

Supporting People Inspection Report

July 2006



Supporting People

London Borough of Waltham Forest

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

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

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

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summary

- 1 Waltham Forest is a north east London borough with a population of 221,800¹ 35.5² per cent from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.
- 2 Waltham Forest has a relatively young age profile and there is a low percentage of people aged over 65 years of age at 13.2 per cent.
- 3 The borough is ranked as the 47th most deprived of the 354 English local authorities³. Unemployment stood at 4.2 per cent in December 2005, nearly twice the national average of 2.4 per cent. From the Council's own surveys the greatest concern of residents is crime and anti social behaviour (ASB).
- 4 There are 94,000 homes in the borough of which 75 per cent, are privately owned 12 per cent are council owned but managed by the Council's arms length management organisation (ALMO) Ascham Homes.
- 5 The Council comprises 60 councillors and there is no overall control. The Labour party has 27 seats, Conservatives have 18 and Liberal Democrats have 15. Labour and Liberal Democrats share the governing of the Council which has adopted the Leader and cabinet model.
- 6 The Council's net revenue budget for 2005/06 is £323 million, compared with £307 million in 2004/05. The Community Care net budget is £47 million in 2005/06, compared to £46 million in 2004/05. The Council has 3,148 employees, excluding school staff.
- 7 The Council was assessed as a 'one-star' authority by the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in December 2005 and judged to be improving well. An inspection of the Council's housing services in 2004, delivered by the ALMO Ascham Homes, was judged to be a 'one-star' service with uncertain prospects for improvement.
- 8 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2005/06 is £7,666,158 with a projected under spend of £445,334. The Council also received an administration grant of £264,635 to fulfil its role as the Administering Local Authority.
- 9 There are 52 different providers with 92 contracts, providing 276 services in Waltham Forest. These services provide 854 units of floating support and 2,590 of accommodation with support⁴. Of these, 1,400 are sheltered housing for older people, 51 per cent of the supported housing supply.
- 10 The London Borough of Waltham Forest was inspected in the third year of the programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money offered by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

¹ ONS mid-2004 estimates.

² ONS mid-2004 estimates.

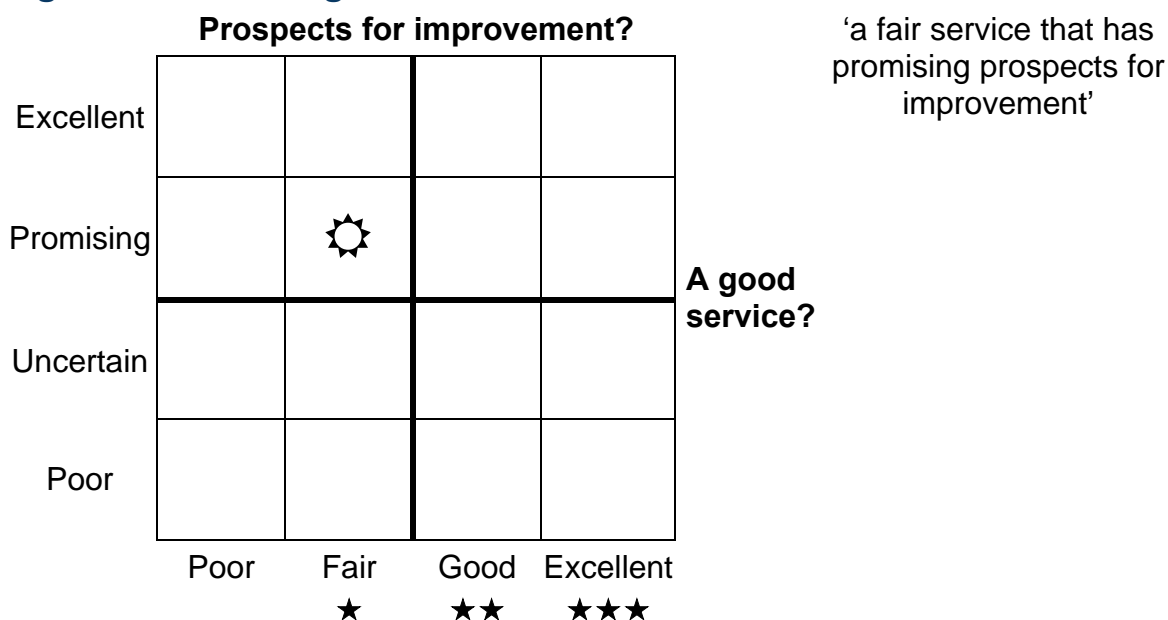
³ ODPM Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2004: Average Ward Score.

⁴ 24 March 2006.

Scoring the service

- 11 We have assessed London Borough of Waltham Forest as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart⁵



Source: Audit Commission

- 12 During our inspection we identified the following strengths in the way in which the Supporting People programme has been administered.
- User, carers and advocates from across all client groups were widely consulted in the development of the five-year strategy which influenced the key strategic objectives and priorities.
 - The first round of service reviews have been completed and improvements to services are being delivered through the quality assessment framework action plans.
 - Three sector reviews have been undertaken adopting a user led approach which has delivered user focussed improvement plans which are monitored through user led boards.
 - Services have been re-modelled strengthening strategic relevance utilising savings achieved through a robust process of service reviews.
 - Many service users were happy with their environment, accommodation and services received.

⁵ 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 programme has been well implemented with all the milestones set by the ODPM being met and the delivery mechanisms are embedded in the organisation.
 - The Supporting People team have a good range of skills and experience and are well motivated and managed.
 - Relationships with providers are working well and they are supportive of the service review process and the outcomes.
 - The relationships between the partners is strong and shows firm commitment to beneficial outcomes for service users.
 - There are robust systems and a value for money process and guidance in place for the financial management of the Supporting People and Administration grants.
 - Service unit costs are low in comparison with other council's in Greater London and are in line with average costs for English authorities.
 - Cross authority working has delivered jointly commissioned services and new schemes for service users.
- 13** However, there are a number of areas where performance is weak and needs to improve.
- There has been poor performance on the delivery of move on accommodation which has significant impact for service users.
 - Outcomes for service users has been variable and the mechanisms in place to monitor changes in performance or encourage complaints are not fully effective.
 - The quality of customer care is variable particularly for potential service users attempting to access services.
 - The Council has made poor progress on making Council buildings compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act compliant.
 - Leadership of the programme has been patchy meaning that the implementation of the programme has been reactive to Supporting People programme requirements.
 - Monitoring of performance is weak by the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group and the members lack clarity about their responsibilities and future development of the programme.
 - Contract management is not consistent across all providers and monitoring arrangements are not sufficiently effective to deal with poor outcomes in some services.
 - Contingency planning for service failure and issues for service users is underdeveloped leaving the Council reactive to issues arising.
- 14** We have judged that the service has promising prospects for improvement for the following reasons.
- A range of additional supported housing services has been delivered.

8 Supporting People | Summary

- Future plans for new services are prioritised between client groups and resource requirements are detailed. Plans are underpinned by a wide ranging framework of consultation and needs analysis.
- Most performance indicators have improved over time with an increasing number in the top 25 per cent. Local Supporting People targets are regularly being met.
- The Council has been successful in drawing additional funding for services from external sources such as the Department of Health pilot for identifying housing options for people with learning disabilities.
- Recent changes in the Council's approach to enabling affordable housing should provide real opportunities for vulnerable people in the longer term.
- There is corporate support for the programme, for example through additional funding for Disabled Facilities Grant to support independent living.
- The five year strategy provides a firm foundation for the delivery of the programme in the future and is well supported with priorities for all client groups, plus plans and policies which are agreed and supported by stakeholders.
- There are plans in place to build on cross authority working to deliver additional services and deliver further benefits from joint commissioning.
- Councillors are gaining in understanding the potential impact of the programme allowing them to strengthen their leadership of the programme.

15 However, there are a number of areas of weakness that need improvement.

- The Council will not be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act for more than five years under the current plans.
- There is current poor performance on delivering affordable housing which impacts on vulnerable people needing to move on from supported schemes.
- Performance management is patchy particularly in respect of outcomes although this is being addressed locally and at regional level.
- There are no action plans for the Commissioning Body Core Strategy Group to demonstrate effectiveness in governance arrangements.

Recommendations

- 16 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 costs⁶ 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 governance arrangements by:

- *developing contingency planning with a focus on service users particularly in respect of sudden service failure or risk of harm to service user;*
- *establishing action plans for the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group which are formally monitored and reported on;*
- *revisiting the terms of reference and membership of the Core Strategy Group to ensure adequate representation across all sectors and a proactive approach to the business of the Supporting People programme; and*
- *reviewing reporting arrangements to both Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body to ensure objectivity is secured and proper challenge to non performance and missed targets, particularly outside the Supporting People team, is encouraged.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- contingency planning from the service users focus has been thoroughly thought through and plans to protect individuals are in place;
- the partners will be able to establish whether the governance arrangements are working effectively and will provide for effective leadership in the future;
- members of the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group will have a clear role in tackling issues about performance and missed targets across the partnership and with stakeholders such as registered social landlords; and
- the role and involvement of representatives on the Core Strategy Group will be strengthened and expertise and experience is fully maximised.

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

⁶ 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 Strengthen delivery arrangements by:

- *ensuring that users are able to access supporting people services with support and assistance which is provided with high standards of customer care;*
- *implementing regular meetings with providers and scheme managers to monitor quality of provision;*
- *improving information for those occupying supported and short term accommodation to ensure they understand the options available to them;*
- *providing direct feedback mechanisms for service users and carers on the quality of service provision;*
- *establishing a systematic approach to feedback from those leaving Supporting People funded services;*
- *reviewing the target for move on accommodation and establish an accurate assessment of need over time which is regularly updated; and*
- *ensuring that all referral arrangements from supported housing for move on accommodation are well publicised and monitored.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improvements in the ways contracts are managed allowing for early identification of problems and issues especially any brought to the attention of the Supporting People team about quality of service;
- mechanisms for highlighting poor service delivery will be expanded and users will have easier opportunities to raise complaints to the Supporting People team which are then rigorously followed through; and
- allow for the consideration of all available sources of suitable accommodation to provide move on accommodation for those in supported housing schemes and short term accommodation.

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

Recommendation

R3 Strengthen access to information and knowledge of Supporting People and service provision by:

- *working with front line service deliverers in health and social care to ensure staff are fully informed about Supporting People services and are kept up to date; and*
- *ensuring that front line staff have easy access to the directory of services.*

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- service providers, their staff, stakeholders and other interested parties, particularly health, probation and council employees are well informed and able to assist potential service users access appropriate services for their needs.

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

- 17 We would like to thank the staff of London Borough of Waltham Forest, and in particular Dezrine Biko, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 27 March to 31 March 2006

Regional contact details

Audit Commission
 1st Floor
 Millbank Tower
 Millbank
 London SW1P 4HQ
 Telephone: 0207 828 1212
 Fax: 0207 976 6187
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Report

Context

The locality

- 18 Waltham Forest is a north east London borough with a population of 221,800⁷. This is a fall of 2 per cent on 2001 census figures. The borough is located on the tip of London, Stanstead, Cambridge, Peterborough growth area. It is next to the Thames Gateway Stratford City development, including part of the proposed 2012 Olympic Games site.
- 19 The borough has a diverse community, with 35.5⁸ per cent of the population from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, compared with a national average of 10.44 per cent. The largest non-white groups are Black Caribbean, and Pakistani, both 8 per cent and Black African 6 per cent.
- 20 Waltham Forest has a relatively young age profile with 26 per cent under 20 years of age, and 35 per cent between 25 and 44 years of age. There is a low percentage of people aged over 65 years of age at 13.2 per cent compared with a national average of 18.5 per cent.
- 21 Despite the lower than average age of the population 32 per cent of households have at least one person with a limiting long term illness, an increase of 9 per cent since 1991. In addition, approximately four thousand people provide unpaid care of more than 50 hours per week⁹.
- 22 The area is relatively affluent, but there is considerable deprivation in the centre and south of the borough. Eleven per cent of the lower layer super output areas¹⁰ are in the worst 10 per cent nationally in respect of income deprivation, and there are twelve wards in the top 20 per cent of the national index of multiple deprivation¹¹. The borough is ranked as the 47th most deprived of the 354 English local authorities¹². Unemployment, as measured by the claimant count, stood at 4.2 per cent in December 2005, nearly twice the national average of 2.4 per cent, and above the London average of 3.3 per cent.
- 23 From the Council's own surveys the greatest concern of residents is crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB).

⁷ ONS mid-2004 estimates.

⁸ ONS mid-2004 estimates.

⁹ London Borough of Waltham Forest Strategy 2005 – 2010.

¹⁰ Lower level super output area - an area with a minimum population of 1000; mean 1500. Built from groups of OAs (typically 4 to 6) and constrained by the boundaries of the Standard Table (ST) wards used for 2001 Census outputs.

¹¹ Provided by the Council in the submission of contextual information.

¹² ODPM Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2004: Average Ward Score.

- 24 There are 94,000 homes in the borough of which a high level, 75 per cent, are privately owned compared with the national average of 68 per cent. Twelve per cent are council owned and managed by the Council's arms length management organisation (ALMO) Ascham Homes. Thirteen per cent are owned by registered social landlords (RSL). There is a high level of non-decent homes, 75 per cent, in the public sector substantially on the basis of lack of thermal comfort.

The Council

- 25 The Council comprises 60 councillors and there is no overall control. The Labour party has 26 seats, Conservatives have 15 and Liberal Democrats have 19 at the time of the local elections in May 2006. Labour and Liberal Democrats share the governing of the Council which has adopted the Leader and cabinet model. The business of the Council is supported by five standing committees and five overview and scrutiny committees.
- 26 The Council has 3,148 employees, excluding school staff. There are five departments including Community Services where Supporting People sits alongside housing, children and families services, although this is under review.
- 27 The Council's net revenue budget for 2005/06 is £323 million, compared to £307 million in 2004/05. The Community Care net budget is £47 million in 2005/06, compared with £46 million in 2004/05.
- 28 The Council was assessed as a 'one-star' authority by the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in December 2005 and judged to be improving well. This is an improvement on the original 2002 assessment of a poor 'no-star' authority. As part of the 2005 assessment, the Council's housing benefit services received a score of 3 out of a possible 4.
- 29 An inspection of the Council's housing services in 2004, delivered by the ALMO Ascham Homes, was judged to be a 'one-star' service with uncertain prospects for improvement. The housing strategy has not yet been confirmed by the Government Office for London (GoL) as fit for purpose.
- 30 The Council's social care services were rated by the CSCI¹³ for both adults and children's services as an equivalent 'one-star' CPA rating, serving some people well with promising prospects for improvement in both areas.
- 31 The Council's vision, adopted in 2005, summarises what the Council wants to be in the future.

'A vibrant borough with new industries, confident young people and highly skilled residents. Waltham Forest provides a community fit for all, characterised by tolerance, caring, respect and cohesion between different groups. Where staff and councillors are proud to work for Waltham Forest, a top performing council providing excellent services.'

¹³ CSCI - Commission for Social Care Inspectorate

- 32 This is underpinned by a values statement where the Council aspire to have a culture within the Council where:

'We are honest, open, our decisions are transparent and we deliver what we say.'

