

# Supporting People Inspection

**Plymouth City Council**

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## Supporting People Inspections

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

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing](http://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 former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), now Department for Communities and Local Government, 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](http://www.spkweb.org.uk).

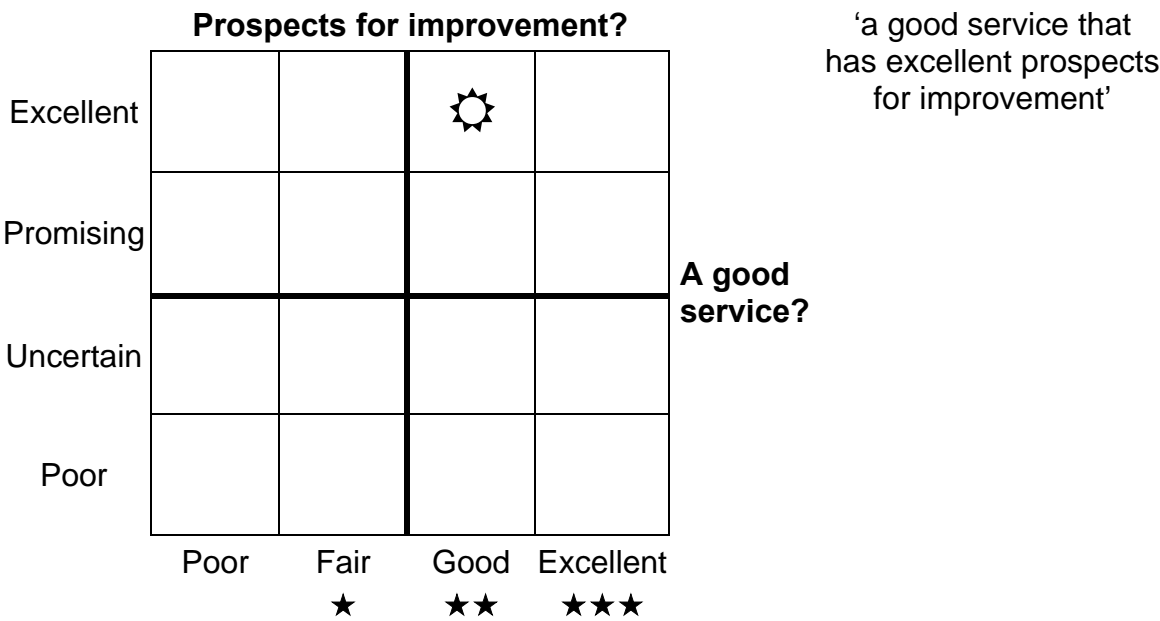
## Summary

- 1** Plymouth City Council is a unitary authority in the south west of England. It is the second largest city in the south west after Bristol. The population of the area is 244,440 people and has been relatively static since 1991 but it is set to rise by 13.7 per cent by 2021. Ninety-seven per cent of the population are of white British origin, compared to 87 per cent in England as a whole, but the ethnic minority population of the city is growing.
- 2** The Council is Labour-led but with only 28 of the 57 seats. A leader and cabinet model of political governance was adopted in 2002. The Council overall was judged to be improving adequately and demonstrating a two-star out of a possible four-star overall performance in the 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- 3** Plymouth City Council employs 11,400 staff across all services. The Council's budget for 2005/06 was £559.6 million.
- 4** Plymouth City Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with one primary care trust (PCT) together with the Devon and Cornwall Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 5** The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2006/07 is £8.11million. The Council also receives £159,251 in administration grant towards its role as the administering authority.
- 6** Forty-nine service providers deliver a total of 146 supported housing schemes including a Home Improvement Agency. In total the programme funds 4,594 units of housing-related support. The highest cost service is £599.80 per unit per week providing housing-related support to people with a learning difficulty. The lowest cost service is £3.93 a week for a Community Alarm service.
- 7** Plymouth City Council was inspected during the fourth year of the Supporting People programme. This report, therefore, reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

# Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed Plymouth City Council as providing a 'good', two-star service that has excellent prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>1</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

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

9 We have scored the Council's management of the Supporting People programme as a good, two-star programme because:

- service users were well engaged in service reviews;
- the process of service reviews and re-procurement has increased the range and nature of services available in Plymouth;
- there is good quality information in respect of the Supporting People programme and related services, including the directory of services and the website is user friendly and easy to navigate;
- there is a strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme both in terms of resources and time from officers and councillors;
- the team to administer the programme are skilled and enthusiastic;
- robust eligibility criteria are in place;
- supported housing needs have been effectively mapped and are being kept up-to-date;
- effective use has been made of the fairer charging scheme in operation within adult social care and to date over 100 service users have been subject to a fairer charging assessment;
- relations with service providers are on the whole good and there has been some effective cross-authority working;
- accurate Office of the Deputy Prime Minister SPLS data upload and payments are made accurately and on time.
- finances are well managed and closely monitored;
- the five-year strategy sets out clear aims and priorities and the annual plan and improvement plan are SMART<sup>2</sup>; and
- the Supporting People programme has helped to achieve shared targets across social care and health and there is good partnership working.

10 Less positive areas of the programme include the following:

- service users do not have a voice in the governance of the programme;
- the Core Strategy Group is relatively new and has not yet established its role fully within Supporting People;
- there is a large amount of Supporting People funding being paid on ineligible services although there is a planned transfer of ineligible services over the next twelve months;
- performance management arrangements are not currently sufficiently robust; and
- benchmarking activity is not focused to ensure ongoing value for money is achieved.

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<sup>2</sup> Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound.

- 11 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has excellent prospects for improvement. This is because;
- the programme has a positive track record of delivering improvements;
  - service reviews were completed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister deadline of March 2006 and have secured real improvements for service users;
  - value for money improvements have been achieved;
  - the profile of housing-related support provision is changing and gaps in services are being addressed;
  - financial management of the Supporting People budget is strong;
  - there is clear leadership of the programme by the Commissioning Body;
  - staff capacity and commitment is good with the Supporting People team having opportunities for training and learning from others;
  - the Supporting People team are well led;
  - partnership working is strong;
  - a robust procurement plan is in place and IT systems are reliable;
  - success has been achieved in leveraging in additional resources from other funding streams.
- 12 However, current performance management arrangements do not yet fully capture the outcomes that the programme delivers for service users and therefore is not yet being used as a tool to drive service improvement.

## Recommendations

- 13 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendation.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Improve the performance management of the programme by:*

- *establishing and monitoring indicators that measure outcomes for service users;*
- *establishing and monitoring indicators that will measure progress against the objectives of the Supporting People five-year strategy;*
- *monitoring indicators that are established to assess progress against Supporting People objectives in strategies of partner agencies; and*
- *reporting performance at regular interval to appropriate bodies, as a minimum of quarterly to the Core Strategic Group, six-monthly to the Commissioning Body and annually to elected members.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the Council and the Commissioning Body will have a robust framework in place that will enable them to monitor progress against shared targets and act swiftly to take remedial action if this becomes necessary.

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

- 14 We would like to thank the staff of Plymouth City Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: 8 May to 12 May 2006

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# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 15 Plymouth City Council is a unitary authority in the south west of England. It is the second largest city in the south west after Bristol. The city is located in an area of outstanding natural beauty, with the Dartmoor National Park to the north, the natural harbour of Plymouth Sound to the south and the Plym and Tamar estuaries on either side.
- 16 The population of the area is 244,440 people and has been relatively static since 1991 but it is set to rise by 13.7 per cent by 2021. Ninety-seven per cent of the population are of white British origin, compared to 87 per cent in England as a whole, but the ethnic minority population of the city is growing.
- 17 Plymouth City Council has employed a world-renowned city architect to produce a vision for the City which will significantly enhance the scale and intensity of development that Plymouth can achieve. Major areas of the city are due to be redeveloped including Bretonside, Sutton Harbour and the Millbay Docks area and it is anticipated that over £1 billion will be invested in the City over the next 20 years.
- 18 The City has pockets of deprivation and is the 76th most deprived area in the country out of 354 areas based on the Government's multiple deprivation indicator.

### The Council

- 19 The Council is Labour-led but with only 28 of the 57 seats. A leader and cabinet model of political governance was adopted in 2002. The Council overall was judged to be improving adequately and demonstrating a two-star out of a possible four-star overall performance in the 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment. It has experienced severe financial difficulties in the recent past but was able to set a balanced budget this year through committing expenditure to its priorities and making savings.
- 20 Plymouth City Council employs 11,400 staff across all services. The Council's budget for 2005/06 was £559.6 million.
- 21 The Council's priorities are set out in the city strategy which was adopted by the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership in 2004. Their Vision for the city is that by 2020 Plymouth will be one of Europe's finest, most vibrant waterfront cities, where an outstanding quality of life is enjoyed by everyone and they have the following four visionary goals:

- A healthy place to live and work – improving health and wellbeing.
- A city which creates and shares prosperity – enhancing our economy and sharing the benefits with all our community.
- A safe and strong city – reducing crime, making people feel safe, making the most of our environment.
- A location for learning, achievement and leisure – raising aspirations and attainment, promoting creativity and leisure.

22 The City strategy also has eight strategic objectives which are:

- improving health and wellbeing;
- developing a prosperous economy;
- promoting community safety;
- raising educational achievement;
- promoting inclusive communities;
- developing an effective transport system;
- maintaining a clean and sustainable environment; and
- stimulating culture and leisure activities.

### **The service**

- 23 Plymouth City Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with one primary care trust (PCT) together with the Devon and Cornwall Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 24 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2006/07 is £8.11 million. The Council also receives £159,251 in administration grant towards its role as the administering authority.
- 25 Forty nine service providers deliver a total of 146 supported housing schemes including a Home Improvement Agency. In total the programme funds 4,594 units of housing-related support. The highest cost service at £599.80 per unit per week is a floating support service for people with learning disabilities. The lowest cost service is £3.93 a week for a Community Alarm service.
- 26 The Supporting People five-year strategy clearly works toward achieving the City's strategic objective of 'improving health and wellbeing and has the following vision:

*'To sustain, develop and improve good quality housing support services, which are guided by the needs of users, and help people who are vulnerable or have a disability to live as independently as possible in their communities.'*

- 27 To achieve this vision the Supporting People programme is committed to delivering the following outcomes.
- Preventing homelessness and events leading to homelessness.
  - Maintaining quality of life, independence and inclusion.
  - Rebuilding lives.
  - Promoting and enabling opportunities for independent living.

