
- 96 A service directory is also available on the web site but it is in a number of parts and is not easy to navigate. Nor is it comprehensive and a number of client groups are omitted. It is not clear if this is because there are no services for these groups or if they are subsumed within other groups. There is no information on the web site about how to obtain information in other languages or formats.
- 97 In June 2000 it became a requirement for councils and certain other public bodies to produce a local charter entitled 'Better Care: Higher Standards', setting out how assistance is provided for anyone aged 18 or over in England having difficulties associated with old age, long term illness or disability and for carers who support people in these circumstances. The charter sets out standards for services in health, housing and social services and indicates what to do if these expectations are not met. This is a key document designed to empower users and give authorities a benchmark against which they can monitor performance based on the experience of users and carers.

- 98 In Bedfordshire, Better Care: Higher Standards does not contain any reference to Supporting People. This booklet is out-of-date and is in urgent need of up-dating. The Council is aware of this but is not planning to do this until mid-2006 to link in with the reconfiguration of the PCTs. This currently represents a lost opportunity to improve the accessibility of public services.
- 99 Information on Fairer Charging is available on the Council's web site and is easy to follow with clear information about how to apply for an assessment. Fairer Charging assessments are carried out by the Welfare Rights team on behalf of the Supporting People programme.
- 100 Each service provided through the Supporting People programme has its own referral arrangements. Information on how to access services is included in the service directory and these processes are known to the statutory agencies that make the majority of referrals. However, this is an area that the team acknowledges needs further development to ensure that there is equality of access across all service user groups.

Diversity

- 101 This is an area where weaknesses significantly outweigh strengths. Although research has taken place into the needs of some specific groups, information on the diverse needs of the community the programme serves is not generally collected and services have still to be tailored to meet these needs. Services are available for the majority of user groups.
- 102 It is a strength that services are available for the majority of user groups. However, there are no services for people with HIV/Aids or for refugees and the lack of alcohol services are a significant gap in Bedfordshire. Services for travellers have recently been suspended but the Council wants to re-commission these in the future.
- 103 The largest individual non-white minority ethnic groups within Bedfordshire are Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi and there are culturally specific services available to meet the needs of some of these service users. These include a domestic violence refuge for Asian women and a sheltered housing scheme for Asian elders. However, these services do not form part of an overall strategic approach to meeting diverse needs and have been developed in an ad-hoc way rather than as a way of meeting the identified needs of a diverse population.
- 104 At the time of our inspection, information that service providers routinely gather on age, gender, ethnicity and disability was not requested by the team to use to shape services to ensure that they are meeting identified needs.
- 105 Although the team is involved in looking at the needs of certain groups, this work has not yet been used to reshape services. The Council was part of a regional research project on the needs of women fleeing domestic violence which reported in June 2005. The outcomes from this work are being used to shape services for inclusion in the revised five-year strategy.

- 106** The Supporting People team are members of the county-wide BME housing and communities forum which was formed in 2003 following a BME accommodation study. Part of the work this group is undertaking is to improve the way that community groups are accessed and consulted with. They are also members of the Prolific and Other Priority Offenders (PPO) group which is looking at the accommodation and support needs of a variety of offenders.
- 107** Compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act is mixed across the county. We visited some services that were not accessible to people with disabilities. The service directory does not routinely contain information on the accessibility of services.
- 108** Bedfordshire has a comprehensive equalities strategy and within this framework, adult social care services are in the process of developing an equality strategy. This will provide the gateway for commissioning services in the future but is not in place yet. Similarly, the Supporting People team is in the process of producing an Equalities Impact Assessment but this is not in place yet.
- 109** However, the major weakness in terms of diversity is the lack of knowledge of the needs of minority groups in general. Without this, it is not clear how the programme will meet the diverse needs of user across the county.

Outcomes for service users

- 110** This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. There are additional services available but these have not been developed against assessed needs. The commissioning body has not addressed the serious shortage of move on accommodation and the programme lacks a mechanism to measure how successful it has been. There have been some better outcomes for some vulnerable people and most services we visited as part of the inspection were promoting greater independence for service users.
- 111** A number of new schemes were developed prior to the implementation of the programme in 2003. Bedfordshire also identified a number of new schemes that came into operation after 2003 as a result of 'pipeline' funding. These include services for frail older people, young people at risk and people with an acquired brain injury. However, these were not developed against a clear assessment of needs and cannot demonstrate strategic relevance in the absence of a strategy for the programme.
- 112** Visits to services and meetings with service users during the inspection showed that most people place a high value on the support that they receive. Examples of good outcomes being achieved for service users include the following.
- A woman with a history of alcohol mis-use was encouraged to see an outreach worker funded by the Supporting People programme. She was on the verge of losing her tenancy as all her benefits were spent on alcohol. She received intensive support from this worker and managed to retain her tenancy and access counselling services. Although she still needs some support from the worker, her alcohol intake has decreased and she feels more independent and is coping better.