'We put our customers first, respond pro-actively and flexibly, and join up our services wherever possible.'

'We have visible and supportive managers and members who enable staff to take responsibility for their decisions. We expect and reward high performance, address poor performance, and are clear about our respective roles.'

'We trust, respect and listen to our staff, each other, customers and partners.'

'We support learning and development to help staff achieve their potential. We celebrate success and learn from our mistakes.'

The service

- 33 The Council acts as the Administering Local Authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in its area.
- 34 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 misuse problems, refugees, travellers and ex-offenders.
- 35 A Supporting People strategy 2005-10 was produced in March 2006. This includes the Council's vision for the Supporting People programme in the borough, which is working together for high quality support.

'We aim to ensure Waltham Forest's Supporting People services provide high quality housing related support to improve quality of life, independence, safety and choice for service users.'

- 36** There are eight key principles which support this vision.

'Tackle social exclusion from a housing related support perspective.

Promote independence through support, enabling people to live in their own homes with the right level of support.

Provide alternatives to residential care.

Provide support to vulnerable homeless households as part of the strategy to prevent homelessness.

Give users a voice and choice in the planning and delivery of services.

Reduce crime and the risk of harm.

Develop and implement Supporting People in partnership with stakeholders: providers, users and carers, health, Probation and community services.

Provide fair, appropriate and accessible quality services to meet the needs of the diverse communities of Waltham Forest, promoting equality of opportunities.'

- 37** The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2005/06 is £7,666,158 with projected under spend of £ £445,334. Underspends of Supporting People grant in previous years were £534,866 in 2003/04 and £426,065 in 2004/05. The Council also received an administration grant of £264,635 to fulfil its role as the ALA. An additional amount of £9,500 per annum is provided by the Council.
- 38** There are 52 different providers with 92 contracts, providing 276 services in Waltham Forest. These services provide 854 units of floating support and 2,590 of accommodation with support¹⁴. Of these, 1,400 are sheltered housing for older people, 51 per cent of the supported housing supply. There are low levels of service provision per head of population £0.68 compared with the London average of £0.97, and the English average, £0.70.
- 39** In the breakdown of spend per client group¹⁵ 68 per cent of the total was on the following groups.
- £1.6 million on older people.
 - £1.31 on people with learning disabilities.
 - £1.24 million on single homelessness.
 - £1.21 million on people with mental health problems.
- 40** There is relatively low spend on the following groups.
- £342,000 on homeless families.
 - £213,000 on domestic violence units a low number of units at high cost.
 - £9,000 on teenage parents.

¹⁴ 24th March 2006.

¹⁵ Supporting People strategy 2005-10.

- £26,000 on care leavers.
 - £32,000 on refugees.
 - £46,000 on people with physical disability.
- 41 The Council has identified the following priorities for new commissioning to meet gaps in services.
- Supported housing for people with learning disabilities.
 - Supported housing for people with mental health problems.
 - Extra care for older people.
 - Substance misuse floating support.
- 42 The highest cost service is accommodation based service for rough sleepers at a unit cost of £600.32. The lowest cost service is accommodation based service for older people with a unit cost of £4.09. Both services have been reviewed.
- 43 The London Borough of Waltham Forest was inspected in the third year of the programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money offered by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

How good is the service?

- 44 The assessment was based upon the following key issues.
- Governance.
 - Delivery arrangements.
 - Service reviews.
 - Value for money.
 - User involvement.
 - Access to services and information.
 - Diversity.
 - Outcomes for service users.

Governance

- 45 Strengths balance weaknesses in this area. The Council made an early start with arrangements for the implementation of the Supporting People programme and all the essential elements are in place. Although the Council has made reasonable progress in implementing the programme, leadership through the Commissioning Body has been variable, making it responsive to central government drivers rather than proactively developing the potential of the programme for vulnerable service users.

- 46 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.
- 47 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions for non-excellent authorities¹⁶ 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. 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.
- 48 The Commissioning Body in Waltham Forest first met in June 2003. There are terms of reference in place which were last reviewed in 2005, and a memorandum of understanding between the three partners. The group has not yet failed to come to consensus in decision making. Should there fail to be consensus over an issue it will be referred to the Chief Executive of the Council before referral to the Secretary of State.
- 49 Nine meetings of the Commissioning Body had taken place at the time of the inspection on roughly a quarterly basis. There are three voting members.
- Council: Head of Strategy and Resources Community Services.
 - Joint Primary Care Trust and Social Care: Head of Integrated Adults Services.
 - Probation: Housing Development Manager.
- 50 The meetings are attended by the Accountable Officer, who also represents housing, and the Lead Officer for Supporting People to provide information and links with the Core Strategy Group. Other officers attend as required such as the heads of service for Learning Disability Partnership, Integrated Adult Services and Strategic Commissioning, the Mental Health Service Manager and the Joint Commission Manager for DAT¹⁷. The level of attendance of the main partners has been good and consistent over time.

¹⁶ Non-excellent authorities - those councils not judged to be excellent through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission.

¹⁷ DAT - Drug Action Team.

- 51 Although it is an expectation of Supporting People governance arrangements that the level of representation should be at Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) level, the Probation service is represented by a Housing Development Manager (HDM). These arrangements work well because of the representative's knowledge and skills. The ACO was fully conversant with Supporting People issues at a strategic level and kept up to date through regular meetings with the HDM. The outcome to date has been a good influence over decision making for offenders.
- 52 Relationships work well between social care and health as these responsibilities are often combined, for example, for adult services where there is a section 31¹⁸ arrangement in place for older people. This also helps to facilitate movement of information between the Supporting People governance framework and the partnership boards and Learning Implementation Teams (LIT).
- 53 The CB has developed into an effective group in respect of decision-making. It has taken difficult decisions, for example in remodelling and decommissioning poor services and those not strategically relevant. The majority of the work on the Commissioning Body has been signing off the service reviews. A particular example is residential care schemes for people with learning disabilities (LD) These were programmed in from end of year two and the Commissioning Body had to decide exactly when funding had to be withdrawn. The lead for LD was a part of the decision making process. This was a good example of the Commissioning Body working effectively, looking at finances and the financial implications of their decisions.
- 54 The areas of weakness for the Commissioning Body are in respect of performance management and strategic direction. The effectiveness of the Commissioning Body is not measured, there is no action plan, and although the members of the group state they are clear about what they need to achieve as a group in the future this was not articulated during interviews or written down. Basic performance information supplied by providers is reported to the Commissioning Body when there are failures. However, the group does not consider performance at a strategic level, for example national performance indicators, the impact of the programme and efficiency targets have not been set. All of this could assist in planning the future direction of the programme.
- 55 The Commissioning Body members are also unclear about their role in respect of performance monitoring. Because the Supporting People team have effectively implemented the programme the group have not been motivated to take a leadership role rather than a responsive one to the key milestones of programme implementation. This means that although there is support by the members for what Supporting People is meant to achieve, there is not a consistent understanding of how the programme can support delivery of corporate and partnership objectives.
- 56 The Council has recognised the need to improve in this area and established an Outcomes working group and a strategic monitoring plan containing key performance indicators was being developed at the time of the inspection.

¹⁸ The section 31 partnership arrangements in the Health Act 1999 give NHS bodies and local authorities the flexibility to be able to respond effectively to improve services, either by joining up existing services, or developing new, coordinated services, and to work with other organisations to fulfil this.

- 57 The Core Strategy Group was established in 2001 and meets bi monthly. There are twenty two listed members, mainly from Waltham Forest council, and include two representatives from the providers forum. The group is now chaired by the Accountable Officer who is also the Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods. The links between the Core Strategy Group and the Commissioning Body are, at this level, supported by the Supporting People Lead Officer. They attend both meetings which ensures a good flow through of information.
- 58 Less than half of the membership of the Core Strategy Group attends on a regular basis. This is linked to a lack of clarity about the role of the group following the development of the five-year strategy. There has been regular representation of the Probation Service by the Community Safety Officer. Health is represented mainly through the jointly commissioned posts. This has not been consistent across all sectors, and lacks the focus of representation from the primary care trust (PCT). In view of the ongoing national reform of the service, this is unlikely to change in the near future. This means that non-attendees are reliant on minutes of meetings to stay updated and these do not reflect the depth of discussions. The outcome is that all sectors are not properly represented in decision-making.
- 59 The Core Strategy Group has developed a fair degree of operational responsibility, particularly in implementing the decisions of the Commissioning Body and delivering the five year strategy. The group has been challenging on operational matters, for example the proposal to add conditions to the steady state contract which the group considered unreasonable. The group also challenged the need to tender for all contracts. Both of these issues were resolved in favour of the group's approach and led to simplified processes for providers and for the Council.
- 60 Other examples of a positive approach by the group have been capacity building with a leaderless community project, bringing together needs information across all sectors, and the development of the five-year strategy over an 18 month period including the management of stakeholder involvement and detailed discussion. Currently the group are working on developing outcome measures, work commissioned by the Commissioning Body.
- 61 However, not all the members of the Core Strategy Group understand their function on this group, although the terms of reference have been recently reviewed but no changes agreed. For example, the group have a supervisory role in respect of the Supporting People team but have only considered performance information at the last meeting, and not in depth. The group have no action plan and were not clear about the future development of the programme. The effectiveness of the group is not being monitored and the general assumption of the members was that their success would be measured on the delivery of targets in the five-year strategy annual plan.

- 62 There is no representation on the Core Strategy Group from the voluntary sector, service users, carers or advocates. The overall impact of this is that attendance is dominated by Council officers and does not make full use of expertise available from elsewhere. In particular it means that stakeholders at the delivery end of services have no formal means of influencing the direction of the programme or service improvement. There is no plan in place to address this.
- 63 Reporting arrangements for the Supporting People team are clear and any potential conflict of interest has been minimised. The Accountable Officer is also the Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods and chair of the Core Strategy Group. This allows for a flow of information between the two groups supported by the Lead Officer for Supporting People. The chair of the Commissioning Body is another director within Community Services. Both chairs have direct reporting lines to the Director of Community Services for any conflict resolution. To date there has been no dispute between the two groups.
- 64 The Accountable Officer has only been in post for ten months, at the time of the inspection. Much of the Accountable Officer's time to date has been taken up with performance management issues in housing. He has identified key weaknesses and is addressing them. He has been building a higher profile for Supporting People through the membership of the LSP Executive and other groups such as the Volume Crime Group, which he chairs, and the Young Peoples action partnership. This enables him to develop a network of relationships outside of the partners of the Commissioning Body. This allows for a greater understanding of the impact of remodelling and decommissioning of Supporting People services.
- 65 The Accountable Officer briefs the Council's portfolio holder for Community Services and other councillors are kept informed on Supporting People developments through cabinet reports and briefings for councillors of which there have been three to date. The briefings have provided useful information to help councillors understand the role Supporting People can play in achieving corporate objectives. The Council are expanding their reporting arrangements to councillors through the Joint Partnership Board. This could have the effect of further improving general understanding of the impact of the Supporting People programme.
- 66 There are good cross authority working arrangements in place. A joint trust has been set up with the London Borough of Redbridge to deliver services for people with learning disabilities. There are jointly commissioned services for people with substance misuse problems including rehabilitation and step down facilities. The Lead Officer is a member of the East London Housing Sub-Region's Supporting People Lead Officers' Group. Key outcomes from the group are sharing benchmarking data and good practice, and linking Supporting People issues into the East London Housing Strategy.
- 67 Engagement with the voluntary sector in respect of the Supporting People programme is limited to a small number from a disparate sector. The risk for the Council is that by concentrating activities with a small number of groups is that there is a failure to maximise the potential of a range of skills and resources for the benefit of vulnerable people.

- 68 There are examples of effective relationships with voluntary agencies, for example Age Concern. This particular relationship with the Council has been a strong and challenging one through the Older Person's forum. This has helped the Council's approach to modernising services for these service users. The Council recognises that there is a need for further development with this sector.
- 69 In addition, voluntary groups have contributed to the development of the Supporting People five-year strategy through involvement with the joint planning structures. These arrangements have also allowed for sharing information about the programme. They have been further supported and promoted by voluntary groups and agencies, such as Service User Training and Research Association (SUTRA), through other events, open days and the 'Place to Live' events. Direct contributions have resulted in the design of user involvement material for services reviews and the facilitation of user led reviews.

Delivery arrangements

- 70 This is an area of strength for the Council leading to a successful implementation of the Supporting People programme. There is robust financial management of both Supporting People grant and administration grant. Relationships with providers are strong and the team is well thought of both internally and externally. Weaknesses in this area are around contract management, formal updating of needs information, provision of move on accommodation and monitoring outcomes.
- 71 The Council has supported the delivery of the Supporting People programme by ensuring arrangements have been put in place in good time for implementation, and providing support through other appropriate council services such as procurement, finance, IT, social care commissioning and fairer charging. Leadership for the programme has been stable over time and provided at senior officer level for the chair of the Commissioning Body. Leadership for the team through Supporting People Accountable Officer has also been at senior officer level, although the present post holder is relatively new. This has enabled good progress to be made by the team.
- 72 The Supporting People team is located in the Community Services directorate within the Housing and Neighbourhoods service. The team comprises four full-time officers.
- Lead Officer (Unit Head).
 - Contracts Officer.
 - Finance Officer.
 - Administration Officer.
- 73 The delivery mechanisms for the programme are embedded in the organisation. The Supporting People team is effective in delivering the programme and has been stable since prior to implementation in 2003. This has enabled team members to develop good skills, experience, practices and procedures covering their activities. The delivery of the service reviews and the five-year strategy to target deadline are examples of positive results achieved.

- 74 There are robust systems in place for financial management and payments have been made to providers accurately and on time. Savings and underspends are regularly monitored, the team have been prudent and outcomes are reported to the Commissioning Body. Under-spends have resulted from delays in implementing pipeline schemes, from remodelling services and fluctuation in subsidy payments.

Table 1 Annual underspends from 2003 to 2006

These have also been used to fund inflation increased in 2005/06

2003/04	£534,000 (7%)
2004/05	£426,000 (5%)
Estimated 2005/06	£445,000 (6%)

Source: London Borough of Waltham Forest Self-Assessment

- 75 Financial risk is managed in line with the corporate approach of monthly meetings between the Lead Officer and strategy and policy finance officers. This is followed up by reporting to the Accountable Officer with exceptions being reported to the departmental management team. This has enabled the Council and its partners to be sure that the Supporting People team is making good progress against target times for local performance indicators and the service review timetable.
- 76 Further support has been made available to the team from corporate services and the partners. PCT and social care staff have directly participated in validation visits in service reviews ensuring that the nature of the services is fully understood before decisions are taken on the future of the contracted services. The Council has also supplemented the team with additional resources as required, such as the Equality Impact Assessment on the Supporting People five-year strategy. This has been funded from the Supporting People administration grant (see 'Value for Money').
- 77 The local eligibility criteria were implemented with effect from June 2005 following agreement by the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group and consultation with the Provider forum. This is late given that the service reviews were being undertaken from February 2004 and from April 2003 services have been assessed against the eligibility criteria. This could have caused confusion for service providers. However, in both the Council's provider survey of August 2005 and our survey of February 2006 providers said they knew about and understood the Supporting People eligibility criteria and were satisfied with the way in which eligibility was assessed in service reviews. There has been negligible impact from the delay.
- 78 There has been further strengthening of this approach through an electronic tool which maps the local eligibility criteria against all service delivery with a particular focus on the division between housing related support and social care. This pilot was undertaken with seven providers and the results have fed into and influenced service review decisions.