## How good is the programme?

### Governance

- 28 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the governance arrangements for Supporting People in Plymouth. The Commissioning Body is working effectively. Probation and primary care trust partners are well-engaged in planning and delivery, as are representatives of service providers and other key stakeholders. The memorandum of understanding has recently been updated and deals with conflicts of interest and potential conflicts between partners. Councillors are involved in the development of the programme and there is an understanding of its objectives. Plymouth plays a role in regional and sub-regional Supporting People structures. Performance management for the programme is, however, underdeveloped and there has been no service user involvement in the governance of the programme.

### Corporate commitment

- 29 There is a strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme both in terms of resources and time from officers and councillors. Additional funding of £208,173 has been allocated by the Council to the administration of the programme to ensure it has the resources to implement arrangements effectively.
- 30 Additional resources have also been made available by the Council when necessary in terms of legal and financial advice. A social worker was seconded to the Supporting People team to work on learning disability service reviews with the aim of unpicking care and support elements in learning disability services which has resulted in savings to the Supporting People budget. The Council has also made available corporate resources such as those in social inclusion for translation and interpretation services. The supporting people programme has helped to hit shared targets across social care and health. The team are well regarded by stakeholders and seen to be proactive in terms of working with others.

- 31 Elected members have been consistently involved in the Supporting People programme through the lead member for Adult Services sitting on the Commissioning Body and through close liaison with the portfolio holder for housing services and social care. In addition, a Quarterly Members e-brief is sent to all Members to keep them fully informed of the significant developments in the programme, both locally and nationally. An annual councillors briefing takes place to provide them with the opportunity to interact with and gain a better insight of the programme. This year, councillors were given the opportunity to go on-site visits to experience, first hand, the programme in operation. This involvement by councillors has built understanding and support for the Supporting People programme.
- 32 Accountability to councillors of the administering authority of the Supporting People programme has been demonstrated by the Supporting People programme being subjected to a robust scrutiny process by the Safer Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel. The process included examining procedures, reading reports, interviewing staff, partners and providers and visiting some of the schemes funded by the Supporting People programme.

### **Commissioning Body**

- 33 The Commissioning Body is well-established, involves all statutory partners and is providing clear leadership to the Supporting People team and the programme. It meets on a regular basis with regular attendance from all key partners which provides consistency and continuity in approach and decision-making. There is evidence of effective decision-making and the Commissioning Body have made difficult decisions in relation to de-commissioning and reconfiguring long standing services to better meet the needs of service users. For example, one service was reconfigured so that there was more support available at times to suit the service users and one service was decommissioned because of poor quality and the clients placed with an alternative provider.
- 34 There are clear terms of reference in place for all the governance groups with a memorandum of understanding effectively addressing the relationship between the Commissioning Body and the Council. The memorandum of understanding was updated in January 2006 to reflect changes in membership. The document also rightly addresses action to be taken to deal with conflicts of interests and spells out how any conflict between partners will be managed.
- 35 Meetings and agendas are well planned in advance and the quality of reports is excellent and these are distributed in sufficient time for them to be read in advance and ensure informed debate. The Commissioning Body agreed at a recent meeting to publish the minutes of their meetings on the Supporting People programme website to allow openness and transparency in their operation.

- 36 Performance management for the programme is, however, underdeveloped. While there is regular reporting on progress against plans, finance, ODPM milestones and service reviews, there is little reporting on outcomes for service users or progress against the programme's overarching aims. The Commissioning Body accept that more needs to be done in this area and are addressing this. Without suitable measures in place and regular reporting, it is difficult to determine what outcomes the programme is achieving for vulnerable people and to systematically address areas of under-performance.

### **Core Strategy Group**

- 37 The Core Strategy Group is developing as an effective body in the governance of the programme. It has agreed its annual work plan and will be considering refreshing the eligibility criteria and looks at contract management and business cases for new and reconfigured services for onward recommendation to the Commissioning Body.
- 38 Prior to February 2005, the functions of the Core Strategy Group were performed by the Supporting People Commissioning Body. The Supporting People team linked into existing strategic forums such as the Older Persons Programme Board, the Learning Disability Partnership Board and the Supporting People client-based strategy groups (older persons, learning disability, physical disability, mental health) to establish Providers and stakeholders' views and priorities to inform the Supporting People planning framework.
- 39 The Core Strategy Group was set up following a decision in February 2005 and took a few months to establish as a group with a wide-ranging membership., It is well chaired by the Accountable Officer, and has attendance from the Youth Offending Team, Probation, Learning Disability Partnership, Primary Care Trust, Adult Social Care, Housing, Drugs and Alcohol Action Team, Police, Domestic Violence Unit, Social Inclusion Unit, Community Safety Unit, Asylum Seekers and Refugee Co-ordinator, Neighbourhood Renewal and two elected representatives from the Provider Forum. This widespread membership ensures that there is now a broad base for policy development and that most points of view are represented. However, it would have been better had the Core Strategy Group been set up from the inception of the programme.

### **Accountable Officer**

- 40 The Accountable Officer is the Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) and so is of sufficient seniority to raise the profile of the programme and to ensure there are adequate resources to implement it effectively. He chairs the Core Strategy Group and attends in an advisory capacity the Commissioning Body.
- 41 There is widespread understanding of the programme across the Council, the Local Strategic Partnership and partner agencies. This is facilitated by the Accountable Officer as a member of the Departmental Management Team and the Director of Community Services who is a member of Plymouth City Council's Corporate Management Team and on the Executive Group of the Local Strategic Partnership.

### Partnership working

- 42 The Council has established clear links and partnerships with Probation and the Primary Care Trust which are vital to the success of the Supporting People programme. There is a history of involvement of Probation in the homeless implementation group and this has led to a pilot project for offender management that provides access to housing by giving advice and assistance to obtain accommodation part funded by Supporting People. While an example of joint working with the Primary Care Trust has been the maintenance of a Community Psychiatric Nurse post now funded by the Primary Care Trust that links to Supporting People funded projects.
- 43 The Supporting People team are well linked into the MAPPA<sup>3</sup> arrangements in Plymouth with appropriate representation from the Housing Operations Division, line managed by the Accountable Officer for Supporting People. This ensures housing options for high risk offenders are properly considered and linked in to the Supporting People programme.
- 44 There have been no cross-authority partnerships to develop services and there are no plans to do so this year. In order to facilitate a closer regional approach the Supporting People team have agreed to share with other members of the South West Regional Implementation Group, the cost of appointing a regional co-ordinator which will allow a much more joined-up approach between authorities.

### Delivery arrangements

- 45 Strengths considerably outweigh weaknesses. The programme is well resourced and delivered by a very competent team which is well led. Robust eligibility criteria are in place. Supported housing needs have been effectively mapped and are being kept up- to-date. Relations with service providers are on the whole good and there has been some effective cross-authority working. Finances are well managed and closely monitored. The five-year strategy sets out clear aims and priorities. However, performance management arrangements need to be strengthened.

### Supporting People team

- 46 There is a competent and committed Supporting People team in place to oversee the Supporting People programme which is well lead by the Head of Supporting People. Staff within the Supporting team (including the Lead Officer) are appropriately supervised and have regular six-monthly appraisals and four to six-week supervision meetings. They are aware of their personal targets and how these link to the Council's wider priorities from the Supporting People programme. Supporting People staff are therefore working towards achieving the Council's priorities for Supporting People and their performance is reviewed on a regular basis.

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<sup>3</sup> Multi Agency Protection Panels (MAPPA) were set up in England and Wales in 2001. Police and Probation take the leading role with other agencies such as housing, health and Social Services. Agencies share information to ensure accurate assessments of risk are made about potentially dangerous offenders and plans put in place to robustly manage those risks.

- 47 The Supporting People Team comprises a Supporting People Project Manager (the Lead Officer), four Project Officers, a Product Portfolio Manager responsible for developing procurement processes and practices, Research and Strategy Officer, Senior Accountant and two Administrative Officers. The team was reduced in size by 1.2 full-time equivalents during last year following an exercise to establish the staff requirement following completion of reviews and new arrangements post the end of the formal review programme. The team was effective in delivering the programme of service reviews to time by working more smartly. The Product Portfolio Manager, who has been employed to manage the Supporting People programme Value Improvement Project, has recently moved from being a temporary staff member to a permanent position to provide ongoing support in terms of procurement.

### **Eligibility criteria**

- 48 Sound eligibility criteria are in place developed in consultation with the Primary Care Trust, Housing Services, Social Services and Probation. The eligibility criteria were formally approved by the Commissioning Body, communicated widely and used as part of the reviews of services. Summary leaflets have been produced for service users and are distributed at publicity events so there is clarity about what activities can be properly funded by the Supporting People grant.
- 49 In order to ensure that services funded through differing funding regimes are complementary and meet the requirements of a wide range of people with differing levels of need, Plymouth have ensured the eligibility criteria complement the Fair Access to Care Criteria.

### **Contracts**

- 50 ODPM grant conditions required that all contracts should to be signed by 31 July 2003 and contracts in Plymouth were signed by that date. For services that have not yet achieved level C, an acceptable standard under the service Quality Assessment Framework, provider contracts have been extended by variation agreements whilst action plans are implemented but if this is not achieved contracts will be terminated. Where providers have reached level C, contracts have been extended by variation in-line with the three-year procurement timetable and 'steady state' contracts are to be let in line with the three-year procurement timetable.
- 51 The Council have provided training and information on the new procurement arrangements. Some providers expressed to us their anxiety about these arrangements and the uncertainty around contracts and the Supporting People team have responded to this by agreeing additional briefings. In the longer term these new arrangements should provide better services with three-year contracts renewable for a further two and so give stability to providers for at least five years.

