

Supporting People Inspection

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

Copies of this report

If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0845 056 0566

© Audit Commission 2006

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

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

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

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Contents

Supporting People Inspections	4
Summary	5
Scoring the service	6
Recommendations	10
Report	13
Context	13
How good is the service?	15
What are the prospects for improvement to the service?	41
Appendix 1 – Performance indicators	49
Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed	60
Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken	61

Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 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 Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) serves a population of 218,000. This has increased by 2 per cent since 1991 and is projected to be sustained.
- 2 BMBC is ranked 28th most deprived out of 354 local authorities in England.
- 3 The proportion of residents from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities is relatively low at 2.7 per cent, compared to 10 per cent nationally.
- 4 The Council has 10,836 employees.

Scoring the service

- 5 We have assessed Barnsley Metropolitan Borough 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.

Table 1 Scoring chart¹

	Prospects for improvement?				
Excellent					‘a good service that has promising prospects for improvement’ A good service?
Promising			☀		
Uncertain					
Poor					
	Poor	Fair ★	Good ★★	Excellent ★★★	

Source: Audit Commission

- 6 The Supporting People programme is making good progress because:
- elected members champion priorities including the development of new services;
 - the Commissioning Body works effectively, involving key partners such as Probation and the Primary Care Trust (PCT);
 - the Accountable Officer is of an appropriate senior level to champion the Supporting People agenda, including through extensive partnership working;
 - Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are in place and working effectively in relation to housing related support, with an information sharing protocol in operation;
 - cross authority working is well established, providing opportunities to share best practice and learning, and develop new initiatives, including a regional procurement programme and an approved provider list;

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 capacity of the programme is increasing, with an emphasis on additional floating support services;
- the Supporting People team is well established, using permanent and seconded staff with access to Council support services;
- stakeholder meetings are held with partners to draw on their expertise;
- the eligibility criteria is comprehensive and links with eligibility criteria in place for care and older people;
- the five-year strategy is comprehensive and partners have signed up to priorities agreed for the programme;
- needs assessments effectively involve partners and consider data and research available;
- providers were complimentary about the advice, support and training they received through the programme;
- the provider forum is effective, meeting regularly and being well attended;
- cross authority working is using provider client records for high risk offenders to inform the regional resettlement framework;
- DCLG data uploads take place on time and data cleansing is progressed;
- the service review programme was appropriately agreed;
- providers assess reviews as being more robust than their experiences with other Administering Local Authorities;
- action plans are agreed in response to service reviews and service improvements are evident;
- service reviews identify best practice, which is shared with providers;
- reporting arrangements scrutinise service review findings and there is an appeals process in place;
- service reviews result in high levels of remodelling and decommissioning and savings are reinvested to meet aims and objectives set out in the five-year strategy;
- services users are involved in service reviews and agreeing remodelling options;
- service reviews are effectively assessing cultural sensitivity and accessibility, including Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance;
- services users have the opportunity to procure care and support services through an individualised budget pilot;
- support plans are in place for most service users and there are a range of housing related support services to assist them to live independently;
- the framework for assessing value for money is based on best practice guidelines and is applied flexibly; and
- ineligible services have been identified and retraction plans are in place.

7 Less positive areas of the programme include:

- the Core Strategy Group does not effectively lead on operational guidance development or provide sufficient support to the Commissioning Body;
- staff working in mental health services are not fully engaged in the programme;
- there is no conflict of interest resolution for governance arrangements;
- arrangements to formally monitor and report outcomes for the programme including for service users are under-developed;
- carers and advocates are not sufficiently involved in the programme even though the Council has established client boards to facilitate this;
- contract negotiation processes to agree steady state contracts are still outstanding;
- the needs of some service users are not fully understood and these groups are not receiving housing related support through the programme;
- needs assessments have not been updated;
- the five-year strategy and the fairer charging policy are not widely publicised to service users;
- contingency plans are not always identified within risk assessments;
- passporting has not been introduced to reduce the burden of service reviews on providers and there are no joint reviews with other Administering Local Authorities;
- publicity on the programme, such as leaflets, are not comprehensive or easy to understand, and the website is difficult to access;
- partnerships leading on equality and diversity have had limited outcomes for the Supporting People Programme;
- the programme does not sufficiently consider the needs of vulnerable people from BME communities; and
- the value for money framework is not widely publicised and is therefore not fully accessible to some providers and partners.

8 We have judged the Supporting People programme to have promising prospects for improvement. We found the following strengths.

- Peer reviews have taken place and this has identified recommendations for improvement which have been implemented.
- The service review programme has released investment for new services and priorities have been identified.
- Remodelling has extended housing related support options, including floating support and outreach services.

- Value for money arrangements are robust and the Council is working with other Administering Local Authorities to identify potential providers to develop the market and procure new services competitively.
 - The programme's aims and objectives are clearly defined and plans are SMART.
 - Supporting People has a high profile within the Council and partnerships, and this is reflected in strategies.
 - Leadership is effective.
 - Key partners are actively involved in the programme.
 - Services have been robustly assessed against the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) to ensure they meet minimum standards and to identify recommendations for improvement.
 - Staff secondments are used to operate a flexible workforce, acquiring staff with additional skills to meet changing priorities.
 - Some areas for improvement identified by the inspection are already being addressed, including arrangements to assess outcomes of the programme.
- 9 However, improvements are still required in the following areas.
- Skills gaps within the Supporting People team are not always addressed through partnership working.
 - The Core Strategy Group's role is still under-developed and arrangements to support the Commissioning Body remain unclear.
 - Plans in place to address some of the weaknesses found in the inspection are still under-developed. This includes the programmes ability to consider equality and diversity issues, arrangements to involve carers, advocates and service users in the programme, and meeting the needs of some service users whose housing related support needs are still being researched.

Recommendations

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

Recommendation

R1 Improve governance arrangements by:

- *clearly defining the role of the Core Strategy Group in line with DCLG guidelines, including its links with the Commissioning Body and responsibilities for developing operational guidance;*
- *agreeing a conflict of interest resolution for governance arrangements; and*
- *more actively engaging mental health services in the programme.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- additional support for the Commissioning Body so that it can focus on decision-making; and
- appropriate decision-making arrangements, with equitable management when conflicts of interest arise.

The implementation of this recommendation will have a high impact with low costs. This should be implemented within three months.

Recommendation

R2 Introduce interim arrangements to assess outcomes of the programme, until the model developed through cross authority working is available by:

- *assessing outcomes from service reviews; and*
- *consulting service users, partners and providers.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- best practice will be identified for potential use in existing and new services;
- weaknesses in service delivery will be identified, with any gaps in provision evident;

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.

- assessments of whether the service is meeting the needs of service users can take place; and
- assessments of whether the service is meeting its aims and objectives can be monitored and reported.

The implementation of this recommendation will have a high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within six months.

Recommendation

R3 Improve arrangements to involve carers, advocates and service users in the programme by:

- *involving existing client boards for carers, advocates and service users in the strategic direction of the programme and agreeing public information available;*
- *agreeing with carers, advocates and service users the range of ways they would like to be consulted on the programme, for example through surveys and/or consultation events;*
- *further utilising existing resources within Social Services to develop public information which is accessible, including for people with limited communication skills; and*
- *developing the Council's website to clearly signpost to Supporting People information, which is appropriate and in an accessible language.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- assessment of carer, advocate and service user satisfaction with the programme;
- identification from a service user perspective areas of the programme that work well or require improvement; and
- improved accessibility to services using a range of formats and access points.

The implementation of this recommendation will have a high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within six months.

Recommendation

R4 Improve service planning and performance by:

- *agreeing steady state contracts;*
- *identifying the needs of all service user groups;*
- *updating existing needs assessments;*
- *agreeing contingency plans for potential risks identified; and*
- *considering equality and diversity within all aspects of programme development and service delivery.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- longer term funding regimes for providers and service users;
- aims and objectives based on completed and updated needs assessments for all service users;
- plans in place to manage risks should they occur;
- diverse need is identified, including excluded groups of vulnerable people; and
- services are accessible to all communities serviced by the Council.

The implementation of this recommendation will have a high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within nine months.

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

Dates of inspection: 8-12 May 2006

Regional contact details

Audit Commission

Kernel House

Killingbeck Drive

Killingbeck

Leeds, LS14 6UF

Telephone: 0113 251 7130

Fax: 0113 251 7131

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Report

Context

The locality

- 12 Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) services a population of 218,000. This has increased by two per cent since 1991. This is the third lowest population density amongst the 36 metropolitan districts in England.
- 13 The area covers 127 square miles and extends from the Pennines in the West to the Dearne Valley lowland in the East. The rural western part of the borough, with a population of just 21,000, has social and economic conditions that are similar to the national average however there are isolated pockets of high deprivation. The more urban eastern part of the borough is more deprived with 22 per cent of Barnsley's population living in the most deprived 10 per cent of English Super Output Areas. BMBC is ranked 28th most deprived out of 354 local authorities in England.
- 14 The proportion of residents from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities at the 2001 census was relatively low at 0.9 per cent, although the proportion has increased in recent years to 2.7 per cent. Fourteen per cent of the population are aged 65 to 74 and 7 per cent are over the age of 74. The 75 plus age group has increased by 14 per cent since 1991. Notably, the number of young people aged 20-24 has declined by 39 per cent since 1991. Unemployment at 3.9 per cent is above the national average of 2.4 per cent and 86 per cent of population state their health to be good/fair.

The Council

- 15 The Council set up an all purpose unitary authority in 1974. It is labour led with a majority of eight. Labour hold 35 seats, Barnsley Independent Group hold 19, Conservatives hold four, Liberal Democrats and Non-aligned hold two and one seat is vacant.
- 16 The Council has adopted the vision of the One Barnsley Local Strategic Partnership's Community Plan. This includes the seven themes of:
 - Opportunity;
 - Prosperity;
 - Community;
 - Compassion;
 - Security;
 - Good Health; and
 - Confidence.

- 17 The Community Plan has set the following goals:
- Social wellbeing;
 - Environmental wellbeing;
 - Economic wellbeing; and
 - Lifelong learning.
- 18 The Council is involved in the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Housing Strategy Group, which is currently under review. This considers the following themes:
- Regeneration and neighbourhood renewal;
 - Provision of new homes and sustainable communities;
 - Improving homes; and
 - Fair access.
- 19 The Council has 10,836 employees. The net budget for 2006/07 is £160.974 million, excluding schools.

The service

- 20 BMBC acts as the Administering Local Authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area. The council received a grant of £5,634,085 for 2005/06. This is a reduction of £298,814 or 5 per cent on the previous year. The Council also receives an administration grant of £220,624, an increase of £6,426 on the previous year.
- 21 The Supporting People team is located within the Vulnerable Adults department, Social Services. It consists of:
- a Supporting People Manager;
 - four Review Officers, three of which are temporary;
 - a Development Officer;
 - an Administration Officer, who is part time; and
 - a Finance and Contracts Officer.
- 22 There are 20 providers delivering 92 contracts. The largest provision is for older people at 93 per cent, followed by learning disabilities at two per cent and generic services at 1.4 per cent. There are no services for people with drug problems, mental disordered offenders, people with HIV/AIDS, refugees, rough sleepers and travellers.
- 23 The largest expenditure is for learning disabilities at 34 per cent followed by older people at 30 per cent.

How good is the service?

Governance

- 24** The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team – drive the whole process;
 - Inclusive forum – consults with service providers and service users;
 - Core Strategy Group – proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme;
 - Commissioning Body – agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme; and
 - Councillors – approve key decisions of the commissioning.
- 25** Overall, strengths outweigh weaknesses in the Council's approach to governance. There is strong corporate commitment through Elected Member championing of the Supporting People programme and there is comprehensive reporting on the programme to Cabinet. The Commissioning Body involves the key partners of Probation and the PCT and there are regular reports to the governance arrangements on performance, budgets and the strategic direction of the programme.
- 26** The Accountable Officer is employed at an appropriately senior level to lead the Supporting People agenda and promotes this through their involvement in a wide range of partnerships. A Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) is in place and the Council has signed up to its information sharing protocol. Cross authority working is well established resulting in learning and sharing ideas for the development of new initiatives, with BMBC having an active role in benchmarking work to inform value for money assessments.
- 27** There are however weaknesses in this area. The Core Strategy Group is not effectively used to lead on the development of operational guidance and there is no conflict of interest resolution for governance arrangements. Crucially, there are no mechanisms in place to formally monitor and report outcomes for the programme, including for service users. The programme has not sufficiently used the Council's existing consultation arrangements to involve carers and advocates.

Corporate commitment

- 28** The Council demonstrates a strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme. The Cabinet Member for Social Services is the Supporting People champion and the Cabinet Member for Development supports this role. This will ensure effective links for the commissioning of new Supporting People services through the capital investment programme.

- 29 The Cabinet Members were well informed regarding key features of Supporting People including finance, service reviews, decommissioning and remodelling. This is achieved through regular meetings with the Accountable Officer and the Chair of the Commissioning Body. The Cabinet Members demonstrate a sound knowledge of current Supporting People priorities and provide political support for the development of new Supporting People services and assist in negotiations where there is opposition.
- 30 Other elected Members are also well informed about the Supporting People programme. There have been several seminars to provide training and updates on the progress of the programme, and regular reports are presented by Members to Cabinet regarding developments. These are comprehensive and include an annual report on the programme, details of the five-year strategy and updates on the budget position. These effective arrangements to involve Members ensure a relatively high profile for the programme, consideration of Supporting People links with other strategies, and the approval of appropriate resources to deliver objectives and support the development of new schemes to meet the needs of people requiring housing related support.