- 79 Ninety-two contracts were signed by both providers and the Council at 31 March 2003. There are steady state contracts in place for those who have been reviewed and who the Commissioning Body have given a three or more year contract. The ODPM model has been adopted without change as the Council believe this will help to ensure consistency of treatment between providers. This appears to have been the case as evidenced by the providers' high level of satisfaction.
- 80 Although there is regular communication between the providers and the Supporting People team members, contract monitoring meetings do not take place consistently enabling regular challenge to any areas of weak performance. There are quarterly meetings with mental health providers, and monitoring of performance information from providers; failures to meet targets are reported to the Commissioning Body. The management of contracts has been undertaken through the service review process. Progress on action plans as a result of the service reviews is measured either towards the end of the short term interim contract or annual report where steady state is in place. Although this has proved effective so far the Council and service users could be vulnerable if negative changes take place in schemes and the Council are not informed through informal communications at an earlier stage. (See outcomes for service users).
- 81 LBWF has some expertise in contract negotiations and is developing this further. Currently contract negotiations are reliant on the Lead Officer, although the Contracts Officer has received specialist training and has carried out one contract renegotiation at the time of the inspection. The outcome of contract negotiations is referred to the Commissioning Body for approval. They are based on sound processes carried out by the Contracts Officer against criteria agreed by the Commissioning Body such as an upper cap of seven hours support per week, £25 per hour cost and, recently reviewed, an expectation of no more than 20 per cent non-staff costs. The impact has been to achieve savings across most contracts.
- 82 Service needs analysis has been positively undertaken through a number of methods and covering each client group. This involved the use of:
- demographic and service data;
 - revised and updated housing needs survey in April 2004 - further updating on vulnerable people is due to be commissioned this year for completion by December 2006;
 - targeted surveys, such as for single homeless people with support needs;
 - research commissioned through health and social care partners, such as members of the Core Strategy Group, for example people with drug problems;
 - information from specialist providers for hard to reach groups such as people experiencing domestic violence and street homeless services; and
 - information from service reviews and client record data.

- 83** The outcomes of this work have been used to identify shortages of provision, for mental health, learning disabilities and specialist homeless services. These areas are prioritised in the five year strategy for new provision in the first year, 2005/06.
- 84** However, LBWF have yet to update this information on a regular basis, although arrangements are agreed. The Council recognise the need to continually update needs information in order to ensure priorities and outcomes are properly targeted. The Council are continuing to develop their needs database which will provide enhanced information in the future. Currently work is underway in the following areas.
- Determining how many people with LD could or would wish to leave residential care if appropriate support was available.
 - MH needs are analysed and updated from individual Supporting People needs assessment.
 - Physical and care needs for those living in council owned accommodation are being updated through a five year programme of house to house visits starting in areas identified through the use of deprivation factors.
- 85** There has been an issue with information relating to the needs of offenders. The Probation service is aware that the Offender Assessment System (OASys) had either not been completed at all or the information was not accurate. This means that current decisions on priorities are based on inadequate information and likely under reporting. This situation is currently receiving attention and completion rates have been improved to ensure this does not arise again.
- 86** MAPPA¹⁹ arrangements are in place and are linked through the Housing Development Manager and Community Safety Manager. A shortage of support arrangements for high risk offenders has been identified and is to be dealt with on a sub regional basis.
- 87** The Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010 is a useful, if unchallenging, document for stakeholders which sets out the strategic approach the partners expect to achieve for service users from the programme. The strategy was approved by the Council on 22 March 2006 and submitted to the ODPM on 30 March meeting the target deadline.
- 88** Future plans for newly commissioned services are prioritised in the five year strategy between client groups and resource requirements are detailed. Plans are underpinned by a wide ranging framework of consultation and needs analysis. Strategic relevance is summarised, giving clear guidance for service reviews, and Supporting People programme specific contributions to other corporate priorities are highlighted.

¹⁹

MAPPA - Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements.

- 89** The Council has taken a basic approach to charging and agreed a statement of local charging policy with effect from 2003. This is published in the five-year strategy. A Supporting People charging leaflet has been produced and this is sent out regularly to providers to inform service users. The level of applications is low; there are an estimated 89 per cent of service users eligible for housing benefit which exempts them from charges. However, of 69 applications (less than 3 per cent of those not exempt) only seven service users have Supporting People subsidy being paid. This suggests that more could be done to encourage people to apply for assessment and potentially improve their financial position.
- 90** Relationships with providers are very positive. They described the Supporting People team, through a focus group, visits and via questionnaires, as strong, flexible and pragmatic. The positive relationships have allowed for joint problem solving, for example in easing difficult financial situations for the Council.
- 91** We sent out 42 questionnaires and received 15 responses, 36 per cent. Providers were generally very satisfied with the following areas which reflects well on the Supporting People team.
- Outcome of service reviews - 100 per cent satisfied and very satisfied.
 - Provision of information, advice and support by LBWF.
 - Eligibility criteria.
 - Involvement of providers in the development and delivery of the programme.
 - LBWF position on determining the strategic approach.
 - Contract negotiations.
 - The five-year strategy.
- 92** A high level of dissatisfaction was expressed about move on accommodation arrangements and this theme was reiterated in most discussions with providers. Performance in this area has been monitored over the last two years against a target of 48 units move on accommodation for those leaving hostels. In 2004/05 only 37 were achieved, although the position for 2005/06 was better at 45.
- 93** This is a low target by comparison to available lets which average 900 per year. It is recognised that there is an overall shortage of affordable housing in London compared with needs. It is also recognised that a range of initiatives are needed to reduce the gap in supply. The lack of sufficient affordable housing contributes to reducing access to supported housing for others in need, and to undermining the benefits individuals achieve from supported housing schemes.

- 94 The Council has achieved some positive results from cross authority working, particularly from jointly commissioned services with the London Borough of Redbridge and from membership of the East London Sub Regional group. In the first instance choice has been extended for service users through newly commissioned services and there are plans to further develop floating support services for persistent and prolific offenders. In the second instance commissioned work on a joint accreditation scheme is nearing completion and should result in consistently high quality services for service users both in and beyond Waltham Forest boundaries.
- 95 A risk assessment of the programme has been incorporated into the five year strategy from a comprehensive review undertaken by consultants in November 2004. The Supporting People team contingency planning is included in the overall Housing Contingency plan. However, there are no arrangements in place to cover events impacting directly on service users such as sudden service failure, or dealing with the threat of or actual incidence of violence.
- 96 The Council has responded to the grant requirements by submitting all milestone reports and information uploads on time and in the required format. However, it has been reactive rather than proactive in improving the level of KPI information being returned by providers. It has responded positively to prompting by the ODPM by engaging in the development of an improvement plan with providers and introduced SPOCC net²⁰ in September 2005 to allow electronic submission by providers.

Service reviews

- 97 This is an area of strength for the Council. Service reviews have been completed to the target deadline of March 2006 and there are processes in place to further drive improvements and ensure that standards are maintained.
- 98 Service review processes and procedures have been clearly established and are supported and understood by providers. The programme of service reviews was developed at an early stage and began in February 2004. Reviews were risk assessed against robust criteria approved by the Commissioning Body. This included renewal of contract, cost outliers, and co-ordination with local performance reviews. This ensured that high risk contracts were reviewed early on in the programme.
- 99 The service review processes have been well managed. Each of the 92 contracts has been reviewed with approximately 54 per cent of the 276 services covered. Desktop reviews have been avoided and all providers have been visited and validated in a two stage approach. This has resulted in services improving, while keeping the co-operation and goodwill of providers.

²⁰ SPOCCnet - IT system, Supporting People Oxford Computer Consultants.

- 100** The outcomes of the service reviews have also been well managed. Where there have been concerns about a service, only interim contracts have been agreed with a re review to assess whether the action plan has been met. A programme of re reviews has been established post March 2006 based on the length of interim contracts which can be as short as six months where concerns have been high. Where there is a steady state contract in place providers are required to self assess their services on an annual basis; issues can then be picked up in the re review programme. This will help the Council to ensure that standards are maintained and improvements are monitored.
- 101** Staff involved in the service reviews have a range of appropriate skills and experience. These have been developed over time with specialist training, such as procurement by in-house specialists. Reviews have been supported by health and social care staff, such as drugs and mental health commissioners in specialist services, and who have attended post review meetings. Probation staff have attended a service review and work has been undertaken to link with social service reviews where there are joint funding streams, for example on sheltered housing schemes and currently a young peoples' care leavers scheme. This helps to reduce the impact of inspection on providers and ensure a consistent approach by the Council.
- 102** Consistency has been maintained through the use of the ODPM model for service reviews, which has been unaltered, and through the same two officers undertaking the reviews from the beginning. Quality is monitored through reports to the Core Strategy Group and to the Commissioning Body where the recommendations are signed off. In addition, external peers have been used particularly on in house services to promote objectivity and a level playing field with external providers.
- 103** The overwhelming view from providers was that the service review process was fair, positive and problem solving. They were aware of the appeals procedure which was little used as LBWF sought consensus on the way forward rather than through confrontation. We were given a number of examples where pragmatic solutions to projects that were not performing well enough had been agreed such as:
- scale of provision for older people was reduced in order to provide better services and easier access for service users;
 - an extra care scheme with joint funding streams to two separate service providers. The review concluded that the service users would benefit from a single provider for both elements which resulted in a jointly commissioned service and one point of contact for service users; and
 - a sheltered housing provider introduced external accreditation following the review which resulted in raising staff morale and confidence.

- 104 The Council has recognised that providers need to receive feedback on their response to the outcome of the review prior to presentation to the Commissioning Body. There was a positive response to the issue being raised through the Supporting People Forum and providers can now see the impact their response has made before decisions are taken. This has made the process more transparent and demonstrated to providers the impact of involvement on shaping the programme in the future.
- 105 The use of the quality assessment framework (QAF) with service reviews has resulted in improvements to services which benefit service users. After each review providers receive a detailed service review report and QAF action plan together with the Commissioning Body recommendations. Any amendments agreed are made to the contract specification. No contracts are renewed on a steady state basis unless all QAF scores reach a minimum of C grading.
- 106 Joint accreditation with neighbouring boroughs has not yet been achieved. This work has been jointly commissioned by the East London sub group and is due to be completed in 2006. In the meantime there is an additional burden for providers who work across a number of local authority areas.

Value for money

- 107 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The Council compares favourably with other councils on average costs and there is a firm commitment to achieving services which are value for money for service users, for example, for those with mental health problems. The administration grant is well managed, and there is a robust methodology for assessing value for money in the service reviews which is accepted and understood by providers. The approach is being further developed through benchmarking which is being updated.

How do costs compare?

- 108 Comparisons of unit costs with London and England are set out in the data appendix. Overall at the outset of the programme in 2003, the Council's costs per head of population were significantly lower in comparison with other councils in Greater London and in line with other councils in England.
- 109 Costs per unit excluding community alarms compare well to Greater London boroughs, but are substantially higher than for other English councils. The costs of the community alarms are not met by Supporting People grant in Waltham Forest, and this indicates that the cost per unit of sheltered housing is high. The highest cost service at £600.32 per unit, a hostel for street homeless, relates to 24 hour cover. The facility is accessed by users from surrounding boroughs as the only one of its type and therefore has high strategic relevance.
- 110 These figures should be treated with some caution as there has been a number of changes since the platinum cut²¹ data was produced.

²¹

ODPM 'Platinum cut' figures, November 2003.

Table 2 Unit costs comparison of SP grant per head of population - 2003/04

	Per head of population £	Per unit £	Per unit excluding community alarms £	Per unit excluding alarms and sheltered housing £
Waltham Forest	0.68	47.37	47.37	64.20
London	0.97	42.37	48.73	68.40
England	0.70	28.30	34.71	76.37

Source: The data quoted is taken from ODPM sourced material 2003/04

- 111** The Council is addressing the issue of high cost sheltered housing in a positive way. Services provided within sheltered schemes were reviewed in 2004 with an emphasis on service user requirements, the SHOPS²² Housing Evaluation Project. It is a priority for the Council to reduce the numbers of sheltered schemes as demand is falling, and there is a concentration on the development of extra care facilities.
- 112** Average cost comparisons are detailed in the five year strategy which show favourable comparisons of most services against other councils. However, this may be misleading as the average costs for the administering authority have been updated as at March 2004, but are being compared to ODPM figures derived in 2002/03. This is not made clear in the strategy. The Council is aiming to improve accuracy of figures through the benchmarking work of the East London sub group. The outcomes are not due until the summer of 2006.
- 113** The data appendix also shows that the level of Supporting People grant expenditure per head of population per week is equivalent at £0.72 to the average of nearest neighbours, all county councils and all English councils in 2004/05.

How is value for money managed?

- 114** The Council has used the administration grant effectively in staffing to meet the needs of the service over time. The Supporting People team is small and adequately resourced from the administration grant. Further support for the delivery of the programme is provided through other corporate services such as IT, finance and procurement. The grant has been used to meet additional needs, for example, to undertake the Equality Impact Assessment on the five-year strategy and funding for the sector reviews.

²² SHOPS - Sheltered Housing Older People Survey.

- 115 The cost effectiveness of the Supporting People team has not yet been reviewed but this is underway. A report is due in April 2006.
- 116 LBWF have adopted a robust value for money process and guidance as a commitment to ensuring cost effective services. This includes criteria for measuring value for money as a part of the service reviews with effect from 2004/05. The criteria is:
- cost per support hour no more than £25 - two services have breached this and costs were recommended to be negotiated down;
 - guide level of no more that 15 per cent for non-staff - four services breached this and costs were recommended to be negotiated down. This guideline has recently been increased to 20 per cent following discussions with providers; and
 - a surplus generated of no more than 4 per cent.
- 117 Our survey of providers supported the outcome of the Council's own survey in August 2005. This showed that providers were supportive of the Council's approach to value for money and said they understood it.
- 118 Value for money assessment is supplemented by benchmarking with members of the East London region benchmarking group. This enables the Council to follow ODPM guidance to use a range of factors when considering costs. The benchmarking group is currently updating unit costs, staffing hours and clients in subsidy schemes in respect of value for money. LBWF have made use of the work of this group to establish a basis on which to negotiate contract costs as a part of the service reviews. This has resulted in £511,000 savings to date.
- 119 Legacy services at either extreme in terms of costs were prioritised for review using three criteria. These included consideration of services on the basis of risk.
- 'Where either the financial value or the nature of the service or issues with the provider or some combination of these make the review a priority - Supporting People Strategy 2005 – 2010.'*
- 120 Providers were required to submit full budget information on high and low costs services, and concerns about value for money were raised during the initial validation meeting to initiate action to drive costs down. This approach was tempered with high risk user groups in order to minimise any potential disruption to services. LBWF made use of the interim contracts of up to a year to allow for negotiation and implementation.
- 121 LBWF demonstrates a commitment to value for money in Supporting People funded services. Mental health services are closely involved in ensuring that resources are being maximised. For example, if people are staying in a facility for a longer period than was intended, this is flagged up and reasons for it identified. Decisions are then taken to correct this to ensure provision matches need. Similarly, there is close joint working with PCT and housing to ensure there is a daily update on demand for bed spaces to enable alternative provision to be secured. These arrangements help the Council to make the best use of resources for the benefit of service users.

