

Supporting People

North Yorkshire County Council

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Supporting People Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high quality local 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 Department of Communities and Local Government (the former 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

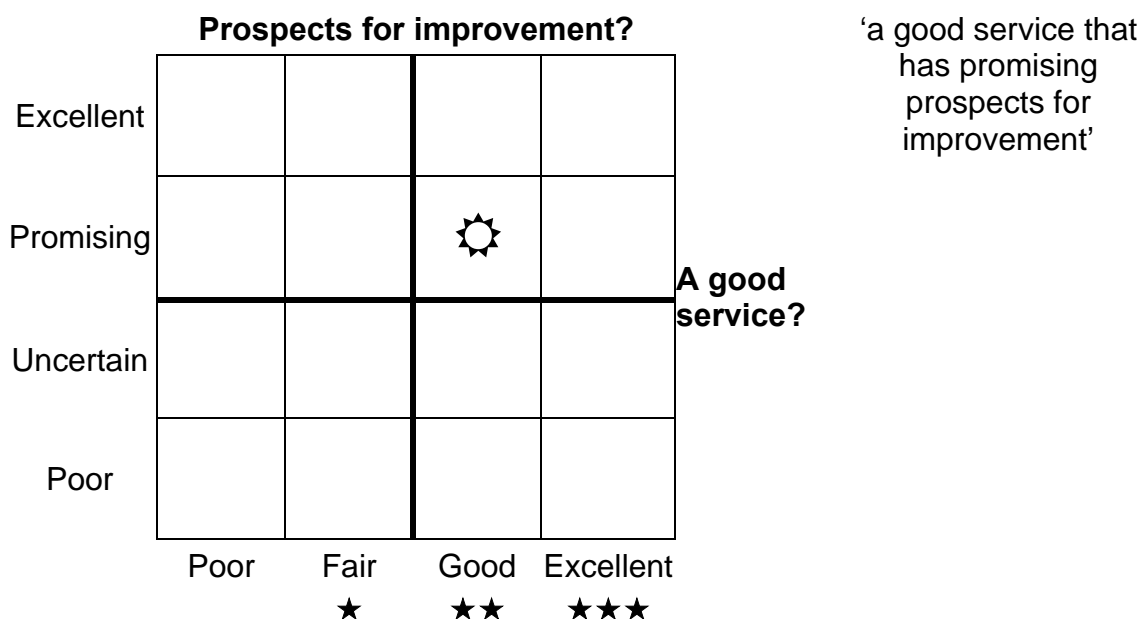
Summary

- 1 North Yorkshire County Council is geographically the largest county in England, covering over 3,000 square miles. The population is 575,000 people, of which 1.1 per cent are from black and minority ethnic groups.
- 2 The Council has adopted a leader and cabinet model of governance. The Council has 72 elected councillors made up of 42 Conservative, 18 Liberal Democrat, three Labour and nine Independent.
- 3 The Council had a revenue budget of £531 million for 2005/06. It employs approximately 22,200 staff with approximately 13,000 of these working in education within schools.
- 4 North Yorkshire County Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with the seven district councils of Hambleton, Craven, Ryedale, Richmondshire, Harrogate, Selby and Scarborough. With the four Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) of: Selby and York; Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale; Hambleton and Richmondshire; and Craven, Harrogate and Rural District as well as with the North Yorkshire Probation Area Service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 5 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2005/06 was £15,584,012. In addition the Council received an administration grant of £385,412 to fulfil its role as ALA.

Scoring the service

- 6 We have assessed North Yorkshire County Council as providing a ‘good’, two-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 chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

- 7 During our inspection we identified the following strengths in the way the Supporting People programme has been administered.
- Governance of the programme is highly effective in the county with key partners engaged at all levels. District council involvement (at both officer and member level) is particularly strong. As a result there is high level of consensus and ownership (including providers) to deliver the programme.
 - Providers in the county reported that they felt involved with the programme and well supported by the Supporting People team. The inspection found recurring evidence of a constructive dialogue and supportive relationship between the team, governance structures and providers.

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

- The Supporting People service in North Yorkshire works well with other authorities in the sub-region and region. A recent benefit of this is the decision to jointly commission a research project into the housing related support needs of gypsies and travellers in the region.
- The service review programme was completed on time and used to drive service efficiency and improvement. Reviews have provided stability to providers and enabled many to plan better in the medium term. As a result of the review programme services in the county reflect local priorities, service remodelling is delivering better outcomes and there is evidence of a significant improvement in the lives of some service users across a range of groups.
- The Supporting People team made very effective and efficient use of a consultant to support providers through the review programme. This support was especially valued by small providers.
- Access to services in the county is good through a range of informative leaflets (available in a variety of formats), effective signposting and referral arrangements.
- The service is delivering value for money. The review programme led to more efficient services and identified ineligible costs. Commissioners have agreed a plan with providers to withdraw this funding over time. This movement of money into SP budget creates the capacity to commission priority services over time.
- Extensive use is made of benchmarking, regionally and nationally, to assess service costs.

8 However, there are a number of areas for improvement.

- The Five-Year Strategy (and its supporting work plans) identify service priorities but do not quantify or cost them. New services cannot be commissioned or remodelled until this has been done, so some needs will continue to be unmet.
- The Provider Forum functions well, however it is overly dependent on the Supporting People team for its operation. Provider capacity needs to be increased to enable the forum to be more self-sustaining.
- There are limited opportunities for service user involvement in the county. As a result, the ability of service users to influence the development and delivery of the Supporting Programme is weak.
- The Council's Supporting People charging policy has not been reviewed since the introduction of the Supporting People programme. Consequently, the policy does not reflect the lessons learnt from implementing the programme so far. The Council recognises this point and plans to review the policy during 2006/07.

9 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement.

- The Council has a strong track record of delivering service improvement.
- The Supporting People Strategy, review programme and commissioning decisions prioritise the most disadvantaged people in the county.
- The Council has a focus on value for money which is clearly reflected in the Supporting People programme.
- Supporting People service reviews were used to drive specific service improvements linked to identified needs and priorities.
- The Council displays a culture of continuous improvement and this is supported within Supporting People by clear and effective leadership at a political, corporate, departmental and programme level.
- There is a performance management framework in place for the Commissioning Body which is also used to inform departmental and corporate performance systems, the Partnership Group and the Member Steering Group. Performance of the programme is widely known and understood.
- The Supporting People service works well with a range of partners (within the county and beyond) to develop and deliver the programme. This is especially reflected in relationships with district councils. For example, the chair and vice chair of the Commissioning Body and chair of the Member Steering Group are district council representatives.
- The service is willing to share learning with, and apply learning from, other Supporting People services.

10 There are however, areas that need to be addressed.

- Service user satisfaction information is limited and should be expanded. This will allow the service to be more certain that the programme is delivering service improvement and positive outcomes for customers.
- To date the service has undertaken only 'soft' market testing and made no use of service tendering options. As result, further efficiencies may potentially be lost.
- The Council's Commissioning Plan for Adult Services is not yet in place. This must be completed and must adequately reflect the needs of the Supporting People programme in order to effectively deliver Supporting People priorities. The Council intends to address this through its response to the Department of Health's White Paper, 'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say'.

Recommendations

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

Recommendation

R1 The Supporting People Strategy and Annual Plan need to quantify and cost commissioning priorities, particularly in relation to unmet need. To achieve this the Commissioning Body should:

- *complete all outstanding needs analysis work;*
- *prioritise within the identified priorities; and*
- *match the above to the timetable for ineligible expenditure coming back into the programme.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- as funding becomes available the Commissioning Body can quickly meet its stated commissioning objectives;
- providers and other stakeholders have clarity regarding commissioning priorities over the next three years; and
- the Supporting People team can assess the best procurement options to deliver the necessary services.

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

Recommendation

R2 The Supporting People team needs to increase service user involvement. To do this the team should:

- *prioritise the capacity to undertake this activity;*
- *explore current barriers to service user involvement and address these where practicable; and*
- *maximise opportunities for engaging with service users through existing, arrangements in the county.*

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

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- The development and delivery of the Supporting People programme will be better informed by the views and needs of service users.

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

<i>Recommendation</i>
<p><i>R3 The Council should finalise its Commissioning Plan for Adult Services. In doing this the Council needs to ensure that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>the plan adequately reflects the needs of the Supporting People programme.</i>

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- Supporting People service priorities will be effectively delivered.

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

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

Dates of inspection: 27-31 March 2006

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Report

Context

The locality

- 13 North Yorkshire County Council is geographically the largest county in England, covering over 3,000 square miles. The population is 575,000 people, of which 1.1 per cent are from black and minority ethnic groups.
- 14 Residents aged 65 years and older are growing in number and comprise 21.5 per cent of the population as compared to an England average of 18.5 per cent. The number of people aged 85 years and above is increasing significantly in the county.
- 15 In terms of deprivation, North Yorkshire ranks 294 out of 354 areas of England (with 1 being the most deprived and 354 being the least deprived) using the average of the Super Output Areas score. Although unemployment in the county is low at 1.5 per cent, compared to a national average of 2.4 per cent, this raises issues of access to affordable housing for low paid local residents.

The Council

- 16 The Council had a revenue budget of £531 million for 2005/06. It employs approximately 22,200 staff with approximately 13,000 of these working in education within schools.
- 17 The Council has adopted a leader and cabinet model of governance. The Council has 72 elected councillors made up of 42 Conservative, 18 Liberal Democrat, three Labour and nine Independent.
- 18 The County Council has identified seven key objectives in its Corporate Plan. These are as follows.
 - Security for all – promoting safe, healthy and sustainable communities.
 - Growing up prepared for the future through good education and care and protection when it is needed.
 - Independence through employment, opportunity and appropriate support.
 - Keeping us on the move with good roads and a safe and reliable transport system.
 - Strengthening our economy by supporting business, developing our infrastructure, investing in powerful telecommunications and helping people improve their skills.
 - Looking after our heritage and our environment in our countryside and our towns and villages.
 - Keeping in touch by listening to views, planning to meet needs, providing new ways to contact us and by telling what we are doing.