### **Needs mapping, analysis and review**

- 52** The Council has carried out a comprehensive needs mapping exercise and used this as a sound basis for their new five-year Supporting People strategy. The Council understands the needs of different client groups and the gaps in service provision. A variety of sources were used including: analysis of demographic data; survey-based work with potential service users and providers of services; focus group research; workshops attended by partnership agencies; and a full desk top review of local, and where relevant, national research.
- 53** The data collated by the Supporting People team for the strategy is comprehensive on the needs of people in Plymouth and is being used by partner agencies as the basis for their service planning. The processes used to involve service users and obtaining their priorities is being used in the development of the new homelessness strategy.
- 54** Although there is a good range of information about most key Supporting People client groups, more analysis work is required to understand the supported housing needs of some groups, such as gypsies and travellers and black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and plans are in place to address these gaps.
- 55** Needs information is kept up-to-date through the collation of information from questionnaires, focus groups, liaison with partner agencies and the monitoring of referrals and waiting lists. This information rightly then informs the strategic decision-making and prioritisation for the annual plan.

### **Five-year strategy**

- 56** Plymouth has established a track record of improving its Supporting People strategy from a low base. The draft strategy was poor but the five-year strategy issued recently is good. It is clear about what it is trying to achieve and its priorities and is being used to drive the delivery of the Supporting People programme to better align resources to the needs of vulnerable people in Plymouth. The strategy includes a vision: 'To sustain, develop and improve good quality housing support services, which are guided by the needs of users, and help people who are vulnerable or have a disability to live as independently as possible in their communities'. To achieve this vision, the Supporting People team are committed to delivering the following outcomes:
- preventing homelessness and events leading to homelessness;
  - maintaining quality of life, independence and inclusion;
  - rebuilding lives and
  - promoting and enabling opportunities for independent living.
- 57** The Council has set out clear priorities within the five-year strategy with its immediate priorities being: homelessness and the development of floating support provision and victims of domestic violence including the development of accommodation and floating support provision.

- 58 The Council has achieved significant user involvement in producing the five-year strategy. It has held a series of focus groups (15) at which more than 100 users attended. Service providers have also been actively consulted in the development of the five-year strategy. There have been a number of events at which providers were consulted, including workshops and exercises to map where services should be located. Providers were also involved in looking at needs data. Involvement of providers and service users has raised awareness and ownership of the strategy.
- 59 The five-year strategy makes strong links with other partners and Council strategies. An example being that between the Supporting People strategy and the housing strategy with the development of extra care needs accommodation following a successful bid to the Housing Corporation for capital funding. Co-ordination is vital to having maximum impact.

### **Financial management and monitoring systems**

- 60 There is effective budget monitoring with clear financial reports provided to the Commissioning Body on a quarterly basis and on a monthly basis to the Head of Supporting People. There has been an under spend in the Supporting People grant originating from the delay in pipeline services in 2004/05 which has been rolled forward. The actual expenditure of the Supporting People grant in 2004/05 was 97.93 per cent and in 2005/06 was 102.38 per cent. Financial probity and controls are given a high priority.
- 61 Payments are made accurately and on time. Providers make monthly returns and the data is checked on a random basis against housing benefit and tenancy records which has been effective in that £9,000 over the last 18 months has been saved in terms of averting potential overpayments.

### **Fairer charging**

- 62 The Supporting People team have made effective use of the fairer charging scheme in operation within adult social care and to date over 100 service users have been subject to a fairer charging assessment. The fairer charging team in Social Care have Department of Works and Pensions staff co-located with them and so as part of any assessment a full welfare benefits check is undertaken. Approximately ten per cent of the service users assessed were found to be failing to claim what they are entitled to and so the Council has been able to add value to the assessment process by maximising the income of vulnerable adults.

### **Relationships with providers**

- 63** There is, on the whole, a good relationship with service providers. Plymouth has structures in place to work effectively with service providers. The provider forum is relatively new having been established in 2005. It is independent and provider led with input from the Supporting People team and wider partnership as needed. There were other structures in place before this that included client-based strategy groups and partnerships based around client groups that were involved in the Council's development of its approach to Supporting People. A range of briefing sessions have taken place for providers, for example, feed back was given on the first tranche of service reviews, training has been provided on the Quality Assessment Framework process and how to achieve improvements in services.
- 64** Providers who attended our focus group value the work of the Supporting People team and feel it has improved over the last 18 months or so and team members are now approachable and helpful. Some of those working across other authorities rated Plymouth's approach more highly than elsewhere, with good planning, a robust review process and partnership working cited as particular strengths. A satisfaction survey of service providers found very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the programme. In 10 out of 13 areas, 100 per cent of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied.
- 65** Small providers who we spoke to thought the administrative burden of the Supporting People reviews and contract monitoring had been too great and that the Supporting People team had not provided sufficient support. There was also more general apprehension among providers about the proposed new procurement process and contracting arrangements and concern about the lack of move-on accommodation. These concerns are understood by the Council and are being addressed by the Supporting People team.

### **Risk management**

- 66** Robust arrangements are in place to manage risks to the programme. A comprehensive risk register has been established and agreed by the Commissioning Body. Each risk is considered in terms of probability and impact, and the control measures that can be put in place. The residual risk rating is then plotted on a probability/impact matrix, to highlight high, medium and low priority risk areas. This approach is governed and in line with the Council's Corporate 'Risk Management Statement' and 'Risk Management Strategy' and feeds into the Corporate Risk Register which is reviewed on a regular basis.

### **Cross-authority working**

- 67** Plymouth plays a significant role in regional and sub-regional Supporting People groups. All the local authorities in the south west have agreed to adopt the decommissioning protocol produced by the Somerset Supporting People Team. Plymouth is playing a leading role in facilitating a regional approach to accreditation and have established and maintain a regional database of cross-authority service providers and their accreditation status to allow passporting of providers and cut down on unnecessary bureaucracy.

- 68 As part of Plymouth's Value Improvement Project (VIP), they have shared good practice with other authorities, including Cornwall, Essex, Southampton, Torbay and Leeds and are to run a series of days with the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to showcase the VIP and share good practice in relation to procurement policy and practice.

### **ODPM SPLS data upload**

- 69 The ODPM SPLS data upload is submitted on time and is accurate. Any anomalies are checked and resolved. Training and information has been made available to providers and specific one to one help is made available where necessary. Data from providers is in electronic format and automatically uploaded which assists in terms of accuracy. Only two small providers have made manual returns, of which one service has now been decommissioned. Accurate and timely uploads ensure that Plymouth is making a full contribution to the national picture of the Supporting People programme being collated by ODPM.

### **Service reviews**

- 70 This is an area of strength. Plymouth has undertaken a robust, fair and transparent programme of service reviews that has driven up quality standards and delivered clear benefits for service users. Stakeholders, including service users and service providers, have been well engaged. Service reviews have been reported to the Commissioning Body and been subject to robust interrogation and challenge.
- 71 The service review programme was developed in line with the guidelines from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister with high risk and high cost services being subject to early challenge. All service reviews were completed by the deadline of the end of March 2006. Some services have been de-commissioned and some re-modelled with action plans served on providers which will improve the quality of services and align these to priorities identified in the Supporting People strategy.
- 72 The Council operates a fair and transparent review process. Services provided in-house have similar action plans to improve as external services and timescales are generally the same giving deadlines to improve before steady state contracts are issued. For example, the review of sheltered housing meant the Council had to take steps to improve its own services to level C of the Quality Assurance Framework in line with improvements required of other providers. It has also taken action with a hostel managed by the Council to reduce costs and improve the service to service users by aligning working hours with service users needs. This has been a difficult process for the Council and is evidence of a robust approach to both internal and external services.

- 73 The Supporting People partnership has undertaken sensitive and planned decommissioning. One scheme on review was found not to be providing services to required standards and its contract was terminated and it chose to immediately cease trading. The Supporting People team worked effectively with Social Services to support those living in the scheme by negotiating a short term contract with another provider while the service users were found other provision in line with their needs. This ensured continuity of support to these vulnerable people and demonstrates the effectiveness of joint working practices.
- 74 The Supporting People project officers who carried out the service reviews are skilled, articulate and competent. Where necessary, other partners have been accessed to supplement existing skills. In particular, a social worker has been seconded to assist in reviewing individual care and support packages for people with learning disabilities. This has provided the necessary expertise to tailor the appropriate support packages for individuals.
- 75 The Council does not have a well developed Quality Assurance process for service reviews outside of the project officer team which would ensure consistency in approach. There has been robust challenge when individual reviews have been presented to the Commissioning Body but no external, independent challenge such as that from a peer in another authority.
- 76 A transparent and independent appeals process is in place but it has not been evoked even though it has been widely publicised and Providers are well aware of its existence. The appeals process provides an opportunity for providers to challenge the outcome of reviews.

### **Value for money**

- 77 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses with regards to value for money in the Supporting People programme. Through the service review process there has been robust challenge to service costs and improved value for money in service provision. However, benchmarking information was limited and ineligible costs are still being funded although plans are in place for this to cease by the end of 2006/07.

### **How do costs compare?**

- 78 Comparison of unit costs with the southwest of England and England as a whole are set out in the data appendix. These are largely based on the 'platinum cut' data submitted to ODPM in July 2003, which is the most up-to-date comparison currently available. These figures contain some inaccuracies and will not reflect changes that have been made since April 2003.
- 79 Overall, the Council has lower unit costs in comparison with other similar Councils, with unit costs totalling £23.12 compared to the rest of England at £28.30. However, for accommodation-based services the Council shows apparently high costs for services for young people leaving care. The Council is currently tendering these services.

- 80 For floating support the Council is showing costs above the national average for people with learning disabilities, drug problems, physical or sensory disabilities, generic needs and single homeless people with support needs.