- A man with visual impairment was living in a damp flat in a great deal of debt. He had problems coping with his visual impairment. A worker from a provider specialising in helping people with a visual impairment maintain their independence helped him to move to better accommodation and to develop practical living skills as well as ensuring he had access to aid that would help him in this. For example, the controls on his cooker have been changed so that he knows when the heat is on under his food. He has described the practical help he has received in becoming more independent as significantly changing his life.
- 113** Overall, support plans are being used effectively. Since the introduction of the programme support plans have been more formally documented and reviewed, giving a clearer indication to providers and users of how the route to independence is being achieved. In the projects we visited service users had support plans which have been agreed with them. These are reviewed on a regular basis although this varies according to the type of provision and the needs of the service users.
- 114** At one project for people with a learning disability, the support plans were good and in a pictorial format. This format was introduced as a result of the service review. Staff in a number of the projects we visited could demonstrate how the use of the support plan enabled users to become more independent over time.
- 115** The Council has not however developed a strategy to resolve how service users access move-on accommodation. Nor is this issue addressed in the five-year strategy. This was an area that was of great concern to many providers in Bedfordshire. There is a general lack of accommodation across the county but this is exacerbated by a lack of clear processes for nominating people to general needs housing. For example, in one district there are still only informal arrangements for nominating women in domestic violence refuges to permanent housing.
- 116** Other providers told us that it is very difficult for users to gain access to social housing and there were examples of where service users had to leave placements and become homeless to qualify for help as there were no nomination rights with local housing providers. This is a waste of resources and detrimental to vulnerable people who have managed to gain a level of independence and need to move on in a planned and managed way.
- 117** At another provision, young people are staying in the placement for longer than necessary because although they are ready to move on, they still need a degree of support, through floating support provision, and this is not available. Until this is addressed, service users will eventually 'silt up' provision which will result in them using services they no longer require and new service users will be unable to access services they need.

- 118** The Council, in conjunction with its partners, has not yet developed a comprehensive set of outcome measures through which the success of the programme can be assessed. Without these, the commissioning body does not know if the outcomes that are being achieved for service users are those which they are aspiring to. Nor are they able to assess the value for money of the services.

Summary

- 119** Overall, we have judged that the Council is delivering a poor Supporting People programme for Bedfordshire.
- 120** Governance arrangements are in place but have not sufficiently driven the programme. There has been a lack of commitment from partners and the core strategy group has not had the level of membership it needs and there was confusion about its role and responsibilities. The five-year strategy through which future services will be delivered is inadequate and was not endorsed by all members of the partnership.
- 121** Service reviews have been completed on individual services but these have not been looked at strategically. There has been inconsistency in both the application and quality assurance processes of the service review methodology. Good practice that has been found through the service reviews has not been collated or widely disseminated to other service providers.
- 122** Value for money is focused on costs and does not include a measure of service quality and outcomes achieved for service users. Financial management and reporting has improved and is now satisfactory.
- 123** Sign posting to services is poor with misleading and inconsistent information. Service users have had no influence over the strategic direction of the programme. The involvement of services users has been limited and there is a general lack of information about the programme.
- 124** There have been positive outcomes for service users though. The introduction of new services and the use of support plans to help focus work with service users has led to increased independence for a number of service users. However, the lack of a strategy to resolve how service users access move-on accommodation is hampering the application of this increased independence.

What are the prospects for improvement to the programme?

What is the programme's track record in delivering improvement?

- 125** This is an area with a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The Council is able to demonstrate overall improvements in performance and there have been significant improvements to both adult's and children's social services. However, these improvements have not been replicated within the Supporting People programme which is only starting to make changes in how it operates. The programme is not able to demonstrate a track record of improvements over the three years that it has been in operation.
- 126** The Council has improved its corporate performance assessment. In 2002 the Council was assessed as 'poor' which improved to a rating of 'weak' at a re-assessment in 2004. In 2005, the corporate assessment changed its emphasis and scoring matrix and Bedfordshire was assessed as a one-star authority that is improving well. The Council was found to be progressing well in most priority areas. There had been significant improvements in the delivery of services to children and families which had previously been under special measures. Services for adults had also improved with significant improvement in the number of older people helped to live at home. Services for adults are now judged to have excellent capacity for further improvement.
- 127** The Council has started to tackle long standing issues such as financial control although overall service costs still do not compare well with other councils. Focused leadership is delivering an increased pace of change and effective action has been taken to build capacity to deliver future improvement.
- 128** There are a number of areas in which the Supporting People programme is able to demonstrate progress.
- The service review process was overhauled in 2005 and has enabled the delivery of the review programme within the deadline set by the ODPM.
 - Savings have been realised from the service review programme.
 - Relationships with service providers have improved over the last six months.
 - A number of schemes were developed using transitional housing benefit prior to the implementation of the programme.
- 129** New and 'pipeline' services have been introduced but these have not been developed against a clear assessment of needs. Pipeline services are those which were being planned with secured capital investment prior to the commencement of the programme but where not operational by April 2003. The ODPM agreed to fund these. These include services for people with a learning disability, people with a physical or sensory disability, frail older people and young people at risk.

- 130** The Council is not able to demonstrate a consistent track record over time in delivering improvements to the Supporting People programme. A major failing is that the five-year strategy has still not been revised, despite consultants working on this for nearly a year. The lack of a 'fit for purpose' strategy means that there is a lack of clarity among all stakeholders as to the key drivers for the programme. This can result in confusion about priorities and duplication or wasted efforts.
- 131** Although the team has delivered the service review programme within the required timescale, there has been no strategic overview of the effectiveness of this process. There is not a clear plan for how these strategic reviews will be conducted. There are also issues with the quality and consistency of the service reviews which have been discussed earlier in this report.
- 132** The programme has not tackled the issue of improving access to services provided through a home improvement agency (HIA). Only one district provides a HIA and the bid to the ODPM for government funds to extend this service across all three districts was not successful.
- 133** There is some evidence that the programme learns from others. For example, there has been learning from other administering authorities through SPERG. Bedfordshire is involved in work on a value for money methodology that will be adopted across the region. SPERG has already delivered on other projects such as a regionally agreed 'Steady State' contract.
- 134** The Council saw this inspection as an opportunity to improve services. Staff we met were open and honest and understood their weaknesses. They were keen to learn about different ways of working and had made use of external consultants to bring in expertise that was not available in the team.

How does the programme manage performance?