The service

- 19** North Yorkshire County Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in its area. The Council works in partnership with the seven district councils of Hambleton, Craven, Ryedale, Richmondshire, Harrogate, Selby and Scarborough. With the four Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) of: Selby and York; Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale; Hambleton and Richmondshire; and Craven, Harrogate and Rural District as well as with the North Yorkshire Probation Area Service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 20** The County Council identified Social Services as the lead directorate for Supporting People and the Supporting People team are functionally based in the Strategy and Performance Service Division with line management responsibility being through the Assistant Director (Strategy and Performance) who is also the Accountable Officer (AO) for Supporting People. The team consists of 11.5 full time equivalent staff whose functions include management, service review, finance, administration, information technology and strategy development. Contracting, information technology and accountancy support are also provided to the team by corporate council services.
- 21** Unit costs for commissioned services are below the regional and national averages per head of population and per unit of housing support. The highest cost service is £610.38 per person per week for a learning disability service. The lowest cost service (excluding community alarms) is £10.67 per person per week for a sheltered housing scheme.
- 22** The pattern of expenditure is characterised by:
- significantly high levels of expenditure on learning disability services (52.4 per cent of the budget);
 - an over reliance on accommodation based support rather than floating support;
 - no specific provision for travellers, asylum seekers, people with HIV/AIDs, rough sleepers, people with alcohol misuse, mentally disorder offenders, and older people with mental health problems; and
 - a mixed economy of provision between private providers, housing associations, local authorities and charitable organisations.
- 23** The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2005/06 was £15,584,012. In addition the Council received an administration grant of £385,412 to fulfil its role as ALA.

How good is the service?

Governance

- 24** Overall, strengths significantly outweigh weaknesses. Governance arrangements in the county are very strong.
- 25** The former ODPM set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process;
 - Inclusive Forum: consults with service providers and service users;
 - Core Strategy Development Group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme;
 - Commissioning Body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme;
 - Councillors: approve key decisions of the commissioning body; and
 - Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.

Corporate commitment

- 26** There is a strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme both in terms of resources and time from officers and councillors. The Council has a clear understanding of its responsibilities as ALA. Lead members and the council's executive, are aware of and understand the Supporting People programme. The governance structures in North Yorkshire are very inclusive with a wide range of stakeholders involved particularly district councils. The county has an active Elected Members Committee, which includes district council members, to provide a scrutiny function. Consequently, the administration of the programme is very effective.
- 27** The county wide Elected Members Committee was established in early 2002 to give community governance to the programme. The Committee draws membership from the County Council, the district councils, and an elected member or board member from each of the partner agencies. Additionally there is attendance from the North Yorkshire Forum for Voluntary Organisations (NYFVO) to represent the voluntary and community sector. Attendance is monitored and there has been a strong challenge from the Chair to partner agencies if attendance is low. The Elected Members Committee has terms of reference that show the Committee advises the Commissioning Body, Supporting People Partnership Group and Administering Authority and acts in a scrutiny role for Commissioning Body decisions.

Commissioning Body

- 28 All key partners attend the Commissioning Body with an appropriate level of representation and attendance is good. In addition, district councils are all represented and a district council representative chairs the meeting. There are also two provider representatives who attend the Commissioning Body out of the four democratically elected provider representatives on the Partnership Group.
- 29 Commissioning Body meeting agendas are thorough and well structured with an appropriate level of reported information to assist and advise members. This includes programme and financial monitoring reports. All relevant protocols and procedures are in place to give the programme in North Yorkshire a sound administrative base. Examples of this include terms of reference, a memorandum of understanding, policies covering charging, service reviews, eligibility and appeals as well as an agreed value for money methodology. Links are in place to all partner agency plans. The Commissioning Body is providing strong strategic leadership of the programme.
- 30 There are no plans for Children's Services to have representation on the Commissioning Body when Social Services restructures into an Adults Directorate and a Children's Authority. The Council acknowledges this and will address it.

Core Strategy Group (CSG)

- 31 The CSG in North Yorkshire is called the Supporting People Partnership Group. The group has an appropriate understanding of its role in relation to the Commissioning Body. It is given information (including performance reports) ahead of Commissioning Body meetings in order to challenge and approve key decisions, which adds to the accountability of the programme.
- 32 The Partnership Group has membership from a wide range of stakeholders and partners. This includes district councils, the Drug Action Team, the probation service, teenage pregnancy, leaving care service, the PCT, and housing associations. This ensures that service user group interests are effectively considered and represented.
- 33 The Group has appropriate terms of reference and meets eight times per year. Additional meetings have been convened as necessary, for example to develop the five-year strategy and to consider the Supporting People National Strategy consultation document.
- 34 All three statutory partners are represented on both the Commissioning Body and the Partnership Group which helps communication between them to be consistent and effective. The Chair of the Supporting People Partnership Group is a Commissioning Body member to ensure continuity and communication links between the two bodies. There are also now standard reports at each of the meetings to provide feedback.

- 35 There is effective representation for domestic violence (DV) services in the Supporting People programme. The DV co-ordinators are on the Partnership Group. DV co-ordinators in the county consider that the Supporting People team prioritise DV within the programme thereby ensuring that the needs of this vulnerable group are served.
- 36 The Partnership Group has not received any recent training to update them on emerging issues. This weakens their capacity to inform the future direction of the programme.
- 37 Formal service user involvement in the operation of the Partnership Group has been limited. This is an area for improvement.

Accountable Officer

- 38 The Accountable Officer champions the programme, monitors links to other strategies, and promotes funding opportunities well. Key issues are effectively reported to the Commissioning Body. The Accountable Officer in North Yorkshire is an Assistant Director of Social Services which gives the Supporting People programme a high profile within the wider County Council.
- 39 Although the Accountable Officer is well briefed about the proceedings of the Partnership Group, relationships with providers would be strengthened by attendance at Partnership Group meetings.

Health and probation partnership arrangements

- 40 The PCTs in the county are well represented within the governance structures and actively engaged with the Supporting People programme. Very close working relationships exist with mental health services.
- 41 Probation providers and service planners are actively involved in the strategic direction and delivery of the programme. A Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) is in place (monitored locally and sub-regionally) and there is clear guidance for Probation Staff with regard to assessing and intervening in the provision of suitable accommodation for offenders who present a high risk of harm to others. An agreement is in place that all level 3 MAPPA cases should not be housed in temporary accommodation where possible and there is good liaison with prisons in the region. This helps to meet the needs of a traditionally excluded group of vulnerable people and assists with homeless prevention.

Cross authority working

- 42 The Supporting People Lead Officer is one of three vice chairs of the regional Supporting People group.

Delivery arrangements

- 43 Strengths outweigh weaknesses and delivery arrangements in the county are good. The Supporting People team has been adequately resourced and is backed up as appropriate by a range of corporate services. Programme performance and outcomes are reported widely throughout the governance structures, including at the corporate council level. Robust contract management procedures are in place.

Supporting People team

- 44 There is a stable, skilled and well-established Supporting People team to oversee delivery of the programme. The team has a range of key skills, including experience of supported housing, finance and contract management and service development. Links with a range of existing forums, including those covering domestic violence, offenders, young people, mental health and people with learning disabilities, have allowed staff to develop their understanding of different client groups.
- 45 Staff within the Supporting Team (including the Lead Officer) are appropriately supervised and have regular appraisals and supervision meetings. Work plans drawn up as a result are SMART, enabling the team to have clarity about their roles and work priorities.
- 46 Overall, providers were positive about the service provided by the team. They considered communication to be effective, and queries were responded to promptly. The Supporting People team is widely viewed as open, supportive, inclusive and forward thinking.
- 47 The team attend provider/partnership meetings if relevant. Partnership Group members confirmed that the team were involved in partnerships they have in place. This raised the profile of the Supporting People programme and its links to their service areas.
- 48 Providers reported that the SP team did respond positively to their feedback and their needs. For example: a service user questionnaire was revised to make it more accessible to a variety of service users; the team has trained stakeholders on the Supporting People programme to emphasise its importance and relevance to their work; Domestic Violence co-ordinators were supported to develop the North Yorkshire domestic abuse strategy.
- 49 Providers confirmed they are paid on time, with schedules included. They get feedback on the workbooks they submit when there are issues to be addressed and receive prompts if they are overdue in returning them. This helps providers to meet their contractual obligations.

Grant conditions and eligibility criteria

- 50 An agreed eligibility criteria policy is in place which is clear and used effectively by the team to ensure the strategic relevance of commissioned services. However some providers are confused about the impact of the criteria on them. This is acknowledged by the team. This should be addressed initially through the Provider Forum and followed up by individual discussions with providers if necessary.

Contracts

- 51 Good quality 'steady state' contracts are being awarded following service reviews. These will start to be issued from April 2006. In addition, 'short form' contracts are being issued to small providers and sole traders which are appropriate and significantly reduce the administrative burden on these services. The new contracts give providers greater clarity as to what is expected from them and improve performance monitoring arrangements.
- 52 Work book returns are monitored and evaluated by the team to inform performance monitoring reports. Non-compliance or poor performance issues trigger direct contact from the team (which can include provider or scheme visits).
- 53 Contracts include a requirement to comply with The Race Relations Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Disability Discrimination Act and Human Rights Act.
- 54 Provider, service and market stability were a strong feature of negotiations following service review and providers reported they were highly satisfied with the overall contracting arrangements.

Needs mapping, analysis and review

- 55 The Supporting People team has undertaken needs analysis and mapping in the county and this has been influenced by national guidance from government. The outcomes from this work have been used to inform local commissioning priorities. This gives more certainty to the Commissioning Body that scarce programme funding will be used to best effect.
- 56 Learning from the needs mapping work has been well disseminated through Supporting People structures which enable the range of stakeholders to influence planning decisions.
- 57 Provider returns, monitoring information, partnership fora and bespoke research projects are used to update needs mapping data. However, there are gaps in the need analysis for hard-to-reach groups.
- 58 Needs mapping is ongoing for children with special educational needs. This includes children with physical disabilities who will transfer to adult services. The Supporting People team need to be informed of this work and plans made to meet the needs of this vulnerable group. This is important in the light of a potential policy shift to maintain more young people with a disability in their own homes in the future.