**How is value for money managed?**

- 81 High cost schemes have been challenged on value for money (VFM) issues and were subject to early review. This approach was consistently applied to both internal and external service providers. Staff undertaking reviews had a sound understanding of what constitutes value for money. The review process incorporated an analysis of unit costs, with comparisons made against regional and national quartiles. The quality of outcomes, number of service users moving on in a planned way, strategic relevance and stakeholder feedback was also used to determine value for money and influence the review outcomes and recommendations. Each service was considered on an individual basis and, where there was an acceptable reason for the high cost of the service, no action was taken. Where there were no acceptable reasons, appropriate action was taken to reduce these costs either by reconfiguring services or negotiating a reduction in contracts with some providers after they had looked at their own internal costs with the aim of achieving better value for money.
- 82 At the time of our inspection there was still a large amount of Supporting People funding being paid on ineligible services which does not represent value for money for the Supporting People budget. However, there is a planned transfer of ineligible services funded by Supporting People to the Social Services budget. £39,000 was transferred in 2005/06 and the remaining £730,000 will be transferred in 2006/07. This retraction plan is releasing money to fund a two per cent inflationary increase of grant to providers and the opportunity to fund new services.
- 83 The Council is not in a position to ascertain full VFM from services funded under Supporting People due to the limited benchmarking information that has been used. It is now a participant in a south west benchmarking club but most of these comparators do not relate to a City situation. The club is also relatively newly established and so there has been limited in depth analysis of benchmarked data to judge costs and quality. The Council cannot therefore be sure that services are providing VFM compared to others elsewhere.
- 84 The Council was among 11 authorities chosen by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to develop a value improvement project which enhances value and efficiency in the delivery of the Supporting People programme. It is making very good progress and the key aim of Plymouth's project is to achieve substantial improvements in value for money through improved procurement and contract management, service re-engineering and improved partnership working. The project is currently in the piloting stage and has recently received responses to its tender for refugee services and has developed a tender for substance misuse services. It is also jointly producing, with another local authority, a new procurement toolkit.

- 85 The Supporting People team have a well developed, risk assessed, three-year procurement plan in place which is planned to achieve 2.5 per cent cashable and 2.5 per cent non-cashable savings over the lifetime of the plan. This means the quality and quantity of services provided should increase.
- 86 The Council is fully aware of the unit costs of administering the Supporting People programme and last year produced a comprehensive breakdown of its costs as part of the service planning process. As part of the process, Supporting People staff completed a percentage breakdown of the time that they spend on particular tasks in order to assist scrutiny and demonstrate that the activities are aligned to the delivery of the Supporting People programme and the Council's corporate objectives. However, it does not have the information with which to show that the quality of administration and costs are comparable with others. It cannot, therefore, demonstrate a conscious decision to provide a service of a particular quality at a quantified cost.
- 87 There has been some cross-authority work on documentation and processes for example; all local authorities in the south west have agreed to adopt the decommissioning protocol produced by the Somerset Supporting People Team. This is a more cost effective use of resources as it avoids authorities all duplicating the same work.
- 88 At the time of inspection Plymouth only had one jointly commissioned service. However, well developed plans are in place to jointly commission ten different services at a value of nearly £1 million with Supporting People contributing £711,400. Joint commissioning saves money on for example, contract preparation and enhances joint working with partners.

### **Service user involvement**

- 89 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in terms of service user involvement.
- 90 The Supporting People team have a Consultation and Information Strategy which covers the involvement of service users, carers, advocates, service providers and other partners and stakeholders. The strategy provides guidance on how all events should be planned and evaluated and provides a structured approach to consultation.
- 91 There is clear evidence of appropriate service user involvement in individual service reviews. Different techniques have been used depending on the particular circumstances and the communication abilities of individuals. These include one to one interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires.

- 92 There is currently no inclusive forum in Plymouth to consult with service users to act as a sounding board with which to judge potential policy changes and developments. While use has been made of existing forums to engage users there are some user groups where there are no forums for Supporting People discussions to take place. The Council do have plans to establish a sounding board with a group of Supporting People service users who have volunteered to take part in regular consultation. It is proposed they will be asked three or four times a year for their views on different topics so as to review and develop services.
- 93 There has been little service user involvement in the governance of the Supporting People programme. There is no representation at the Core Strategy Group and users are not involved in monitoring of services or remodelling/decommissioning/commissioning of services.

### **Access to services and information**

- 94 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in respect of access to services and information. The standard of information that is produced to inform service users and other stakeholders about Supporting People services in Plymouth is good. However, information is not always readily available and access into some services can be difficult but these problems are being addressed.
- 95 There are well designed, attractive and easy to read Supporting People information posters, and information leaflets available which are clear and informative. They signpost people to the website or a telephone number. A comprehensive service directory is readily available.
- 96 The Supporting People team have produced a provider pack which is comprehensive and a good guide to eligibility for Supporting People funding. The pack provides comprehensive guidance to service providers on services that are eligible and the Supporting People process including service reviews and the Quality Assurance Framework.
- 97 The Supporting People website is user friendly and easy to navigate. It is possible to reach the service directory directly from the search facility and the directory is split into categories to make its use easier.
- 98 The team produce a well designed, attractive and easy to read Supporting People newsletter three times a year, one for providers and one for service users which are clear, have easy to read text and bite size chunks of information which give readers a good overview and update of the supporting People Programme.
- 99 The Council is improving access to Supporting People services by way of surveys. It has carried out a survey among the 2,000-strong city panel and Council tenants. It has learnt the main access points for Supporting People services are the housing advice centre and the Citizens' Advice Bureau and is working with those advice agencies to ensure that good quality advice and information is available.

- 100 There is also a clear plan to address access to services by offenders and people at risk of offending utilising the combined resources of the Priority and Prolific Offenders Unit, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Probation and Supporting People. But access at the moment is difficult for some service users because of the lack of move on accommodation.
- 101 During the inspection we found that Supporting People information was not readily available at some access points and there was poor access to the emergency service out-of-hours via housing department numbers advertised on the council's website.
- 102 We also found a lack of service standards for the Supporting People team. For example there is no standard by which to inform providers the outcome of reviews or in the future the outcome of contract monitoring. Neither is there a standard and target with which to measure the effectiveness of providers in informing users of the outcomes of reviews and future contract monitoring.

### **Diversity**

- 103 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. The Council has a good overall understanding of the needs of the community for Supporting People services. The Supporting People team are in touch with a range of hard to reach groups and there is evidence that Supporting People services go to a higher proportion of people from BME communities than the proportion of people from BME communities within Plymouth. All providers are required to monitor ethnicity as part of their contract. There are gaps in the information of supported housing needs of some excluded groups which are being filled, for example through commissioned research with gypsy and traveller communities. Good baseline data has provided a solid platform for determining strategic priorities.
- 104 The Supporting People team have individual champions within the team for each diverse group but not all staff have received diversity training. The team has worked with Social Services to develop alternative and more effective ways of communicating with people who have learning difficulties and as a result the Supporting People team developed a satisfaction survey form in picture format which was successfully used as part of the service reviews of schemes for people with learning difficulties.
- 105 We found awareness of diversity issues among the providers we visited. As part of the service review process, the Supporting People team worked with providers to achieve Level C within the QAF in terms of fair access, diversity and inclusion. Encouraged by Supporting People, a specialist sheltered housing scheme for Chinese people has now made a permanent appointment of a Cantonese speaking Sheltered Housing Officer hence providing a more sensitive service.
- 106 The Supporting People team has access to the City Council in-house translation and interpretation service. However, the strapline on leaflets stating the leaflet is available in other formats is only in English and so the availability of leaflets in other languages has not been articulated to non-English readers. The Council are in the process of translating the leaflets into the ten main languages spoken in Plymouth.

- 107 The Council is only at level 1 of the race equality scheme, (this is on a scale of one to five), but has plans to reach level 3 by 2008/09. The Supporting People team were chosen corporately to lead on piloting equality impact assessments which have been carried out and improvements have been incorporated into the Supporting People Annual Plan.

### **Outcomes for service users**

- 108 Strengths outweigh weaknesses with regard to service user outcomes. The Supporting People programme has led to better outcomes for people in Plymouth since its introduction in April 2003. Services we visited as part of the inspection were promoting greater independence for service users. The programme is developing a set of outcome measures by which achievements can be assessed but this is not in place at the moment.
- 109 There is evidence that the Supporting People programme has produced real benefits for vulnerable people in Plymouth. We were provided with a plethora of case studies where individual lives had been changed and helped by the services they had received, for example, a young adult with learning difficulties who was living independently with support for the first time; a victim of domestic violence who had found safety and security and encouragement to take up a new tenancy and rebuild a home for her family and a person with mental health issues who had help to manage budgets, maintain a tenancy and access education. In our visits we talked to service users and heard their stories of how the support they received was helping them live more independent lives.
- 110 The Council can show increasing choice for service users. The process of service reviews and re-procurement has increased the range and nature of services available in Plymouth. For example, there are new services for people with low level learning difficulty needs, additional floating support services for people with mental health issues and increased provision of supported housing for people in order to facilitate successful and sustainable hospital discharge.
- 111 The Council can demonstrate how the quality of services had improved as a result of service reviews. All service providers have been assessed against a range of quality measures including health and safety, protection from abuse, involvement in service delivery and recognition of diverse needs. Action plans are in place for providers who did not meet these standards so that within six months all providers will meet at least level C of the Quality Assurance Framework (Quality Assessment Framework). The Council is clear that services that fail to meet an acceptable standard will be de-commissioned. Improving the quality of services improves the quality of life and life chances of users of those services.
- 112 We found that in very few of the services we visited support plans were not comprehensively complete and in place. The Council's action plans to bring all providers up to level C of the Quality Assessment Framework will address this issue. Good support plans are essential for focussing on the individual's support needs over a set time period.