Commissioning Body

- 31 The Commissioning Body is highly effective in governing the Supporting People programme. It meets monthly and involves health, probation and the Council as key partners in the Supporting People programme. Meetings are well attended and partner representatives are of an appropriate seniority to ensure the programme is given sufficient profile within their respective organisations.
- 32 Partners considered meetings to be effectively managed with relevant issues discussed and that they were given sufficient opportunity to be involved and have their views considered. Meetings robustly consider aspects of the programme and further work is requested where required to ensure decisions are based on sound information and best practice. It is a weakness however, that the Commissioning Body does not make best use of the Core Strategy Group to lead on operational matters, often relying in the Supporting People team to drive this work. This is a missed opportunity to further involve partners and providers in the programme.
- 33 The Commissioning Body has a strong understanding of the services currently provided and gaps in provision for some service users, which it has prioritised for future service development. The Chair of the Commissioning Body is responsible for leading the Council's capital investment programme and this enables Supporting People priorities to be championed within this funding opportunity.
- 34 The Commissioning Body effectively considers the findings of service reviews. This identifies services which could potentially be ineligible for Supporting People funding and prompts partners to begin early discussions on alternative funding arrangements so as not to disrupt services provided to users.

- 35 Difficult decisions have been made by the Commissioning Body to ensure effective delivery of the programme. This includes meeting the needs of service users where gaps in provision are identified. For example, the Commissioning Body prevented a projected overspend in 2004/05 of £500,000 by introducing a five per cent cut in payments to providers, securing additional funds from the Council and working with a provider to decommission an underutilised service. The Commissioning Body partners have also been involved in raising priority areas for service development, such as people with substance misuse and offenders with Members and through other partnership forums. This has raised their profile and secured support for commissioning.
- 36 Terms of reference for the Commissioning Body clearly set out its membership and role, including voting arrangements which comply with DCLG guidelines. There is also a memorandum of understanding between the partners to agree their obligations for achieving the aims of the programme. It is a weakness however that there is no conflict of interest resolution procedure to ensure that such circumstances are managed equitably and transparently.
- 37 The Commissioning Body receives regular reports on performance, such as progress with the service review programme and budgets. However, it does not have mechanisms in place to monitor improvements and outcomes in the Supporting People programme. This is recognised and the Council is working with other Administering Local Authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside to agree a framework to evaluate and report these.

Core Strategy Group

- 38 The contribution of the Core Strategy Group to the Supporting People programme is weak, but improving. The Core Strategy Group has been unclear about its role and partners involved do not have an understanding that the responsibility of the group is to develop operational guidance and to carry out work delegated by the Commissioning Body. The group has mainly been used by the Supporting People team to consult on Supporting People developments, to link up with partners working with service users in the area and to be updated on the progress of the programme in terms of budgets and the service review timetable. This lack of direction has resulted in low attendance. This includes key partners since some have been unable to see the benefits of investing time and resources in a group that has so far had limited impact on the Supporting People programme.
- 39 The Core Strategy Group has recently revised its terms of reference however it is a serious weakness that this still does not recognise the responsibility to undertake work delegated by the Commissioning Body. It also implies that reports may be sent to the Core Strategy Group after the Commissioning Body. It is best practice to use the Core Strategy Group as a resource to involve a wider range of partners to carry out the operational aspects of the programme. It then makes recommendations up to the Commissioning Body who is then able to focus on its decision-making responsibilities.

The terms of reference does provide clearer aims for the Core Strategy Group, including involvement in updating the five-year strategy and identifying strategic priorities and commissioning opportunities.

- 40 The role of the Core Strategy Group in undertaking work for the Commissioning Body is further weakened by the scheduling of meetings. The Commissioning Body meets more regularly than the Core Strategy Group, which meets bi-monthly. This means that the Commissioning Body will be unable to allocate work to the Core Strategy Group and receive responses it time for its next meeting. This prevents the Core Strategy group from being involved in some initiatives which are alternatively undertaken by the Commissioning Body or the Supporting People team.
- 41 Positively in the last few months the role of the Core Strategy Group has been expanded. This includes updating needs assessments for service users, analysing current provision of services, commissioning the development plan, considering options and models for services, and considering the revenue and capital implications of the programme. This is an opportunity for the group to have a more significant impact on the programme.
- 42 The membership of the Core Strategy Group extensively involves partners, and this is appropriate. This includes representatives from the Primary Care Trust (PCTs), Probation, the Drug Action Team (DAT), the Youth Offending Team (YOT), and staff with homelessness and planning and commissioning responsibilities within the Council. It is a strength that there are also two representatives for providers, nominated through the provider forum. This ensures that partners responsible for delivering and commissioning Supporting People services can influence the programme using their expertise and local knowledge.

Accountable Officer

- 43 The Accountable Officer is sufficiently senior within the Council to effectively champion the Supporting People programme. They have a clear understanding of their role for overseeing the programme and monitoring performance. Partners were positive about the involvement of the Accountable Officer, who they recognise as actively involved in a range of partnerships.
- 44 Partners considered the Accountable Officer to have a comprehensive understanding of local issues for services users, of gaps in service delivery and links to other strategies. For example, the Accountable Officer chairs separate boards within the Council for older peoples services, and people with physical disabilities and/or sensory impairment, in addition to attending the local equality and diversity inclusion partnership. They also attend the PCT's Professional Executive Group. The Accountable Officer has been highly effective at promoting the Supporting People programme at Member level, including attracting additional funds to bridge shortfalls in resources.

Health and probation partnership arrangements

- 45 Probation and the PCT are strongly involved in the Supporting People programme through the Commissioning Body where they have an equal role with the Council as the Administering Local Authority. This ensures they are actively involved in the strategic direction and delivery of the programme, particularly for approving new services and agreeing contingency arrangements, where required, for decommissioned and remodelled services.
- 46 Involvement in the Core Strategy Group is effective for health representatives, as Lead Planning and Commissioning Officers represent both the PCT and the Council through a pooled budget arrangement. Probation attendance has been infrequent, although YOT and DAT are actively involved. YOT is also represented on the vulnerable user accommodation group which includes recognising the specific needs of vulnerable young people. Attendance of Probation and health are essential to ensure that the Supporting People programme delivers effective services for service users, and to ensure the strategic direction is appropriate to meet their priorities.
- 47 There are issues with the involvement of mental health operational staff who were not fully engaged in the programme and who had little understanding of its relevance to service delivery. They reported difficulties in getting the right accommodation and support for people leaving hospital.
- 48 Probation has effective links with other agencies working in social care and housing in respect of offender accommodation issues through the South Yorkshire Offender Housing Forum. A draft protocol has been produced to agree the future direction of housing and support services for offenders.
- 49 A Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA) is in place and has appropriate links to housing related support. There is an information sharing protocol and the Council has signed up to this, ensuring that appropriate information about high risk offenders is shared to ensure public protection.
- 50 The Drug Intervention Programme worker attends the Moving On In Barnsley Group, which acts to share information and best practice at front-line worker level and to identify any barriers to access. This is seen as a useful group which combines awareness raising on housing support related issues, for example, workshops on housing exclusions and evictions policy. It also focuses on the needs of traditionally excluded groups such as rough sleepers.

Cross authority partnership arrangements

- 51 The Council is an active member of the Supporting People Regional Strategy Group for Yorkshire and Humberside and this is highly effective for sharing best practice and joining up resources to deliver Supporting People programmes. BMBC is considered to be well engaged, attending groups for lead officers and operational staff to consider the strategic direction and delivery of the programme.

- 52 The group has produced several initiatives having a positive impact on the Supporting People programme and outcomes for service users. This includes agreeing a model to assess the outcomes of programmes and establishing regional groups for types of service users to assess cross authority working. BMBC has had a high profile role in value for money evaluations including benchmarking. It is therefore making an important contribution to this joint working for shared outcomes.

Voluntary sector

- 53 Arrangements to involve the voluntary sector are weak. There are no carer or advocacy representatives in the governance arrangements and there have been no consultation events or surveys for these stakeholders relating to the Supporting People programme including service reviews. This is a missed opportunity to get feedback from individuals with an interest in the programme, or those who may be able to represent the views of service users with limited abilities to communicate. Particularly, carers and advocates may have seen at first hand the service provided to service users and how this has changed over time. This means that BMBC can not fully assess whether the programme is producing positive outcomes in housing related support to assist people to live more independently.
- 54 The Supporting Team does consult carers and advocates through other forums, but this has had little impact on the delivery of the programme. There is a joint working agreement between Barnsley PCT, BMBC and Barnsley District General Hospital. This considers the care and support needs of people with mental health problems, children and young people, people with learning disabilities, people with physical disabilities or sensory impairment, older people and people with drug, alcohol and tobacco problems. There are client boards for each group which include carers, advocates and service users, and the Supporting People team and other partners and officers involved in the programme attend these. So far this has focused on the programme's strategic approach rather than service delivery. The Council has therefore failed to use the client boards to involve carers, advocates and service users in service reviews or the publicity it provides to promote the programme to existing and potential service users.

Delivery arrangements

- 55 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the delivery arrangements of the Supporting People programme. Partners have signed up to the five-year strategy which clearly sets out aims and priorities, including links with other strategies. The Supporting People team is now well established using permanent and seconded staff, with access to Council support services. This is supplemented by stakeholder meetings with partners. Comprehensive eligibility criteria is in place, which links with eligibility criteria for care and older people. Providers agree that ineligible service assessments are justified and involve effective discussions to agree alternative funding arrangements. The capacity of the programme has increased since the shadow strategy.

- 56 Needs assessments are effective for most service user groups, although further research is required in some areas. Priorities have been agreed for development, remodelling and research. There are effective work planning arrangements and these include a range of targets to develop the programme. IT systems monitor and report the financial position and identify shortfalls to instigate remedial action. An effective provider forum is in place, and this is increasingly provider led. Providers were positive about the advice and support they received. There is a robust framework to manage and prioritise risk and DCLG data uploads take place on time, including full extract submissions.
- 57 Processes to agree steady state contracts have not been finalised, the five-year strategy is not widely publicised and arrangements to update needs assessments are weak. The fairer charging policy is insufficiently publicised to service users and contingency plans are not always identified within risk assessments.

Corporate commitment

- 58 Corporate commitment to the delivery of the Supporting People programme is strong, particularly over the last year. The Council has recently transferred responsibilities for Supporting People from the Housing Department to Social Services, which has more extensive links with key partners and service users affected by the programme. There have also been several vacancies at a senior level within the department and the Supporting People team, and this has been used as an opportunity to clarify staff responsibilities for the programme, particularly at Accountable Officer level.
- 59 Corporate aims and objectives are considered within the five-year strategy and the Supporting People team's operational plan to give direction on how the Supporting People programme will contribute to their delivery. Similarly, the programme is effectively considered in a range of Council plans, such as homelessness and older people. Staff are involved in other plans being agreed, such as learning disabilities and young people with substance misuse. Supporting People is also included within the local delivery plan of the PCT and the Offender Accommodation Strategy. This is crucial for the effective delivery of the programme, since it ensures that partnerships have shared goals and targets.
- 60 These partnerships now demonstrate outcomes for service users through the commissioning of new services. Since the shadow strategy there has been increased provision, totalling 165 units, for people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems, ex-offenders, young people leaving care and teenage parents. Positively, these services provide floating support, enabling service users to live more independently in their own home or move on accommodation.
- 61 These partnerships are in the process of agreeing and delivering other schemes including an extra care scheme for the frail elderly. In addition, a comprehensive review of older people's services has resulted in the reconfiguration of services to offer more choice in the type and levels of support available. This will also benefit people in private sector accommodation, including home owners, to be supported to live independently.

Supporting People Team

- 62 The Supporting Team has made progress in the delivery of the programme over the last year, which is all the more creditable considering the staff vacancies it has experienced. At one stage interim managers were appointed to oversee the programme while permanent recruitment was underway. This uncertainty delayed the delivery of some aspects of the programme, which have since been accelerated with DCLG deadlines met.
- 63 The team is now well established, using an effective mix of permanent and seconded staff, with access to support services from the Council's IT, finance and legal departments. This is highly efficient, enabling the team to draw additional resources when required from across the council and its partnerships to meet the current requirements of the programme. The Council shows a willingness to further resource the programme, for example by supplementing the administration budget when it was overspent in 2004/05. This enabled further recruitment required to deliver the service review programme on schedule.
- 64 The Supporting People team has a range of relevant skills to effectively deliver the programme, particularly in the areas of project and contract management. Staff have some experience of working with service users, but limited involvement in providing care and support. It is positive that where experience is lacking stakeholder meetings are held with partners, such as Social Services and Probation, to draw upon their expertise. The involvement of staff in partnership boards, strategy working groups and cross authority partnerships also helps the team to improve its understanding of the needs of service users and providers. These arrangements ensure that the programme is effectively delivered to meet their requirements. It is a weakness however, that partners have limited input into service review visits to assess services and supplement any skills gaps of staff carry out this work.