Work planning

- 59 Service Plans and Delivery Plans are SMART and linked to other partners' agendas. These are monitored by the Commissioning Body and Partnership Group at each meeting and are linked well to the five-year strategy. As a consequence they effectively prioritise work within the Supporting People team.
- 60 The Partnership Group holds regular away days to intensively work on priorities for the Supporting People programme. This ensures that tasks allocated by the Commissioning Body are carried out efficiently, on time and involve relevant stakeholders.
- 61 The Probation Area's Business Plan for 2005/06 contains a performance measure for accommodating offenders which is supportive of the targets for offender accommodation contained in the Supporting People five-year strategy.
- 62 There is regular reporting on the Supporting People programme to governance structures and to management structures within the county council. Reports are comprehensive and assist decision-making on the programme. They include a financial forecast for the current year, a summary of current expenditure against user groups and long term forecasts. This enables governance groups to assess performance and make informed decisions regarding future priorities.

Five-year strategy

- 63 The five-year strategy was completed and submitted within the amended former ODPM deadline and complies with government guidance in terms of its content and structure.
- 64 An informative summary of the strategy has been produced and is widely distributed amongst partner agencies and providers. This ensures that the key aims and objectives of the programme in North Yorkshire are commonly known.
- 65 There is strong ownership of the five-year strategy within the county council, district councils and amongst other partners and providers. All partners have signed up to the five-year strategy, which will assist with its inclusion in other, related, strategies and assist its delivery throughout the county.
- 66 Extensive consultation was undertaken to ensure that the five-year strategy is an accurate and robust document. Providers and other stakeholders were consulted in a variety of ways and felt that the process was accessible and constructive. The Partnership Group has 'champions' to lead on each service user group. This ensured that the expertise of partners informed the strategy.
- 67 The Supporting People team carried out a series of roadshows to consult stakeholders on a draft strategy. Providers particularly welcomed the fact that the draft strategy was under-developed enough to enable them to fully input into its development. This enabled providers and other stakeholders to have an early input into strategy development and identify local priorities and needs.

- 68 A weakness in the strategy is that while it identifies and reflects local priorities these are neither costed nor quantified. This inhibits service commissioning decisions. The needs assessments generated by service reviews do not make comprehensive conclusions, and this is a weakness. They contain data on the level of known service users in the locality and current provision, plus targets for reconfiguration of funding amongst the service user groups to meet this demand. However, they do not identify how many units of each type of housing related support are needed or where this should be in the county to provide sufficient additional services where it is needed most. This detail is needed to identify which services will be developed in the future as funding becomes available.

Performance monitoring and management

- 69 There is regular reporting of high level programme outputs and outcomes to the Commissioning Body, Partnership Group, Social Services Management Team and elected members (at County and District level). This provides a broad overview of performance. Reports to the Commissioning Body and Partnership Group include information on key performance indicators, service review progress and outcomes, and progress against the delivery of the five-year strategy and delivery plan.
- 70 Performance reports to the Commissioning Body and the Partnership Group include a very high standard of budget and financial profiling information. There are also effective IT arrangements in place for financial management which can be linked to performance indicators to generate detailed reports.
- 71 There was an under-spend carried forward from 2004/05 to 2005/06 of £523,764. The under-spend is as a result of the efficiency savings identified through the Service Reviews and implementation of the VFM policy and eligibility criteria. The potential for significant reduction in grant in future years has led to a strategy based on carrying forward underspends to compensate for the reduced grant income and align this with likely programme costs after VFM and eligibility work is completed. The lack of certainty about future funding levels has prevented the Commissioning Body from entering into new commitments whilst it remains unclear whether future funding will be able to fund existing services which have now gone through the service review and are seen as strategically relevant.

Fairer charging

- 72 North Yorkshire County Council has a Fairer Charging Policy and a customer information leaflet. New service users are automatically screened for a Fairer Charging assessment which is good practice.
- 73 However, information about Fairer Charging is not reaching service users whose circumstances may have changed. When conducting service visits over the course of the inspection (to block subsidy schemes), less than half of service users had any awareness of Fairer Charging and none had seen any literature about it. As a result some service users may be unnecessarily paying for support.

Relationships with providers

- 74 Supporting People providers in North Yorkshire are regularly consulted and involved. A survey of providers in the county showed that they feel informed of developments in the programme and kept up to date with emerging issues locally and nationally.
- 75 Providers are able to draw on independent support in various areas from a commissioned organisation whose remit is to help and advise them. This provides independent advice and training to providers. In particular, support was given to providers in preparing for service reviews and this was especially valued by small providers with limited experience of formal review processes. As a result, providers were better able to participate in service reviews. This arrangement also increases the capacity of providers in the county generally, enabling them to take a more active role in programme development.
- 76 Since the establishment of the Supporting People programme the Partnership Group has had two provider representatives. This has recently been increased to four representatives to better reflect the wide range of services delivered through the Supporting People programme. Two of the representatives attend the Commissioning Body on a non-voting basis.
- 77 The Supporting People team is paying providers on time, four weeks in advance, which is important for provider stability and confidence.
- 78 Although the Supporting People team is working with providers to try and establish an effective provider forum this is not yet 'driven' by providers. Meetings are arranged and facilitated by an independent consultant. Provider capacity needs to be built to bring this about as it will increase the accountability of the programme.

Cross authority working

- 79 The Supporting People team are active participants in regional and sub-regional groups and work. The team displays clear evidence of learning from (and sharing with) others.
- 80 Recent examples of good joint working include the joint commissioning of research into the housing related support needs of gypsies and travellers and the decision to jointly fund a Regional Co-ordinator post with other ALAs in the sub-region.
- 81 North Yorkshire does not currently commission any services jointly with other local authorities. This misses opportunities to increase efficiency and ensure consistent service standards for cross-authority Supporting People services. Similarly, there is no joint accreditation of providers with other local authorities (although within the county there is 'passporting' between Supporting People and social care providers).

Risk assessment

- 82 All major risks (including significant service failures) have been assessed and planned for. The Council has an established Risk Management Strategy. The Strategy ensures that a risk prioritisation process is in place at corporate, directorate and service area level as well as some project and partnership areas. The process assists with ranking risks and develops risk registers using appropriate software.

DCLG data uploads

- 83 Data returns to government are being completed and submitted on time.

Service reviews

- 84 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area.
- 85 The Service Review programme in North Yorkshire has been completed in advance of the 31 March 2006 deadline and was well prioritised. All reviews have been completed satisfactorily and most negotiations with providers have now finished. Consequently, the team are now better placed to monitor the contracts free from the task of still having reviews to complete.
- 86 The providers interviewed and surveyed were very positive about the service review process.
- 87 Providers agreed that areas of weakness identified in the reviews were justified and that the Supporting People team worked with them to make improvements. Providers felt able to present additional information in response to draft review reports and agreed that this was taken into account for the final version.
- 88 The service review programme has been prioritised appropriately. The area of highest spending, learning disability services (accounting for over 50 per cent of the budget), was prioritised in the programme and all services have been validated in this area. As a result ineligible expenditure has been identified and commissioners have agreed a plan with providers to withdraw Supporting People funding over the next four years.
- 89 The outcomes from service reviews were reported to the Commissioning Body for approval and formal sign off. All service decommissioning decisions were required to be made by the Commissioning Body.
- 90 The service review programme delivered improvements to Supporting People services in the area. Four existing services were commissioned at the same cost but with increased capacity, six services were commissioned at the same capacity but with reduced costs and fourteen services were decommissioned on the basis that they were not strategically relevant and/or were under used.
- 91 Draft reports are not sent to operational managers. There was some evidence that this could lead to misunderstandings not being sorted out at an early stage and also that final QAF scores may have come as a surprise to operational managers.

Skills and capacity to deliver

- 92 The Supporting People Team had the capacity to conduct reviews within the methodology agreed by the Commissioning Body. Many of the skills needed existed within the team already. Where they did not, the team made use of expertise from other disciplines, for example, learning disability.
- 93 Services better reflect local needs and priorities following the service review process. Reviews have led to greater stability and certainty regarding future provision. Grant eligibility has been determined and confirmed and this has enabled some providers to plan over the medium to longer term as steady state contracts are introduced from April 2006.

Quality assurance

- 94 A review scoring sheet developed by North Yorkshire and attached to review files is very useful in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each provider and used effectively to plan improvements to standards.
- 95 All providers now meet the minimum standard of quality or better. As a result of service reviews all providers have an individual improvement plan to address identified areas of weakness. Over time, the implementation of these plans will also raise standards of housing support across the sector.
- 96 While providers were given a breakdown of their score against each element of the Quality Assurance Framework they were unclear as to their 'overall' score for reviews and frequently misinterpreted this. The Supporting People team should discuss the benefits of this approach with administering authorities that have adopted it.

Review reporting

- 97 The Partnership Group was updated on the outcome of reviews at each meeting. This enabled them to challenge any issues that arose before the findings went to the CB for decision-making. The Commissioning Body signed off all review outcomes. However, there was a period when, given the volume of reviews, the chair of the Commissioning Body and the Accountable Officer confirmed the outcomes subject to final ratification by the Commissioning Body.

Appeals process

- 98 Although used rarely, the appeals process within the Supporting People programme is clear and has been applied fairly and effectively. File inspections show good knowledge and information on the process among providers and appeals that have been carried out appear fair and appropriate. As such, providers are confident that, should they appeal, it will be carried out effectively. Providers were fully informed of their right to appeal against the findings.