- 122** The Council has taken a cost effective approach to service delivery through joint commissioning a range of health and social care posts, for older people and setting up a trust with the London Borough of Redbridge for people with LD. Another example was undertaken at the start of the Supporting People programme. LBWF developed and ran joint training sessions for providers with the London Boroughs of Redbridge, Havering and Barking and Dagenham. Subjects included supply mapping, payment processes and service monitoring and review.
- 123** Underspends of Supporting People grant have been reinvested in 2005/06 to support newly commissioned services for people with LD and MH problems and support for people with substance misuse problems. The Council has also given providers inflation increases to help sustain existing services in 2005/06. This followed no inflation increase in 2004/05 due to the reduction in Supporting People grant funding.

Service user involvement

- 124** This is an area of strength for the Council. User contact and consultation is working well but the benefits of feedback are not being maximised. A wide range of methods are used to help users influence policies and shape services. There are some improvements which need to be made in respect of offenders and systematic use of feedback from those leaving the services.
- 125** The Council has had a consultation strategy in place since 2001/02 which was agreed with voluntary and statutory partners. This includes representation from provider groups, joint planning structure and is supplemented by well attended events and conferences, sector reviews and input from the user led reviews of services.
- 126** Service review processes and procedures were developed in consultation with stakeholders. All procedures were discussed by the Core Strategy Group, Supporting People Forum and joint planning groups. User questionnaires and interviewing questionnaires were developed through a working group of user reps via SUTRA²³ and providers. The impact is a high level of acceptance and ownership of the service review programme evidenced by a high rate of satisfaction by providers in both the Council's survey of August 2005 and ours in February 2006.

²³

SUTRA - Service Users Training and Research Association.

- 127** Service user involvement in services reviews has been improved following lessons learnt in the first year of service reviews. The team found that responses were poor to the ODPM model stakeholder questionnaire. Processes were changed to encourage feedback for example, providers to follow up with stakeholders as response rate was poor. This has resulted in 878 users providing direct feedback on services through face to face interview and questionnaires to date; 33 per cent of service users. To support this approach:
- where QAF standards appear to have improved from desktop information this is being validated with users on re visits; and
 - where users have expressed concern about service standards the Commissioning Body has built in recommendations for the provider to address them.
- 128** In addition, LBWF has enabled user led sector reviews, a good example of service users directly shaping service delivery. These have been facilitated by SUTRA, and jointly commissioned by providers and the Supporting People team. So far mental health provision, in 2002/03, sheltered housing in 2004/05 and priority homeless temporary accommodation in 2005/06 have been undertaken. Service users are involved in the design and conduct of the research with other service users. Through this process service users have received training, payment and benefits advice, been assisted in working up questionnaires, carrying out interviews and delivering presentations about the findings. Progress against the recommendations was monitored by a board of tenant representatives and through meetings with providers. The process has led to user focussed outcomes aimed at improving direct service provision.
- 129** The range of methods of involving service users has enabled them to influence policy decisions. The best example is the focus on improving information for people with LD through input from the LD partnership and the work being undertaken by the 'Place to Live' group. Outcomes are the involvement of users in the design of Housing Choices pack and web site designed especially for people with LD.
- 130** During site visits we found that there is a great deal of involvement of service users in matters which affect them in their homes. Scheme meetings are undertaken and service users' views are taken into account in the running of schemes. This contributes to a high level of satisfaction with the services received for many service users.
- 131** However, the Council has not made the best use of all available resources to engage with service users. One gap is in respect of offenders. There is a specialist housing advisor in the housing advice service who works with people in custody which involves prison visits. The advisor has a background in working in prisons and undertakes training for prison staff in housing issues. However, this resource has not been used to engage with offenders, despite an acknowledged gap in service provision for this client group. There is no formal agreement in place for user consultation for offenders, although London Probation is funding a housing advice worker to work with offenders in the community.

- 132** In addition, unless the Council maximises engagement with the voluntary sector they are failing to take full account of the breadth of diversity in the borough and available resources to assist the full range of vulnerable people.
- 133** There is a service user involvement charter for Community Services in place. This is not resulting in consistent use of service user feedback to inform services and provide qualitative information when people move on. LBWF staff offering support and resettlement services to those accepted as homeless are undertaking some surveys and have used other means to secure feedback from service users. However, there has been no systematic means of securing regular feedback, such as exit surveys, although these have recently been introduced.

Access to services and information

- 134** Services in this area are variable with some significant weaknesses which outweigh strengths. Considerable effort has been invested in web based information but the availability and quality of information in other formats and advice is variable. Information and training for staff on Supporting People services is not consistent or comprehensive resulting in barriers to accessing services for some people. We also found some people have poor experience with the customer care offered by some staff.
- 135** Paper based information for people trying to access Supporting People services is limited. Two leaflets specifically about Supporting People are available, about charging and a general leaflet about Supporting People services. These are undated which makes it difficult to determine whether they are still relevant. More up-to-date information is being made available through Supporting People Newsletters, introduced in September 2005. Three have been issued to date. Information issued for people with mental health problems and those looking for sheltered housing include basic information about Supporting People.
- 136** A good example of information produced for vulnerable people is the housing choices leaflet produced by and for people with LD.
- 137** The Council has a range of opportunities in place to promote applications for assessment for assistance with charges, although take up is low. Leaflets on charging are sent on a regular basis to providers. There is a team in place in Community Services undertaking Fairer Charging assessments including home visits and surgeries for older people in sheltered housing schemes. Articles have appeared in newsletters and on the website.
- 138** The five year strategy is densely packed with information which undermines its accessibility for people; it is difficult to read and assimilate. The contents page and formatting throughout the report is insufficiently detailed to enable the reader to easily find specific information. This is offset by the availability of an executive summary which, although in the same design and style as the full document, is focussed and easier to read and understand. Both the full document and the executive strategy are available in a range of formats, can be made available in community languages and are included on the Council's website.

- 139** Website access to services is good. The site is easy to navigate and there is a wide range of information about Supporting People services and clear links to related services and external websites. A good example is information for people with LD who may be suffering from abuse. LBWF has invested £20,000 in the development of a specialist website for people with LD due for launch in April 2006. There are arrangements in place to update the spkweb²⁴ and the Council's website with the newsletters and information for potential Supporting People service users. Overall the site provides a comprehensive directory of services.
- 140** The current Better care: Higher standards does not include any reference to Supporting People. This is a significant omission which is a barrier to those trying to access services. This has been rectified in the revised version which is due to be circulated in June 2006 and contains good information and signposting to Supporting People services. However, as it has not yet been published it is not available to potential service users.
- 141** There is acceptance in the Council that more needs to be done to improve staff knowledge of Supporting People services to reduce potential barriers. Methods adopted so far have not been fully effective. For example, although the LD integrated team of social workers and community nurses are very familiar with services and referral system through the 'Place to Live' panel, officers believe that in the wider arena knowledge and understanding is more patchy. Staff in social care and health services are not being consistently trained and updated to ensure they are able to assist potential service users in accessing Supporting People services. There is no plan in place to rectify this.
- 142** We undertook 19 site visits to schemes in receipt of Supporting People funding. We found that service users are provided with tenant handbooks or equivalent information which sets out the services they should expect to receive. In some cases users had been involved in the development of this information ensuring it was accessible to that client group.
- 143** We undertook a range of mystery shopping exercises to test the accessibility of services and found variable responses. In all cases we were able to find the appropriate contact information on the website, where appropriate with 24-hour access. In cases about homelessness, domestic violence and older people needing support, phone calls were handled well and characterised by:
- pleasant, helpful and well informed staff who were able to give the callers the right information; and
 - explanations on referral procedures, details of other support networks and connections to relevant departments were given.
- 144** However, a call in respect of a young person with learning difficulties needing to be near family was poorly dealt with. Staff on duty were unable to provide adequate information and support at point of contact or refer to the relevant departments to solve the query. As a result the caller was referred to four different departments, who were not helpful, before finally receiving the help required.

²⁴

Spkweb - Supporting People Knowledge website.

- 145** A call in respect of an older person paying for services was also poorly dealt with. Staff on duty were not able to provide any adequate support, help or information regarding the query. As a result the caller was referred to five different departments with none able to provide support or any information. The process took over 60 minutes; it appeared that staff did not know or have access to the information needed.
- 146** We visited a local office and were kept waiting for nearly 30 minutes with no information offered on when we were likely to be seen. During the wait poor customer care towards other service users was witnessed, and an unwillingness on the part of staff to assist a person with learning disabilities likely to become homeless within 28 days was experienced. All housing service staff are required to undertake customer care training and reception staff are expected to undertake reception skills training. It is clear that this has not been effective fully.
- 147** There is no separate complaints procedure for Supporting People. Complaints in connection with the programme or services can be made through the departmental procedure. The Council expect complaints to be made in the first instance with the provider and monitor how many are made and whether they are responded to within the target times. Performance over 2005/06 show only 3 per cent of service users (47) making complaints to their providers and only 13 per cent failed to be dealt with within the target time.
- 148** However, the records showed for the Council only one complaint made through the corporate complaints route. This conflicts with the circumstances we found during site visits and discussions with service users where a number of complaints were made which have not been logged with the Council indicating that existing arrangements do not encourage service users to seek help with poor service from the Council (see Outcomes for service users).

Diversity

- 149** The Council can demonstrate several strengths in this area but they are undermined by a substantial weakness in relation to compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) where performance is poor and progress is slow. In other aspects there is a strong commitment to providing access to Supporting People services for all irrespective of background and personal needs.
- 150** The Council is not Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. The best value performance indicator for 2005/06 shows compliance at 28.4 per cent. The Council's target is to be 25 per cent compliant at the end of 2005/06 and, although achieved, is well outside the target of full compliance with the legislation by October 2005. This is poor performance and undermines fair access for people with physical disability. There is an action plan in place to improve the physical access to Council buildings but will take several years to complete.

- 151 LBWF has identified a range of demographic information about the diverse groups resident in the borough. This information has been extensively used to formulate the priorities in the five year strategy on the basis of identified need. Sources for the information include ONS census data, local BME strategies, data from specialist services, surveys run by the Supporting People team and research commissioned by health, social care and probation services partners. In addition ethnicity information is drawn from client record data, or providers are required to provide an ethnicity snapshot of current service users. This helps the Council to monitor accessibility of services by people from BME communities.
- 152 However, it is not clear how this information is kept up to date. For example, there is a gap in provision for an increasing number of people from Eastern Europe coming in to the borough but this has not yet been addressed. This is despite complaints being received from local people highlighting unmet need. The need has now been identified by the Equality Impact Assessment on the five year strategy and is included in the 2006/07 action plan. In the meantime any specialist provision which may be needed is not being planned for, so some people will have to wait for longer for assistance.
- 153 The Council shows a commitment to ensuring the programme delivers outcomes for people from diverse backgrounds in the following ways.
- In respect of people with LD current services are fairly representative of the ethnic makeup of the local population.
 - Corporately the Council has attained Level 3 of the Equality Standard and is working towards Level 4.
 - Staff across the Council are broadly similar in makeup to the community which should make the services more sensitive and knowledgeable about other cultures.
 - Using additional resources to collect data on excluded and hard to reach groups for the five-year strategy.
 - The Rainbow project (for older people) has built in specific activities to meet the cultural and religious needs of services users.
 - Supporting People leaflets and newsletters can be made available in a range of formats and community languages.
 - Auto translations in the main community languages are available on the website which helps people to access information on services.

- 154** We undertook a number of mystery shopping calls and found that staff responded well on diversity issues. For example:
- a service user's faith was mentioned during contact and the staff highlighted services which could cater for needs and cultural beliefs;
 - a caller on domestic violence was given five different refuge contact numbers outside of the borough if the caller did not wish to remain in the local area; and
 - the homelessness team was able to access translation facilities out of office hours.
- 155** Information on need has led to the development of Y Stop project for young people fleeing forced marriages. This has been developed in partnership with the London Borough of Redbridge. This facility meets needs which cannot be met in other refuges and expands choice for service users.
- 156** An objective equality impact assessment (EIA) of the five-year strategy was commissioned from a consultant. The negative impacts have been identified resulting from the lack of information on need for specialist services, such as for travellers and offenders and an action plan has been drawn up to address this.

Outcomes for service users

- 157** There is significant evidence of improved outcomes and expanded choice for service users. The Council is making progress against stated priorities in this respect. However, the poor performance on delivering affordable housing has a significant impact on providing move on accommodation which is a big issue for service users. While the outcomes for most users are positive, we did find some examples of poor service despite all service reviews being completed. This suggests the complaints system is not working effectively.
- 158** The Council has delivered a good range of service improvements for people from different client sectors as a result of the Supporting People programme. These include:
- stock transfer leading to the upgrade of five sheltered schemes to extra care standards benefiting approximately 200 people;
 - de-commissioning and re-commissioning of a substance misuse floating support service jointly funded with drugs commissioners benefiting 25 people;
 - seven bed space scheme providing short-term accommodation for people with MH problems;
 - change of use of an eight bed unit for LD needs;
 - extending night shelter for street homeless as a single site, all year round provision; and
 - expansion of tenant support service in Council accommodation serving over 124 vulnerable tenants.

- 159 These services all relate to targets in the five year strategy annual plan, are based on local needs and strategic priorities and are outcomes from the service review programme.
- 160 Choice for service users is being expanded in the borough particularly in providing more alternatives to residential care. The programme has been key in delivering the Valuing People agenda for people with LD by delivering accommodation which enables people to live independently with support. There is an increase in the range of accommodation for people with complex needs. Choice is promoted through the choice based lettings scheme supported by targeted information such as the 'Place to Live' information pack for people with LD. This is well written and clear and was developed with service users.
- 161 However, the Council is presently dealing with an issue about the allocation of housing through the housing register via the choice based lettings scheme. The impact is for people with complex needs who are not being well served and therefore reduces the effectiveness of the Council's approach in this area.
- 162 During the site visits we found that all service users had support plans. These have been checked and monitored through the two-stage process of the service reviews. This is an essential requirement for Supporting People grant payment. LBWF has taken a systematic approach to support plans and service users are well aware of them, taking part in their development and monitoring. There is a clear promotion of independent living meeting the Council's and national objectives.
- 163 Many of the service users we spoke to were happy with their environment and accommodation, the interaction with staff, and the support and help they were receiving. Many of the staff we spoke to in the various schemes were professional, knowledgeable, supportive and helpful. In the majority of cases we found that beneficial outcomes were being obtained helping people to be better motivated, confident and positive about the future.
- 164 Case studies illustrating the benefits of the Supporting People programme in Waltham Forest are set out below.

Case Study 1

Ms P was a former street homeless applicant who was referred to a single homelessness project. She had experienced abuse and violence in two marriages and suffered from serious health problems; pancreatitis and liver disease.