- 113** Plymouth's current performance management system does not fully capture the outcomes that the programme delivers for service users. National key performance indicators and indicators on service provider performance are collected and since September 2005 are now reported to the Commissioning Body. The programme is developing a set of outcome measures by which achievements can be assessed through the new contract-monitoring arrangements. However, these developments are not in place as yet and so it is difficult for the programme to measure and monitor, by client group, its progress in meeting its objectives or take informed decisions on any remedial actions that may be necessary.
- 114** Several providers mentioned problems with the availability of move-on accommodation for users who have achieved a level of independence that should allow them to move into their own accommodation. The lack of move on impacts on the effective delivery of the Supporting People programme, restricts access for new service users to accommodation-based services, reduces the value for money that current investment is achieving and will make it more difficult for the Council to deliver the objectives set out in the five-year strategy The Supporting People team are well aware of this problem and there are timely and appropriate plans in place to address this issue.
- 115** The following case study is an illustration of the benefit of the Supporting People programme in Plymouth.

#### **Case study**

This is the case study of an older homeless man who had lived in various hostels around the country and ended up in a hostel in Plymouth.

He was lonely and had no privacy or stability. He then heard about a sheltered housing scheme and has now lived there for two years. The Supporting People programme part funds the warden and the 24-hour emergency alarm system available in the sheltered housing scheme. The warden has helped him learn how to budget, apply for services and pay his household bills. She has also encouraged him to socialise and become independent. He feels he now has security and can invite people to his home and is much more confident and enjoys life. He is now part of a group of volunteers who help to run the scheme's coffee mornings and social activities and has been on days out and attends a luncheon club twice a week.

He told us: 'When I moved in to sheltered housing, I wasn't sure whether I would be able to cope with being totally alone. However, I soon learned that I was only alone if I chose to be. I have made a lot of friends and we have a really good community atmosphere. I am free to make my own choices, something I have not known for years. I will not be moving on again, I am happy and content, safe and secure.'

## Summary

- 116** The Council's approach to administering the Supporting People programme in Plymouth is good.
- 117** There are clear strengths in the way in which the programme is being delivered. In particular, service users were well engaged in service reviews and the process of service reviews and re-procurement has increased the range and nature of services available in Plymouth. There is good quality information in respect of the Supporting People programme and related services, including the directory of services and the website is user friendly and easy to navigate for service users and potential service users. Robust eligibility criteria are in place and effective use has been made of the fairer charging scheme in operation within adult social care and to date over 100 service users have been subject to a fairer charging assessment and income has been maximised for this vulnerable group of service users.
- 118** There is a strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme both in terms of resources and time from officers and councillors and the Supporting People team administering the programme are skilled and enthusiastic. Supported housing needs have been effectively mapped and are being kept up-to-date and used to influence priority setting for service provision in the robust five-year Supporting People strategy. The annual plan and improvement plan are both SMART<sup>4</sup>. Relations with service providers are on the whole good and there has been some effective cross-authority working and strong partnership working. Finances are well managed and closely monitored and payments to providers are accurate and on time.
- 119** However, performance management arrangements have been underdeveloped and not outcome-focused, benchmarking needs to be improved to ensure ongoing value for money is achieved, service users' voice in the governance of the programme needs to be enhanced and access to information and into services is not always readily available..

## What are the prospects for improvement to the programme?

### What is the track record in delivering improvement?

- 120** There is a positive track record of improvements being delivered by the Supporting People programme in Plymouth. Service reviews have been completed and tangible improvements in terms of quality and value for money of services has been achieved. The profile of housing-related support provision is changing and gaps in services are being filled.

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<sup>4</sup> Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timebound.

- 121** The Council, as a whole, has made changes to management and services over the last two to three years and corporately and in housing there is now a track record of delivering improvement. The Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment has improved from poor to improving adequately and demonstrating a two-star out of a possible four-star overall performance in 2005. A new Chief Executive took up his post in March 2005, making this the first time in three years that the Council has a permanent Chief Executive. There have also been significant changes in the Corporate Management Team to reflect a more corporate approach to service delivery.
- 122** The Council have had severe financial difficulties with a projected overspend of £6.2 million reported in July 2005 which has been dealt with through a range of management actions and Cabinet decisions to break even at year-end. Plymouth has strengthened and developed its longer-term financial planning.
- 123** Partners report that the culture for partnership working has changed in the City and that there is buy in to the Local Strategic Partnership with agreement to work in the best way possible for the benefit of the residents of Plymouth but the partnership is not fully embedded as yet.
- 124** There is a positive track record of improvements being delivered by the Supporting People programme in Plymouth. They have established a track record of improving its Supporting People strategy from a low base. The draft strategy was poor but the five-year strategy issued recently is good with a strong strategic approach to deliver, develop and improve the programme in order to more effectively meet unmet need and deliver the wider strategic priorities of our partners. The Supporting People team has a good track record in developing some new services, aligning the service to their priorities and improving services.
- 125** A clear example of re-alignment has been in the homelessness, drug and alcohol and offender sectors which have all been strategically re-aligned to ensure service users have choice in their move-on, spend an appropriate period in supported accommodation and are better prepared for independent living. An example of de-commissioning and re-commissioning of a service following the service review process is where a generic floating support service was found not to be strategically relevant and was therefore re-modelled to meet a priority need within the five-year strategy of providing support for homeless families. Supporting People has also enabled the provision of a new floating support service for victims of domestic abuse.
- 126** Service reviews have delivered tangible improvements in terms of financial savings and all services are at level C of the Quality Assessment Framework or on a short action plan to achieve this. Service users now have personal support plans in place identifying personal objectives and means that service delivery is now focused on improving or maintaining independent living. Savings have been re-invested in new services and in funding an inflationary increase to service providers.

- 127 With regard to ODPM key performance indicators around outcomes and utilisation levels of services for long term services, there is a positive trend in those maintaining independent living and utilisation levels for Supporting People services remain good (in excess of 95 per cent) with 2005/06 figures indicating a slight increase on the previous year.
- 128 Through the Value Improvement Project the Supporting People team are developing good practice in terms of procurement not just for the programme but also across the Council. It has led to capacity building in existing and potential Supporting People markets, highlighted the benefits of joint commissioning and developed robust service specifications.

### **How does the service manage performance?**

- 129 The programme has clear overarching aims and priorities with an annual plan and improvement plan in place to deliver both strategic and operational improvements. These plans address the right areas to move the programme forward and continue improvement. The Supporting People team are proactive in both learning from others and spreading good practice. However, performance management arrangements do not yet fully capture outcomes that the programme delivers for service users and so cannot be used as a tool to drive further service improvement. Overall, this is an area of strength.
- 130 The Council now has a clear vision in terms of priorities and the five-year Supporting People strategy sets out clearly the service's vision, priorities and targets which support the overarching Council's priorities. The strategy was developed through extensive consultation with partners, providers, service users and other stakeholders and sets a clear direction for the programme.
- 131 The annual plan and the key lines of enquiry continuous improvement plan are in place to deliver the strategy and improvements to the programme. The annual plan sets out the key priorities and is looking to address the right things, for example additional accommodation for victims of domestic violence. The plans are clear about tasks and actions required, allocate responsibilities and include target completion dates. Links to overarching aims are also clear. Clear plans will help to deliver improvement in key areas.
- 132 Plymouth are putting in place arrangements for the future improvement of services with future contract management. The statutory review process ended in March 2006 and Plymouth have in place a system for future contract management as part of the VIP project to manage contracts in proportion to the risk they present based on the nature of the client group and contract value. There are now clear plans for procurement which includes plans to improve efficiency and value for money over a three-year period.

- 133** The Council and the Supporting People programme have effective leadership with a 'can do' attitude evident in its workings. The director, assistant director and Supporting People manager work as an effective team. The track record of improvement and high quality management of the programme stand as strong evidence of their ability to deliver. Their leadership of the programme combined with leadership corporately and the high quality future plans give confidence that improvements will continue.
- 134** Performance management of staff is effective. Staff in the Supporting People team are aware of their personal targets and how these link to the Council's wider priorities from the Supporting People programme. Regular appraisals are carried out at which priorities are set together with targets based on the annual plan and five-year strategy. Performance achieved against targets is reviewed every four to six weeks in supervision meetings with the Lead Officer for Supporting People. Supporting People staff are therefore working towards achieving the Council's priorities for Supporting People and their performance is reviewed on a regular basis.
- 135** The Supporting People partnership is proactive and effective in learning from others. The team have undertaken a telephone survey of stakeholders' perceptions, both of the programme and the team to gauge how effective the programme has been in engaging stakeholders, but also to see how they can involve them more effectively in the future. The outcomes of the survey have been built into the team's improvement plan. The team regularly reviews documents from the Audit Commission and other bodies to learn of new developments and best practice and makes changes to the delivery of the programme as a consequence. The team produced a DVD recently, featuring service users and providers, in order to celebrate the excellent practice of some service providers and this has been used for the Supporting People team to learn and has been shared with other providers.
- 136** Performance management arrangements are not robust and new performance indicators do not yet have targets and are not fully outcome-focused. The Council are addressing these issues and as part of the re-procurement of Supporting People services where they are developing detailed specifications with a suite of indicators some of which are outcome focused. Specifications to date have been developed for Refugee Services, HIV/Aids, Extra Care and Domestic Violence.
- 137** Performance reporting was only introduced in September 2005 and the Commissioning Body agreed to report performance every quarter. Regular reporting is necessary to closely manage progress and use the system as a tool to drive improvement so the Council and its partners can be certain the programme is as fully effective as possible.