Cross authority working

- 99 North Yorkshire carries out some effective cross authority working, but could develop this area further. North Yorkshire chose to have a Peer Review of its review process, conducted by staff from Leeds City Council and the Regional Co-ordinator. This demonstrates an openness to challenge and willingness to learn within the team.
- 100 There is no joint accreditation of providers working in other local authority areas. Joint accreditation would help to streamline the procurement of services. While this issue is under discussion in the regional group it needs to be progressed into action.

Feedback to providers and improvement planning

- 101 There is good communication between the Supporting People team and providers about service provision. There is evidence of constructive dialogue and a supportive relationship where service improvement is deemed necessary by the review process. The process is delivering improved services in the county.
- 102 Overall providers were positive about the scope and process of reviews. Service users were consulted, and the Supporting People team were seen as approachable. Providers felt able to challenge verbal feedback received during the review visit, and could submit additional information which was taken into account for the final report. Most reports were issued promptly, with the majority completed within four weeks. Providers considered guidance on any weaknesses found to be particularly helpful.

Outcomes from service reviews

- 103 There is clear evidence of improved outcomes for service users through the remodelling and reconfiguration of services as a result of the review process.
- 104 North Yorkshire has used national guidance to inform some of its reconfiguration targets in the five-year strategy. For example, the level of learning disability provision is informed by former ODPM recommended levels for the locality.
- 105 Other examples include homeless provision in Hambleton which has moved away from accommodation based support to floating support arrangements. In Richmondshire, mental health services have increased, including more floating support, available regardless of tenure. Services are being adapted strategically to better provide for known needs.
- 106 There is a plan to withdraw funding from ineligible services. £520,000 has been taken back from services so far, with no effect on service users. The Supporting People team has negotiated a retraction plan with North Yorkshire Social Services to withdraw £0.5 million per year between 2007 and 2010. This movement of money into the Supporting People budget creates the capacity to commission priority services over time.

- 107 Service users believe that provision has improved since the introduction of Supporting People. In particular, support plans are used to agree goals with service users and to tailor services. The Supporting People programme is delivering services that benefit service users as a result.
- 108 Confusion exists among a number of providers about the grant eligibility criteria. Within a focus group, several providers (particularly learning disability providers) described a lack of clarity around those elements of their service that had been deemed to be housing related support. Although this has been an issue nationally, work still needs to be done to ensure that providers are adequately informed.

Service user involvement

- 109 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. While there is effective use of large scale consultation, there are weaknesses in engaging hard-to-reach groups.
- 110 Large events were held in Scarborough and Leeds to involve service users in agreeing the five-year strategy and this was effective in identifying improvements to existing service arrangements. These events are supplemented by the use of existing fora where service users are represented, for example the Learning Disability Partnership Board and District Housing Task Groups.
- 111 Support plans are not agreed with all users. Several older people interviewed who are receiving a support service were not aware of a support plan having been agreed with them. As a result some services may not be based upon needs.
- 112 Opportunities for service user involvement are quite limited, although there are intrinsic difficulties in organising this within such a large geographical area. There has been little structured involvement with hard-to-reach groups apart from large events in Scarborough (in 2005) and Leeds (in 2003) which involved people with drug and alcohol misuse problems, homeless people, rough sleepers, young people and women fleeing domestic abuse . As such, there is a risk that service users views are not regularly or adequately informing service delivery.
- 113 Some providers considered that the questionnaires issued to service users during service reviews were ineffective, although a pictorial questionnaire was used with service users who had known communication difficulties. Overall, service users were involved well during reviews.

Access to services and information

- 114 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. Supporting People literature is readily available covering a wide range of services. However, this is not always tailored to the specific needs of customers.
- 115 There is a good range of leaflets that are widely available, in a variety of formats, which provide information to customers on Supporting People services and how to access them. The Supporting People team have access to Language Line to provide interpretation services where needed.

- 116 Some customer information is not accessible. A pictorial leaflet regarding Supporting People services is not easy to understand for service users with learning disabilities. Despite wide consultation it contains the same text as the non-pictorial leaflet. Some service user information lacks straplines that advertise their availability in other languages or formats. Consequently customers' diverse needs are not always being adequately catered for.
- 117 There is a comprehensive directory of homelessness services in place for North Yorkshire and York which assists service users, advocates and providers to refer people to an appropriate service.
- 118 The Council acknowledges that there is no directory of other Supporting People services and it plans to address this when the outcomes from consultation on the national Support People Strategy are known. In the meantime, this is a gap in the information available to current and potential service users.
- 119 Although North Yorkshire County Council's website contains good information on Supporting People the site is not easy to navigate and information on Supporting People services is not easy to find. Links to other relevant pages are unclear. Many customers will be discouraged from accessing service information through this route.
- 120 There is a set of high quality information booklets (one per district council area) that relate to Better Care, Higher Standards. The information provided is comprehensive and written clearly with customers in mind. Customers are provided with appropriate information about the range of health, social care and housing support services available in their area. Booklets contain specific information on Supporting People.
- 121 The fairer charging policy is applied to all user groups. The leaflet about entitlement to a fairer charging assessment is clear and user focussed. Fairer charging is promoted at tenancy sign up to all tenants. An assessment is automatically conducted where tenants do not qualify for housing benefit. This helps to ensure that new customers entering the service are not charged inappropriately.
- 122 The fairer charging leaflet however makes no reference to Supporting People which could mislead service users into believing that the policy does not apply to them. The Council accepts this and is addressing it.
- 123 The Council's Supporting People charging policy has not been reviewed since the introduction of the Supporting People programme. Consequently, the policy does not reflect the lessons learnt from implementing the programme so far. The Council recognises this point and plans to review the policy during 2006/07.
- 124 In Council offices and those of partner agencies we found staff to be available and approachable. Signposting and referral arrangements are seen as effective and in each office leaflets were displayed well and accessible to potential service users.

- 125 Awareness sessions and written information on the Supporting People service have been provided for a range of staff to enhance their awareness of the service and their ability to signpost service users. Sessions have also been held for groups of staff from provider organisations.

Diversity

- 126 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. Baseline data is good and there is a range of initiatives to help address diversity issues. There is however scope to increase service user input and gaps in assessing provider compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- 127 Demographic information on diversity is widely available within the County Council and the Supporting Team has identified the needs of traditionally excluded groups through its needs analysis work. This gives the Commissioning Body a clearer picture of unmet need and has been used to inform commissioning priorities.
- 128 The inspection found examples of useful initiatives to assess or meet the needs of some very vulnerable groups.
- In 2004 the Supporting People team worked with the Domestic Violence Co-ordinators to identify funding for a consultant to assess the need for domestic violence services in BME communities. This information fed into the five-year strategy and has helped to identify the need for Supporting People services in the future.
 - Funding has recently been obtained for a two-year project to develop accommodation for substance misusers aged 16 to 25.
 - Local authorities in the sub-region have jointly commissioned research into the housing related support needs of gypsies and travellers.
- 129 Some social landlords were found to be excluding certain offenders and the five-year strategy includes objectives to reduce the incidence of inappropriate exclusions. This is being addressed through various strands of activity including, training, floating support and advice to landlords and the appropriate targeting of resources towards ensuring only warranted exclusions.
- 130 Provider compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act is being driven by contracts but this is not monitored. As a result, the Supporting People team is unable to track progress against this. This should be addressed through contract monitoring procedures.
- 131 Mentally disordered offenders (MDOs) were not reported to be well provided for in North Yorkshire. While there are some local factors to be overcome, including the wide spread throughout the county of vulnerable groups, there were no clear plans to address these issues. The Supporting People service cannot therefore be confident that MDO's receive a service.
- 132 Service user input is underdeveloped and this is acknowledged by the Council. The Supporting People team needs to maximise opportunities for engaging with service users through other existing arrangements in the county.

Outcomes for service users

- 133 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. There is evidence of significant improvements in the lives of some service users across a range of groups and the inspection found several examples of positive and innovative work. Schemes were providing a range of appropriate housing related support to service users across all housing tenures across most client groups. Choice is however often very limited for service users given the rural nature of the county.
- 134 Generally, support plans were in place and these are reviewed annually or following a known change in circumstances. Plans are tailored to the needs of individuals and designed to promote their independence. However, one scheme we visited had several service users without support plans.
- 135 The improvement plans in place for providers following service review include specific service user outcomes. Service reviews have been used to inform provision to better meet the needs of communities in North Yorkshire and the Supporting People programme in North Yorkshire has delivered more and improved services. Progress is being made to achieve the strategic target of moving from 80 per cent of services being accommodation based to a position where 50 per cent is accommodation based and 50 per cent is floating support in five years time.
- 136 The housing needs assessment tool previously used by housing staff in prisons had proved to be inconsistent. This was withdrawn and replaced by the more robust West Yorkshire protocol that maps the needs of offenders and tracks their progress. This reduces the risk of offenders with support needs being discharged into unsupported accommodation and also contributes to homelessness prevention in the area.
- 137 Service review files did not routinely record service user outcomes. This makes it more difficult for the Supporting People service to easily demonstrate tangible outcomes.

Value for money (VFM)

- 138 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. Supporting People Grant in North Yorkshire is well managed, despite the pressures upon it. Financial performance is included in monitoring reports and this is reported to the Commissioning Body and the Partnership Group.

- 139 Unit costs in North Yorkshire compare favourably to England and the Yorkshire and Humberside region as follows.

Table 1 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)³

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
North Yorkshire	£ 0.57	£ 19.93	£ 20.09	£ 46.30
Yorkshire & the Humber	£ 0.72	£ 25.38	£ 32.87	£ 100.47
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.'

Methodology

- 140 The Council has an agreed a VFM strategy setting out a consistent approach. This was applied by the Supporting People team during the service review programme. The strategy is based on approaches used by other councils and guidance from former ODPM. The data received from providers is inputted onto a spreadsheet which looks at the number of support hours per client and compares overhead costs between providers as a percentage of total funding. It is also linked to the eligibility criteria. Overall, this represents a reasonable approach to assessing VFM, for example, by setting guidance on appropriate cost ceilings such as 20 per cent for overhead costs. The Council adopted a sound approach to value for money assessments in service reviews which took account of performance, quality and cost.
- 141 Use of the administration grant is closely monitored by the Commissioning Body. It uses the performance reports it receives to ensure that the Supporting People team has adequate resources to deliver the programme. This is benchmarked against comparable county councils.