Staff supported Ms P to remain abstinent from alcohol to improve her health and she has been successfully resettled into sheltered accommodation.

Case Study 2

Mr C has chronic schizophrenia who was supported in supported housing for three years. During this period the service user set himself high goals and achievements which have been accomplished including acting as a spokesperson in tenant meetings and acceptance onto a housing board. The service user still keeps in touch with the scheme and has agreed to do a short film based on where he was at one point in his life and where he is now.

Mr C has successfully moved on to independent living.

- 165** The overwhelming issue for providers was about a lack of move on accommodation (see delivery arrangements) and the Council has not fully addressed this issue. Corporately the Council has failed to deliver against its own targets in respect of affordable housing units averaging only 67 per cent over a three-year period against the Council's target of 161 additional homes; the performance is even worse when compared to the London Plan target of 230 homes per annum. Subsidy has up until now come from the Regional Housing Board and Housing Corporation.
- 166** The Council has just agreed to use discounted or free land towards subsidising affordable housing; this assumes that the land is suitable for development and that the proper infrastructure is available. There is no agreement to use capital receipts for the development of affordable housing, which would allow for more flexibility, for example investment in re-designated or refurbished dwellings, and might therefore ease the pressure for move on accommodation.
- 167** The impact of failing to address the issue of inadequate move on accommodation is for people to be unable to continue making progress, remain in inappropriate accommodation and prevent others in need from obtaining access.
- 168** During the site visits we came across a number of problems that the Council were either not aware of or had not been able to resolve. Systems currently in place to monitor outcomes and quality of service delivery are not effective. This includes access to the complaints process where despite our findings only one complaint for Supporting People services was recorded. Issues include the following.
- During a visit to a person with LD and other support needs and in receipt of floating support, we found that repairs had been outstanding for some time, for example the gas fire was not working and there were inadequate cooking facilities. Hygiene conditions in the flat were very poor despite the involvement of a support worker for twelve months. Support provided had not been effective in addressing the individual's issues. The Council are monitoring the level of support delivered by this provider as a result of the service review.

- During a visit to a specialist sheltered housing scheme service users told us that they do not feel that staff take their needs seriously, are complacent and too slow to act on their needs. We were also told that service users feel they do not have a life at all and the scheme was God's waiting room. People do not take part in social activities, feel lonely and depressed and felt there was a need for more support. This is despite previous evidence given to the Council which highly rated the service and a separate positive review by consultants.
- In the same scheme service users were encouraged to take computer lessons and as a result a computer was bought for their sole use with internet access availability. This had been withdrawn by staff and service users were advised they must use the staff computer which removed privacy and undermined developing independence. The Council has taken this up with the provider.

169 A range of other issues were raised with us in discussions with service users.

- In one scheme, the change in the role of sheltered scheme managers meant they were no longer able to support social activities as they had before leaving it to service users who often find it too much responsibility so they no longer take place. The SHOPS research identified this as a key problem in 2004 so action plans to address the issues do not appear to have been effective although there are clear targets to do so.
- Service users with LD felt that there is a high turnover of staff now and in order to meet contractual obligations a lot of contract and agency staff are now being used and service users are unable to build relationships with the temporary staff which undermines the benefits of the service.
- Service users receiving floating support were not clear that if they were offered accommodation it would be long term. The Council confirmed that long term accommodation is offered to those in temporary provision. This indicates that communication on this issue is not effective with all service users.

Summary

- 170** We have assessed the administration of the Supporting People programme by the London borough of Waltham Forest to be a 'fair', one-star service.
- 171** The Council made an early start with establishing arrangements for the programme and has met the milestone targets set out by the ODPM. The relationship between the partners has been well developed and there is an open and positive relationship with providers. Delivery arrangements are strong and the small, stable Supporting People team has worked hard to keep the programme on track and put in place the day to day requirements of policies and processes. The service review programme has been completed in an effective and efficient way. Internal and external relationships are positive and the team is well thought of. Service user involvement is an integral part of the programme and outcomes are generally positive. Cross authority working is delivering results in respect of specialist provision for small numbers of people, and value for money through benchmarking. Service costs are low, the administration grant is well managed and the Council has robust financial management arrangements in place.
- 172** Overall there is ample evidence of improvements to services since the implementation of the programme and on the whole service users are happy with the standard of accommodation and the services they receive. Service users' access to services are particularly well supported through the website. Information for people with LD is well developed.
- 173** However, we found some significant poor quality outcomes for some service users, and a lack of effective mechanisms to deal with them despite the completion of the service reviews. There were some poor responses to mystery shopping in respect of customer care which indicate that the related services to Supporting People are not consistent and high quality. The low levels of move on accommodation impact on service users and serve to undermine the effectiveness of the overall programme. Some weakness in the delivery arrangements exists in contract management, the formal updating of needs information and monitoring outcomes. The Council is not DDA compliant and plans to improve the situation will take several years. The Supporting People programme has been officer led in order to meet central government requirements and leadership has been patchy through the Commissioning Body. There are weaknesses in performance management and strategic direction with members of the Core Strategy Group being unclear about their role and responsibilities. Lack of consistent attendance across all relevant sectors has also undermined the group's effectiveness.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 174 LBWF has a good track record in delivering improved and additional services through the Supporting People programme. There are transparent monitoring arrangements in place to encourage continuous improvement through the QAF²⁵ action plans. Savings obtained through the service review programme have been reinvested in realigning services with strategic priorities. All key areas of performance have improved over time although two remain in the worst 25 per cent compared with other London boroughs.
- 175 Arrangements for the administration of the Supporting People programme were put in place at an early stage. This has allowed for the smooth implementation of the programme and meeting of all ODPM milestones within the target time. This includes the programme of service reviews. The outcome has been a range of improvements to services through the QAF and follow-up action plans.
- 176 Action plans are monitored through the re review programme for those schemes where interim, short-term contracts are awarded. There are 34 so far in the 2006/07 programme. For others this is undertaken through an annual self assessment to promote continuous improvement, and spot checks which are a requirement of the QAF.
- 177 A good example of the types of outcomes being achieved is for offenders. The Supporting People programme has contributed to an increase in bed spaces from 35 to 49. Since 2003 there is better quality provision due to a robust service review process using QAF. This allows for drilling down for evidence of effectiveness, better understanding by probation services of the profile of service in the borough and helping to raise the profile of offenders' needs.
- 178 From the perspective of people with LD, strong, joint working internally with the Supporting People team has resulted in the delivery of pipeline schemes which is significantly advancing the corporate aim of developing independent living. Key to making this happen is the Supporting People team working together with the LD partnership to move the agenda forward. The approach to reviews has been structured and effective and remedial plans were put into place to improve services before issuing the steady state contracts.

²⁵

QAF - Quality Assessment Framework.

- 179** Service users have benefited from the programme in a range of ways.
- The development of specialist services for older offenders and those with LD.
 - Receiving a range of feedback from staff through face to face contact, correspondence and newsletters.
 - Enabled to develop new skills and manage their own affairs through training such as book keeping, using computers.
 - Older tenants encouraged to make decisions on their own by forming an in house committee.
 - Bidding for funds amounting to £2,700 through the lottery commission to fund Tai Chi lessons to aid mobility.
- 180** As a result of the completion of the first round of service reviews LBWF has made £511,000 savings and demonstrated an effective approach to value for money. Strategic relevance has also been improved through the robust process and savings have been used to reconfigure services in line with local needs.
- 181** Outcomes have been improved for service users through the joint commissioning of new projects to meet a wider range of needs. Examples include Y Stop for young people fleeing arranged marriages and the substance misuse project developed in partnership with the London Borough of Redbridge.
- 182** Service performance has improved in most key areas related to Supporting People. Full details are set out in the Appendices, but report nationally audited figures only from 2003/04. Figures provided by LBWF for 2004/05 are audited but not published against comparators. The figures for 2005/06 are unaudited.
- 183** There has been improvement across a wide range of adult social care performance during 2004/05 with success most notable in the time taken to complete assessments and provide services.
- 184** Intermediate care services continued to develop and more people used them. Emergency hospital admissions have been stabilised and the new enabling policy is improving care planning. There is good focus on promoting independence and more people with disabilities are being supported to live at home with fewer admitted to residential care. More people are being provided with direct payments across a wider range of service groups. There has been continued progress in reshaping services for adults with mental health problems and people with learning disabilities, although the shift to community and home based services is not yet complete.

- 185** Best value performance has also improved from 2003/04 to 2004/05 in housing related areas with energy efficiency in council owned dwellings and numbers of domestic violence refuge places improving to be among the best 25 per cent. The average time for processing new housing benefit claims improves from the bottom 25 per cent to the middle 50 per cent in 2004/05. There has been substantial improvement in this area during April 2005 to February 2006 with performance ranking with the best 25 per cent at an average of 27 days. Local Supporting People targets are being met in terms of service availability and the utilisation of services. The target for bringing dwellings back into use has exceeded a challenging target of 430 by 27 and this was reached in February 2006.
- 186** Although there is improvement in performance, the following remain in the bottom 25 per cent for unaudited performance for 2005/06.
- BV184a - council homes meeting the decent homes standard at 74.4 per cent compared to top 25 per cent performance of 51 per cent.
 - BV78A - average time for processing housing benefit change of circumstances at 29 days against a top 25 per cent performance of 9.7 days.
- 187** In respect of housing benefits assessments for change of circumstances, this is most likely to have the greatest impact on vulnerable claimants and potentially lead to homelessness among tenants from private sector rented accommodation where many vulnerable people reside.

How does the service manage performance?

- 188** Strengths balance weaknesses in this area and include the development of the five year strategy which provides a firm basis for future development of the programme, and learning from good practice as well as disseminating it to others. The Council has performed well in respect of bringing properties back into use; top 25 per cent compared with other London councils. The weaknesses include the delivery of move on accommodation, leadership of the programme, monitoring of outcomes, making proactive use of performance information, and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance arrangements.
- 189** The five year strategy provides a firm basis for the future planning of the programme. The effort and information which has gone into developing the strategy, together with the wide ranging consultation process make it a good driver for improvement. The aims, objectives and priorities are clear to the extent of prioritising between client groups in line with identified needs. For example, LBWF is changing services for older people recognising that numbers overall are falling. In contrast numbers from BME backgrounds are increasing, but overall there is a need for greater numbers of extra care schemes and a reduction in sheltered schemes. The detailed requirements for all client groups are the building blocks for the combined output of both internal and external partners as well as the expanding level of joint commissioning of services.

- 190** There is both an action plan for the strategy and an annual Service Operation Plan for the Supporting People team. Progress against the targets is reported through the monthly performance schedule using a traffic light system and is presented to the housing and neighbourhood's senior management team.
- 191** The action plan for the strategy is capable of driving improvements to the delivery of the programme and the plan is updated quarterly. However, a number of activities are not making appropriate progress and are highlighted as amber using a traffic light system. In the main these link to additional provision of both supported accommodation and floating support. Areas under the control of the Supporting People team are progressing well. There is, however, a lack of interventions highlighted for the areas not making good progress indicating a passive approach from other Council services. The impact will be to further worsen delays for people needing these services.
- 192** The service operation plan 2006/07 shows clear links to the objectives of the five-year strategy. The Supporting People team has the responsibility of implementing the strategic objectives and a number of related projects and targets. Monitoring of the team's progress is formally undertaken through reports to the Commissioning Body and the service management team. In addition, progress against targets is discussed with staff during appraisals and individual meeting with managers.
- 193** The impact of mounting 'silting-up' of supported accommodation as a result of poor provision of move on accommodation is not mentioned in the service plan. It is a 'key factor likely to affect service delivery' as there is mounting evidence of barriers to access for people needing the services and the undermining of progress made by those accommodated who no longer need that level of support.
- 194** The Council has made very good progress in returning empty properties back into use through a variety of funding sources such as the single regeneration budget, temporary social housing grant funding through the Housing Corporation, leasing schemes and regional fund for flats above shops. Between 2003 and 2006 1,378 properties have been brought back into use exceeding the overall target of 1,301. This represents performance in the top 25 per cent compared with other London councils.
- 195** However, although these homes will have assisted people who were homeless or threatened with homelessness, they do not provide move on accommodation.

- 196** The Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group's approach to monitoring outcomes is not transparent. Under performance or missed targets are not reported outside of Housing and Neighbourhoods, for example, to councillors and senior officers who are only aware of positive messages concerning Supporting People. For example, it is not apparent that the loss of provision of a six unit step down facility as part of the network of substance misuse services in the borough, to be delivered by April 2006, was reported to councillors. This means that non performance is not being tackled objectively outside of the directorate. In this case the failure to deliver a capital project, which is reliant on other service areas and external agencies performance, has not been challenged. This means that a balanced picture of achievement for the programme is not being presented in a transparent way. This is an area which will be looked at by the performance improvement sub group to the Commissioning Body.
- 197** Performance information returns have been tightened up following criticism from the ODPM. The Supporting People team has given support and explanation to providers to help them to provide the information required. Improvements to the analysis of performance information through the IT system are planned. The team has commissioned enhanced reporting functions through their IT supplier, and this will improve tracking of returns, validity of data and provision of benchmarking performance information across client groups.
- 198** Key performance information was presented to the Core Strategy Group for the first time in March 2006. However, members of the group were not clear about their role and responsibilities in this respect and there was no active consideration and analysis.
- 199** The Supporting People team will benefit from a dedicated additional resource brought into Housing and Neighbourhoods to improve performance management. This has resulted in a basic monitoring system that identifies all the items in service plan, improvement plan, local performance information as well as the BVPI. This was put in place with effect from September 2005. The service as a whole should be in a better position to report on and manage performance and this will underpin planning for continuous improvement, for example, in September 2005 the service only had records to prove processing of approximately 40 per cent of complaints. At the time of the inspection this had improved to 80 per cent.
- 200** There are no individual work plans for the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group. Although members of the groups say they are clear on what they need to achieve in the future with the programme, they were only able to articulate this in the shorter rather than longer term. It was felt by them that the groups' success would be measured by successful outcomes from the action plan of the five-year strategy. This approach lacks ambition and indicates weak leadership. It does not assist with continuous improvement including a regular review and evaluation of structural arrangements to ensure they are operating effectively.

- 201** The Supporting People programme is supported across the political parties in LBWF although Councillors have been slow to take full ownership over the past three years. Supporting People is central to all the Council's main objectives and Councillors are now taking a lead, for example, the management of Supporting People budget reductions was called into Scrutiny Committee to ensure that this would be achieved with the least impact on service users. Unless there is demonstrable leadership for the programme from the decision takers in the organisation future progress is likely to be undermined. This is most visible in the level of response to deal with the poor provision of move on accommodation.
- 202** There is likely to be a greater focus on Supporting People as the Local Strategic Partnership concentrates effort on delivering against the Local Area Agreement particularly in the areas addressing crime, health, and housing.
- 203** LBWF has taken a proactive approach to learning from others and sharing good practice which has been developed in house. The Supporting People team is piloting value for money tools used by other authorities such as Tower Hamlets and North Tyneside. It is also developing further the Council's approach to value for money through benchmarking with the East London region councils. LBWF is leading on gathering up to date cost information with a target of May 2006 to bring it all together to update the costing information which currently dates back to the platinum cut of December 2002.
- 204** Other examples of learning include:
- basing the eligibility criteria on the good practice model developed by the London Borough of Hounslow; and
 - using the provider forum to disseminate good practice, such as service user involvement models, outcome measurement work and managing change including decommissioning of services post review.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 205** There are strengths in this area which outweigh the weaknesses. The main strengths are in the Supporting People team and their capacity to deliver future improvements and strength of partnerships, the change in the way the Council will be supporting the provision of affordable housing and additional resources to increase the capacity of the organisation to deliver more support services for a wide range of service users. There are weaknesses in respect of succession planning and support for the Lead Officer, consistency of training, slow delivery of improvements for physically disabled people accessing council buildings and accessibility of housing benefit advice and assistance. In addition the Council has failed deliver affordable housing to target which impacts on the provision of move on accommodation for vulnerable people.

