

Supporting People Inspection Report

September 2006



Supporting People Programme

Cornwall County Council

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Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

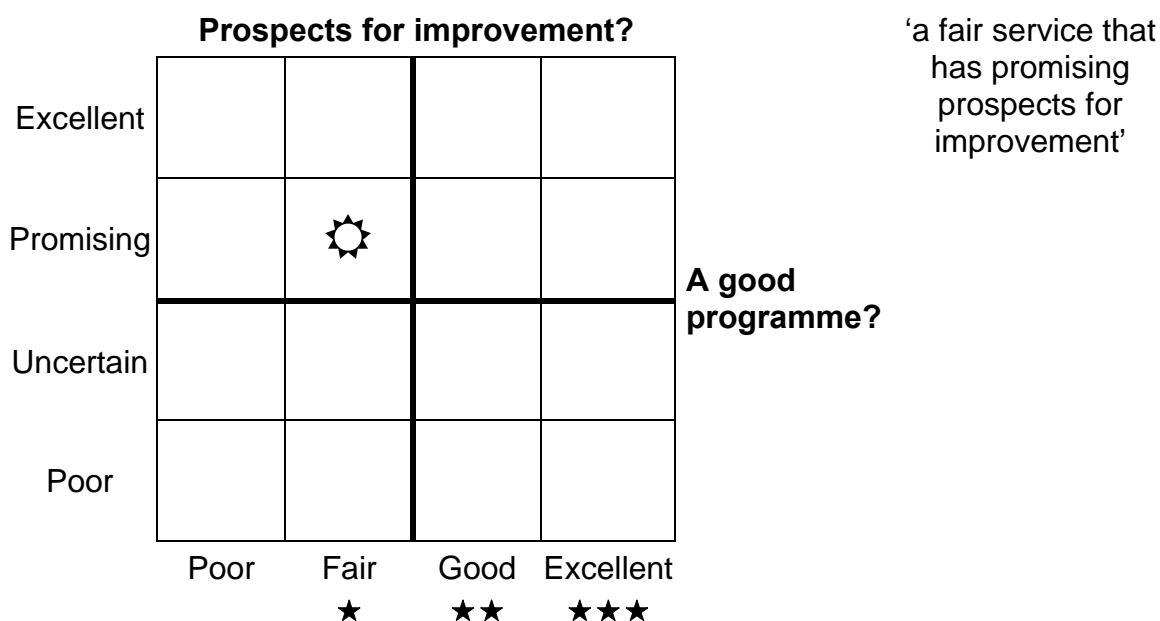
Summary

- 1 Cornwall is the south western peninsula of England and is characterised by small towns and villages separated by large tracts of protected open spaces. It is a major holiday destination, with its population of 517,000 supplemented by 5.5 million visitors each year. It has the fourth highest population of people aged over 65 years of any county and an increasing population of over 85 year olds. The population of under 45 year olds is consistently below the national average. The 2001 census identified a very low recorded black and minority ethnic population of 1 per cent.
- 2 The local economy is heavily dependent upon the relatively lowly paid industries of tourism, agriculture and the care sector. Based on the national index of local deprivation in 2004, four of Cornwall's six districts were rated among the 30 per cent most deprived of the 354 districts in England while the remaining two had average levels of deprivation.
- 3 The County Council is the administering local authority for Supporting People. It adopted a Leader, Executive and Committee model of governance in 2003 and is controlled by the Liberal Democrats. There are 48 Liberal Democrat, 19 Independent, 9 Conservative and 5 Labour Councillors. There are six district councils of Caradon, Carrick, Kerrier, North Cornwall, Penwith and Restormel, whose political leadership varies between Independent, Liberal Democrat and no overall control. There are also 210 Town and Parish Councils across the County.
- 4 The overall revenue budget for the County Council was £508 million in 2005/06 and this has risen to £540 million for 2006/07. The 2005/06 Community Care service unit budget was £80 million and this has risen to £86 million for 2006/07.
- 5 The Supporting People team is located within the Adult Social Care Department. The Accountable Officer is the Director of Adult Social Care. There are 13.5 full-time equivalent staff in the team, with an estimated additional £43,000 of corporate support. There is also £10,000 in short term funding for a 'value improvement project' (VIP) that draws in external consultancy support.
- 6 The total budget for Supporting People for 2006/07 is £14.1 million, of which £13.6 million is for services and £0.5 million is for the administration of the programme. This helps to fund 395 services and a caseload of 7,645 service users (March 2006). The cost of administering the programme in 2005/06 was £532,000 for the Supporting People team, £10,000 for the VIP and £43,000 in corporate support. This was funded by £534,000 in government grants, with the balance of £51,000 funded by the County Council.