³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

- 142** Providers have not been sufficiently consulted on the VFM strategy to ensure they sign up to the approach as reasonable and appropriate. Some providers were unaware of the potential impact of the strategy on them. In addition, assessments of the service cost analysis forms were not completed prior to the review visit, so providers were unable to discuss the impact of this on their activities, and challenge any findings. Work needs to be done to alleviate this confusion amongst providers.
- 143** The VFM approach is not promoted in the five-year strategy even though it is key to the council's aim to reconfigure services. Overall, this means that the VFM strategy is not transparent. The council has not yet assessed the effectiveness of its VFM approach in order to identify further improvements and efficiencies.
- 144** The Council has a procurement policy in place which sets out how services should be procured in an open and transparent manner in order to ensure best value. However no guidance is given on how to secure best value when services are exempted from the usual tendering process.

Legacy services

- 145** All legacy Supporting People services in North Yorkshire have been assessed for VFM and the service review process used to start reconfiguring services. As a result the nature and type of service provision is better positioned to meet known need.

High and low cost outliers

- 146** The service review timetable reflected the need to prioritise the highest and lowest cost services in the county.
- 147** The Supporting People programme inherited some very high cost services (especially in learning disability services). Service reviews identified a number of ineligible costs. In learning disability services there is a major challenge to the programme to withdraw £0.5 million worth of ineligible funding over each of the next four years. Commissioners have agreed a plan with providers to achieve this. This process will greatly assist the Commissioning Body to meet its savings targets and create the capacity to fund new services.

Benchmarking

- 148** Substantial use is made of benchmarking. This is shared, locally and regionally, and was also used to inform the VFM assessment in service reviews. Quartiles were identified for a range of costs and services which helped the Supporting People team assess whether services were high or low cost compared to providers of similar services nationally and regionally.
- 149** The Supporting People Regional Strategy Group set up a regional VFM/benchmarking sub group. This working group has three specific aims.
- To obtain clean service level data to improve the reliability and accuracy of the benchmarking.

- To update and agree on consistent calculations that will be used to obtain regional benchmarks.
- To agree and develop a process that can be used to publicise the exercise, enabling service providers to access the data and benchmark their schemes.

150 Some providers consider that the rationale for contract and service changes following review is appropriate, but believe that too much priority is given to benchmarking without adequate consideration of specialist schemes and the higher costs they sometimes incur.

Improving VFM

151 There is evidence of improving VFM through several routes, for example service decommissions, service remodelling and agreeing increased service capacity for the same level of funding.

152 Some new services appropriate for Supporting People funding are being developed and funded through non Supporting People sources. For example, Social Services is working with landlords to provide floating support and a housing support service in some extra care sheltered housing schemes. This is an efficient use of resources as this expenditure is reducing reliance on, for example, much more costly residential care. The Supporting People programme will pick up these costs in the future as resources become available.

153 North Yorkshire has made efficiency savings through the Supporting People programme totalling £1.08 million. The programme contributes to the Council's efficiency statement and Gershon savings have fed into the medium term financial plan of the county.

154 There is currently a £1.2 million underspend in the programme which has not yet been allocated to other priorities. Decisions on this will be taken in light of the new national Supporting People Strategy and greater certainty over government funding of the programme.

Summary

155 Overall we judge that the administration and delivery of the Supporting People programme in North Yorkshire is good.

156 Governance of the programme is highly effective with key partners engaged at all levels. District council involvement, at both officer and member level, is particularly strong. As a result there is high level of consensus and ownership (including providers) to deliver the programme.

157 Providers feel involved in the programme and well supported by the Supporting People team. The inspection found recurring evidence of a constructive dialogue and supportive relationship between the team, Commissioning Body, Partnership Group and providers.

- 158** The Supporting People service in North Yorkshire works well with other authorities in the sub-region and region. A recent benefit of this is the decision to jointly commission a research project into the housing related support needs of gypsies and travellers in the region.
- 159** The service review programme was completed on time and used to drive service efficiency and improvement. Reviews have provided stability to providers and enabled many to plan better in the medium term. As a result of the review programme services in the county reflect local priorities, service remodelling is delivering better outcomes and there is evidence of a significant improvement in the lives of some service users across a range of groups.
- 160** Access to services in the county is good through a range of informative leaflets (available in a variety of formats), effective signposting and referral arrangements.
- 161** The service is delivering value for money. The review programme led to more efficient services and identified ineligible costs. Commissioners have agreed a plan with providers to withdraw this funding over time, creating the capacity to commission priority services.
- 162** The five-year strategy, and its supporting work plans, identifies service priorities but does not quantify or cost them. New services cannot be commissioned or some current services remodelled until this has been done so some needs will continue to be unmet.
- 163** The Provider Forum functions well but is overly dependent on the Supporting People team for its operation. Provider capacity needs to be increased to enable the forum to be more self-sustaining.
- 164** There are limited opportunities for service user involvement in the county. As a result, the ability of service users to influence the development and delivery of the Supporting Programme is weak.
- 165** The Council's Supporting People charging policy has not been reviewed since the introduction of the Supporting People programme. Consequently, the policy does not reflect the lessons learnt from implementing the programme so far. The Council recognises this point and plans to review the policy during 2006/07.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 166** There are more drivers than barriers to delivering improvement. The authority has a track record of delivering service improvement that compares well with others. The needs of the most disadvantaged are prioritised within the Supporting People programme and there is a focus on VFM. For example:
- key government milestones for the implementation and delivery of the programme have been met including the development of a five-year strategy and the completion of the service review programme;
 - the profile of supported housing in the county is changing away from predominantly accommodation based to a position where this is balanced with floating support;
 - efficiency savings are impressive at £1.02 million; and
 - the Commissioning Body have made some difficult decisions including the withdrawal of ineligible funding of £2.6 million over the next four years.
- 167** The level of services provided has increased in line with the five-year strategy and action has been taken to improve services. Those that were poor or failing to meet standards have been addressed and decommissioned where necessary.
- 168** User satisfaction information is limited however and the Council should take steps to address this. This is particularly important in relation to hard-to-reach groups who are more likely to be receiving inappropriate services or be excluded from services.

How does the service manage performance?

- 169** There are significantly more drivers than barriers to managing performance. There is a clear commitment to, and understanding of, the Supporting People programme at senior levels in the Council. The Council has a culture which promotes continuous improvement.
- 170** The five-year strategy is thorough, well integrated into partner plans and widely owned by all key stakeholders. The delivery and service plans to implement the strategy are SMART and there is clear evidence that Supporting People service reviews have driven specific service improvements.
- 171** The commissioning body receives information on aspects of performance including the completion of reviews, budget monitoring, former ODPM milestones, the production of performance indicators by providers, the issuing of contracts, and the service improvement plan at each meeting. This has enabled poor performance to be identified and action put in place to address it. Efficiencies are also routinely identified and reported and integrate with plans across the Council.

- 172** At a corporate level, the Council has demonstrated its commitment to the programme, and councillors demonstrate an effective understanding of Supporting People and its potential. They are knowledgeable about its aims, clear about the challenges that face North Yorkshire and receive and act on regular information about the programme. The Chief Executive, the Director of Adult Services, portfolio holders and the accountable officer were all able to demonstrate an active involvement in promoting Supporting People and in forging links with strategies within the Council's own services and with those of its partners.
- 173** There is evidence of a willingness to tackle difficult issues through for example service decommissioning, an acknowledgement of significant ineligible service costs and an agreement to take corrective action.
- 174** The Supporting People team works well with a range of partners to develop and deliver the programme, shares learning with other Administating Local Authorities and regularly demonstrates a willingness to adopt good practice.
- 175** Plans are in place to move the programme forward. These include:
- an annual plan to deliver key elements of the five-year strategy;
 - a service improvement plan to drive improvement year on year; and
 - a risk log that identifies risks, assesses their likelihood of occurrence and impact and sets out proposed actions to manage them.
- 176** Stated commissioning priorities are yet to be properly quantified and costed and this is a major omission. Without clear costs the Commissioning Body cannot be certain that its plans are realistic or achievable.
- 177** A new performance management framework has been developed that collates information from the current wide range of sources and presents it in a more manageable, coherent and comprehensive manner but this has just been introduced and is not yet embedded.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 178** There is a balance of drivers and barriers to improvement. The Council has the capacity in terms of staff and skills within the Supporting People team, its financial and human resource planning, management support and resources to deliver improvements. The Supporting People team networks well within the County Council and with Health, Probation and district councils. The team demonstrates a willingness to learn from other Supporting People teams in the region and to share its learning and experience.
- 179** The Council has reduced costs and increased levels of provision. Its medium term financial plan indicates that it manages the budget effectively and has the capacity to invest in some additional services. However, despite a budget underspend of £1.2 million in the Supporting People programme, there has been little progress to date in addressing known areas of unmet need.

- 180 In terms of commitment, skills, and dedication the Council has the appropriate resources to make progress. Officers within the Supporting People team are well managed, have relevant experience, access to training and a formal development and appraisal framework.
- 181 North Yorkshire has used a consultant to assist providers with aspects of the SP programme. This greatly assists the Supporting People team's capacity to deliver the programme as well as helping to improve knowledge, skills and capacity among providers.
- 182 There has been little activity to date to examine the specific service procurement of the Supporting People programme and an over reliance on exemptions from the Council's procurement strategy in the commissioning of services. However the North Yorkshire team have stated their intention to learn from the outcomes of the former ODPM Value Improvement Project being undertaken by Leeds City Council on Supporting People procurement.
- 183 A current barrier to improvement is that only 'soft' market testing has been conducted to date with no use made of other options such as competitive or negotiated tendering. Joint commissioning is, as yet, unused in the programme and has the potential to increase improvement capacity. The Commissioning Body has agreed, in principle, to look at joint commissioning of learning disability services.
- 184 The Commissioning Plan for Adult Services in the county is still being drafted and, although Supporting People staff are involved, it is not yet known whether it will reflect the needs of the Supporting People programme.