### **Does the service have the capacity to improve?**

- 138** The service can clearly demonstrate it has the capacity to improve and this is an area of strength. There is strong commitment from the Council to the programme and clear and effective leadership of both the Supporting People team and programme. Partnership working is strong. Procurement arrangements are sound and IT support is reliable. A skilled and committed team is in place with access to development and training. The team can also demonstrate success in leveraging in additional funding from other funding sources.
- 139** The quality and effectiveness of the team is good and they are well respected within the wider council and with partners. There is strong leadership of the programme by the Commissioning Body and the team are well led by the Head of Supporting People with clear direction from the Accountable Officer and Director of Community Services.
- 140** The IT systems are good and appropriate to the needs of the team and support is available when necessary. Good records are being maintained and payments to providers are accurate and on time. There is an effective auditing process in place and sound contingency plans should the system breakdown.
- 141** The Council is investing in improved procurement. It has decided to fund the post of procurement officer when the ODPM funding for the VIP project ceases in September 2006. It has a robust three-year procurement plan for the Supporting People services, which incorporates 2.5 per cent cashable and non-cashable gains.
- 142** It also has advance plans for joint commissioning of services with a variety of partners which will enhance and streamline service provision and provide better vfm. For example, the Primary Care Trust, Housing Services, Social Services and Supporting People are jointly funding Plymouth's Care and Repair scheme. Commissioners are currently working on a joint contract for this service involving one specification and agreed outcomes and targets. Another example is the review of young people's services which has resulted in a tender with Housing and Social Services for a jointly commissioned service providing a holistic approach to meeting the needs of homeless young people combining assessment, floating support and supported lodgings all in one service. This should improve the likelihood of homeless young people making a successful transition to independent living and increasing their life chances.
- 143** Since our inspection the Council, as the lead authority, have received confirmation of their success in a bid to the Ethnic Minorities Innovation Fund for £299,000 to set up and deliver a Devon-wide homelessness prevention initiative for Black and Minority Ethnic households.
- 144** The Council is attracting additional funding with which to build the capacity of its staff. It has attracted additional funding of £1.5 million from the ODPM with which it plans to make additional senior staff appointments. Plymouth are investing in its staff. Training for the Supporting People team is well supported financially and there is a planned approach to staff development and training.

- 145** The Council has also received additional funding of more than £3,364,000 (£1,682,700 from the Department of Health and £1,682,700 match funding from the Housing Corporation) to develop an Extra Care scheme for older people. The Supporting People team's older person's project officer provided the lead on Plymouth's bid applications working closely with the Housing Strategy team and the Older Persons Programme Board which includes representatives from Health and Social Services. This successful bid fits with the needs identified in the Supporting People five-year strategy to provide help for older people with increasing support needs and also meets the strategic priorities of the Supporting People partner agencies.

### **Summary**

- 146** We consider the Supporting People programme has excellent prospects for improving on progress made to date.
- 147** The programme has a track record of delivering improvements. The profile of housing-related support provision is changing and gaps in services are being addressed. Service reviews were completed by the deadline of March 2006 and have secured real improvements for service users. Value for money improvements have been achieved and there are improved outcomes for service users.
- 148** Leadership of the programme is effective. Managers have worked well with stakeholders to set a clear direction for the future and have demonstrated their track record to continue to deliver change. However, current performance management arrangements do not yet fully capture the outcomes that the programme delivers for service users and therefore is not yet being used as a tool to drive service improvement.
- 149** The features needed to demonstrate capacity to improve are in place. Financial management and staff capacity is good. Partnership working is strong. The new procurement arrangements are sound and IT systems are reliable. Success has been achieved in leveraging in additional resources from other funding sources.
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## Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

### Demographic information

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

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**Table 1**

Measure	Plymouth	England
Population (mid-2004) <sup>5</sup>	244,400	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	18.6	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than white-British 2004)	1.6	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) <sup>6</sup>	2.5	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) <sup>7</sup>	75	-

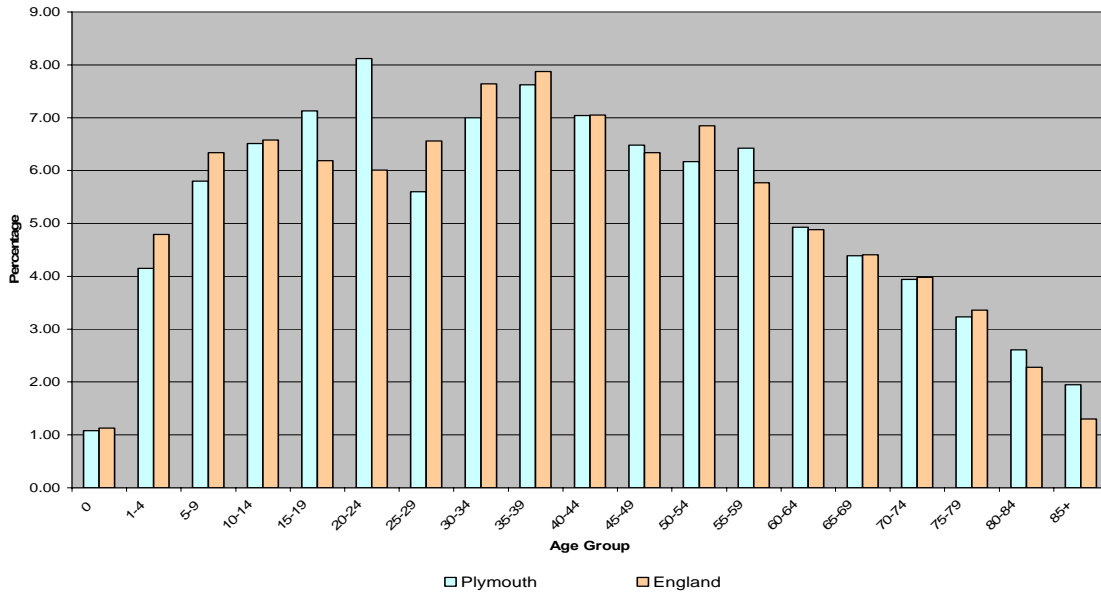
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<sup>5</sup> Source: mid-year population estimates (2004).

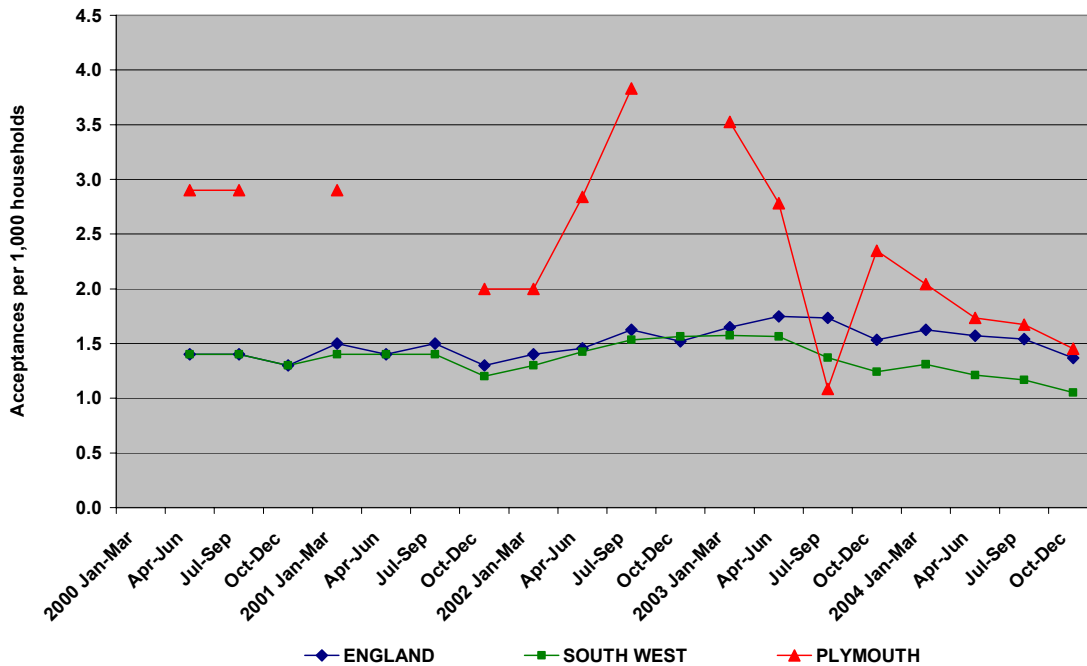
<sup>6</sup> Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (February 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Source: Deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the Authority.

**Figure 2 Percentage of the population<sup>8</sup> in each age group compared with England**



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



<sup>8</sup> Source: mid-year population estimates (2004)