Grant conditions, eligibility criteria and contracts

- 65 Comprehensive eligibility criteria is in place and this complies with DCLG guidelines. It is particularly positive that it has links with eligibility criteria for care and older people. The eligibility criteria has been agreed with partners, including providers, which is best practice. They considered it to be a fair approach, but were critical of its late introduction in November 2005. This meant they were operating for some time without guidance on how eligibility would impact on service review assessments. Overall however, this has not had a significant impact on service reviews, since services most likely to be effected by the criteria, such as services for people with mental health problems and learning disabilities were scheduled towards the end of the review programme.
- 66 Providers have a clear understanding of grant conditions and eligibility criteria. They also consider they are being applied robustly and appropriately by the Council. Where services are assessed as ineligible, providers agree that this is justified, resulting in effective discussions about decommissioning and remodelling. They also consider that the Council applies the criteria flexibly to ensure service users with high care needs qualify for some housing related support to increase their independence.

Overall, they agree it is being applied consistently across the range of Supporting People services through the service review process. This ensures that the Supporting People grant is appropriately used to pay for housing related support. Services assessed as ineligible have released funding for investment in new services. This will enable the needs of other service users to be met through the programme.

- 67 Overall current contract arrangements are satisfactory, but the Council is not significantly progressed in contract negotiation processes to agree steady state contracts. Its approach is currently out to consultation with providers. In the mean time interim contracts have been extended until April 2007 and this gives providers some stability until steady state contract can be agreed, based on service review outcomes. It is proposed that steady state contracts will have a three-year term, and this will give providers further guarantees. Providers receive training on financial and performance monitoring issues relating to the programme and this helps them to understanding the current position for contracting arrangements.

Five-year strategy

- 68 The five-year strategy is comprehensive, complying with DCLG guidance in content and structure. Importantly, it clearly identifies priority areas for the development of new services, and this is a strong aspect of the approach. It is a weakness however that the housing related support needs of some service users still requires research. The current programme and plans to develop additional services will therefore not adequately reflect their needs. Partners have signed up to the strategy, which was agreed by the DCLG deadline. There has been a peer review of the five-year strategy to identify areas for improvement.
- 69 Although partners are aware of the content and proposals within the strategy, it is not widely publicised, which is a weakness. Currently it is distributed within the Council and to partners, but not to the public or other stakeholders to make it accessible. The executive summary effectively reflects the key points, but this is not available in a separate document to raise the profile of the strategy to a wider audience. The strategy is available in different languages and formats, such as Braille and large print if required.
- 70 The five-year strategy is robust. In addition to identifying current supply and grant distribution for service user groups, there is comprehensive consideration of the legislative and national context for services. Where needs assessments have been carried out these are effective, involving a range of partners through surveys and interviews, and considering data and research they have provided. Assessments have been used to decide priorities for development, remodelling and research, which have also been prioritised for delivery within the next 18 months or future years, with an emphasis on floating support. Where needs assessments have been completed there is clear direction for the future, including how savings will be reinvested to achieve outcomes for service users, particularly for some services where there is currently no or inadequate provision.

- 71 The Council accepts it needs to do more to understand the needs of young people leaving care or who are at risk, people with alcohol problems and gypsies and travellers. Where needs assessments have been carried out for other service user groups identified within Barnsley the Council accepts it has to do more to understand their actual support and accommodation needs. This work will be crucial to ensuring that new services commissioned will provide appropriate housing related support to service users.
- 72 These priorities clearly link to other partnerships and strategies and partners were supportive of these commitments. Work is already underway to deliver some of these, with capital bids being approved for homeless families provision and an older persons extra care unit. Additional services are expected to be approved for people with substance misuse and offenders, in partnership with probation, and people with physical disabilities. There is also extensive remodelling of older persons services, particularly increasing floating support available, including to people living in the private sector.

Needs mapping, analysis and review

- 73 The Council's arrangements to update needs assessments are weak. The data has not been updated since the five-year strategy was agreed in April 2005. This work has recently been allocated to the Core Strategy Group to progress. The Council is working with the Supporting People Regional Strategy Group for Yorkshire and Humberside to conduct a research project on gypsies and travellers, and this is positive, but other research requirements identified through the strategy have not been progressed. If needs assessments are not updated to maintain their relevance the Council can not ensure that it effectively targeting savings from the programme into priority services or that it is meeting new and emerging demand for housing related support.

Work planning and performance monitoring and management

- 74 The Council has effective work planning arrangements through its annual service plan for Supporting People and the action plan within the five-year strategy. These set a range of targets to develop the programme and positively report progress with delivery and perceived outcomes for service users and the programme generally. They also delegate responsibility to staff, partners and governing bodies to deliver, and include utilising partnerships, such as cross authority working and other strategies. This ensures that objectives are linked to the corporate aims of the Council and partners to avoid duplication and to work more efficiently by pooling resources.
- 75 The action plan and the annual plan reflect objectives within the five-year strategy, the Council's aims and objectives, deadlines set by DCLG to deliver the programme, and other national priorities, such as ensuring that the programme represents value for money. There is annual reporting on progress to Members, with more regular updates to the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group. Staff understand their role and contribution through monthly supervision meetings, regular appraisals and bi-weekly team meetings. Overall, this framework sets clear and relevant priorities for the programme, ensuring adequate scrutiny for delivery.

- 76 The Council has set up IT systems to effectively monitor and report the financial position of the programme, and providers report that they are paid on time with schedules of payments provided. Financial reports include details of the grant available, expenditure, and project the year end position so that any shortfalls can be identified to prompt remedial action. The Council is also able to estimate savings and use scenarios, such as inflationary uplifts for providers, to assess their impact on the financial capacity of the programme. This helps inform the Council's decision-making for how the grant will be allocated, including commitments to new services. Performance management systems also monitor and report the Council's performance against Supporting People specific Key Performance Indicators. In 2005/06 the programme was £220,000 underspent and this is being carried forward to the current year for exclusive investment in additional Supporting People services.
- 77 There are regular reports to the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group on the budget position and performance against indicators. This information is also reported to Members in the annual report. Reports include details of the service review programme. This assists in the Council's budget planning for the Supporting People programme and helps agree contingency arrangements for decommissioning. This has resulted in £600,000 being agreed for retraction plans for learning disability services. This ensures that services to service users are not adversely affected by changes to the way they are funded.

Fairer charging

- 78 The Council has a policy and procedure for fairer charging in place and this is based on the recommendations of the DCLG and the National Association of Assessment Officers, which is best practice. However it is not sufficiently publicised to service users and this is a weakness. The leaflet publicising the scheme does not clearly set out how charges will be applied or circumstances likely to be eligible for assessments. The website includes more information but this has limited examples on circumstances likely to qualify. For example, it does not include older people, the main group to benefit from the scheme. Providers stated that they had not been provided with any information to issue to service users to promote fairer charging. If the scheme is not widely publicised in an accessible language service users are less likely to identify its relevance to their own circumstances.
- 79 This is reflected in the poor take up of only 13 assessments in the first two months of 2006/07, and this is a concern. The Council has benchmarked the scheme with neighbouring Administering Local Authorities, but this has had limited outcomes. A review of fairer charging is underway with service user consultation taking place conducted by an external agency, and this is a positive approach to addressing these issues.
- 80 Providers are regularly updated on the scheme and other partners working with service users, such as Social Workers and Welfare Rights Officers, have also been trained on fairer charging. This will provide additional opportunities for the scheme to be promoted to service users.

Relationships with providers

- 81 The Council has contracts with 20 providers to deliver the Supporting People programme, and they were complimentary about the Supporting People team, particularly the advice and support it provides. Staff were considered to be approachable and responsive to queries. This included visits to providers to discuss complex issues such as value for money and service review assessments. Providers found this useful for helping them prepare evidence required.
- 82 Providers stated that they did not always agree with decisions made by the Council, for example through service reviews, but they were positive that when such situations arose there was adequate opportunity to discuss and resolve conflict. This helps sustain effective working relationships in the delivery of the programme, while considering the priorities of both parties. Providers confirmed that there is a level playing field between the Council's in house providers and external providers. Small providers were also positive, considering that their views were considered equally to those of providers with a larger investment in the programme. Overall initiatives, such as value for money and service reviews were applied fairly and equally, ensuring that no provider had an advantage through the administration of the programme.
- 83 An effective provider forum is in place, which meets quarterly. It is well attended and currently jointly chaired by the Council and providers. The group is encouraged to be provider-led now that two provider representatives have been elected to attend the Core Strategy Group. Representatives were democratically nominated by other providers through the forum. This ensures that providers support arrangements in place and have a full understanding of how these operate so that they can give their view and get feedback.
- 84 Providers consider the forum to be effective, discussing a range of useful initiatives linked to the Supporting People programme, including sharing information, benchmarking, budgets, performance and workbooks. Minutes of meetings are circulated to all providers so that those who could not attend are kept informed. Providers found the forums useful for the training they received on emerging issues, the updates they received on the progress of the programme, and consultation on the strategic direction of the programme, such as the five-year strategy. This involvement ensures that providers are engaged and that the Council's priorities have been informed by the expertise and local knowledge of partners delivering services direct to service users.

Cross authority working

- 85 The Council's active involvement in the Supporting People Regional Strategy Group for Yorkshire and Humberside is resulting in positive examples of sharing best practice and seeking resolution to shared problems. It also enables partners to join up resources to administrate their programmes more efficiently. This includes jointly funding a worker to lead on initiatives prioritised by the group for development.

- 86 Other outcomes of this cross authority working include peer reviews of service review approaches and there are regional groups looking at the needs of service user groups most likely to access cross authorities services, such as offenders and homeless families. It is also working with the regional centre of excellence to benefit from regional market analysis work to identify potential new providers for Supporting People services. This will ensure that procurement for new services is competitively market tested. The group has also identified priorities within five-year strategies to inform a procurement programme in the region. This will enable the group to join up procurement needs and improve its bargaining power.
- 87 The group is aiming to approve joint accreditation of providers to reflect that quality standards have been achieved, and this will act as a reference for other Administering Local Authorities currently, or considering, using these providers. Positively the group is also working to get provider client records for high risk offenders to inform a regional resettlement framework. This is in response to national guidance which recommends this as best practice.
- 88 The group does not currently jointly commission any cross authority services and this is a weakness. This would enable Administering Local Authorities to combine Supporting People grants to meet the specialist needs of services users across several local authority areas.

Risk management

- 89 Risk management within the Supporting People programme is strong. There is a robust framework to manage risk, with areas prioritised through a scoring regime. This includes assessments of arrangements in place to manage risks, the potential consequences of risks not being addressed and action points to overt risks. It is a weakness however that contingency plans are not always identified within the assessments. This would give the programme clear direction should risks take place. The risk management approach is regularly monitored, on a quarterly basis, and this is reported to the Social Services management team. This ensures that this area of work has a high profile within the Council.

DCLG Supporting People Local System (SPLS) data upload

- 90 DCLG data uploads take place on time and include full extract submissions. The Council is currently undertaking a data cleansing exercise to ensure that the information contained in the SPLS system is accurate and up to date. This will contribute to the DCLG's assessment of the Supporting People programme on a nationwide basis.

Service reviews

- 91 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the area of service reviews. The service review programme was appropriately based on potential risks and ineligibility. Providers considered reviews to be more robust than other Administering Local Authorities they have worked with. Action plans have been agreed and this has improved services through higher Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) assessments.

- 92 Review reporting arrangements effectively scrutinise strategic relevance, eligibility and recommendations and an appeals procedure is in place. There are also effective arrangements to report review findings to providers. The review process has been evaluated through self-assessment and peer reviews. Review outcomes have resulted in 75 per cent of contracts being remodelled or decommissioned, with savings reinvested back into the programme to meet the additional housing related support needs identified within the five-year strategy. Staff carrying out reviews do not have experience of service provision for some vulnerable people and the Council has not introduced passporting to reduce the burden of reviews on providers. There have been no joint reviews with other Administering Local Authorities.
- 93 The service review programme is nearing completion, with nine validation visits outstanding. The programme comprises of 254 service reviews and commenced in August 2004, after a slight delay due to staff changes. The programme was appropriately agreed with the Commissioning Body and at the provider forum based on risk assessments around the areas of high cost services, potentially ineligible services and services developed late through the transitional housing benefit process. The timetable has been revised in response to changing priorities. For example, the largest provider carried out an internal review of older persons services and this service review was brought forward to align resources and agree joint outcomes and recommendations.
- 94 A comprehensive procedure has been agreed for service reviews. Providers have been trained on the approach by an external consultant. They were positive about this opportunity, considering it helpful for understanding the approach and preparing for self-assessments, validation visits and value for money assessments. The procedure was informed by best practice through skyweb and DCLG guidance, and by learning from other Administering Local Authorities through the Supporting People Regional Strategy Group for Yorkshire and Humberside. The approach was piloted through a service review of a high cost offender service, and feedback from providers and the Supporting People team resulted in refinements of the process.
- 95 Staff carrying out reviews are experienced in service provision for vulnerable people, but this is not comprehensive. Staff have no experience of some services, such as offenders or people with disabilities. Staff carrying out reviews have worked in children's services, housing management and welfare rights. They also have project and performance management skills, which assists with quality assurance assessments. Whilst providers consider that staff have the ability to carry out reviews robustly and appropriately, there are a few examples of staff not fully understanding the housing related support needs of some service users.
- 96 The Council has accessed additional expertise through stakeholder meetings to discuss potential decommissioning and remodelling, for example services for young people, people with mental health problems, and offenders. It is a weakness however, that the Council has not used these links to carry out joint validation visits for service reviews where the Supporting People team has skills gaps.