Summary

- 185 The service has promising prospects for improvement. The Council has a strong track record of delivering service improvement and a focus on value for money which is clearly reflected in the Supporting People programme.
- 186 The Supporting People Strategy, review programme and commissioning decisions prioritise the most disadvantaged people in the county. Supporting People service reviews were used to drive specific service improvements linked to identified needs and priorities.
- 187 The Council displays a culture of continuous improvement and this is sustained within Supporting People by clear and effective leadership at a political, corporate, departmental and programme level.
- 188 There is performance reporting to the Commissioning Body which is also used to inform departmental and corporate performance systems, the Partnership Group and the Member Steering Group. Performance of the programme is widely known and understood.
- 189 The Supporting People service works well with a range of partners to develop and deliver the programme. The service is willing to share learning with, and apply learning from, other Supporting People services.

- 190** Service user satisfaction information is limited and should be expanded. This will allow the service to be more certain that the programme is delivering service improvement and positive outcomes for customers.
- 191** There is a lack of regular engagement with hard-to-reach groups.
- 192** To date the service has undertaken only 'soft' market testing and made no use of service tendering options. There is an over reliance on exemptions from the Council's procurement policy. As result, further efficiencies may potentially be lost.
- 193** The Council's Commissioning Plan for Adult Services is not yet in place. This must be completed and must adequately reflect the needs of the Supporting People programme in order to effectively deliver programme priorities.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

Measure	North Yorkshire	England
Population (mid-2004) ⁴	579,900	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	21.5	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	1.1	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁵	1.5	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁶	294 (Craven)	-

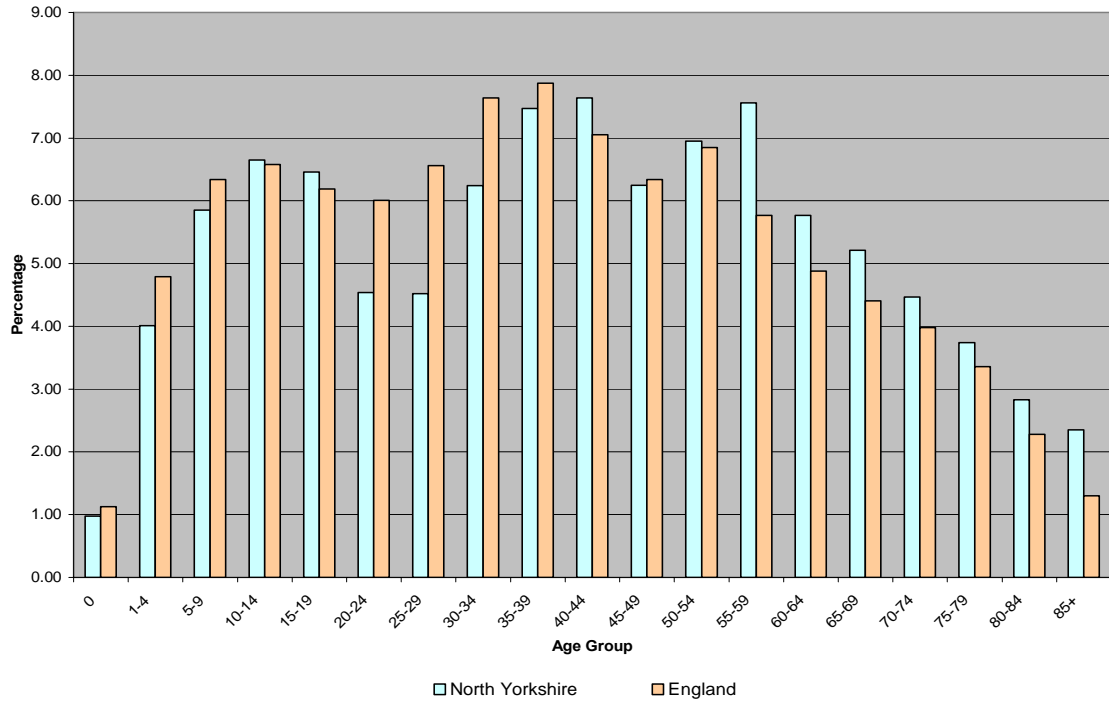
Percentage of the population⁷ in each age group compared with England

⁴ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

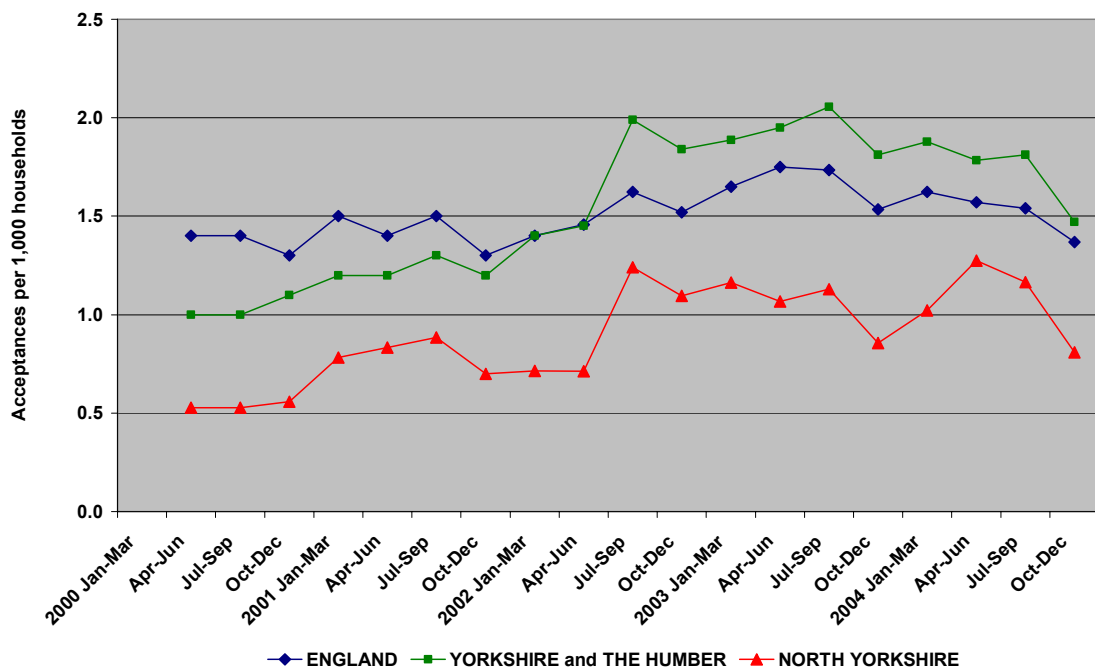
⁵ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (October 2005)

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

⁷ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)