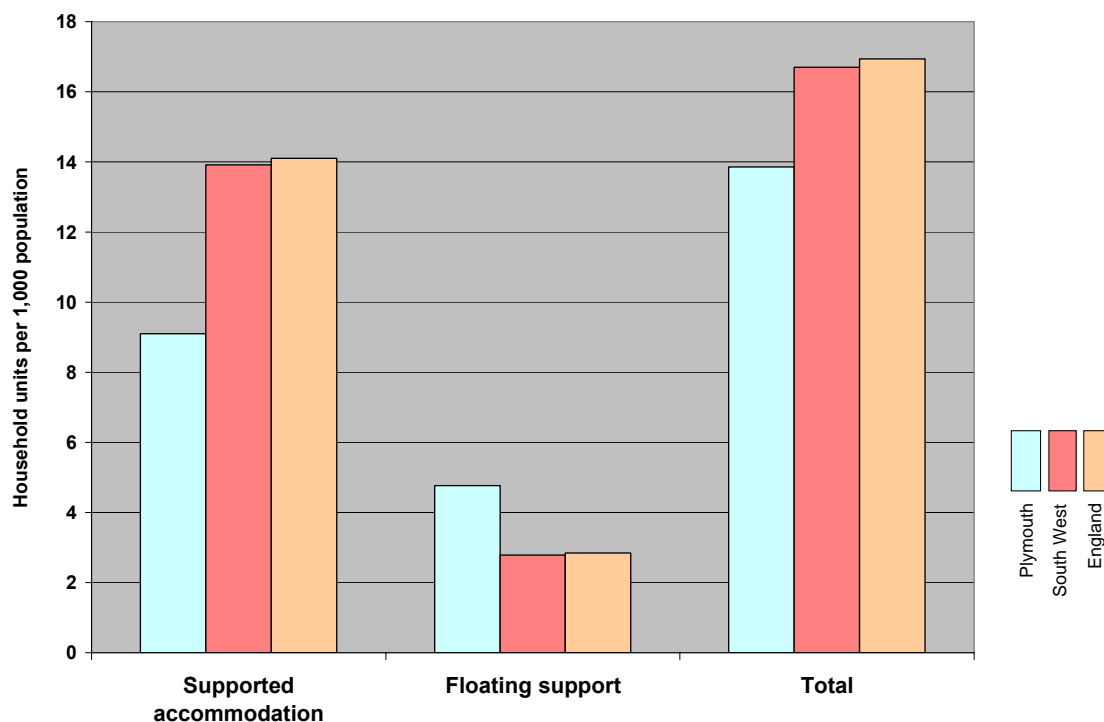
## Performance information

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

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

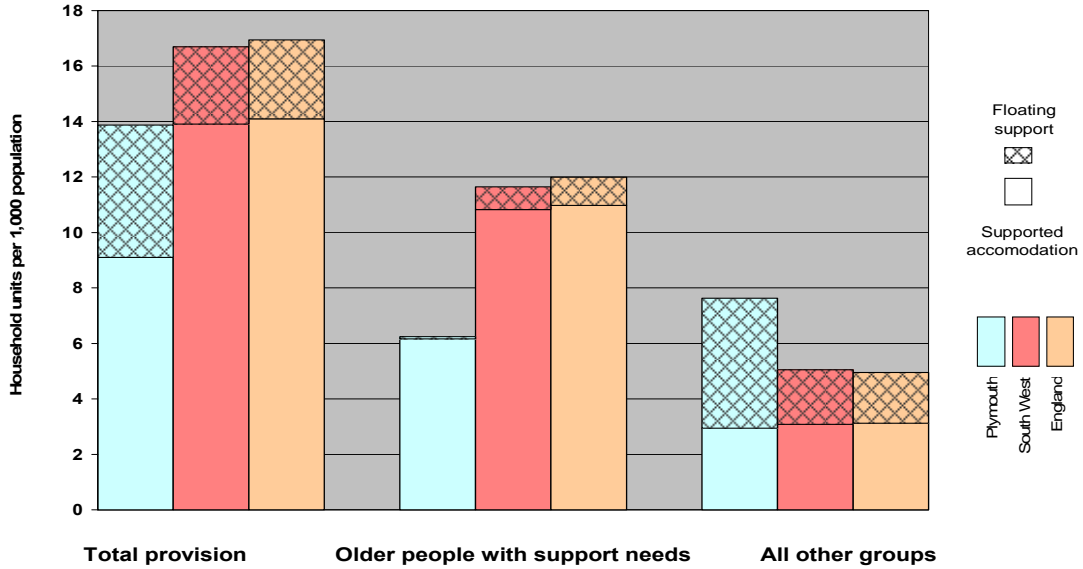
### Supporting People data

Figure 4 **Total service provision funded through Supporting People<sup>9</sup>**

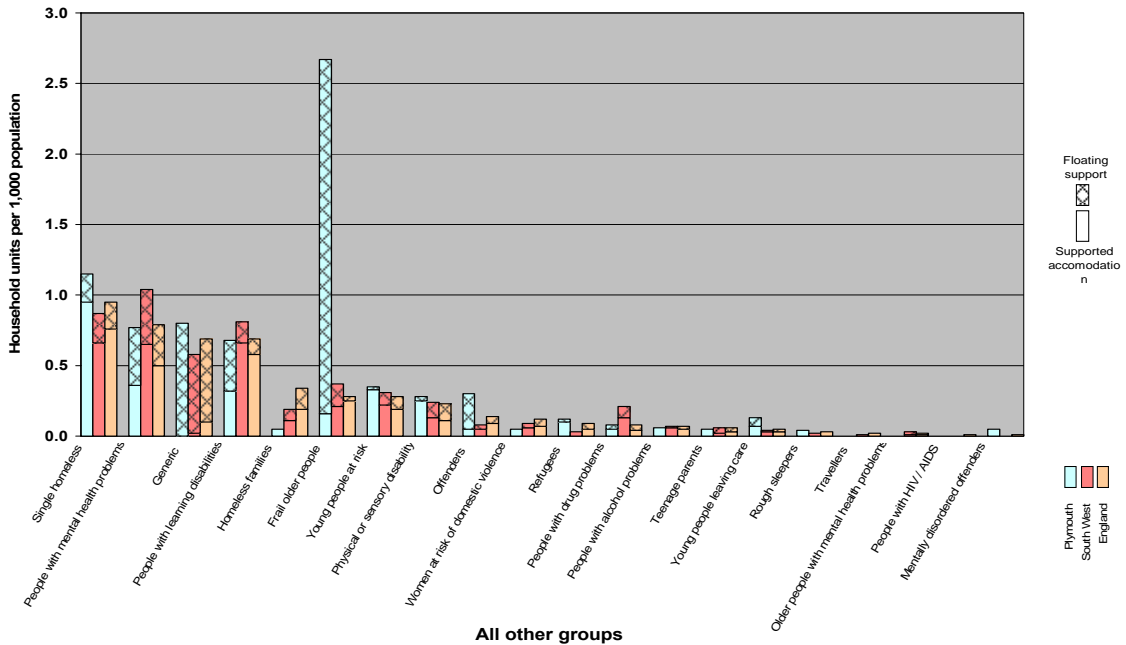


<sup>9</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Figure 5 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England<sup>10</sup>**



**Figure 6 Services for other groups compared with the region and England<sup>11</sup>**



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

<sup>11</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Table 2 Funding for Supporting People<sup>12</sup>**

<b>Plymouth</b>	<b>2003/04</b>	<b>2004/05</b>	<b>2005/06</b>
Final Supporting People grant	£ 8,673,785	£ 8,689,124	£ 8,251,491
Pipeline allocation	£ 173,354	£ 257,281	£ -
Administration grant	£ 220,815	£ 199,064	£ 159,251

**Table 3 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)<sup>13</sup>**

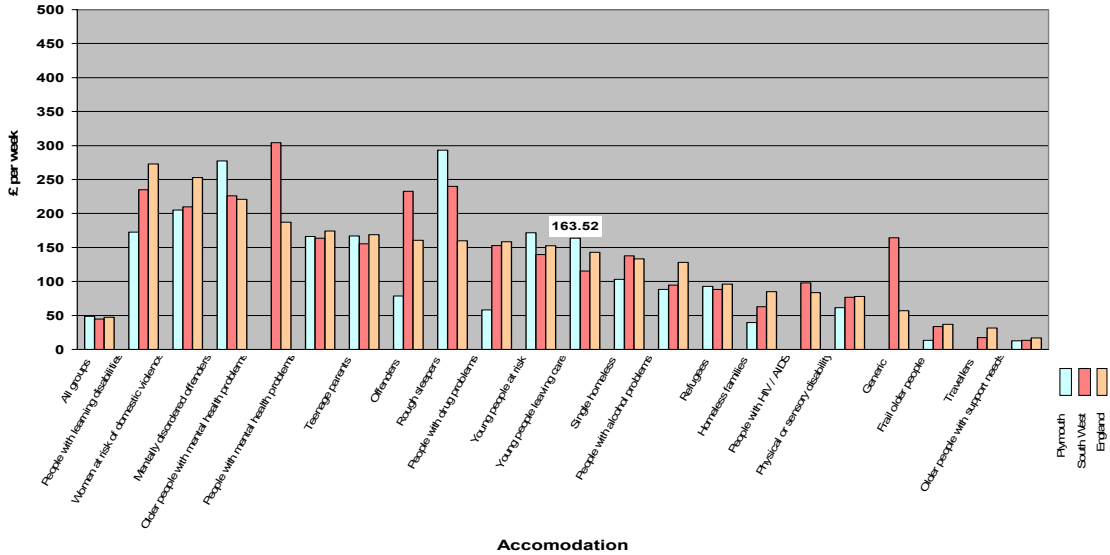
	<b>Per head of population</b>	<b>Per unit</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms</b>	<b>Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing</b>
Plymouth	£ 0.70	£ 23.12	£ 40.06	£ 57.48
South West	£ 0.73	£ 33.33	£ 36.46	£ 80.42
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

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

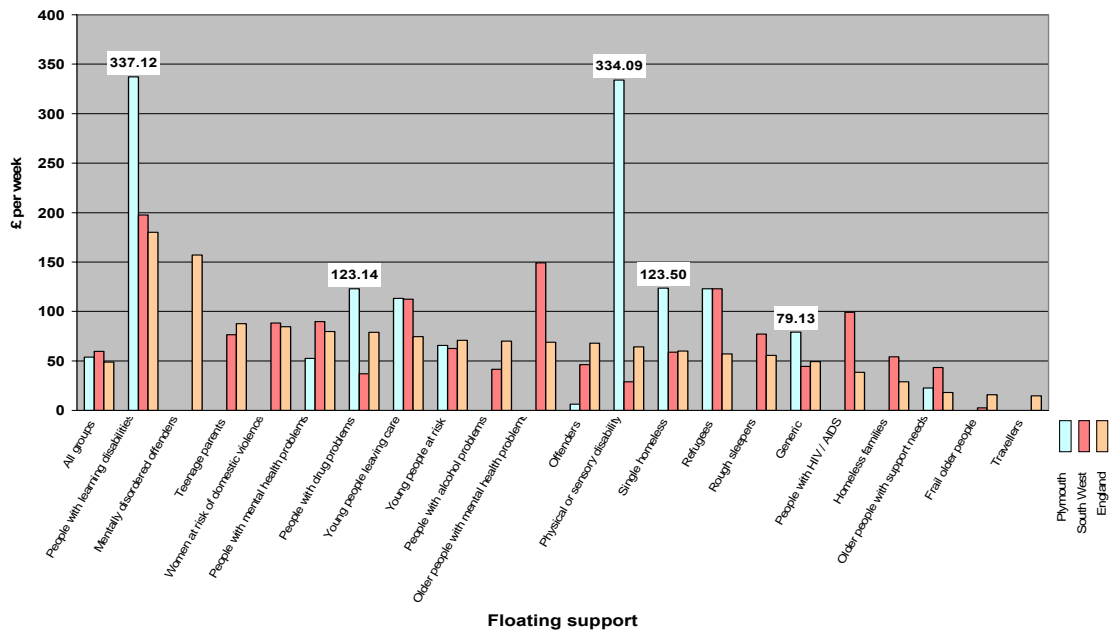
<sup>12</sup> Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

<sup>13</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003.