- 135** This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. Corporately, a culture of performance management is being embedded but this is not well developed in the Supporting People programme and there is not a comprehensive suite of performance reports. The programme is not consistently linked to Council and partner strategies although the leadership of the programme is improving.
- 136** Performance management of the programme is not well developed. There are concerns over the quality of some data being submitted by providers although the team has been working over the past year to improve this. There is not a complete suite of performance indicators nor are there any joined up targets across the criminal justice and health services. Without these, the Commissioning Body and the Council, as the administering authority, are not yet able to clearly measure and demonstrate the effectiveness of Supporting People programme delivery.
- 137** There are no clear targets for improving value for money. 'Highlight Reports' are presented to the commissioning body, core strategy group and social services senior management team on aspects of the programme but there is not as yet a comprehensive suite of performance reports and targets which can be used as a basis for future decision making.

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- 138 Payments are now being made promptly to providers as a result of improvements to the IT system. This has also enabled providers to receive a full schedule giving a breakdown of the payment electronically. Further improvements are planned which will enable providers to automatically update rent accounts for service users.
- 139 Long standing staffing problems have hampered the effective working of the team and it is of concern that these were not recognised and dealt with until the programme was in its third year of operation. The appointment of an interim lead officer in the autumn of 2005 has improved day to day management of the team. The work of the team is now guided by a detailed work plan and this has enabled improvements in the team's ability to deliver on a number of different aspects of the programme. The work of the team now clearly links into the high level work plan for both the commissioning body and the core strategy group.
- 140 A culture of performance management is being embedded across the Council but further work is required to ensure consistent progress is made with this. The Council has shown that it can take action to address under performance and improve service performance. The £250 million Hyder Business Services contract was terminated because it was not delivering the capacity and improvement required by the Council.
- 141 Without the revised five-year strategy in place it is not clear how the programme will effectively support corporate objectives. The Council has nine short term priorities that link to its overall vision. There are links between some of these and issues that have been identified in the Supporting People programme. These include delivering stronger partnership working, improving communications with the public and improving management of performance.
- 142 The Council has plans to improve service user involvement in the programme. These however rely on the appointment of a service user involvement officer who will work across adult social care services. This post has not been filled and there is consequently no date for when this officer will start to undertake this work.
- 143 Supporting People is not consistently linked to social care strategies. There are clearer links to the programme in the leaving care strategy than in the one for older people. The programme is referred to in the Valuing People Strategy but this is not followed through into the Strategy for Commissioning Services for People with a Learning Disability 2005–2010. The programme needs to be fully included in service strategies to ensure that the contribution it can make across different client services are recognised and fully realised.
- 144 The local probation service does not yet have an accommodation strategy but is aware of the need to link this to the Supporting People strategy when it is written. As yet, there are no links to relevant health strategies.
- 145 Leadership of the programme is improving. Both the director of social services and the assistant director of adult services are now playing key roles in the management of the programme and the governance arrangements. The commissioning body is now chaired by a senior officer from a district council. This has assisted in the programme being seen as a partnership rather than a county council led function.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit of the ODPM is working with the commissioning body and other stakeholders on developing partnership working further.

Does the programme have the capacity to improve?

- 146** This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Action is being taken to improve the capacity of the programme through the move of the team to the adult social care commissioning unit but it is too early to see the benefits that should be realised by this. The Council is committed to improve its overall performance and additional capacity is available corporately to support this. Partnership working should be further improved through the implementation of the Local Area Agreement.
- 147** The capacity of the team should be enhanced by the move into the adult services commissioning unit in March 2006. This unit has been established to integrate and modernise the commissioning functions for older people, people with a learning disability, mental health problems, physical and sensory disability, and drug and alcohol problems. Supporting People will be a key part of this team as it commissions housing related support services for all these client groups. The Council considers that the unit will bring together the skills, tools and finances to deliver service improvements to the programme. The move should also overcome the isolation that the team has suffered in the past. However, as the move had not taken place at the time of our inspection, the effectiveness and outcomes are still unknown at this stage.
- 148** The proposal is that the commissioning unit will link to the new Adult Services Strategic Partnership Board. This board has high level representation from the district councils, the county council and the PCTs and should bring coherence to the whole range of services that the partners are providing. The clarity that this should provide if implemented successfully will also assist in commissioning decisions. The adult's board will have the potential to build on the experience of the strategic partnership board that is already in operation in children's services and has achieved greater partnership working from the different agencies involved.
- 149** The team is motivated and committed and this is despite the staffing problems that they have suffered from. Management of the team has been improved and staff have one-to-one meetings with their managers and regular team meetings. They are now attending in-service internal and external training courses although personal development plans have still to be completed.
- 150** The work that is currently being undertaken with the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit from the ODPM should improve capacity of both the commissioning body and the core strategy group as well as improving partnership working between stakeholders.

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- 151 Additional capacity is being provided at a corporate level by the new Chief Executive, Service Directors and the new political leadership of the Council. A momentum for change has been built up with the goal of improving the current CPA rating, aiming to achieve a good, three-star rating by 2007. This is a key driver for managers to demonstrate continuous improvement and be accountable for the performance of their services.
- 152 Bedfordshire County Council has not had a history of working in partnership with other agencies although this has been improving over recent years. The implementation of a Local Area Agreement in April 2006 is seen by the Council as a way of further improving partnership working and ensuring that all agencies involved can benefit from greater synergy and collaboration.
- 153 There are imminent changes in the staffing arrangements in both probation and health services. Within the probation service there is a new appointment to the core strategy group but at the time of the inspection it was not known who would represent the service on the commissioning body. The two PCTs that cover the area are in the process of changing and again at the time of the inspection it was not known how these would be amalgamated or reconfigured. As such, it is not known how these changes will impact on the programme.
- 154 As a member of SPERG, Bedfordshire has used the partnership working that is available to it through this group to improve its capacity. It has already benefited from regional contracting work and is currently awaiting the outcome of the regionally commissioned value for money work.