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



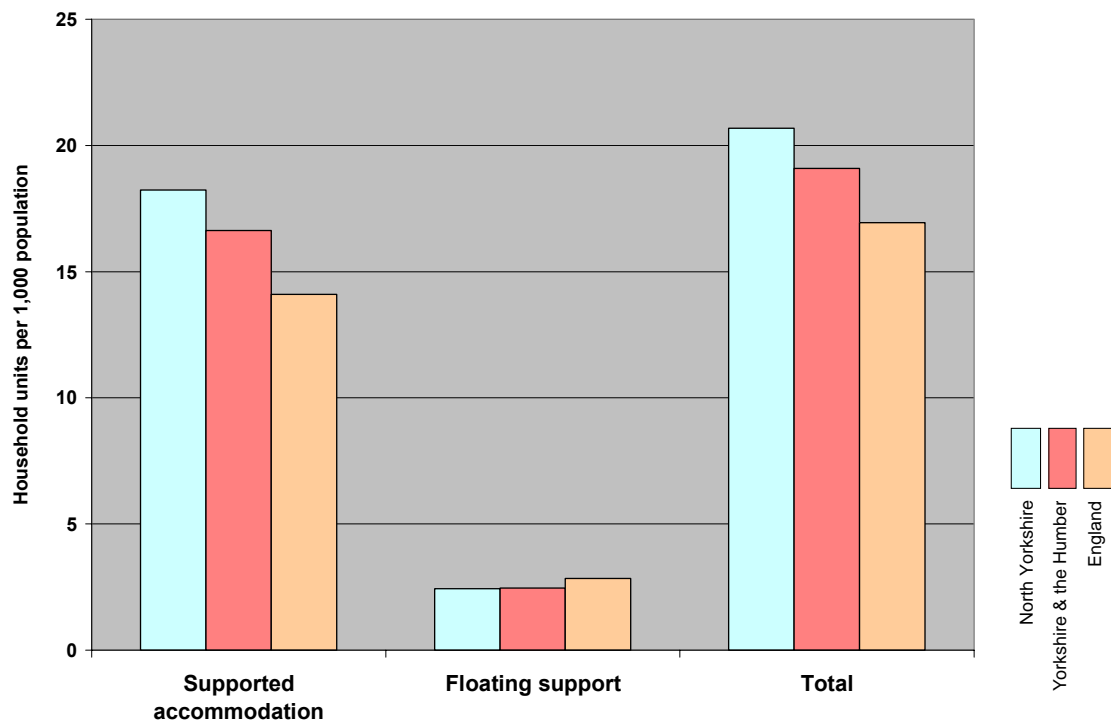
Performance information

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

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

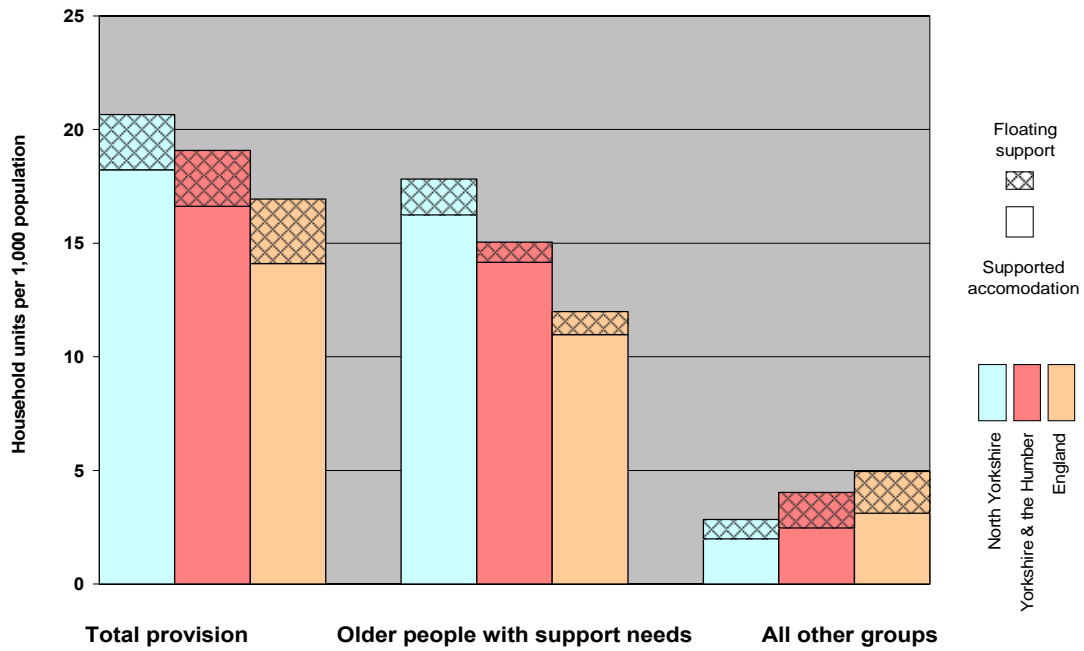
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁸

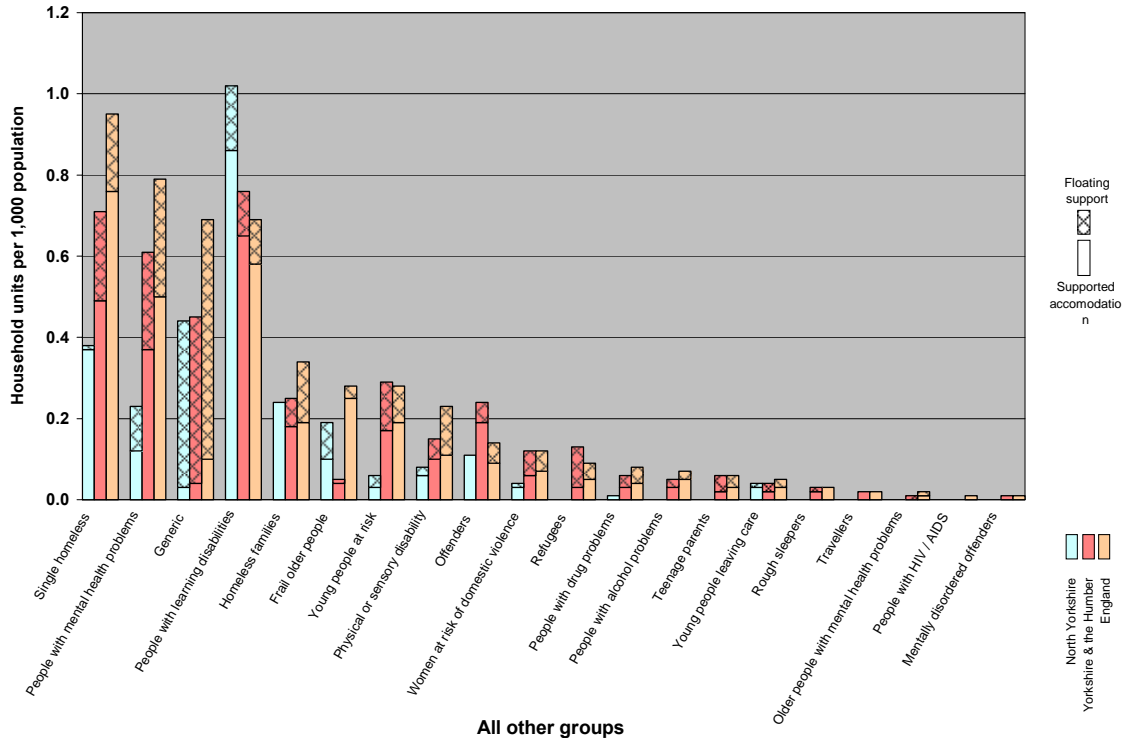


⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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



Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹⁰



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

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

Funding for Supporting People¹¹

North Yorkshire	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 16,847,226	£ 16,540,897	£ 15,584,012
Pipeline allocation	£ 279,273	£ 357,385	£ -
Administration grant	£ 476,100	£ 481,765	£ 385,412

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

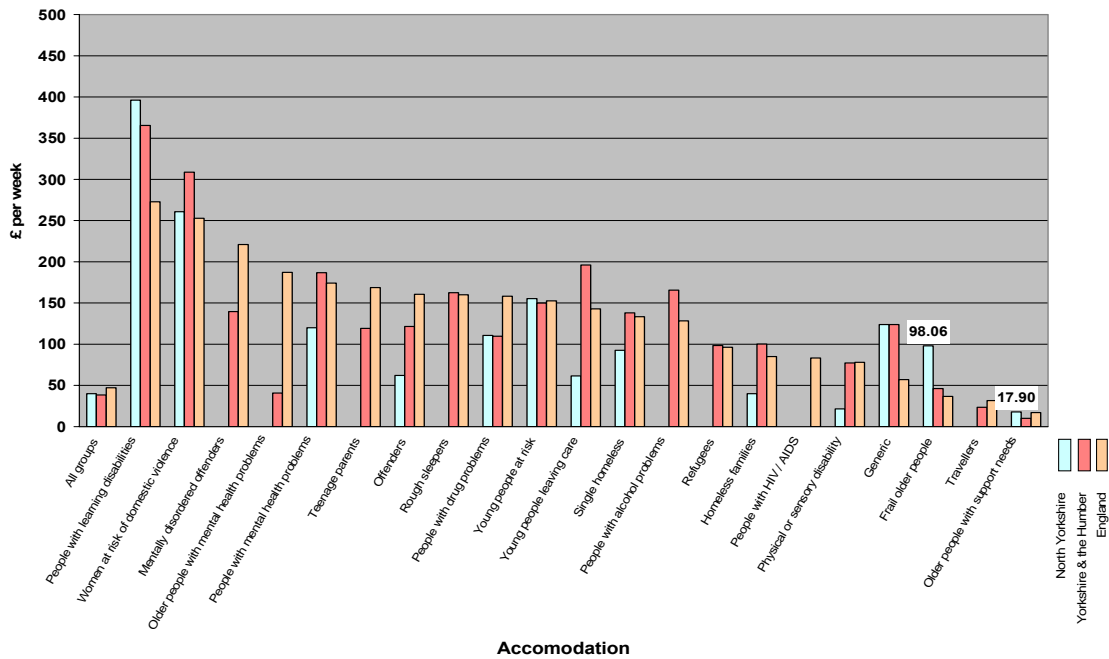
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
North Yorkshire	£ 0.57	£ 19.93	£ 20.09	£ 46.30
Yorkshire & the Humber	£ 0.72	£ 25.38	£ 32.87	£ 100.47
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

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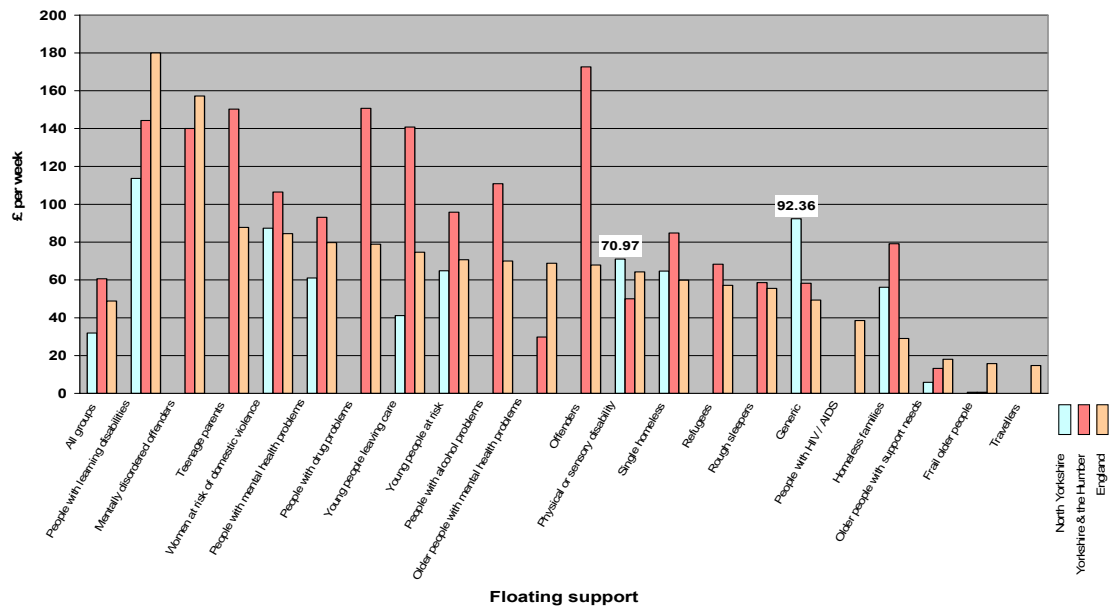
¹¹ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