- 206** The Council has the capacity within the Supporting People team and Accountable Officer to administer the programme. The team is confident and has a good range of skills, experience and ability developed during the successful implementation of the programme. The team has been a stable team with no turnover of staff and over time low rates of absence through sickness. Targets and objectives are clearly set out in the appraisals of each team member and are firmly linked with the five-year strategy and the service operational plan. This makes clear the contribution expected from the team members and provides measurement for continuous progress.
- 207** The Supporting People team is vulnerable in terms of succession planning and support for the Lead Officer. The Lead Officer is a key individual in a small team who is personally responsible for much of the liaison between the team and a wide range of stakeholders in addition to the management of the programme and implementing the five-year strategy. The role has been well developed over time due to the stability of the team. The Accountable Officer is increasingly taking on some of the burden of strategic relationships, for example chairing the Volume Crime Group and becoming a member of the LSP Executive. This allows for the programme to be championed at senior levels. However, with a wide range of responsibilities as Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods support can only be limited. Any negative impact on the Lead Officer could jeopardise future plans along with maintaining the strength of relationships with stakeholders.
- 208** The Supporting People team has used the administration grant creatively to bring in additional resources, such as the consultant to undertake the equality impact assessment work on the five-year strategy. During 2006/07 there are plans to use the grant to bring in additional resources to undertake some work on building up the links between the Supporting People programme and the local area agreement as this is an increasingly important objective for the Council.
- 209** LBWF has a positive approach to training for staff, councillors and other stakeholders such as providers and the voluntary sector. The Council has delivered some training that increases knowledge of Supporting People issues, and this improves the overall capacity to address needs effectively. Training has been provided for the voluntary sector on Supporting People needs and referral arrangements in Waltham Forest in order to raise awareness of provision and encourage more take up.
- 210** The Council has not capitalised on this training though by making it regular and consistent. It needs to be supported by easy access to information for front line staff across partner organisations and other stakeholders. This is needed for new staff and to bring existing staff up to date in a fast changing environment.
- 211** A good partnership with the IT provider has been developed from prior to 2003 which allowed for the smooth implementation of the programme. This allowed for providers to be paid on time through the IT system. The team is planning improvements to performance information through the reporting process which the IT provider is currently developing in conjunction with the Supporting People team.

- 212** Additional resources are being made available to support offenders by the probation service as a clear commitment to the programme. The probation service considers support and accommodation are key to reducing re-offending and risk of harm. To this end, a housing officer will be employed based in the Walthamstow probation office who will work with the Housing Development Officer and the Housing department increasing the resources serving this client group.
- 213** LBWF has committed extra resources for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG); in addition to the £956,000 from the government it is using £409,000 of the Council's own resources during 2005/06. This represents an increase of £175,000 on the previous year. This increased resource is assisting vulnerable people in the borough. This approach has been undertaken in order to offset known reductions in the Council's ability to borrow in subsequent years to fund extra DFG and renovation grants. In this way, the Council has reduced the overall impact for service users.
- 214** The Council has very recently changed its approach to enable the provision of more affordable housing. The Council will sell its own assets at market, submarket and discounted levels to enable the provision of new housing. The new Local Development Framework has a new target of 40 per cent of new homes which must meet the requirements of vulnerable people. Although these steps increase the Council's opportunity of improving the poor performance on delivering new affordable housing, they will not achieve the 230 per annum property target of the London Plan. The impact of the approach will not be evident for at least two to three years given the long lead in time required to develop new housing, but will make a real difference in the longer term for people who need affordable housing and support.
- 215** The Council can demonstrate corporate capacity to improve failing services. This has been achieved for Children's services, and there is confidence at the senior level of the Council that the Chief Executive can and will tackle under-performance firmly and effectively as demonstrated in this service. This confidence extends from senior officers that there is the political will to redirect resources to tackle issues of priority.
- 216** Staff have led the implementation of Supporting People to date. However, leading councillors have an understanding of Supporting People and with the creation of the Adults and Older People Scrutiny Panel with a dedicated portfolio holder, there is a growing understanding of the importance of the programme in achieving corporate goals. The capacity of backbenchers is being increased through awareness raising sessions delivered by providers. These measures increase ownership at a political level and should lead to greater constructive challenge from councillors, while raising the profile of what the programme is achieving.

- 217** In some areas the Council has been slow to achieve identified improvements. A significant example of this is the lack of progress to make Council buildings DDA compliant. In respect of directly related services to the Supporting People programme, the need to improve housing benefit advice and access to services was identified during 2002/03. Despite this, improved access through one-stop-shop services did not take place until August 2005 and has been rolled out since that time. However, this delay is offset by the significant improvements to performance which have been made to dealing with housing benefits assessments, and this has directly impacted positively on service users.
- 218** The team has been successful in attracting inward investment to deliver improvements and expanding the service provision of the programme. Notable examples include the following.
- The encouragement and commissioning of partnership working in Supporting People projects such as the Rainbow project which involves three registered social landlords and joint working with health partners to provide holistic support for older people.
 - LBWF were selected as one of only six Supporting People health projects nationally which involved assessing the housing needs of people with LD in residential care. As a result improved information on housing choices was developed.
 - A successful bid of £507,000 was made to the Department of Health Extra Care funding to upgrade one further sheltered scheme to extra care standards including meeting the needs of people with dementia.
- 219** Additional resources are being levered in by the Council to increase accommodation provision for people with housing and support needs. Examples include £434,000 from the Regional Housing Board in 2006/07 being used to convert existing properties into larger family units. This is aimed at assisting people with special needs and disability as well as their carers. A £0.5 million grant from central government is being directed at meeting the decent homes standard (DHS) in respect of improving thermal comfort for vulnerable people. In this sector a local LEEAC²⁶ grant of £100,000 has been obtained to undertake energy conservation work in Council housing. These measures will improve physical conditions and reduce fuel poverty for a range of vulnerable people. A recent stock condition survey indicates that the DHS target for vulnerable people in the private sector could be achieved by 2010.

²⁶ LEEAC - London Energy Efficiency Advice Centre.

Summary

- 220** Our judgement is that the Council's Supporting People programme has 'promising' prospects for improvement.
- 221** The programme has been well implemented and there has been strong financial management combined with a robust service review process which will continue to deliver service improvements for current service users. Outcomes for users have been largely positive. Savings on the Supporting People grant and through the service reviews have been used to support existing services and additional services have been commissioned. The Council has done well in attracting inward investment which has resulted in direct improvements for service users. Councillors are gaining in capacity and understanding of the impact of Supporting People which should enable them to strengthen their leadership role. Changes in the approach to enabling affordable housing could deliver more move on accommodation in the future based on a robust assessment of needs and prioritisation of new services through the five-year strategy. Most performance indicators have improved over time and there is a significant increase in top performance. Learning from the good practice of high performers has strengthened the capacity of a small team and they have been able to share good practice they have developed with others and improved the quality of service delivery by disseminating good practice among providers.
- 222** However, performance management has been patchy and there is a lack of clarity about the roles of the Core Strategy Group members in monitoring and tackling any areas of low performance. The monitoring of outcomes is weak and the Council has recognised this and has put arrangements in place to deal with it. The effectiveness of governance arrangements has been patchy and this has not been helped with a lack of action planning to enable the evaluation of the effectiveness of the arrangements. There is current poor performance on delivering affordable housing which impacts on people needing move on accommodation. Performance is in the bottom 25 per cent for council homes meeting the DHS, and time taken to deal with housing benefit changes that has a direct impact on vulnerable people. Of great concern is the non-compliance with DDA legislation and the inability of the Council to achieve this in the near future.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Table 3 Demographic information

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

Measure	Waltham Forest	England
Population (mid-2004) ²⁷	221,800	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	13.2	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	35.5	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ²⁸	4.2	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ²⁹	44	-

²⁷ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

²⁸ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (December 2005)

²⁹ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

Figure 1 Percentage of the population³⁰ in each age group compared with England

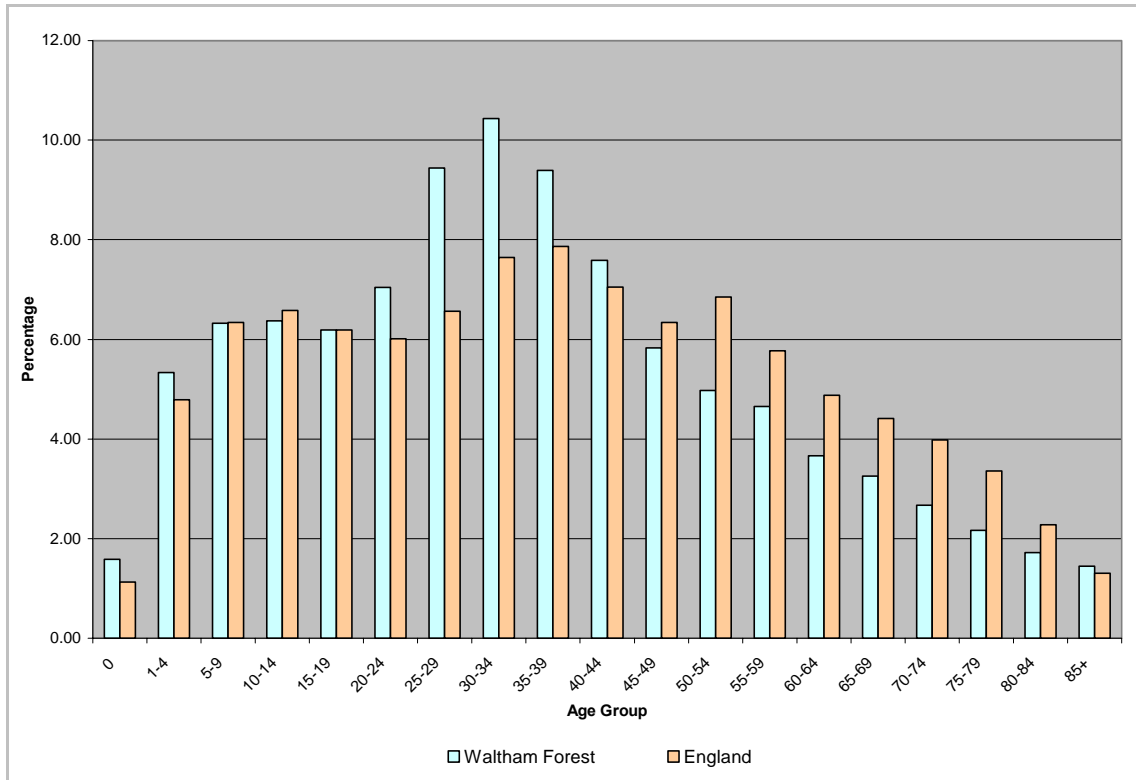
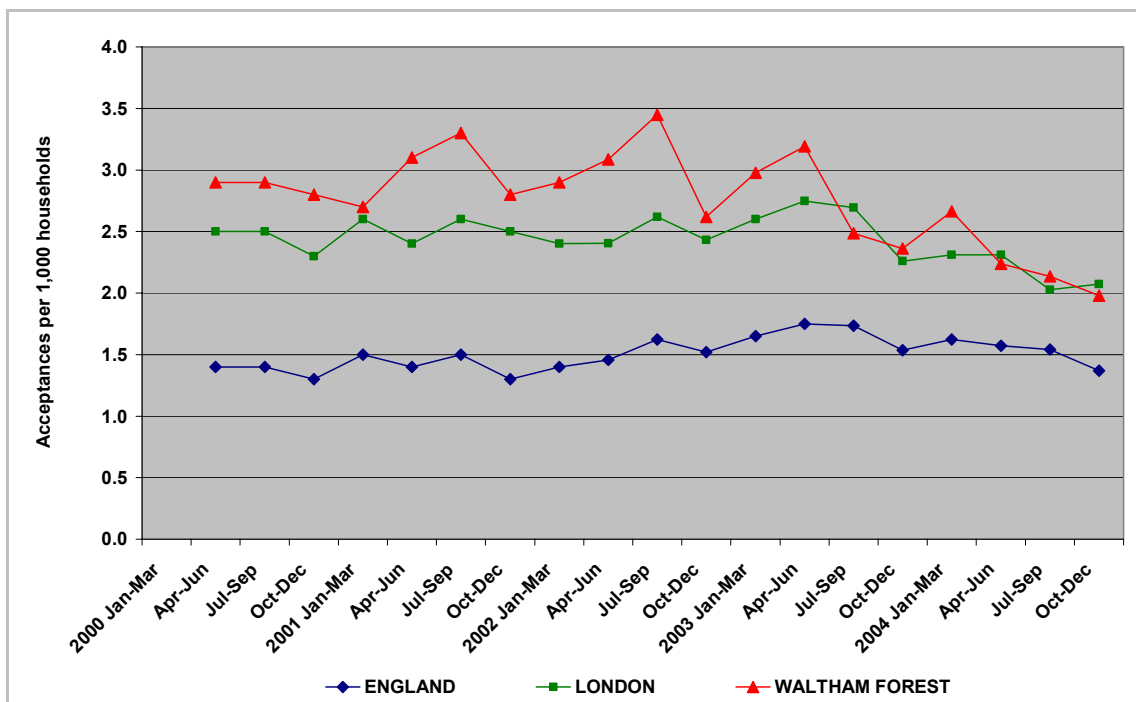