Summary

- 155 We have judged Bedfordshire's prospects for improvement as being 'uncertain'. This is because although the Council is aware of the weaknesses in its implementation and operation of the programme and has started to address these, it is too early to see the outcomes from these interventions. For example, the move of the Supporting People team to the commissioning and planning unit should bring about a number of benefits but at the time of our inspection, this move had not yet taken place.
- 156 A major concern in terms of the speed of and outcomes from improvements, is the fact that the five-year strategy was not endorsed by all members of the commissioning body and it was agreed in March 2005 that this would be revised. At the time of our inspection, this work had still not been completed.
- 157 Corporately, the authority has a track record of delivering improvements as is demonstrated by its improving corporate assessment rating but the Supporting People programme is not able to similarly demonstrate improvements over the life of the programme.

- 158** Leadership of the programme has improved and there is now greater involvement from senior officers in the County Council. However, the commissioning body is still working with the ODPM on the development of greater partnership working and the involvement of partners and stakeholders in the programme. Until this work has been completed, it is not possible to say how successful these measures have been.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

Table 2

| Measure | Bedfordshire | England |
|---|---------------------|----------------|
| Population (mid-2004) ³ | 392,200 | 57,851,100 |
| Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004) | 16.7 | 18.5 |
| Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004) | 6.7 | 10.44 |
| Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁴ | 1.6 | 2.4 |
| Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁵ | 175 (Bedford) | - |

³ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

⁴ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (October 2005)

⁵ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

Figure 1 Percentage of the population⁶ in each age group compared with England

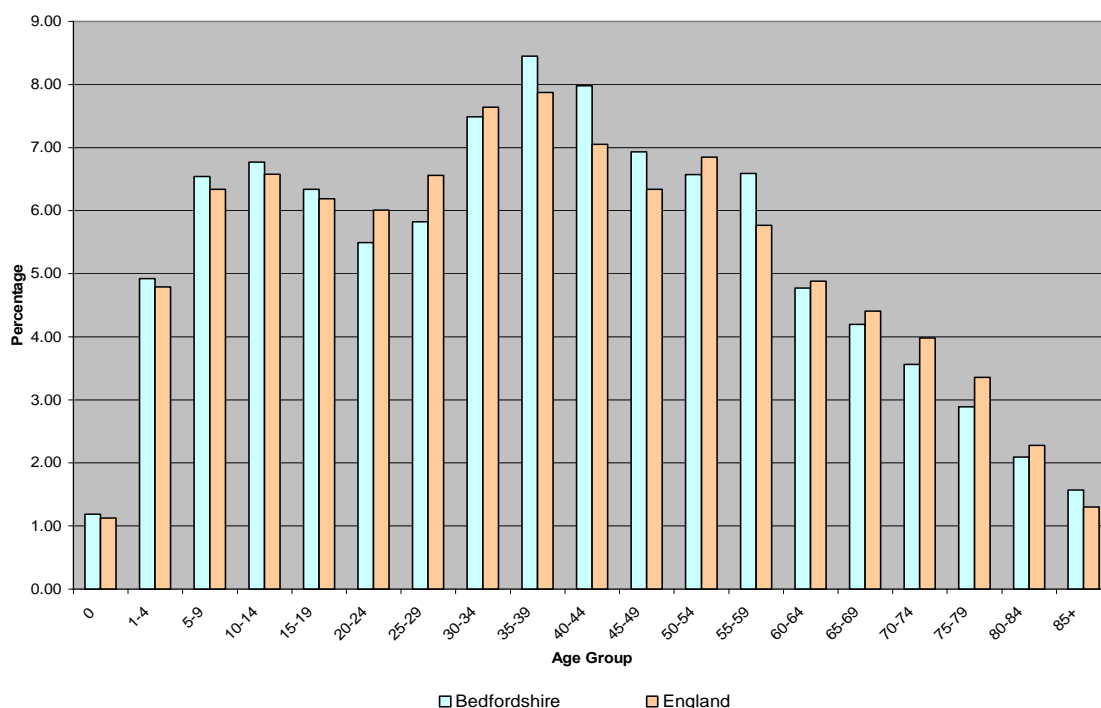
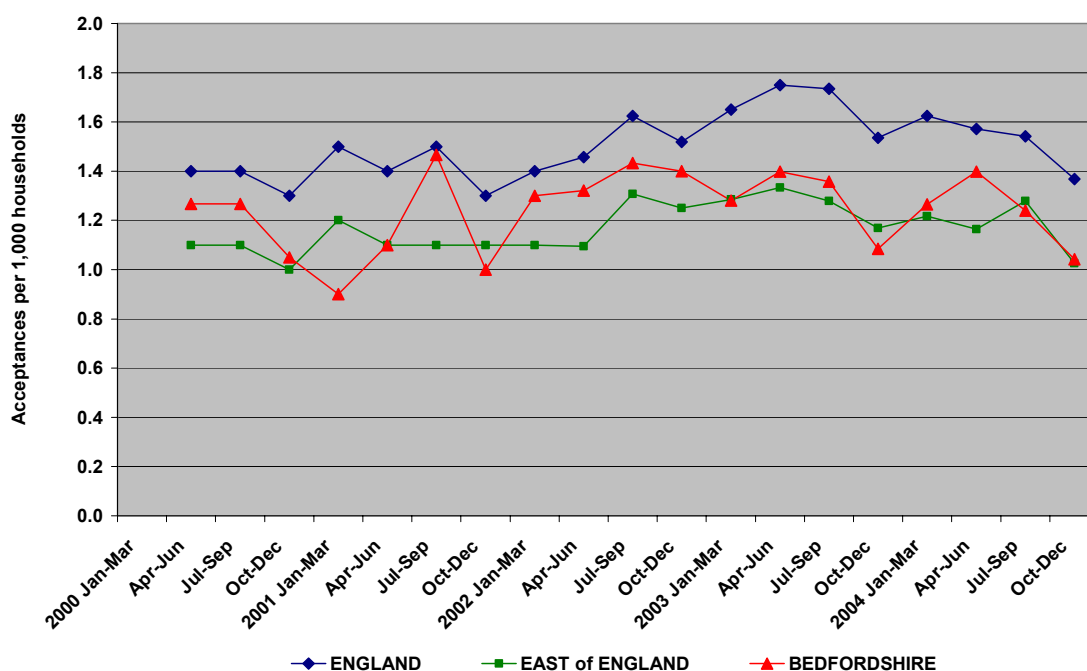