¹² Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

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



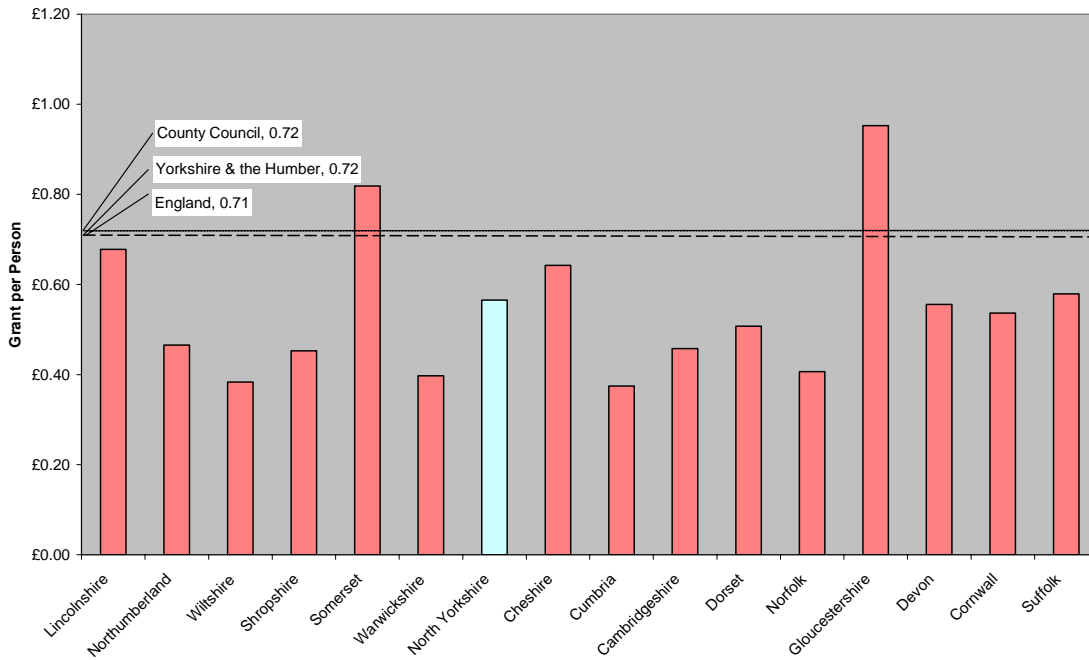
Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁴



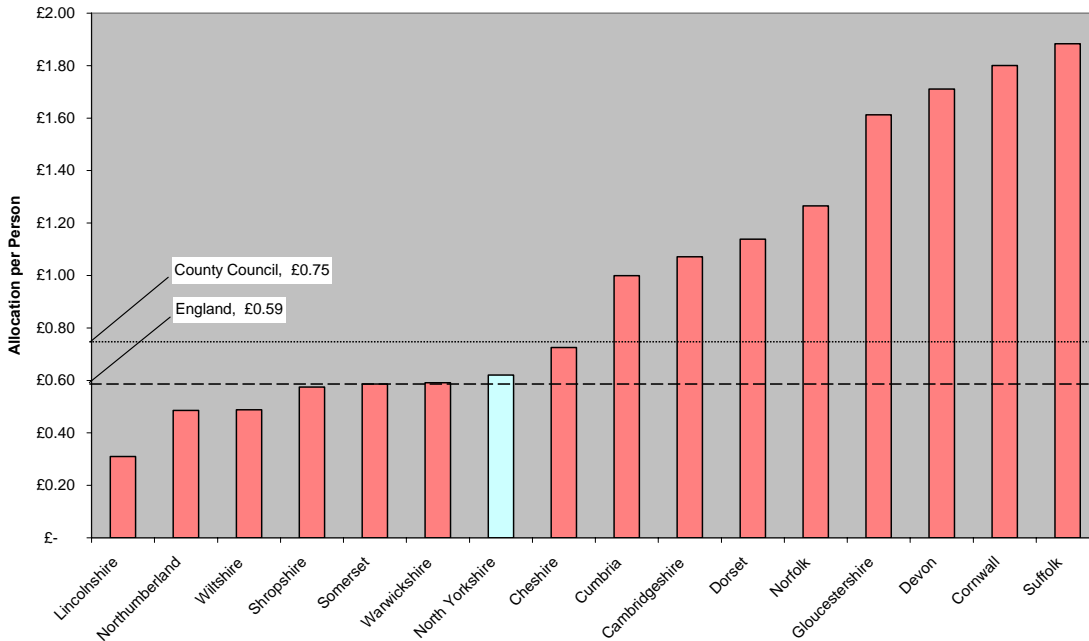
¹³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

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



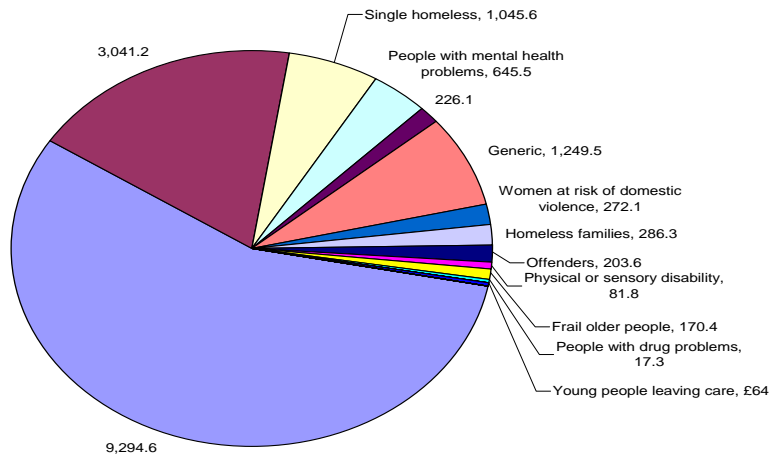
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹⁶, all county councils and all English councils.



¹⁵ A comparator group of similar councils.

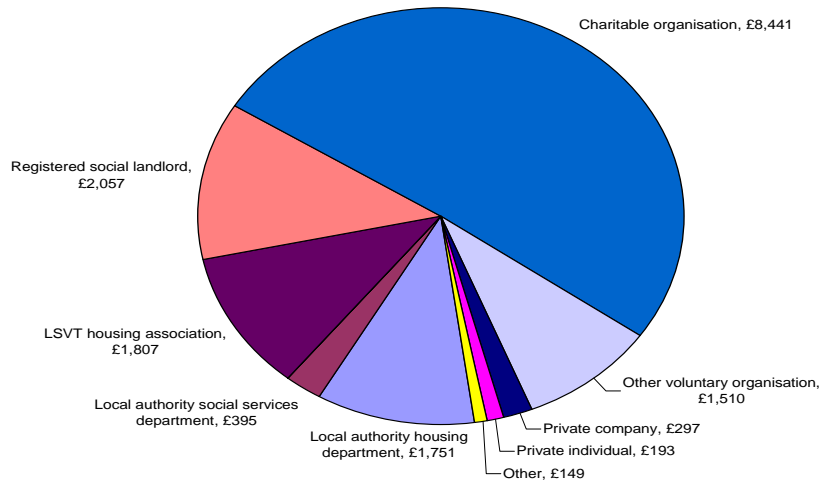
¹⁶ A comparator group of similar councils.

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



North Yorkshire
Funding by user group

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



North Yorkshire
Funding by provider type

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

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

Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults' Services	Most	Promising	★ ★ (2)
Children's Services	Most	Excellent	

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

North Yorkshire	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30)
Above average (●●●)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Admissions of older people to residential/ nursing care (C26) Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)

North Yorkshire	
Average (•••)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Delayed transfers of care (D41) Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)
Below 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)
Significantly below average (•)	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 county councils

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

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

District council performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04

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

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

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

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

Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on-site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
 - the Council's self-assessment;
 - Supporting People five-year strategy;
 - the Council's corporate strategies which impact upon Supporting People, including the strategic plan;
 - plans and strategies from partner agencies that may impact on Supporting People;
 - service documents including policies and procedures, information leaflets for users and providers, newsletters;
 - service review timetable;
 - Better Care, Higher Standards document;
 - departmental and service improvement plans;
 - performance reports;
 - terms of reference for key governing groups; and
 - minutes of the Commissioning Body, Supporting People Partnership 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, voluntary organisations and key stakeholders.
 - visits to 17 contracted supported housing services, to talk to service users and front-line staff;
 - visits to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
 - interviews with key staff and stakeholders within the County Council, the district councils, the primary care trusts and the probation service;
 - interview with the relevant portfolio holder;
 - review of the website;
 - mystery shopping visits to housing and social services area offices;
 - desktop checks of procedure guides and service review files; and
 - observation of meetings of the Commissioning Body and Member Steering Group.

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)

Independent support for providers

- 1 Supporting People in North Yorkshire has commissioned an independent consultant since 2002 to carry out provider capacity building and assist with service user consultation. This was done as it was recognised that a number of providers would need support to meet the requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework, and that it would be more beneficial if the support had a degree of independence from the Supporting People Team.

The consultant’s work has included:

- undertaking one-to-one sessions on demand;
- carrying out pre-validation visits to prepare providers for review;
- setting up training events and delivering sessions on the QAF;
- assisting in building capacity for the Providers’ Forum;
- working with service users to be able to take part in reviews;
- organising the service user consultation events with providers; and
- carrying out ‘mystery shopping’ exercises with service users.

The consultant has an annual work plan and a Steering Group, made up of Supporting People Team and provider representatives oversees his work. His activities are reported regularly to the partnership and feedback has given consistently high levels of satisfaction.

County and District relationship

- 2 North Yorkshire is a two tier Local Authority and, as such, there was potential for a difficult relationship between the County Council, as the Administering Authority, and the seven District/Borough Councils. However, a productive and positive relationship exists. This is due to:
 - the initial Supporting People governance body being built on an existing group and an Elected Members Group being set up early in the programme;
 - a clear Memorandum of Understanding and Terms of Reference;
 - appropriate senior representatives from all partners; and
 - an evidenced commitment from both officers and Members.

The strength of the relationship is evidenced by the ability of the Commissioning Body to make difficult decisions such as service reviews/decommissioning and the withdrawal of Supporting People funding from ineligible services which has significantly impacted on some partners' budgets.