Figure 2 Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



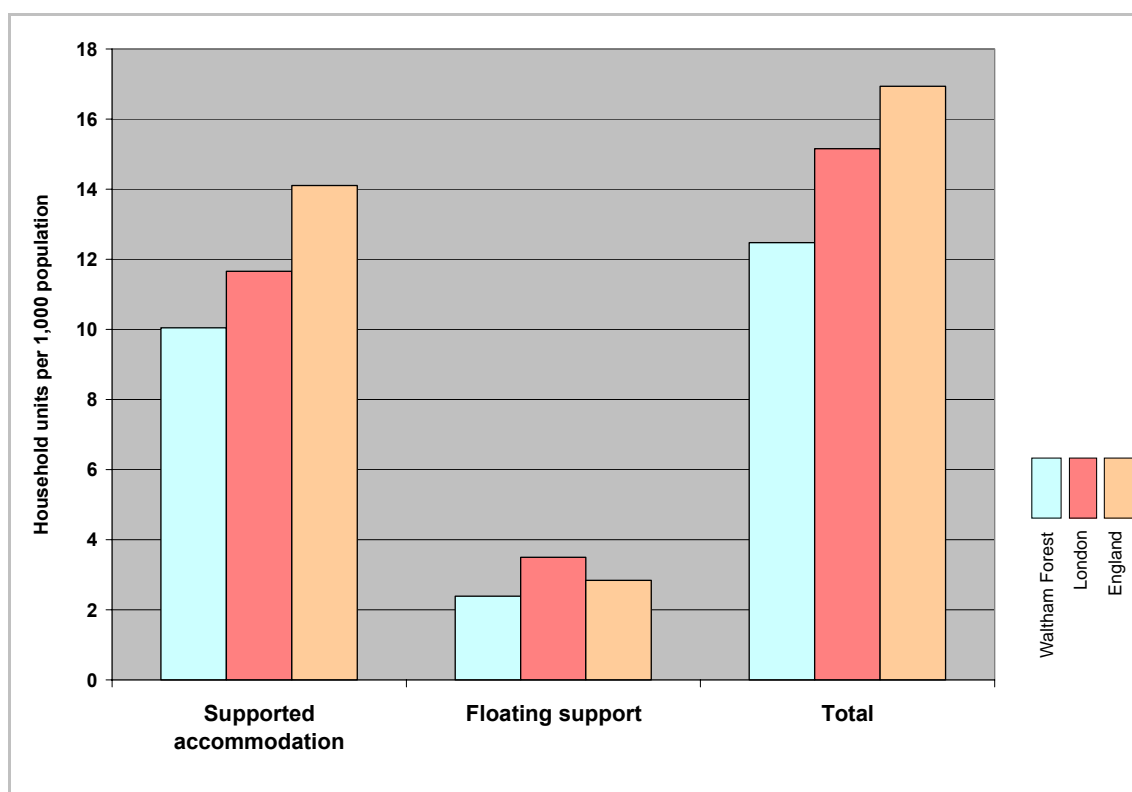
³⁰ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

Performance information

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

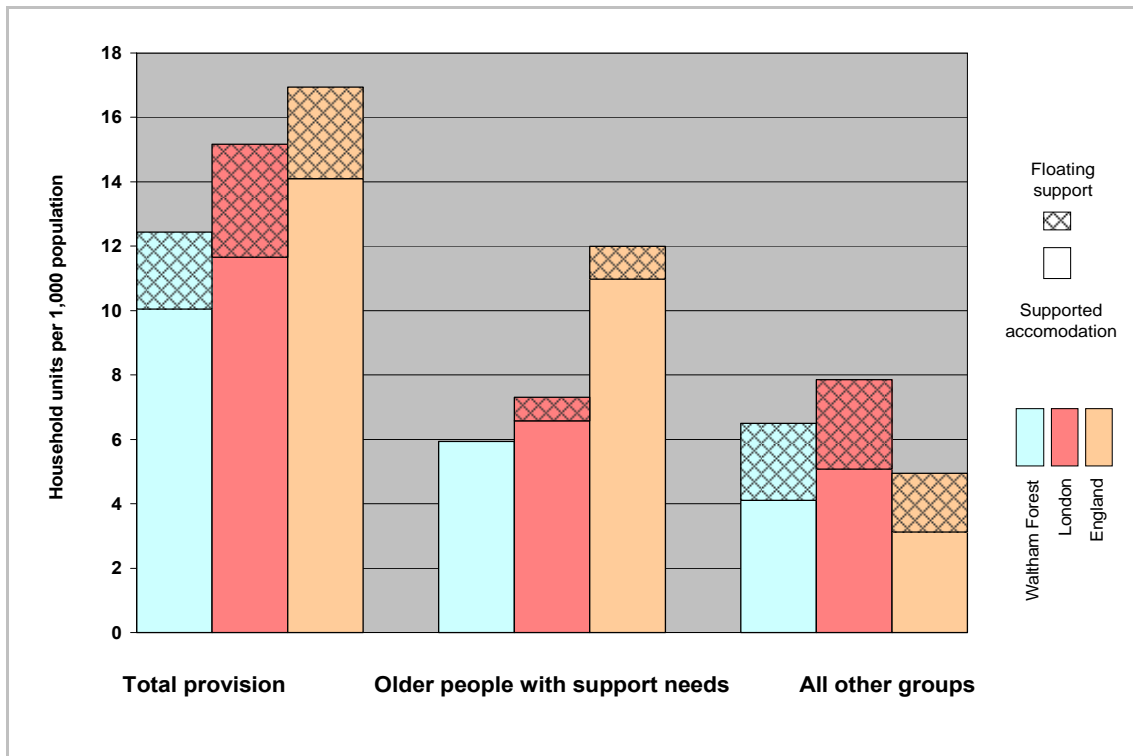
Supporting People data

Figure 3 Total service provision funded through Supporting People³¹



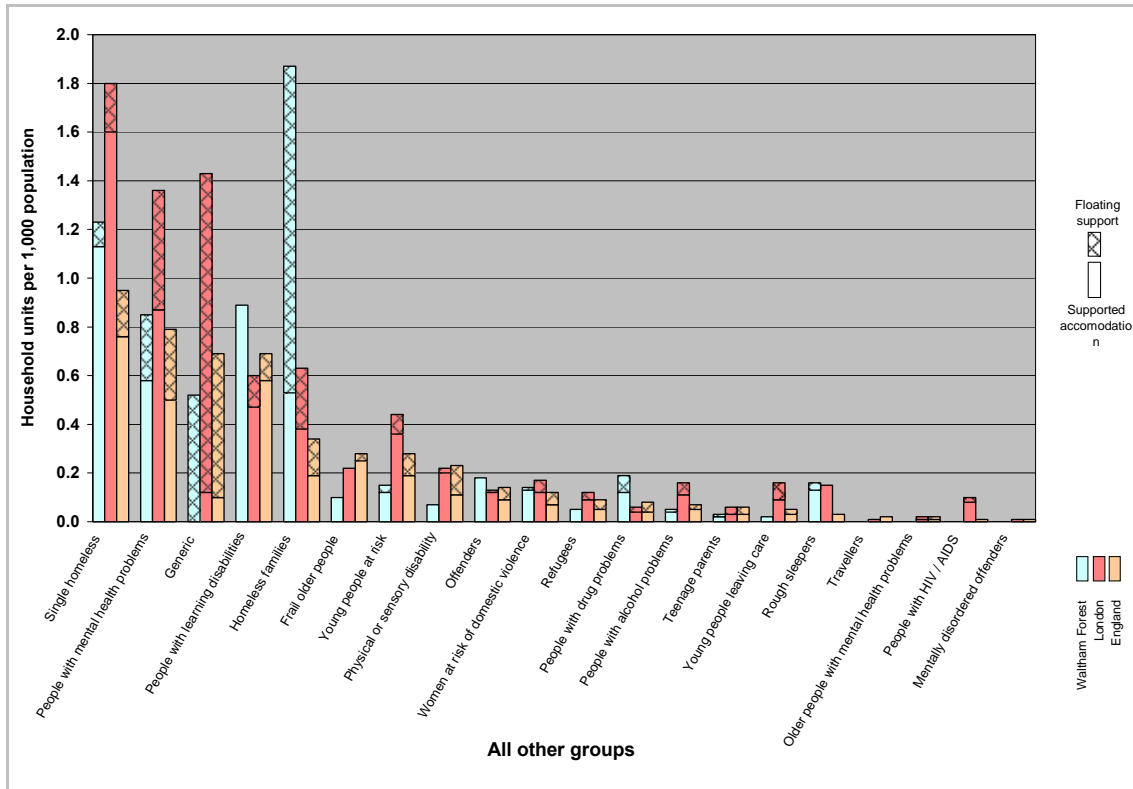
³¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 4 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England³²



³² 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 England³³



³³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Table 4 Funding for Supporting People³⁴

Waltham Forest	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 7,934,650	£ 7,967,877	£ 7,666,158
Pipeline allocation	£ 189,654	£ 371,712	£ -
Administration grant	£ 263,019	£ 256,927	£ 264,635

Table 5 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)³⁵

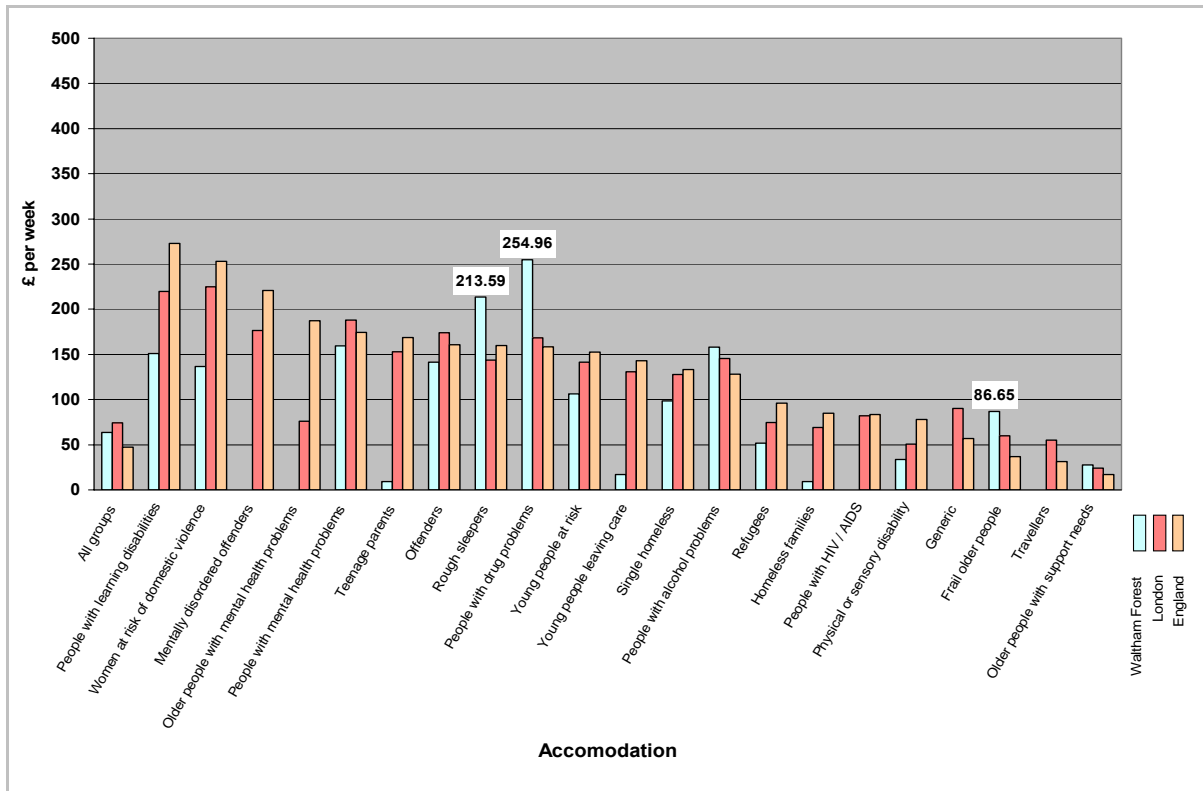
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Waltham Forest	£ 0.68	£ 47.37	£ 47.37	£ 64.20
London	£ 0.97	£ 42.37	£ 48.73	£ 68.40
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

Source: 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.

³⁴ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

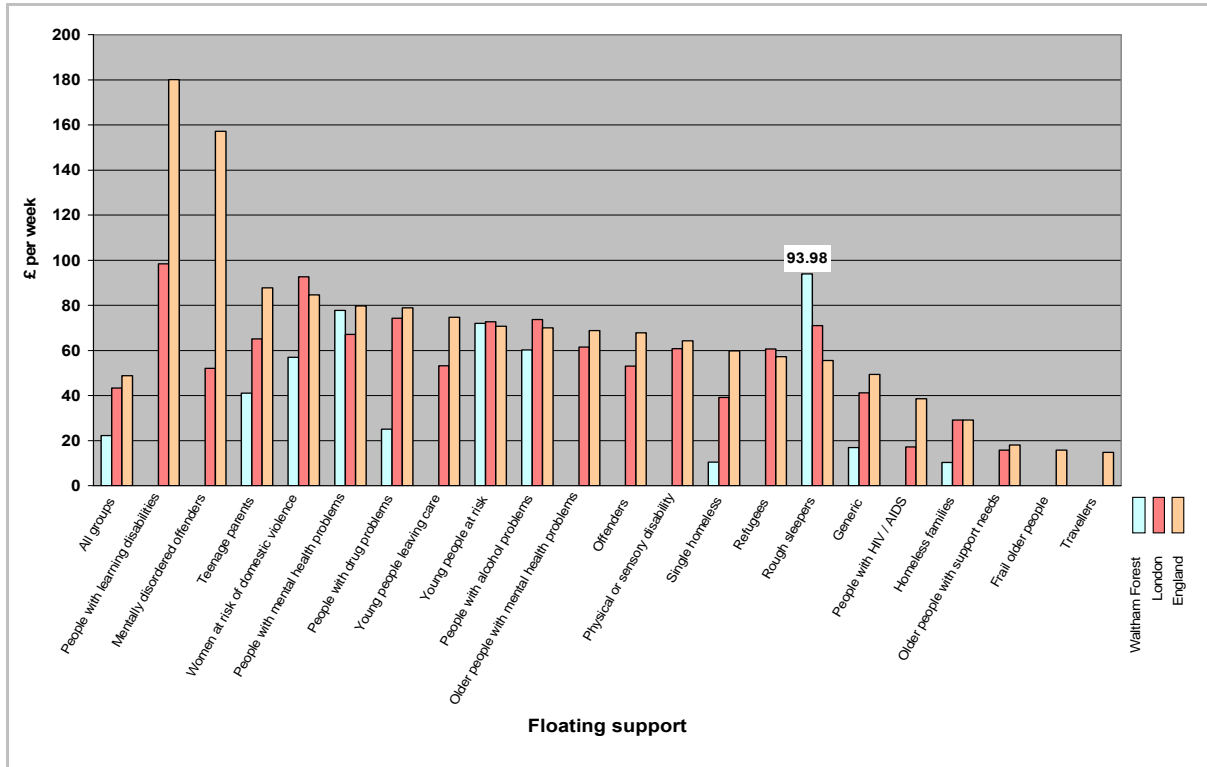
³⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