**Figure 7 Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)<sup>14</sup>**



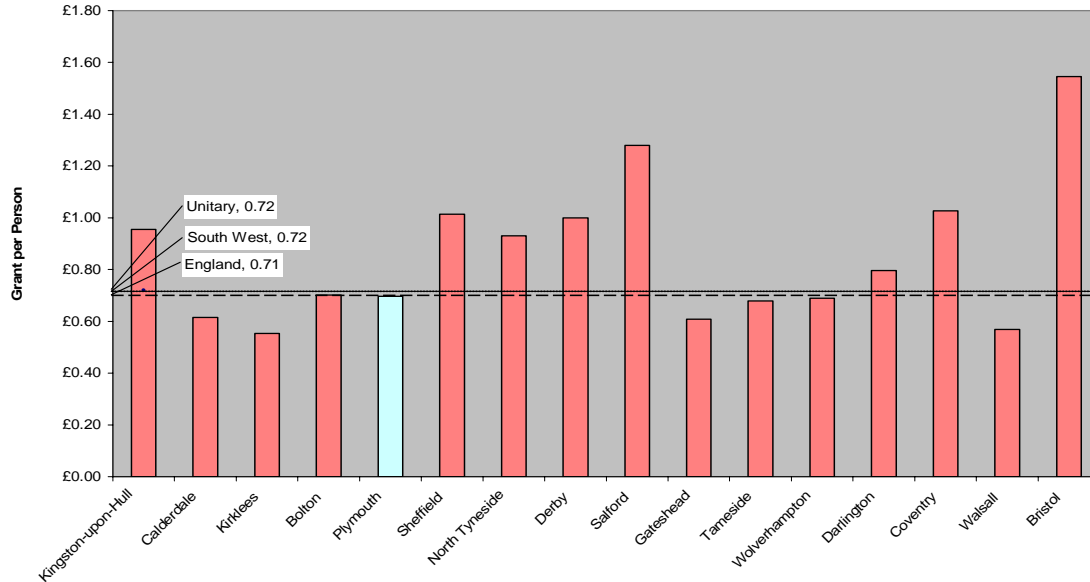
**Figure 8 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)<sup>15</sup>**



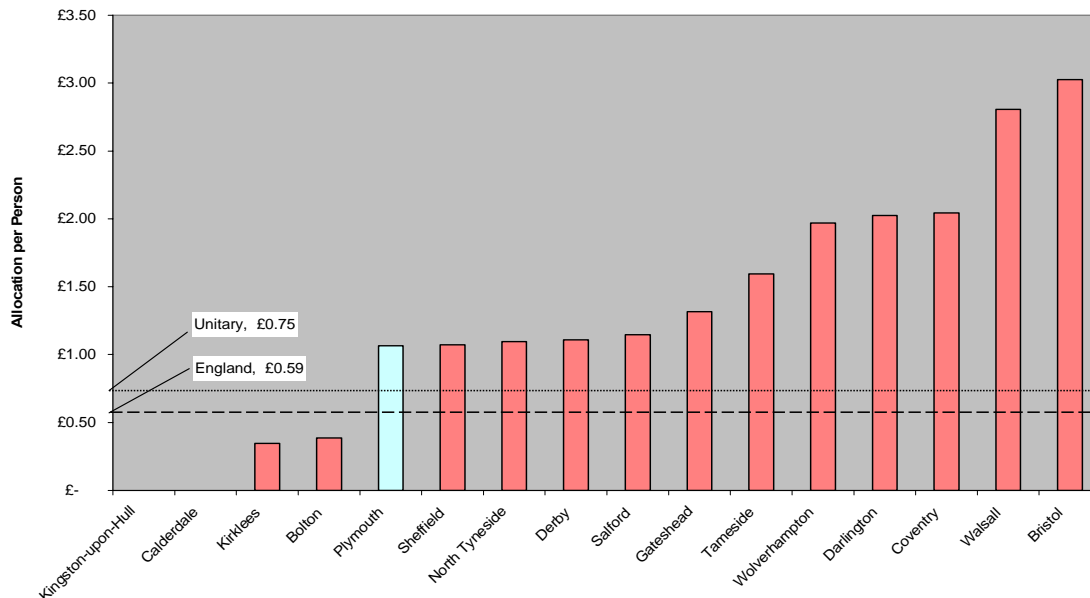
<sup>14</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Figure 9 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours,<sup>16</sup> all unitary councils and all English councils (2004/05)**



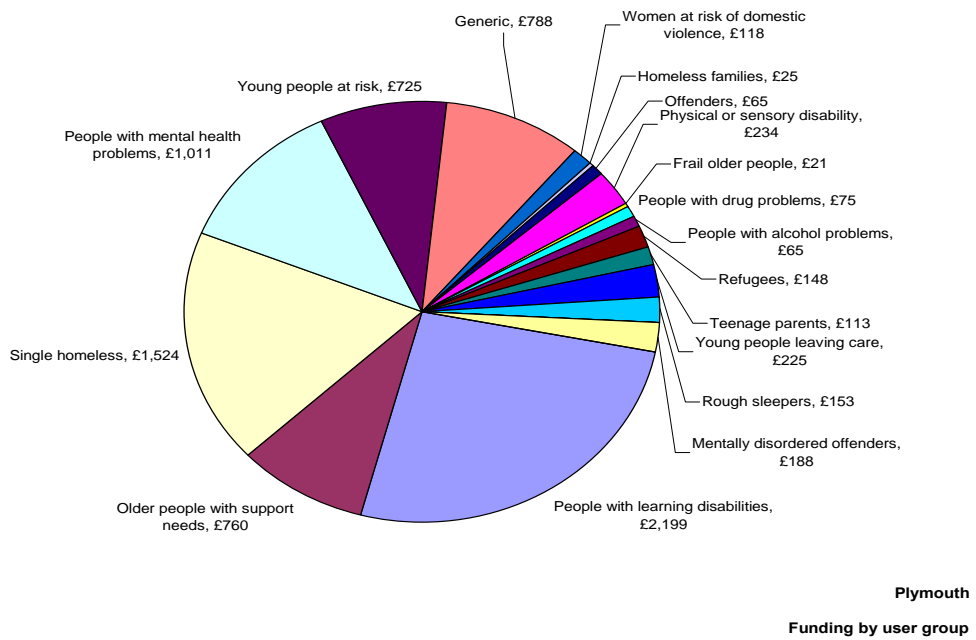
**Figure 10 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours,<sup>17</sup> all unitary councils and all English councils.**



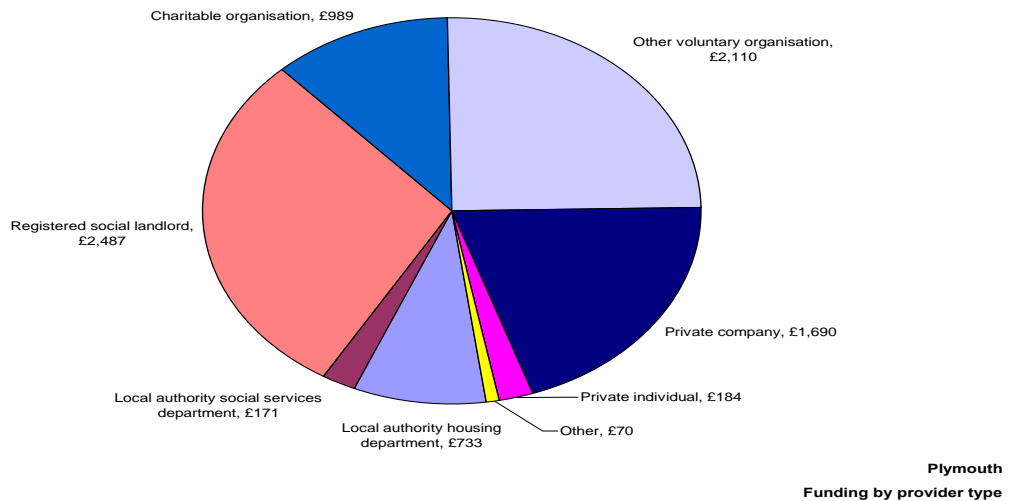
<sup>16</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

<sup>17</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

**Figure 11 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)<sup>18</sup>**



**Figure 12 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)<sup>19</sup>**



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

<sup>19</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

**Social Services star ratings November 2004**

**Table 4 The table below shows the Social Services Inspectorate ratings of the Council’s performance**

	<b>Serving people well?</b>	<b>Prospects for improvement?</b>	<b>Performance rating (CPA equivalent)</b>
Adults’ Services	Some	Promising	(0)
Children’s Services	No	Uncertain	

**Social services performance indicators**

**Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04**

**Table 5 How the Council’s Social Services performed on indicators relevant to Supporting People**

<b>Plymouth</b>	
Significantly above average (•••••)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)
Above average (••••)	Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26) Admissions of supported residents aged 18 to 64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Delayed transfers of care (D41)
Average (•••)	Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact Social Services easily (D58)

<b>Plymouth</b>	
Below average (**)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39)
Significantly below average (•)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57)

### Best value performance indicators

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

**Table 6**      **How the Council performed on best value performance indicators relevant to Supporting People**

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

## Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on-site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
  - the Council’s self-assessment;
  - Supporting People five-year strategy;
  - the Council's corporate strategies with impact upon Supporting People;
  - plans and strategies from partner agencies that may impact on Supporting People;
  - service documents including policies and procedures, information leaflets for users and providers, newsletters;
  - Better Care, Higher Standards document;
  - service improvement plans;
  - performance information; and
  - minutes of the Commissioning Body, Core Strategy Group and other key meetings.

## Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
  - a questionnaire-based survey sent to all providers of housing-related support services;
  - focus groups with service providers;
  - visits to contracted supported housing services, to talk to service users and frontline staff;
  - telephone calls to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
  - interviews with key staff and stakeholders within the Council, the Primary Care Trust and the probation service;
  - interview with the leader of the Council;
  - review of the website;
  - mystery shopping visits to council offices;
  - desktop checks of service review files; and
  - observation of a meeting of the Commissioning Body.