Figure 2 Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



⁶ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

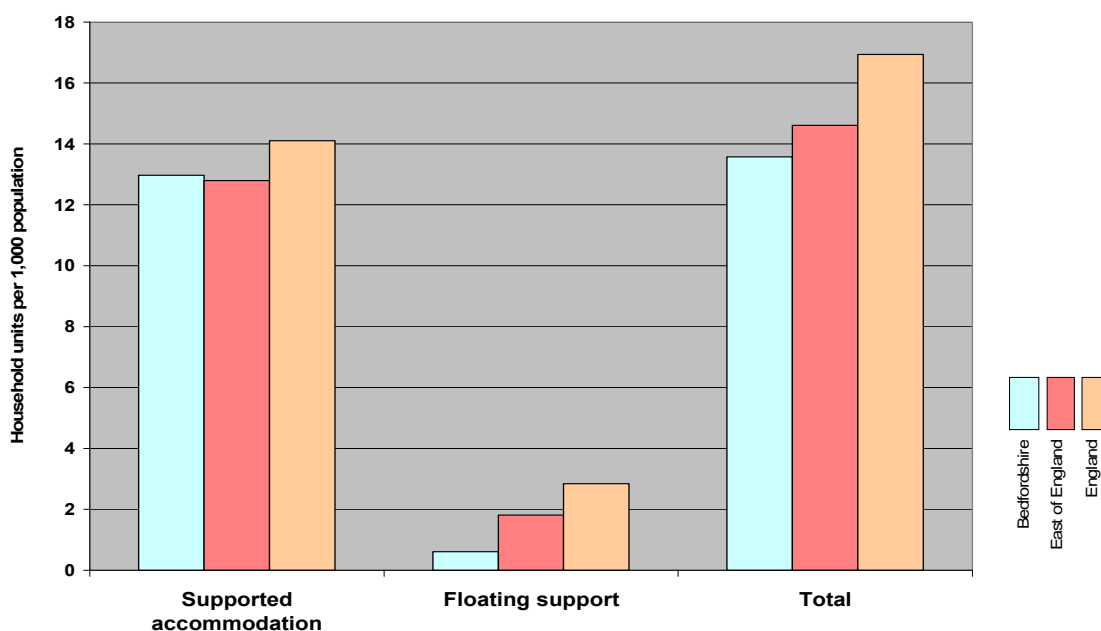
Performance information

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

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

Supporting People data

Figure 3 Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁷



⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 4 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁸

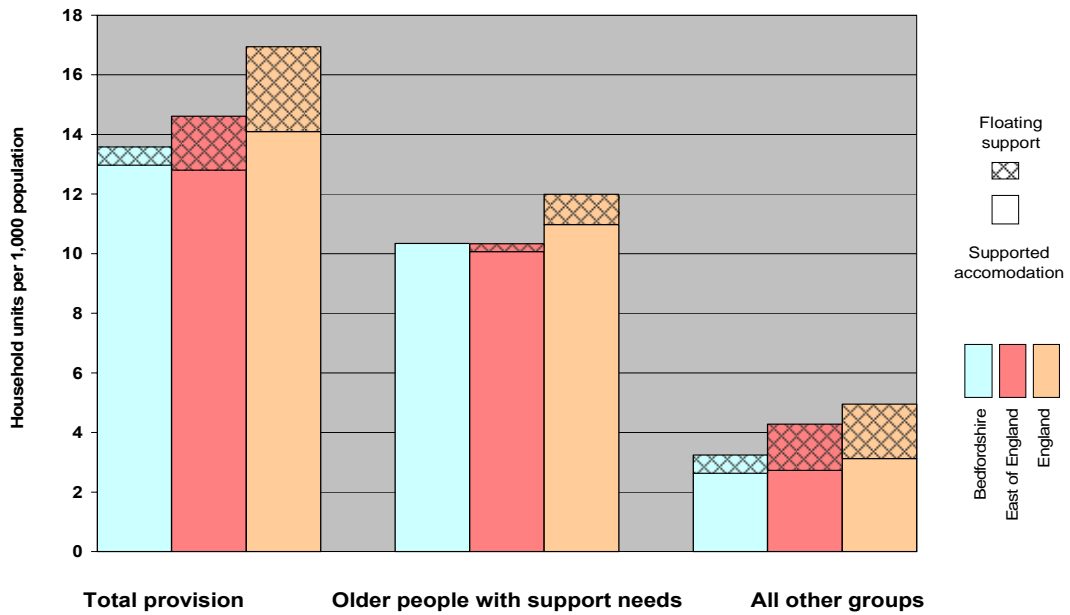
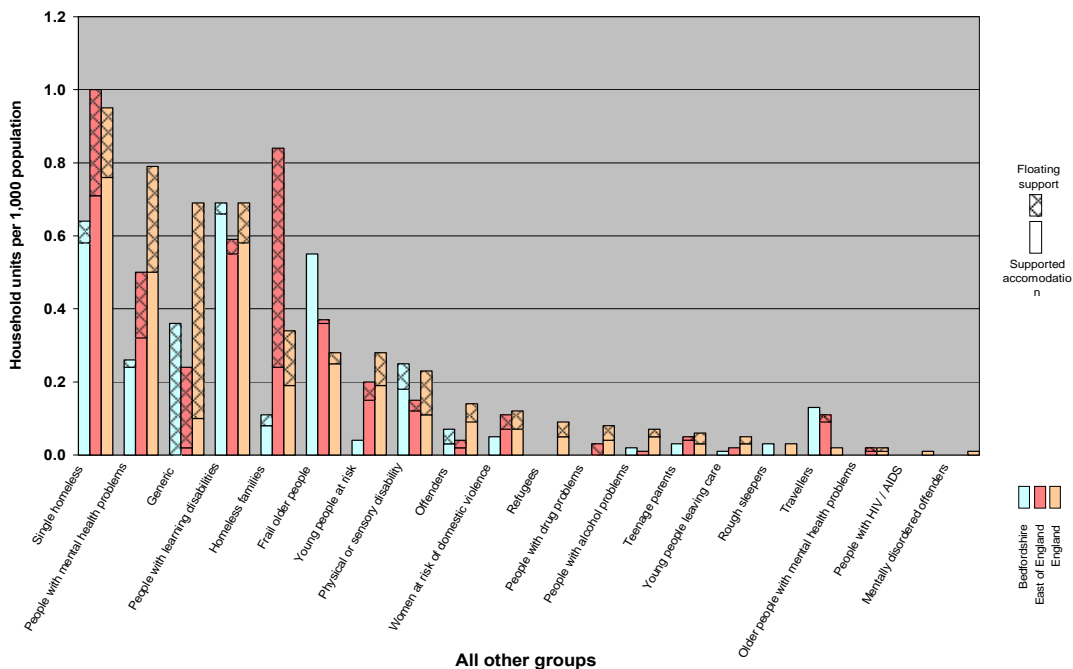