Figure 6 Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) ³⁶



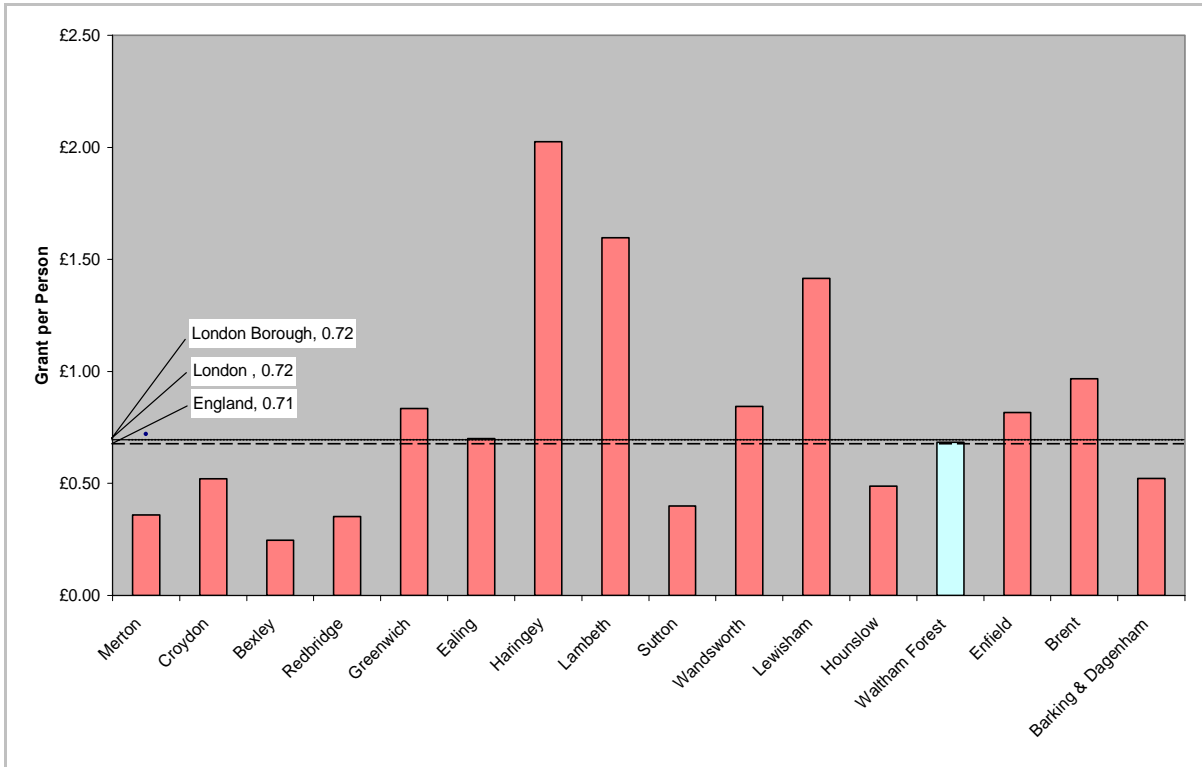
³⁶ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 7 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) ³⁷



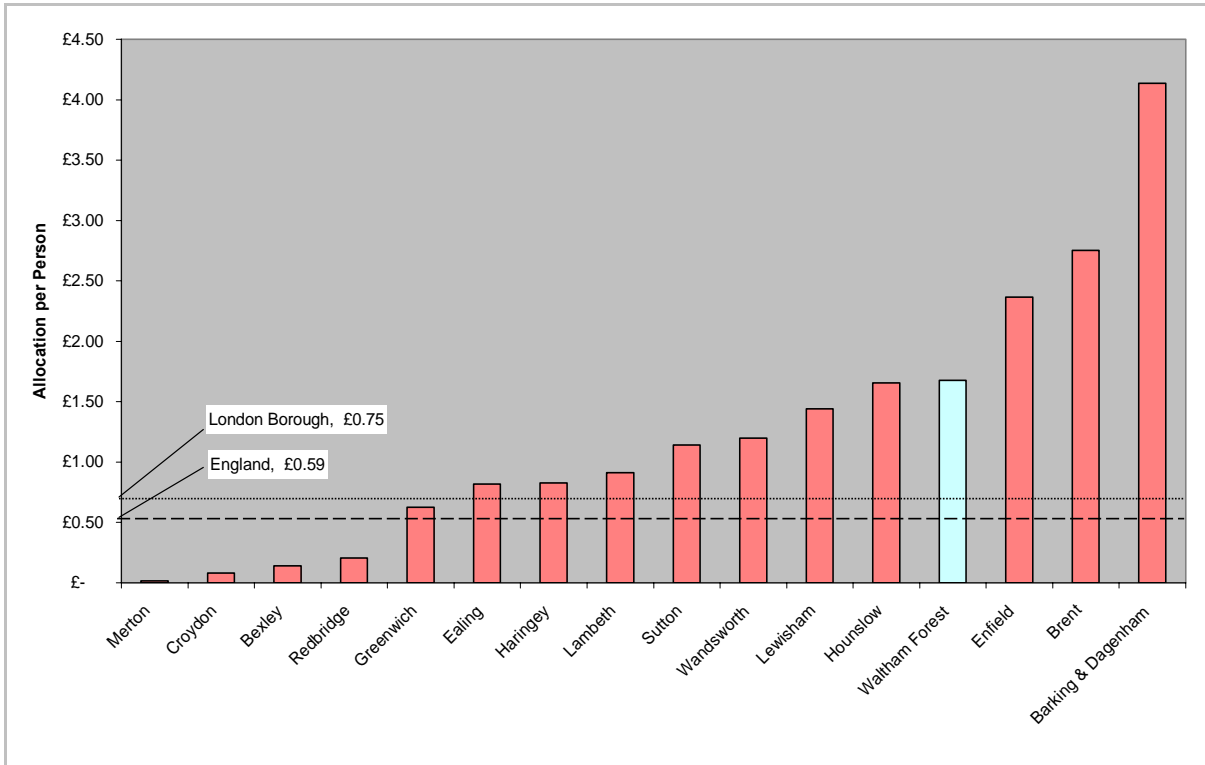
³⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Figure 8 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours³⁸, all London boroughs and all English councils (2004/05)



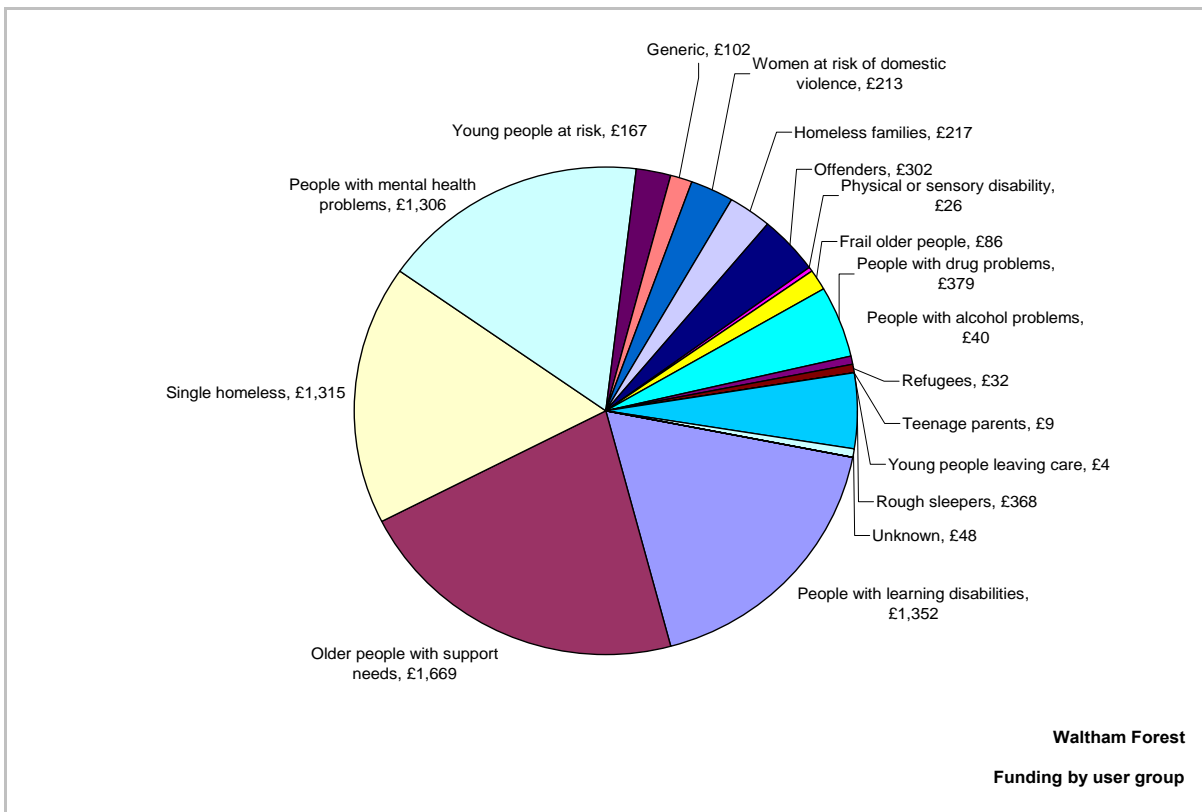
³⁸ A comparator group of similar councils.

Figure 9 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours³⁹, all London boroughs and all English councils.



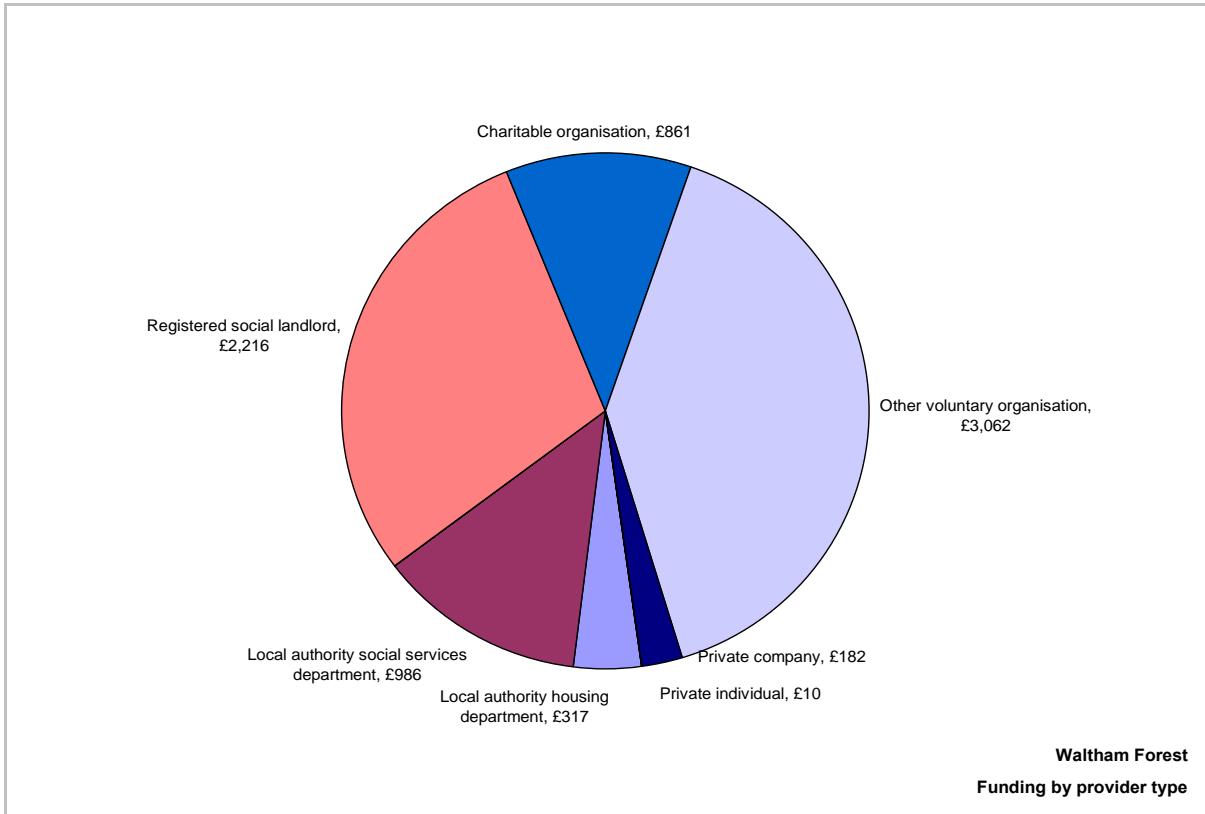
³⁹ A comparator group of similar councils.

Figure 10 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)⁴⁰



⁴⁰ 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)⁴¹



⁴¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Table 6 Social Services start 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	★ (1)
Children's Services	Some	Promising	

Social services performance indicators

Table 7 Performance Assessment Framework indicators

The table below shows how the Council's social services performed on indicators relevant to Supporting people and trend over two years

Waltham Forest	2003/04	2004/05
Significantly above average (•••••)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31). Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26). Employment, education & training for care leavers (A4).	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31). Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26). Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4). (Up) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54).
Above average (••••)	Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54).	(Up) Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6).

Waltham Forest	2003/04	2004/05
Average (***)	<p>Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6). Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51). Delayed transfers of care (D41).</p>	<p>(Down) Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27). Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31st March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51). Delayed transfers of care (D41). (Up) Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40). (Up) Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39). (Up) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29). (Up) Adults with LD helped to live at home (C30). (Up) Older people helped to live at home (C32).</p>

Waltham Forest	2003/04	2004/05
Below average (••)	<p>Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40).</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39).</p> <p>Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29).</p> <p>Adults with LD helped to live at home (C30).</p> <p>Older people helped to live at home (C32).</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57) This PI was not collected in 2004/05.</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58) This PI was not collected in 2004/05.</p>	
Significantly below average (•)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5).	A5 no longer a BVPI

Best value performance indicators

Table 8 Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with London Boroughs

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

Waltham Forest	2003/04	2004/05
Within the best 25 per cent	<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>BV2 retained position.</p> <p>BV183a retained position.</p> <p>(Up) Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63).</p> <p>(Up) Domestic violence refuge places (BV176).</p>
Average	<p>Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63).</p> <p>Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b).</p> <p>Domestic violence refuge places (BV176).</p>	<p>BV183b retained position.</p> <p>(Up) Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a).</p>

Waltham Forest	2003/04	2004/05
Within the worst 25 per cent	<p>Council homes which did not meet the decent homes standard (BV184a).</p> <p>Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a).</p> <p>Average time for processing change of circumstances for housing benefit claims (BV78b).</p>	<p>BV 184a retained position.</p> <p>BV78b retained position.</p>

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 following.
- 2 Corporate documents.
 - Area and council profile.
 - Community strategy.
 - Vision for Waltham Forest.
 - Better Care Higher Standards.
 - Charging Policy Summary 2005-06.
- 3 Service documents.
 - Self-assessment by the authority.
 - Supporting People Strategy 2005 – 2010.
 - Minutes of Commissioning Body, Core Strategy Group and Provider Forum meetings and reports.
 - Reports to Cabinet.
 - Supporting People Service Operation Plan.
 - Service Review Timetable.
 - Summary of Reviews completed.
 - Financial reports and ODPM data.
 - Service user leaflets and newsletters.
 - SHOP, HEAT and SPHERE reports.
 - QAF Summary.
 - Range of client strategies.

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:
 - interviews with key personnel, including Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group representatives, Supporting People team, senior managers, partner organisations, providers and leading councillors;
 - visits to 19 services funding by the Supporting People grant, including interviews with managers, staff and service users;
 - questionnaire to service providers funded by the Supporting People grant in Waltham Forest;
 - mystery shopping phone calls and visits;
 - focus groups with a range of providers from a range of services, service users, and staff from related services; and
 - review of files.

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)

Management of service review outcomes

- 1 Use of interim contracts and re reviews to monitor improvements agreed through the quality assurance framework action plan.

User involvement in Supporting People programme

- 2 User led sector reviews and validation visits supported by training and facilitated by an independent, customer focussed consultant.