This would have assisted the Council to fully understanding the care and support needs of some services users, and how this informed provider arrangements to deliver services appropriate to support independent living.

- 97 Quality assurance systems are in place and this is a strong element of the Council's approach to service reviews. Providers considered that BMBC's assessments of services was more robust than other Administering Local Authorities they have worked with. Although this was challenging at times, with no service initially reaching the minimum level C of the DCLG's Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). However, providers considered this an effective process for identifying areas for improvement in service delivery. They also considered that this was applied consistently for internal and external providers, regardless of their size.
- 98 Action plans have been agreed with providers and this has resulted in service improvements with most now reaching the minimum standard and others even exceeding this. Positively, the Council has used service reviews to identify best practice, which it shares with providers through the providers' forum. It also signposts providers to this work in response to weaknesses found so that they can consider whether these examples would improve their own service arrangements.
- 99 The service review programme has been evaluated for transparency and consistency through a peer review programme. This found arrangements to be robust and effective. There has also been a self-assessment of the approach and this was effective for reducing duplication and ensuring consistency. Recommendations from these evaluations have been implemented to further refine the approach.
- 100 There are regular reports on performance against the service review timetable to the Commissioning Body, the Core Strategy Group and the providers' forum. The Commissioning Body has the responsibility of making decisions on the recommendations from reviews. Positively providers have the opportunity to make comments about the review outcomes within reports and they are also invited to attend the Commissioning Body meeting considering their report to be fully involved in the discussions. Partner agencies, such as the PCT and Probation are involved through their membership of the governance arrangements. It is evident that reporting arrangements effectively scrutinise the findings of service reviews with the meetings clearly recording challenging debates and subsequent decision-making.
- 101 Other partners have been involved through the stakeholder meetings to agree remodelling and decommissioning recommendations for reviews following validation visits. This ensures that providers and partners are fully engaged in the assessments. This includes making recommendations to improve services, to decommission or remodel services which are ineligible, or to provide alternative types of housing related support to more effectively meet the needs of service users.

- 102** An appeals procedure is included within the service review methodology. This is appropriate, initially being considered by the Accountable Officer and Supporting People team manager, after which the provider can further appeal to the Commissioning Body. The appeals procedure is promoted to providers at the pre-validation visit meeting, but it is a weakness that it is not explained within the letter that accompanies the service review report when it is issued to providers. This would reiterate appeals options at a time providers are most likely to consider taking such action. It would also set out the arrangements in writing so that providers could fully consider and understanding this opportunity. So far the Council has received one appeal.
- 103** It is a weakness that the Council has not streamlined processes to reduce the burden for providers through service reviews, for example by introducing passporting. This would provide joint accreditation of providers and accept service review assessments of Administering Local Authorities using the same providers. There are also no examples of joint reviews being carried out with other Administering Local Authorities, to pool resources, share expertise, ensure consistency and identify best practice to be shared.
- 104** There are effective arrangements to report findings of service reviews throughout the various stages of the process. The pre-validation visit is used to give an initial assessment on the desktop review of evidence received and this includes feedback on the provider's value for money assessment. This is positive since it will give the provider adequate opportunity to reassess potential weaknesses identified and scrutinise costs if they have been identified as high risk when compared to benchmarking data for similar services nationally and regionally. The validation visit was generally regarded as thorough by providers, being at least two days and sometimes significantly longer if issues were identified which required further investigation and discussion with providers. Providers are informed of strengths and areas for improvement at the end of the validation visit and staff visit again within two weeks to discuss the findings in more detail.
- 105** Providers receive the report two weeks before the Commissioning Body meets to discuss the recommendations. This includes the score and action plan so that recommendations can be responded to early on. The providers receive an updated report one week after the Commissioning Body meeting, so that they are fully informed of decisions and how it affects future service provision.
- 106** Positive outcomes can be demonstrated in respect of improved configuration of contracted services to meet identified need and local priorities. This is an area of strength for the Council. Significantly, 75 per cent of review outcomes have resulted in remodelling and decommissioning decisions. The Council has been successful in securing repayment of Supporting People grants for some services, notably £600,000 for learning disability services, £200,000 for older peoples services and £140,000 for a scheme providing floating support for offenders.

107 All savings within the programme will be reinvested to meet housing related support needs of other service users as identified in the five-year strategy. This includes:

- remodelling offender services to move away from accommodation based support to floating support;
- remodelling a young people's shared accommodation service to provide self-contained units with more appropriate facilities on a new site;
- decommissioning accommodation based services for mental health service users, due to the inflexibility of the provision, eligibility issues and long term void issues;
- increasing floating support provision for mental health clients to better meet service user needs and ensure services can be delivered cross tenure;
- extending the capacity by seven units of the homeless families unit to deliver a floating outreach service;
- remodelling alcohol services, in consultation with DAT and key stakeholders, to address current issues around shared accommodation, demand and long term void issues; and
- remodelling and reconfiguring 165 older people services delivered through the ALMO, which will provide more choice in the housing related support available and extend this across tenure to people living in the private sector.

Service user involvement

108 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in the area of service user involvement and this is the weakest area of the Supporting People programme. Consultation arrangements already in place within Social Services to involve carers, advocates and service users are not being effectively used, and there have been no specific consultation events on Supporting People. Arrangements to make a complaint about the programme are not promoted to attract service user feedback. Service users are involved in service reviews through questionnaires and meetings, and this has been particularly effective for agreeing remodelling options.

109 Arrangements to involve service users are weak. The Council involves carers, advocates and service users, through the client boards set up as part of the joint working agreement between Barnsley PCT, BMBC and Barnsley District General Hospital. However, these have not been sufficiently accessed to involve carers, advocates and service users in planning the Supporting People programme and reviewing services, and this is a serious weakness. The client boards tend to receive updates on the Supporting People programme, rather than being consulted about initiatives being developed. Their involvement would ensure that the programme's priorities were relevant, meeting their needs and expectations.

110 Overall, partners considered the client boards effective for engaging carers, advocates and service users, and this makes the lack of focus on Supporting People issues even more disappointing. The Supporting People programme has missed the opportunity to access existing successful consultation arrangements so that consultation can happen quickly with limited additional resources.

There are client boards for people with mental health problems, children and young people, people with learning disabilities, people with physical disabilities or sensory impairment, older people and people with drug, alcohol and tobacco problems.

- 111 There are limited additional mechanisms to involve service users in the programme. This is restricted to consultation as part of the service review process, although this is effective through meetings and questionnaires. There have been no Supporting People specific consultation events with carers, advocates and services users and this is a weakness. There are also no arrangements to consult offenders, or to involve service users in the commissioning cycle. Crucially, service users do not have a range of ways to participate. This would enable them to be involved according to their needs and aspirations.
- 112 Improvements in programme delivery as a result of service user involvement are therefore limited to service review recommendations. However, this did include effective involvement of older people and offenders in agreeing remodelling options. These were strong initiatives to involve service users in shaping future service provision to offer choices in housing relating support available.
- 113 There is a customer complaints procedure within Social Services and positively this includes the opportunity to report dissatisfaction in a pictorial format. To date public information relating to Supporting People does not detail how to make a complaint, and this is a weakness. This is a missed opportunity to obtain service user feedback on the programme.

Access to services and information

- 114 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in the area of access to services and information. With the exception of Better Care: Higher Standards, information is not easy to understand and does not sufficiently explain the Supporting People programme, circumstances likely to be eligible for housing related support or arrangements for referrals to access services. Supporting People information is difficult to access through the website since links to the relevant pages are not clearly signposted.
- 115 The quality of information available to the public on the Supporting People programme is weak. There is a new range of leaflets but these do not actively promote service user groups eligible for housing related support or list types of support available. This would make it very difficult for potential service users to identify the opportunities presented through the programme for independent living.
- 116 Information has not been agreed in partnership with carers, advocates and service users to make sure it is relevant and easy to understand. It does include straplines in different languages to promote the availability of translation and other formats such as Braille, large print and audio tape are also publicised. It is a weakness however that there is currently no information in a pictorial format to make it more accessible for people with limited communication skills. The Council is in the process of developing this.

- 117** There is a directory of services available through a range of different access points, including offices open to the public and the Council's website. It has also been issued to providers and partners. It includes the location of services, details of providers responsible for delivery and the type of support provided. It is a weakness however that it does not inform how to access services. Directories of services publicise the choice of housing related support options available to service users.
- 118** The Council's website includes a site for the Supporting People programme but this is inaccessible. It relies on people accessing the website identifying the Supporting People brand as the icon to gain entry. Supporting People is not included in the search facility or the A-Z of council services. The Supporting People site is easy to use and gives details on housing related support available and the Supporting People team. It also including leaflets for the programme and makes links to partners, the spkweb and fairer charging assessments. However, due to the difficulties in locating the site service users may be unable to access this information.
- 119** There is comprehensive information on Better Care: Higher Standards. This is an effective charter for long term care in Barnsley. It sets out values and targets for care and support services and reports performance. It also clearly explains how to access services provided by a range of organisations, how to find appropriate accommodation, signposts to money advice and explains how to make complaints. It includes details of the Supporting People regime and promotes fairer charging. It is an accessible document which is easy for service users to understand and the availability of this information in different languages and formats is publicised to make it accessible.
- 120** Overall access and referral routes for potential services users to access services are weak. Although publicity gives contact details for the Supporting People team and providers, they do not detail the process for making referrals. When referrals are required through other agencies, such as Social Services, contact details are not provided to signpost people making enquiries. This would make it difficult for potential service users to know what to do once they have identified Supporting People services they are interested in.

Diversity

- 121** Weaknesses outweigh strengths in the area of diversity. The Council recognises in its self-assessment completed prior to the inspection that this is an area for improvement and work is underway to address this through additional research on needs assessments. Although the Council is involved in a range of partnerships leading on equality and diversity this has had limited outcomes for the Supporting People Programme. The five-year strategy does not consider the needs of vulnerable people from BME communities although service reviews are effective for assessing cultural sensitivities and accessibility, including Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance. A Social Inclusion Framework is in place and this makes explicit links to the Supporting People programme.

- 122 There is a robust process for assessing the housing related support needs of some eligible vulnerable people and this has been compared with existing service provision to identify gaps to inform future service developments. This involved partners through the governance arrangements, interviews and surveys.
- 123 The Council accepts it does not fully understand the needs of some service users and plans are in place to research this. Research will focus on excluded groups of vulnerable people, such as people with substance misuse, offenders, rough sleepers, gypsies and travellers, teenage parents and young people leaving care. Positively, the research will be jointly commissioned through cross authority working and other partnerships, and this will ensure shared priorities to inform commissioning. Work is already underway to identify new services for offenders and homeless people but overall there is little information regarding some service users to inform future service developments through the programme.
- 124 An Accommodation for Vulnerable Adults group has been established, led by the Chief Executive, to work on a cross sector gap analysis concentrating on the priority areas of offenders, young people leaving care or with limited family support, substance misuse and domestic violence. The group is working to develop clear needs assessments to identify gaps and agree how these will be met. The outline strategy will be available this year to enable outcomes and recommendations to be aligned within the capital investment budget setting process. This is a positive initiative to identify unmet need and subsequent commissioning of additional services.
- 125 A Social Inclusion Framework is in place to prioritise social inclusion as a cross cutting theme within the Council's community plan. This includes housing related issues and makes links to Supporting People. This has prioritised three key groups determined by poor basic skills, poor health and mental health, and BME and Asylum seekers. This was developed alongside the development of the five-year strategy and work is now underway to deliver the framework across the borough.
- 126 There is limited evidence of diversity issues being actively considered within the Supporting People programme. There are no equality and diversity policies or strategies for Social Services and the Supporting People team. Without these insufficient priority is given to equality and diversity within the programme.
- 127 The five-year strategy has been developed with limited baseline information relating to vulnerable people from BME communities. The corporate centre is however researching 52 neighbourhoods within Barnsley which will update the needs assessments. The five-year strategy does not make specific reference to equality or diversity and its aim to identify 'hard-to-reach' groups is limited to asylum seekers and gypsies and travellers.
- 128 The Council has partnerships in place to lead on diversity issues, but to date with the exception of the research it has commissioned on gypsies and travellers this has had limited outcomes for the Supporting People programme. Partnerships include the Equality and Diversity Partnership, part of Barnsley's Local Strategic Partnership. The Accountable Officer and the Chair of the Commissioning Body are involved and this strengthens links to the Supporting People programme.