Figure 5 Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁹



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

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

Table 3 Funding for Supporting People¹⁰

| Bedfordshire | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Final Supporting People grant | £ 7,665,801 | £ 7,627,643 | £ 7,243,472 |
| Pipeline allocation | £ 231,097 | £ 385,656 | £ - |
| Administration grant | £ 328129 | £ 317,827 | £ 327,362 |

Table 4 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹¹

| | Per head of population | Per unit | Per unit excluding community alarms | Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| Bedfordshire | £ 0.38 | £ 26.72 | £ 27.23 | £ 83.51 |
| East of England | £ 0.46 | £ 22.73 | £ 28.11 | £ 65.57 |
| England | £ 0.70 | £ 28.30 | £ 34.71 | £ 76.37 |

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

¹⁰ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

¹¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

Figure 6 Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹²

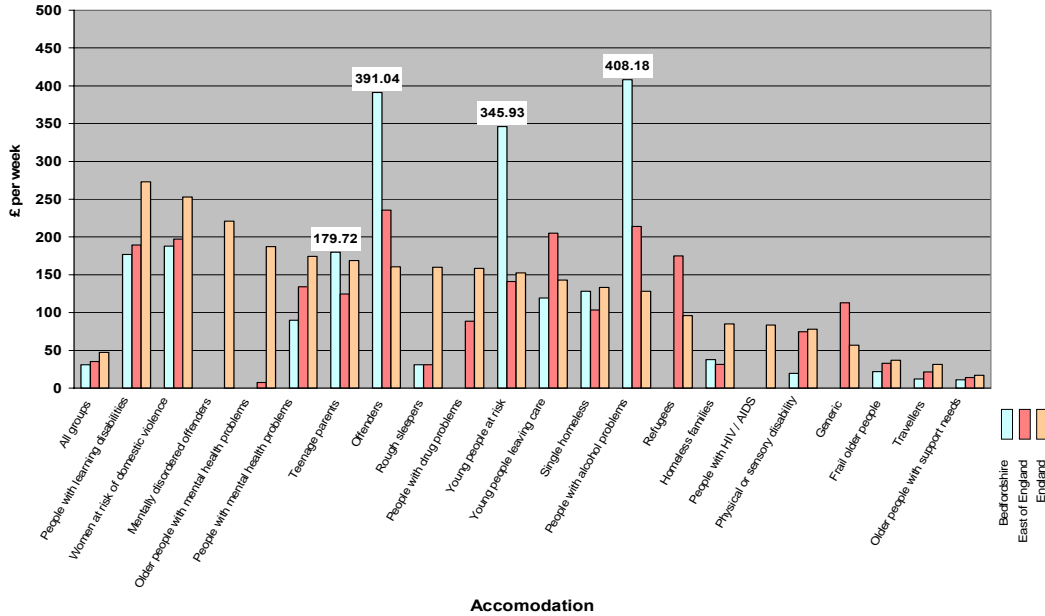
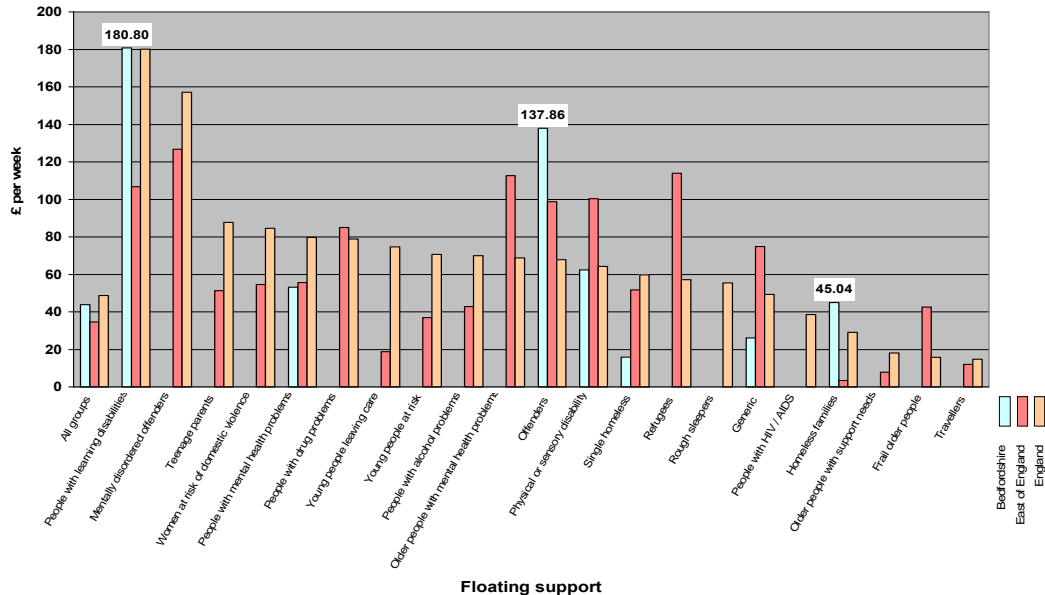