- 129** There is an awareness of new BME groups within the area. Although the overall BME community is relatively small BMBC recognises there are new emerging groups. It is estimated that the BME population has increased to 2.7 per cent with growth in Eastern European communities. The BME population and new emerging BME groups are being supported by the Council through the Barnsley Black and Ethnic Initiative (BBEMI), a voluntary agency. In addition £3.5 million has been provided by Yorkshire Forward to develop an infrastructure of services including Voluntary Action in Barnsley, community partnerships and BBEMI. However, there are no outcomes to date as a result of this work on the Supporting People programme.
- 130** Reviews of current services have assessed cultural sensitivities and accessibility and this is positive. This includes an assessment of whether equality and diversity policies are in place, checking service user records to see if any cultural and religious issues have been taken into account through service delivery, and assessing provider awareness of equality and diversity. It is a strength that the Council has identified best practice on equality and diversity and shared this with other providers and it also refers providers to the Council's equality service for further guidance if required. Service reviews have been particularly effective for assessing DDA compliance of service user accommodation. This is explicitly referred to within review reports, with recommendations as appropriate to improve accessibility.
- 131** The Supporting People team were aware of how to access translation and signing services. Positively, there are translation drop in sessions three days a week in the town centre service centre. Service points are DDA compliant including level access and hearing loops. These facilities enable service users who do not use English as a first language or who have physical, sensory and/or learning disabilities to be aided to access services and information.

Outcomes for service users

- 132** Overall strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. Remodelling has taken place to provide more appropriate accommodation-based housing related support to service users and increase choice through extending floating support available. Further choice is available through the individualised budget pilot underway. Savings generated by service reviews are reinvested into new services to meet the housing related support needs of additional service users. Support plans are in place for most service users, and where this is an issue action plans are agreed with providers to introduce these. Housing related support is appropriate, offering a range of support services to assist service users to live independently. The needs of some service users are not fully understood and these are therefore not benefiting through the programme. Arrangements to assess the outcomes of the programme are under-developed.

- 133** Plans to reinvest savings are improving how services meet local need in accordance with priorities set out in the five-year strategy. This includes introducing new services, including floating support, and remodelling and reconfiguration existing services to ensure they provide housing related support which is more appropriate to the needs of service users, such as move on accommodation as the next step to independent living. Older persons, offenders, young people leaving care or at risk, people with mental health problems, frail elderly people and people with alcohol misuse have all benefited from these changes.
- 134** The Council accepts however, that it still needs to research the housing related support needs of some service user groups. There are currently no services in place or under development for mental disordered offenders, people with HIV/AIDS, refugees, rough sleepers or gypsies and travellers. These groups are therefore not adequately provided for within the programme. The lack of provision has been identified and plans are being agreed with partners to research and address this.
- 135** Service users are involved and engaged in discussions about changes if they receive support through a service being remodelled. There are effective arrangements to hold stakeholder meetings with service users at offender and older persons schemes, supported by a service user survey. This plays a key part in agreeing remodelling proposals, including the type of housing related support to be made available to service users under new arrangements for these services.
- 136** The robust assessment of services against the QAF has effectively scrutinised the quality of services provided to service users. This has resulted in service improvements as providers implement action plans to at least meet the level C standard, and in some cases exceed this.
- 137** It is a weakness that service users are not involved in the strategic direction of the programme, since there have been no carer, advocate and service user events. The Council can therefore not be confident that aims and objectives for the Supporting People programme reflect their needs.
- 138** The Council offers sufficient choice to service users regarding services available. Older persons services represent 93 per cent of the Supporting People programme, and this is being extensively remodelled to offer alarms and floating support across tenure. The programme provides floating support for other services, being 11 per cent, an increase of 125 units since the 2002. The impact of pipeline schemes provides an additional 44 units, 12 of which are floating support with the remaining 21 being accommodation based. These additional services addressed gaps within the Shadow Strategy. Positively, the Council is one of 16 national pilots for individualised budgets. This will enable service users to receive grants directly so that they can exercise greater autonomy and procure their own care and support arrangements.

- 139** Support plans are in place for most service users, and where these are absent this has been identified through service reviews and prioritised within action plans. Support plans are crucial to agree with service users the housing related support they require from the provider to help them to live independently. Support plans are regularly reviewed to assess progress and to identify any additional or alternative support requirements.
- 140** Service users report they receive a range of relevant support to help them live independently and deal with some of the difficult situations they experience. This includes:
- benefits advice;
 - budgeting skills;
 - advice on educational courses available in the area;
 - life-skills including cooking and healthy living;
 - courses on self-esteem and confidence building;
 - assistance with health care;
 - assistance to access local schools when service users have children; and
 - help with employment options.
- 141** The council accepts that it does not have sufficient mechanisms in place to identify and quantify outcomes of the Supporting People programme and this is a weakness. It is working with the Supporting People Regional Strategy Group for Yorkshire and Humberside to pilot a model to develop such assessments. The Supporting People team meet regularly to discuss outcomes, but this is on an informal basis. No shared targets or performance indicators have been agreed with partners to give a clear focus on outcomes for the programme and to make sure they meet shared priorities for key partners within the programme.

Value for money

- 142** Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the area of value for money. The average unit costs for the programme in Barnsley compare favourably with similar services regionally and nationally. There is a clear framework for assessing value for money and this is based on best practice guidelines. It is also applied flexibly to support specialist services which may be more expensive to deliver. Providers were positive about assessments which they considered to be fair. The council has effectively identified ineligible services and has retraction plans in place. The capacity of the programme has been extended by remodelling some existing services and robust assessments of services through reviews have driven up standards in service delivery to service users. Cross authority work is extending the market place of potential providers for future procurement. The value for money framework is not widely publicised and is therefore not fully accessible to some providers and partners.

How do costs compare?

- 143** Average unit costs for Supporting People services in Barnsley are 48 per cent less than the regional average and 53 per cent less than the average across England. When community alarms and sheltered accommodation are excluded average unit costs still compare favourably and are 48 per cent less than the national average. These costs are to be viewed with caution however since they are based on data provided by Administering Local Authorities to the DCLG in 2003. The Council has since carried out service reviews which include an assessment of the eligibility of services for Supporting People funding.

Table 2

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered accommodation
Barnsley	£0.51	£13.26	£14.57	£52.32
Yorkshire and Humberside	£0.72	£25.38	£32.87	£100.47
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37

How is value for money managed?

- 144** There is a clearly defined approach for identifying value for money in the delivery of Supporting People funded housing related support and this is included in the service review methodology. The value for money framework sets out principles for assessing value for money and this effectively considers best practice as specified by the DCLG. The Council has also worked with other Administering Local Authorities to seek advice and learn from their experiences to inform its approach.
- 145** Positively, it gives due regard to evaluating low costs as a possible indicator of unsustainable services in addition to high costs which may be providing poor value for money. It also recognises that some high costs may be justified for some services, for example, those which are specialist, requiring staff with extensive qualifications and experience.
- 146** The value for money approach has a sound basis. It focuses on comparing unit costs with national and regional quartiles for other Administering Local Authorities providing similar services. The Council has set a figure of five per cent above or below these levels as a trigger to scrutinise whether costs represent value for money. This mainly considers weekly unit costs, costs per support hour, staff to service user ratios and standard support hours per week per service user.

It also gives guidance on recommended overheads for inclusion in direct service costs, which meet best practice at 10-15 per cent. This gives clear guidelines to providers on how their costs will be assessed against value for money indicators based on peer group information.

- 147** The value for money approach has been agreed with partners through governance arrangements and providers through the provider forum. Partners understand the approach and the implications for themselves, such as their role to provide alternative commissioning arrangements for ineligible services. Providers were less knowledgeable on the value for money approach and this is a weakness. However the Council can demonstrate that it has carried out comprehensive training for providers and it offers visits to assist with the completion of assessment forms. It is a weakness that opportunities to promote the value for money approach in other areas of the programme have been missed. For example, it is not sufficiently detailed within the five-year strategy and the framework is not included with the value for money assessment forms sent to providers. Wider publicity of the approach would enable providers a greater opportunity to prepare for assessments by robustly analysing costs and carrying out self-assessments to calculate how they may be financially affected.
- 148** High cost services have been subject to early review as is best practice. This was based on benchmarking data which identified offender services to be particularly high cost. Services developed late through transitional housing benefit were also prioritised. The Council has developed a comprehensive spreadsheet for providers to complete to submit their costs for assessment. This clearly sets out how to calculate the various component costs, including housing related support needs, and includes quartile information for peer group comparisons. This assists providers to calculate costs and compare them with similar services nationally and regionally. This is an effective transparent approach for the Council to work with providers to apply the value for money framework.
- 149** The Council has robustly interrogated services, including legacy services, through service reviews which included value for money assessments and this is recognised by providers. Assessments examined standards of service against the QAF, in addition to strategic relevance and grant eligibility. Overall providers consider outcomes of value for money assessments as fair, and where decommissioning or grant cuts are recommended they have ample opportunity to be involved in discussions regarding these decisions and alternative funding options.
- 150** Overall the application of the value for money framework is a strong area of the programme. It is effective for decommissioning underutilised and ineligible schemes and there is remodelling of some schemes to increase the capacity of the programme by increasing the number units of support within the same contract price. This has given the Council greater capacity to develop additional services to meet the needs of other service users.

- 151** The Council is effective at negotiating with partners regarding retraction planning. It has a contingency plan of £600,000 over two years to fund decommissioned learning disability services. This will ensure there is minimal disruption to service users ineligible for housing related support, so that they continue to receive necessary care and support of an appropriate standard.
- 152** The Council's strong cross authority working through the Supporting People Regional Strategy Group for Yorkshire and Humberside has resulted in comprehensive benchmarking, of which BMBC is a key partner. The group's regional market analysis work is identifying potential providers currently not involved in Supporting People programmes. This will increase the potential number of providers in the market place bidding for new services being procured to test value for money. There is currently no joint commissioning or procurement, but this is a priority for the group to develop now that service reviews are identifying savings for further investment. Contracts will follow legislation and agreed Council procedures, including its procurement strategy. This is currently being reviewed to reflect government initiatives such as targeting small and medium businesses, carbon reduction, e-procurement and new IT systems.

Summary

- 153** Overall we judge the Council is delivering a good Supporting People programme.
- 154** Elected Members champion the programme and the Commissioning Body works effectively, involving Probation and the PCT. Cross authority working is well established, sharing best practice and learning and developing new initiatives. The capacity of the programme is increasing through decommissioning and remodelling. Savings are being reinvested into new services, including floating support and outreach, improving housing related support options for services users.
- 155** Partners have signed up to priorities set out in the five-year strategy, which is comprehensive. Needs assessments have involved partners and considered research available. Providers are supported through training, advice and an effective forum. Service reviews are robust and action plans are agreed to drive improvements in the quality of services. The value for money framework is effective for scrutinising and challenging costs.
- 156** There are some areas for further development. The Core Strategy Group does not effectively lead on developing operational guidance and arrangements to monitor outcomes for the programme are under-developed. Needs assessments for some service users, including vulnerable people from BME communities, are not fully understood and therefore the programme is not providing housing related support needed for these groups. Needs assessments are also not being updated. Carers, advocates and service users are not fully engaged within the programme and public information on the programme is not comprehensive or easy to understand.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 157** Drivers outweigh barriers in the area of the service track record of delivering improvement. The Supporting People programme has been evaluated through peer reviews and recommendations for improvement have been delivered. Additional funding has been secured for pipeline schemes and the service review programme has identified ineligible services which has released investment for new services. Services have also been remodelled to provide more housing related support options for service users, including floating support. There are effective arrangements to assess value for money and these have been robustly applied. The Council is developing the market to ensure that new services are procured competitively.
- 158** The Council has a strong track record of implementing change and this has led to improvements in service delivery for the Supporting People programme. This has mainly been achieved through peer reviews of the five-year strategy and service reviews. This robustly tested arrangements in place and identified recommendations for improvements, which have been implemented.
- 159** The Council has capitalised on opportunities for additional resources for the programme and has secured £944,465 in pipeline funding since the shadow strategy. This has resulted in increased provision for people with learning disabilities, people with mental health problems, offenders, young people leaving care and teenage parents. Positively, these provide floating support to enable people to live independently in their homes or move on accommodation.
- 160** The Council has made improvements which have contributed to the achievement of service aims. These have delivered a range of objectives within the five-year strategy including implementing the service review programme by the DCLG deadline. This has released £220,000 for investment in new services, with further savings of £800,000 expected over the next two years when contingency plans have been utilised. The Council is already progressed in developing new services and has secured capital funding for homelessness projects, with others in the pipeline. This includes plans to develop services with social care, health and housing directorates to resettle 35 people with learning disabilities from long term hospital admissions into independent tenancies.
- 161** Services have also been remodelled to provide more choice to service users on the levels and types of support they receive. The Council is working jointly with the local ALMO and Social Services on a best value review of services for older persons. This is delivering outcomes including giving more choice to service users on the type of housing related support available, including across tenure. One service for people with alcohol issues has been remodelled from six shared living units to self-contained and floating support. This was in response to service user preferences to be supported to live independently in their own home.

- 162 The Council has put into action other objectives such as researching the housing related support needs of hard-to-reach groups such as gypsies and travellers. It is also working extensively with partners to agree strategies and carry out research to identify the needs of potential service users. This will inform the commissioning of new services.
- 163 The Supporting People programme demonstrates improving value for money. The Council has agreed a robust framework based on best practice guidelines from the DCLG and learning from other Administering Local Authorities. BMBC had a lead role in the cross authority working to identify benchmarking data to compare Supporting People costs with other Administering Local Authorities regionally and nationally. This is effective for assessing whether its own services represent value for money. Providers agree that the value for money methodology has been robustly and fairly applied.
- 164 The Council has a clear focus on value for money within the Supporting People team's operational plan and the five-year strategy and the Council's procurement strategy is being updated in line with new government guidelines. The Council is working with other Administering Local Authorities to identify additional providers in the region to expand the market place when new services are procured and five-year strategies have been assessed to inform a regional procurement programme. This will strengthen BMBC purchasing arrangements through joint working, with larger contracts attracting discounts and being more lucrative propositions to providers who will benefit through improved economies of scale. The Council has not yet agreed joint commissioning with other Administering Local Authorities for specialist services.
- 165 The cross authority working is prioritising evaluating the outcomes of the Supporting People programmes, including for service users. It has agreed a model being piloted which assesses whether the quality of services represent value for money, in addition to costs. This will address current arrangements to assess outcomes which are under-developed.
- 166 The Council has a track record of positive assessments through previous inspections, particularly for prospects for improvement. In 2005 the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment scored the Council as 'three stars' and 'improving well', with improvements evident in adult and children's social care. In the same year an Inspection of Children's Services assessed the Council as serving 'most' people well, with a 'promising' capacity of improvement. In 2003 Social Care Services for Disabled People assessed the Council as serving 'some' people well, with 'promising' capacity of improvement.

How does the service manage performance?

- 167 Drivers outweigh barriers in the area of managing performance. Aims and objectives for the programme are clearly set out in the five-year strategy and operational plans, which are SMART. Partnership working has given Supporting People a high profile in other strategies. There is effective leadership at Member and Accountable Officer level, with strong links to commissioning partnerships. Key partners, such as the PCT and Probation are actively involved in the programme, including decision-making arrangements.

Areas for improvement identified by the inspection are already being addressed, particularly the involvement of carers, advocates and service users in the programme. The role of the Core Strategy Group is more clearly defined with increased responsibility, but links with the Commissioning Body are still under-developed. Performance is effectively managed and reported, and services have been robustly assessed against the QAF, with action planning in place to drive improvements to at least meet minimum standards. Learning from others is extensive and this has informed the Council's approach.

- 168** It is a strength that the Council has set clear aims and priorities through a range of strategies, giving the Supporting People programme a high profile. This includes strategies for people who are homeless, young people with substance misuse, people with learning disabilities and older people. The Council ensures the needs of other service user groups are prioritised through the partnerships it is involved with. This has raised the profile of Supporting People on other agendas, including the local crime and disorder partnership, gypsies and traveller research and the Offender Accommodation Strategy.
- 169** The five-year strategy and the Supporting People operational plan include a wide range of objectives to develop the programme. Objectives are clearly delegated to staff, partners and governance structures to deliver, with timescales for completion. Positively, desirable outcomes of these objectives are identified and there is some information on progress in delivery. The Council is in the process of assessing its delivery of the five-year strategy to date, and aims to report this to the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group in the next meeting cycle.
- 170** The five-year strategy is ambitious, mainly due to the programme's slow start following staffing issues. Overall, the Council has made significant progress in delivering priorities set, particularly the service review programme and the introduction of value for money assessments. It is still behind in some areas, such as steady state contracts, which still need to be introduced, and it has only recently been submitting workbook data from the ALMO, its largest provider.
- 171** Arrangements are in place to address some of the weaknesses identified by this inspection. Arrangements to involve carers, advocates and service users is under-developed, but the Supporting People team is now working with Social Services' communication and information service to address this. The Council has also prioritised the identification of the housing related support needs of some service users to inform future commissioning.
- 172** There is effective leadership of the Supporting People programme. Members are actively involved, with cabinet members championing priority services for commissioning and supporting contingency funding for ineligible services. The Accountable Officer is of an appropriate senior level to raise the profile of the programme within the Council and through partnerships. This includes client boards which plan and commission services for service users. This enables Supporting People funding to be linked to investment from health and social care partners. The Chair of the Commissioning Body is the lead officer for delivering the capital investment programme for the Council and this positively enables Supporting People commissioning priorities to be delivered in partnership with potential providers.

- 173 Governance arrangements are robust and this allows the Commissioning Body to tackle difficult areas. Examples include lobbying the Council for additional funding to address the a projected budget deficit during 2004/05 and supporting additional housing related support services for some service users which have met with opposition from some Members and communities. The Council is working with partners, Members and community groups to discuss such opposition and elevate concerns.
- 174 The Commissioning Body's decision-making effectively involves partners, including the PCT and Probation. This works particularly well in terms of the budget position and recommendations resulting from service reviews. However, whilst Probation is actively involved in the Supporting People programme it is a weakness that Supporting People outcomes, such as remodelling following service reviews, have not been reported to the Probation board, which operates on an exceptions reporting basis.
- 175 Other partners and providers are engaged through the Core Strategy Group, which now has a clearer remit within the programme. Providers are additionally involved through the provider forum, which is well attended and positively received by participants who find it useful for being consulted on the programme and to be informed on delivery developments.
- 176 The Core Strategy Group is still under-developed in terms of its support role to the Commissioning Body, and this is a weakness. It is still not sufficiently leading on operational matters or being delegated sufficient responsibilities from the Commissioning Body. This would involve a greater range of partners in Supporting People developments being agreed and give the Commissioning Body greater opportunity to focus on its decision-making role.
- 177 There are effective arrangements to manage performance. IT systems are set up to monitor key performance information set by the DCLG, data required through workbooks for the SPLS upload, and contract payments, which are made on time. Performance is regularly reported to the Commissioning Body and this includes outcomes resulting from service reviews. There are examples of the Commissioning Body requesting additional information before it makes decisions to ensure they are based on a robust understanding of key issues. It also identifies potential risks, such as budget shortfalls, ineligible services, and staffing issues early on so that action is taken to agree contingency arrangements, in most but not all cases.
- 178 Arrangements to drive and deliver value for money through performance management arrangements are sound. The Council has a key role in agreeing benchmarking data with the cross authority group to compare contract costs with that of other Administering Local Authorities regionally and nationally. This demonstrates that costs are low for most services.
- 179 It is positive that the Council is challenging the quality of services through the robust application of its service review approach within the short time period of the programme. This initially assessed all services below level C, with comprehensive action planning to improve services against standards set out within the QAF.

This has been effective for driving up the quality of services to service users, with several providers now achieving level B. Providers agreed the process was helpful for driving improvements.

- 180** Learning from other Administering Local Authorities is a strength of the Supporting People programme. The Council's involvement in the Supporting People Regional Strategy Group for Yorkshire and Humberside is extensive with groups meeting regularly for Accountable Officers, lead officers and operational officers. This has demonstrable outcomes such as the development of accreditation for providers, the regional procurement programme and the pilot to assess outcomes from programmes, including for services users. The Council has learned from partners with more advanced programmes to inform its approach, for example when agreeing its eligibility criteria.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 181** There is a balance of drivers and barriers in the area of capacity to improve. Staff have appropriate skills and training and the expertise of partners is utilised where there are gaps, although this has not occurred for service reviews. The use of staff secondments enables recruitment to be flexible, responding to changing priorities. The Commissioning Body has delegated powers from elected members for decision-making, but the Core Strategy Group is still under-performing in terms of the support it provides. IT systems are effective for managing budgets and performance monitoring, financial planning has agreed contingency plans for decommissioning, and priorities have been set to reinvest savings in additional services. Arrangements are being developed to assess outcomes of the programme, including for service users. This will address a key weakness identified by this inspection.
- 182** The Supporting People programme has access to the appropriate skills, tools and finances. Staff have appropriate experience of project and contract management and working with some service users regarding housing services. They have limited expertise in care and support needs, but have arrangements to involve partners, such as Probation and Social Services, in agreeing decommissioning and remodelling options. The programme does not sufficiently use this expertise when carrying out service review visits, and this is a weakness.
- 183** Members have formally delegated decision-making powers to the Commissioning Body, making it well placed to promptly lead the programme. Terms of references are in place for governance arrangements, and this clarifies roles and responsibilities for effective and productive relationships. This does not sufficiently set out the links between the Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body, to ensure resources are used adequately to support decision-making at Commissioning Body level.
- 184** IT systems have been effectively used to manage budgets, performance monitoring and review work. Spreadsheets have been set up to manage contract payments and assess value for money, and the latter is particularly effective for calculating costs, particularly for housing related support.

The Council has had difficulties with its website IT capabilities and this has limited its capacity to promote the service and make it accessible to service users. This is being replaced in the current financial year.

- 185 Human resource planning is strong. The Council has recruited the Supporting People team using a mixture of permanent and seconded staff, with specialist support provided by the Council's IT, finance and legal departments. This enables the Council to operate flexibly, recruiting additional staff to meet new commitments within the programme, such as service reviews, and ending secondments when such work is complete. It also allows the team to draw additional resources from across the council and its partnerships, as required.
- 186 Positively, the team is currently being restructured based on new priorities for the programme now that service reviews are complete. This places an emphasis on performance management, particularly through the delivery of service review action plans. This will support providers to deliver improved services to service users to at least meet level C of the QAF or to exceed this minimum standard to deliver high quality services.
- 187 There are effective arrangements to manage staff performance through regular one to ones and appraisals. There are also bi-monthly team meetings to assess the progress of the programme and share positive outcomes identified. This ensures that the capabilities of staff are robustly assessed. Staff report they have access to training through partnerships and Social Services. They also attend training for providers facilitated by an external consultant. This enables staff to carry out their roles and implement Supporting People initiatives.
- 188 There is robust financial planning based on grant availability and savings carried forward from previous programmes. Due regard is also given to future years in relation to contingency arrangements for decommissioned services. This has set aside £600,000 over two years for learning disability services. This will enable services to be sustained to service users through alternative funding streams. The Council also supplemented the administration budget when it was overspent in 2004/05, enabling the service review programme to be completed on schedule through essential staff recruitment.
- 189 Developing additional services within the programme is a priority. The Council has made a commitment to reinvest all savings back into the programme. This will fund housing related support for new services which have already successfully received capital funding or have received positive assessments for such investment in the near future.
- 190 The Council has been mindful of supporting the financial capacity of providers to sustain service delivery arrangements by awarding an inflationary uplift of one per cent for 2006/07. This will be reviewed mid year in the context of additional savings made through service reviews to consider whether an additional one per cent can be committed. This demonstrates the Council is reviewing financial planning throughout the year as additional capacity is made available.

- 191** Service reviews consider equality and diversity issues by ensuring providers have equality and diversity policies in place, that services have been designed around service user cultural and religious requirements and to assess provider awareness of equality and diversity. Reviews are also highly effective for evaluating DDA compliance of schemes, and this is reflected in review reports, with recommendations as appropriate. A Social Inclusion Framework is in place and incorporates housing related issues with links to Supporting People. It is a serious weakness however that equality and diversity is not sufficiently reflected in Supporting People strategies and plans, and that the needs of vulnerable people from BME communities are not considered.
- 192** Procurement arrangements are not fully developed, with the corporate policy being under review to incorporate new government guidelines. Likewise, cross authority working has not resulted in any joint commissioning for specialist services, although a regional procurement programme has been agreed based on the priorities set in the five-year strategies of the Administering Local Authorities involved.
- 193** Work is underway to pilot a regional model to assess the outcomes of Supporting People programmes, and this will inform procurement decisions based on the quality of services in addition to low cost options. This will be improved by the market analysis work carried out to identify additional providers to deliver Supporting People services to increase the capacity of the market place and to ensure it remains competitive. This attracted inward investment from the DCLG who funded this value for improvement project. Another Administering Local Authority manages this project.
- 194** The Council also attracted inward investment through the pipeline services it developed and it has pooled resources with other Administering Local Authorities to fund a regional co-ordinator post. The Council is working with providers to develop additional accommodation using capital investment and it has committed to fund housing related support of service users.

Summary

- 195** We consider that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement.
- 196** The programme has an effective track record of delivering improvements. Recommendations from peer reviews have been implemented, additional funding has been secured for pipeline schemes and the service review programme has released investment for new services. Remodelling has extended housing related support options for service users. Value for money arrangements are robust and the market is being developed to procure new services competitively.
- 197** Performance is managed effectively. Aims and objectives are clearly defined. And plans are SMART. Supporting People has a high profile within the Council and partnerships, and this is reflected in strategies. There is effective leadership and partners are actively involved in the programme. Services have been robustly assessed against the QAF and some areas for improvement identified by this inspection are already being addressed.