Figure 7 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹³



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

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

Figure 8 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁴, all county councils and all English councils (2004/05)

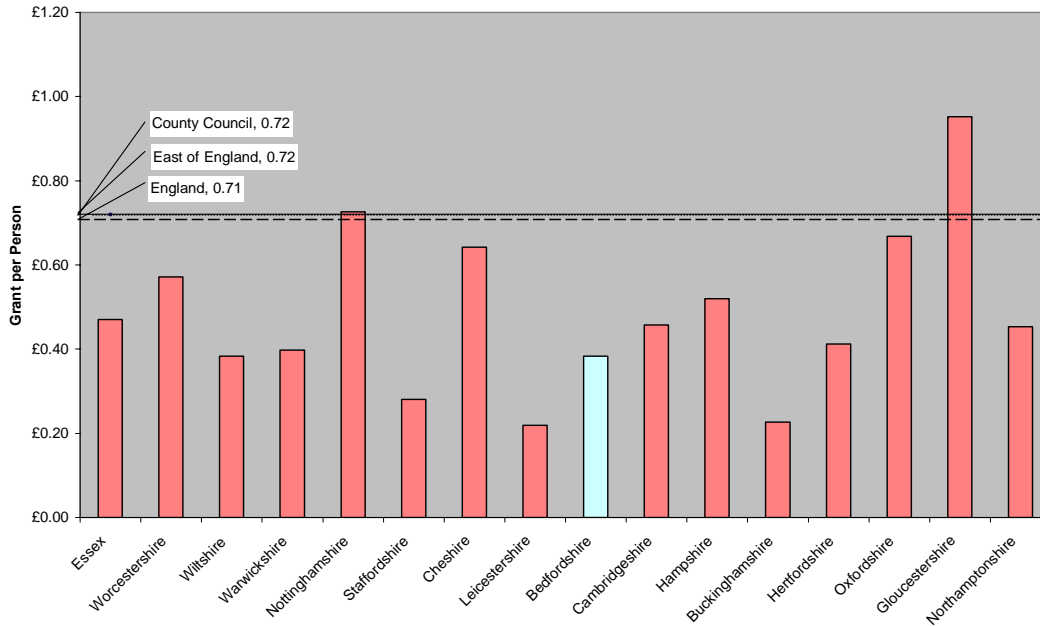
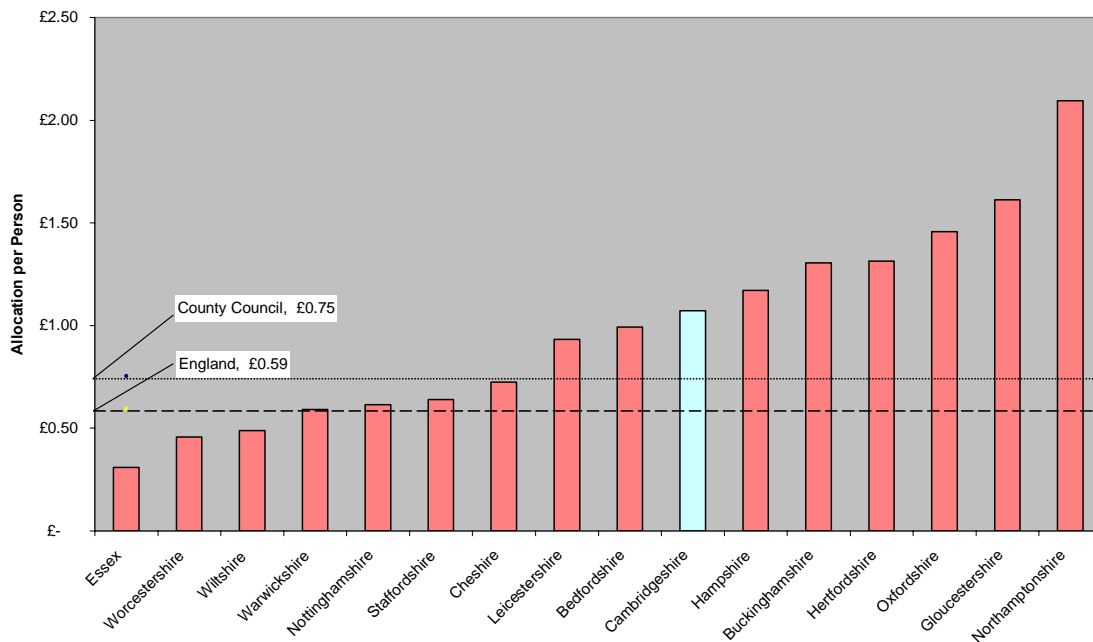


Figure 9 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹⁵, all county councils and all English councils.



¹⁴ A comparator group of similar councils.