- 198 The Council has the capacity to improve, although skills gaps of staff are not always addressed through partnership working. The Council uses secondments to supplement a permanent workforce and this ensures that it can recruit staff with new skills to meet changing priorities. The Core Strategy Group's role is still underutilised regards it links to the Commissioning Body. There are contingency plans for decommissioning and savings are being reinvested in new services identified as priorities. Weaknesses in arrangements to assess outcomes of the programme are being addressed.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

Measure	Barnsley	England
Population (mid-2004) ³	221,000	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	18.9	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	0.9	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁴	2.7	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁵	34	-

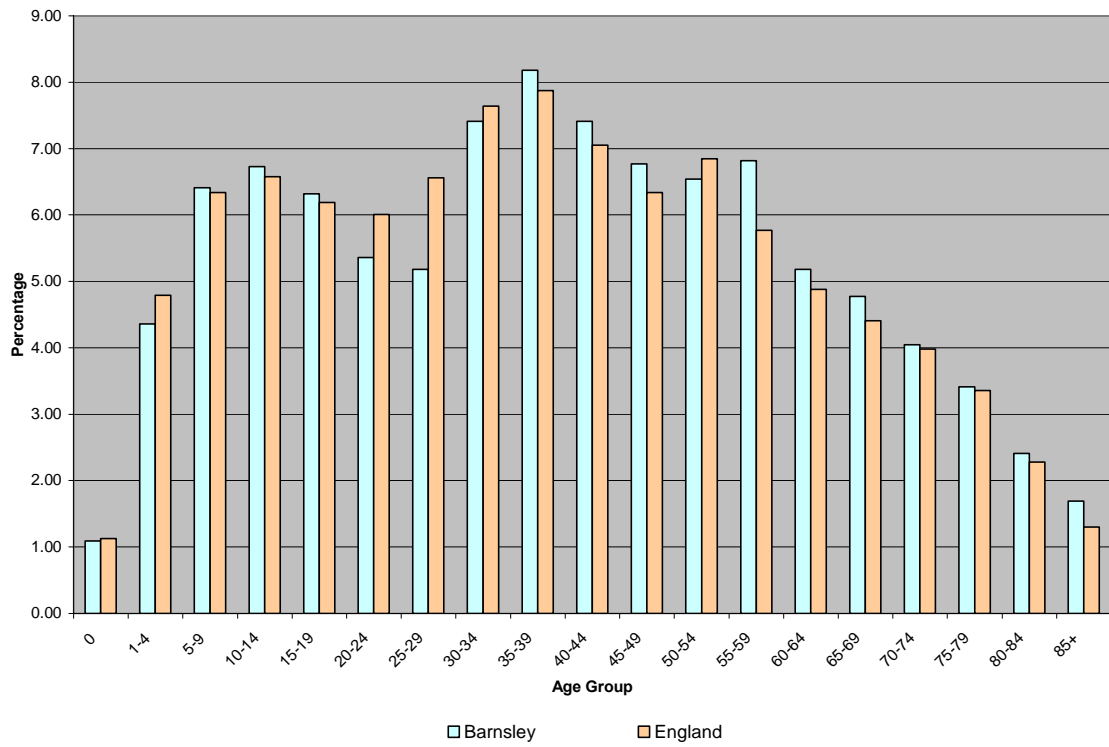
Percentage of the population⁶ in each age group compared with England

³ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

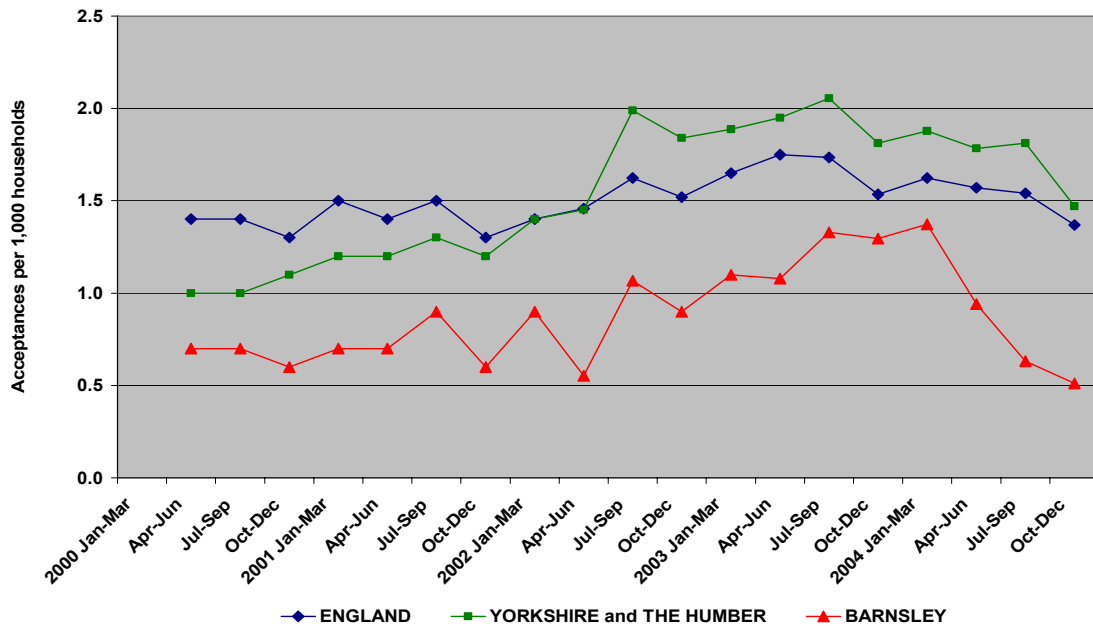
⁴ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (January 2006)

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

⁶ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)



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

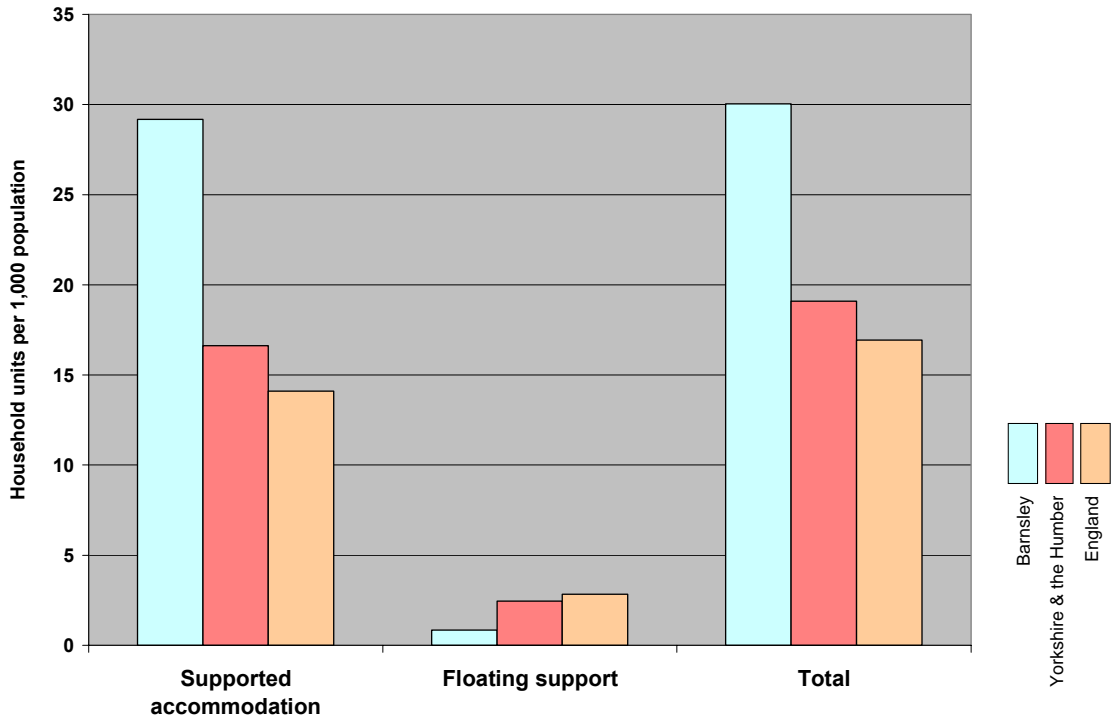


Performance information

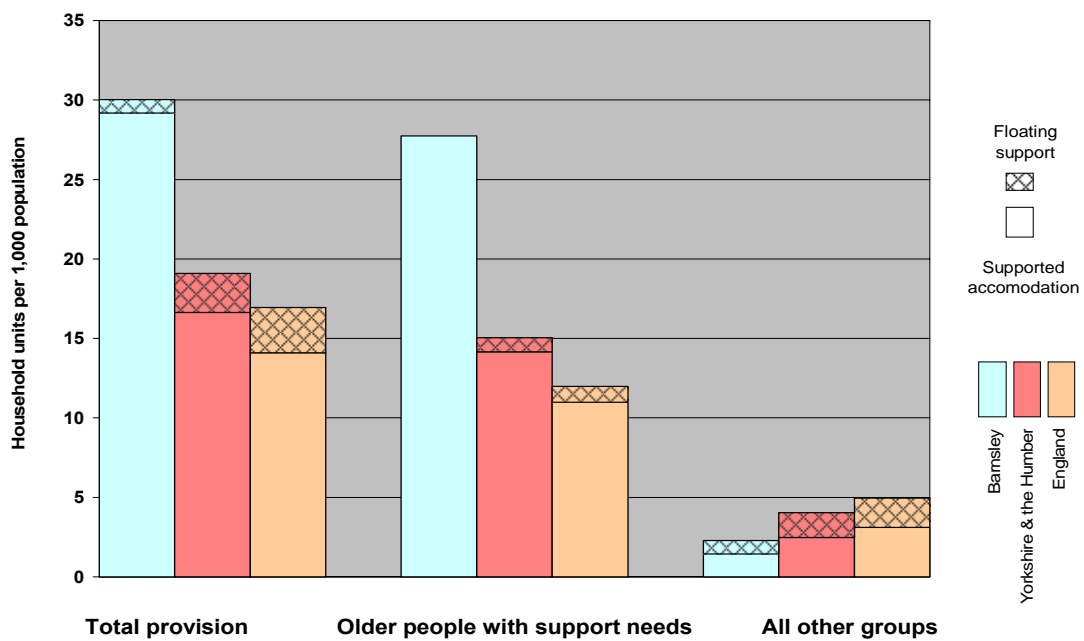
- 2 This section highlights strong and weak areas of the Council's performance in services that are relevant to Supporting People. We have used the following information to help us reach our judgements:
- data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
 - Comprehensive Performance Assessment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

Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁷

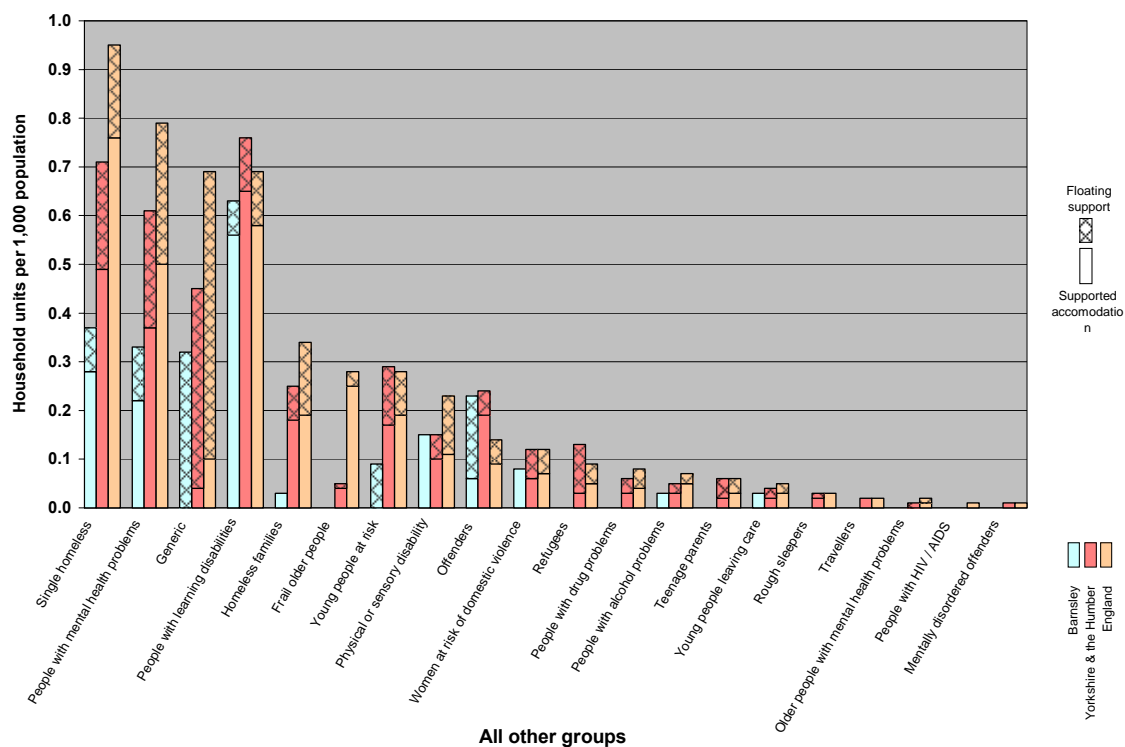


Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁸



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

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

Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁹

Funding for Supporting People¹⁰

Barnsley	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 5,766,523	£ 5,932,899	£ 5,634,085
Pipeline allocation	£ 334,750	£ 609,715	£ -
Administration grant	£ 228,994	£ 214,198	£ 220,624

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

¹⁰ Source: Grant allocations, DCLG.

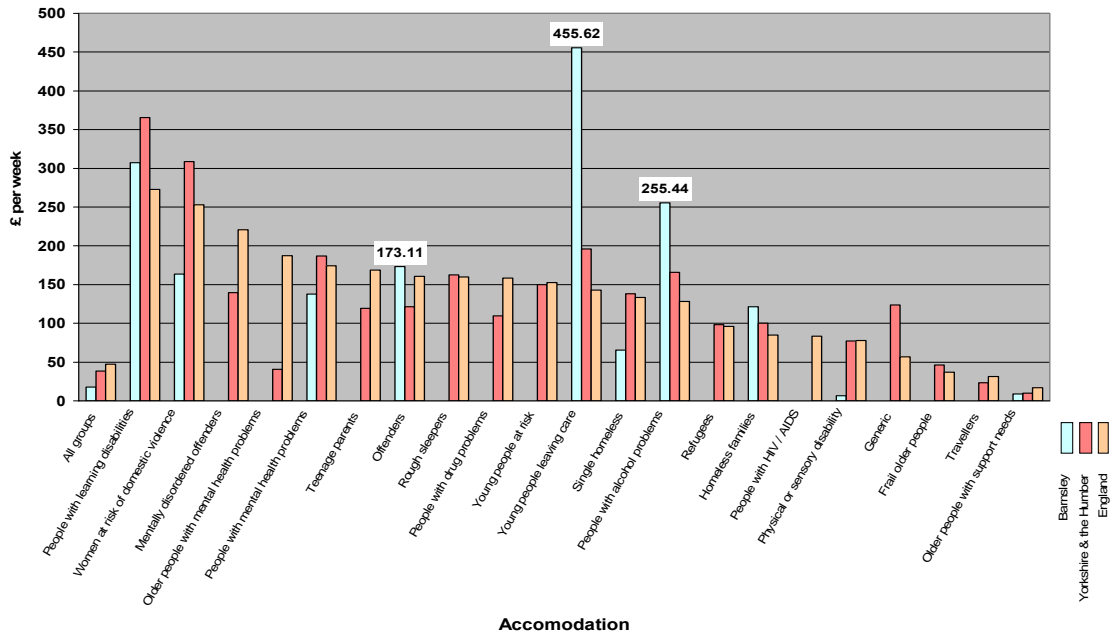
Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹¹

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Barnsley	£ 0.51	£ 13.26	£ 14.57	£ 52.32
Yorkshire and the Humber	£ 0.72	£ 25.38	£ 32.87	£ 100.47
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

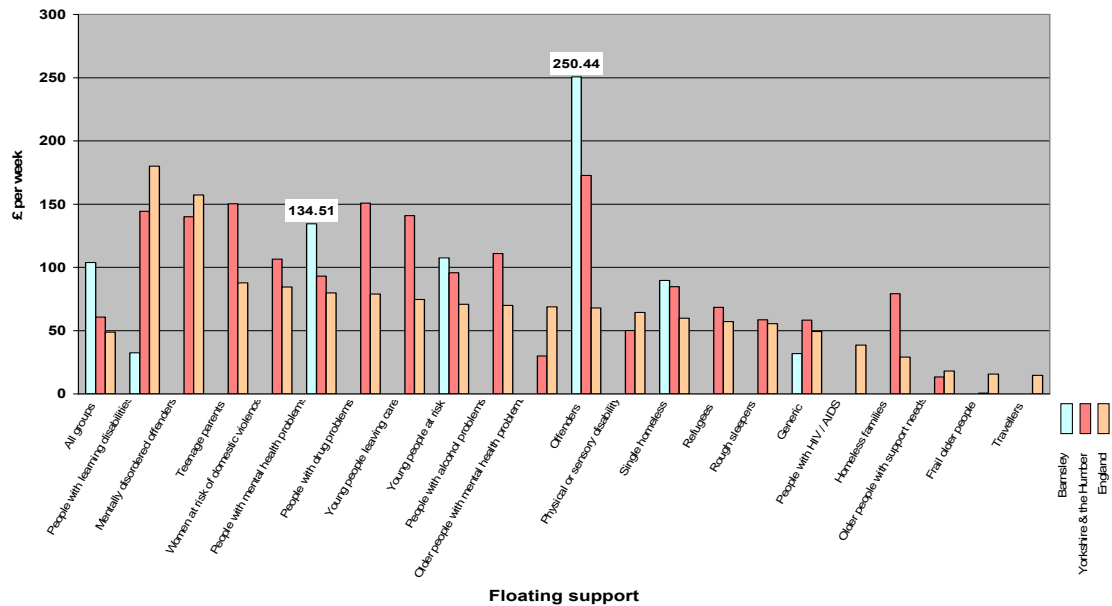
‘The data quoted is taken from DCLG sourced material 2003/04. This is the only data currently available. DCLG will be able to provide updated data when it becomes available and this will then be used.’

¹¹ Source: Platinum cut data, DCLG November 2003

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



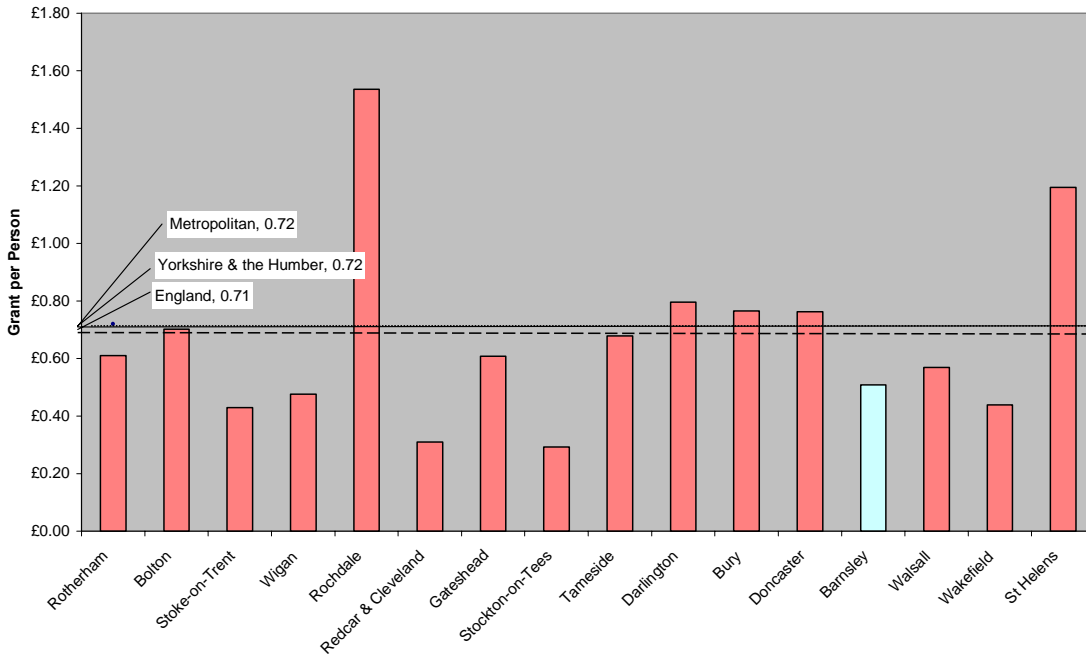
Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹³



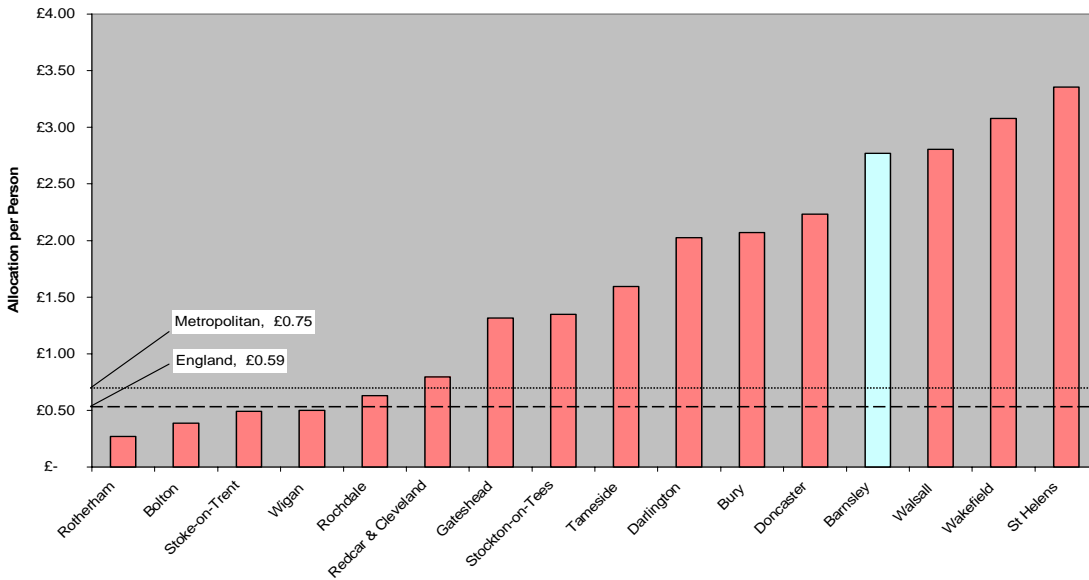
¹² Source: Platinum cut data, DCLG November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹³ Source: Platinum cut data, DCLG 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 neighbours¹⁴, all metropolitan councils and all English councils (2004/05)



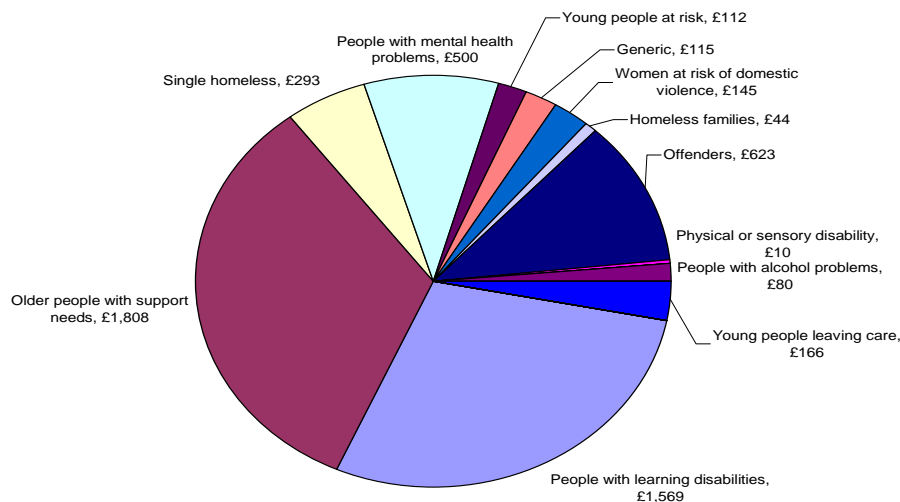
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹⁵, all metropolitan councils and all English councils.



¹⁴ A comparator group of similar councils.

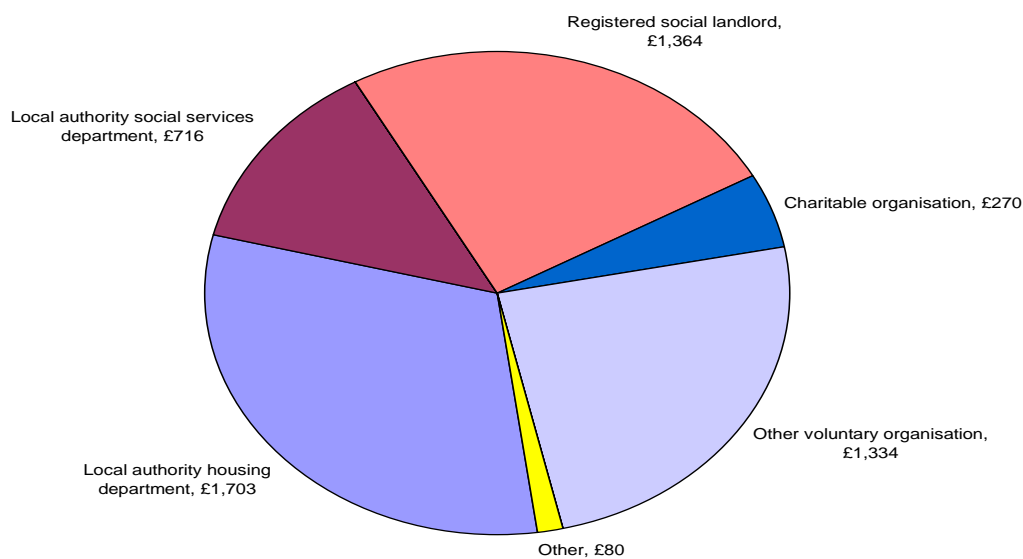
¹⁵ A comparator group of similar councils.

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



Barnsley
Funding by user group

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



Barnsley
Funding by provider type

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

¹⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, DCLG 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	Yes	Excellent	★★★ (3)
Children's Services	Most	Excellent	

Social Services Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

Barnsley	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Adults with learning disabilities to live at home (C30) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Delayed transfers of care (D41) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)
Above average (●●●)	Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)
Average (●●)	Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26) Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29)

Barnsley	
	Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)
Below average (••)	Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51)
Significantly below average (•)	

Best value performance indicators

- 3 Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with metropolitan councils.

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

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

Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
 - the Council's corporate strategies that impact upon Supporting People;
 - plans and strategies from partner agencies that may impact on Supporting People;
 - housing needs research information, the five-year Supporting People strategy, the 2005/06 Annual Plan and the service review programme;
 - minutes of Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group meetings; and
 - information to service users and other stakeholders on the Supporting People programme.

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:
 - visits to supported housing schemes, talking with service users, managers and frontline staff;
 - visits to a number of service user access points to assess information available for service users;
 - a questionnaire survey to providers of housing related support services;
 - a focus group of service providers;
 - meetings with Supporting People lead officers and support staff;
 - meetings with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive;
 - meetings with Social Services commissioning managers, representatives of the Probation service and the Primary Care Trust; and
 - observing meetings of the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group.