¹⁵ A comparator group of similar councils.

Figure 10 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)¹⁶

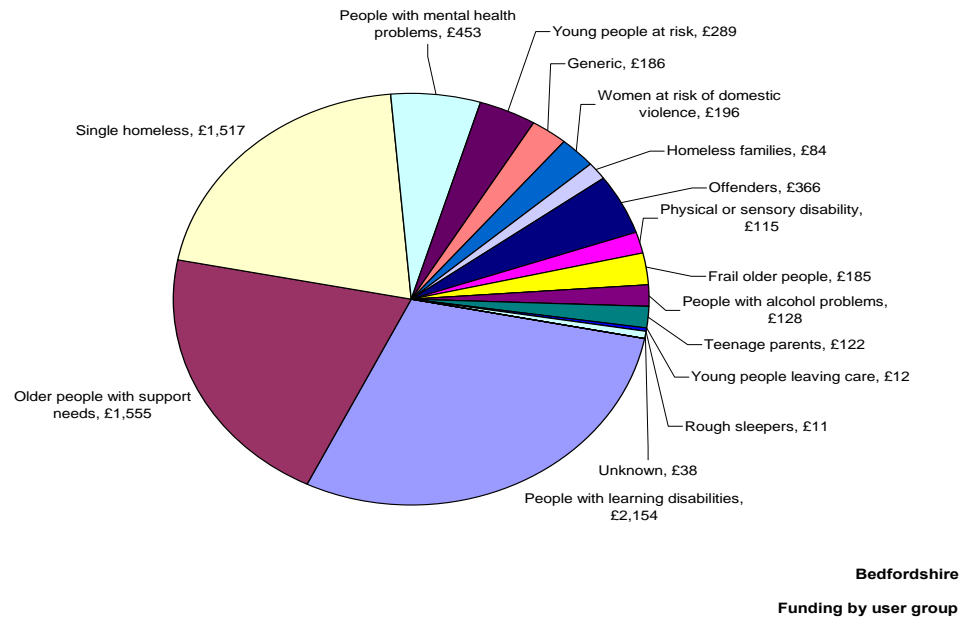
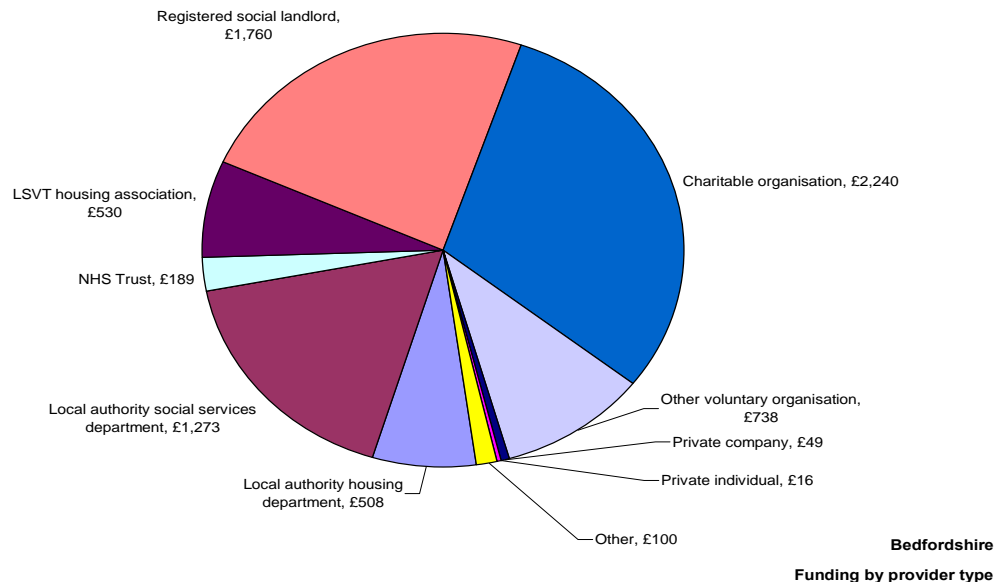


Figure 11 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)¹⁷



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

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

Table 5 Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

| | Serving people well? | Prospects for improvement? | Performance rating (CPA equivalent) |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Adults' Services | Some | Promising | (0) |
| Children's Services | No | Promising | |

Social services performance indicators

Table 6 Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

| Bedfordshire | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Significantly above average (•••••) | Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Admissions of older people to residential/ nursing care (C26) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54) |
| Above average (••••) | Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39) Delayed transfers of care (D41) |
| Average (•••) | Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58) |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Bedfordshire | |
| Below average (••) | 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) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57) |
| Significantly below average (•) | Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Employment, education & training for care leavers (A4) |

Best value performance indicators

Table 7 Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with county councils

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

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

Table 8 District council performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04

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

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

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

Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
 - the Council’s self-assessment;
 - Supporting People five-year strategy and current revisions;
 - the Council's corporate strategies with impact upon Supporting People;
 - plans and strategies from partner agencies that may impact on Supporting People;
 - service documents including policies and procedures, information leaflets for users and providers, newsletters;
 - service review timetable;
 - departmental and service improvement plans;
 - performance reports;
 - terms of reference for key governing groups; and
 - minutes of the commissioning body, core strategy group and other key meetings.

Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - a questionnaire based survey sent to all providers of housing related support services;
 - a focus groups with service providers;
 - meetings with carers, advocates and voluntary organisations;
 - visits to 11 contracted supported housing services, to talk to service users and front-line staff;
 - telephone calls to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
 - interviews with key staff and stakeholders within the County Council, the borough and district councils, the primary care trusts and the probation service;
 - interviews with councillors and with the relevant portfolio holder;
 - review of the website;
 - mystery shopping visits to council offices;
 - desktop checks of procedure guides and service review files; and
 - observation of a meeting of the commissioning body.