Scoring the Supporting People programme

- 7 We have assessed Cornwall County Council as providing a fair, one-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

- 8 Our judgement is that the Council is providing a 'fair', one-star service. There are a number of strengths to the Supporting People programme in Cornwall.
- There are improved outcomes for service users directly attributable to the Supporting People programme, both in terms of the overall supply of services and in the way in which individual schemes are managed, ensuring better quality support for some service users.
 - Service users have been actively engaged in Supporting People reviews, with the reviews and complaints system being used to improve services.
 - Some poor services have been challenged, and where required remodelled or decommissioned, as a direct result of service reviews.

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

- There are some good examples of individual services being tailored to meet the needs of the most excluded groups.
 - There is a high degree of political and corporate commitment to the programme across the County.
 - The Council has recognised the role of Supporting People in delivering wider corporate and partnership objectives and can demonstrate outcomes that reflect this.
 - The Council has put in place the appropriate management and governance framework for the programme.
 - The Advisory Group (Core Strategy Group) has played a clear role in developing and monitoring the programme.
 - Service providers are positive about their relationship with the Supporting People team.
 - The financial management of the programme and budgetary control is sound.
- 9 However, there are some important weaknesses that the Council and its partners need to address.
- The leadership role of the Commissioning Body is not fully developed.
 - Health partners have not been fully engaged in the development of programme.
 - MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangements) and Adult Protection arrangements are not fully implemented at the operational level.
 - Although there are clear ambitions for the development of Supporting People services, these are not based upon comprehensive research and consultation, nor linked to wider strategies and plans which address the need of Supporting People client groups.
 - The five-year strategy does not set out clear targets and outcomes to guide the further development of the programme.
 - The Council is not yet involving users and advocacy groups effectively in the strategic development of the programme.
 - The timetabling of service reviews has not taken enough account of the risks associated with new providers or decommissioned services.
 - There have been some improvements in the value for money of individual services, but the approach taken to date has been relatively unsophisticated.
 - While there is a high take up of existing services, the quality of written information, face to face and telephone access is weak and this means that harder to reach groups are less able to access services.

- 10 We judge the Supporting People service to have promising prospects of improvement.
- There have been improvements in the range and quality of services that vulnerable people can receive.
 - The plans for Supporting People address the key weaknesses of the programme.
 - There are good examples of learning from other Councils and via regional partnership working.
 - The progress achieved since 2004 indicates that the programme now has high level and effective leadership, with an increased management focus.
 - There is now a fully staffed Supporting People team supported by strong financial management systems and improved IT.
 - The capacity of the service has been improved by additional investment by the Council and by the drawing in of substantial external funding.
- 11 However, there remain some barriers to improvement.
- Performance against key corporate and adult social care performance indicators does not demonstrate continuous and sustained improvement.
 - The capacity of the service could be improved by a shared vision of how the pattern of services will be improved.
 - The quality of partnership working is mixed, with some strong partnerships including the Drug and Alcohol Team and weaker partnerships, most notably with health partners.

Recommendations

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

Recommendation

R1 Improve access to Supporting People Services by:

- *establishing a continuous joint induction programme and information pack for the receptionists and frontline staff of housing, social care, health and advice services throughout the County within a year;*
- *ensuring that information on housing, social care and health services is distributed and displayed consistently in the most accessible locations throughout the County within a year; and*
- *implementing the proposals for the joint assessment and planning of services within three years.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- that they will help to address the issues of rural isolation that are a specific feature of Cornwall; and
- ensure that excluded groups are better able to obtain the services that they need.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs.

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

Recommendation

R2 Assure the welfare of Supporting People service users by:

- *ensuring that any re-provision is reviewed within six months of its introduction and continuously monitored until all significant weaknesses are addressed;*
- *ensuring that referral arrangements are risk assessed and that all nominations to vacancies are appropriate; and*
- *introducing a contractual requirement for providers to demonstrate their agreement and compliance with the protection from abuse requirements of QAF level B.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- to ensure that the lessons of the investigation into services for people with a learning disability are learnt and embedded within the Supporting People programme; and
- the protection of the welfare of the most vulnerable service users.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented as contracts are reissued.

Recommendation

R3 Revise the five-year Supporting People strategy in order to:

- *incorporate comprehensive information on users' needs;*
- *involve service users more effectively at the policy making level;*
- *re-examine the shared priorities of the Council and its partners;*
- *provide a clearer definition of what volume and range of services need to be provided at the end of the five years;*
- *spell out how gaps will be addressed through both re-configuration of existing services and the creation of new services; and*
- *identify the scale of resources needed to achieve this vision.*

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- that the Council and its partners will have an informed and planned programme for the delivery of Supporting People services that meet the needs of a wider range of the population.

Revising the strategy will have high impact with medium costs. This should be result in a revised strategy to cover the period from April 2008 onwards.

Recommendation

R4 Develop a more sophisticated approach to value for money based upon good practice, in order to:

- *better understand the relationship between cost, intensity and quality of service;*
- *make best use of the experience of the VIP approach to improve commissioning and procurement; and*
- *continue to negotiate steady state contracts.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- adequately funded services that demonstrate value for money and are eligible;
- a transparent and fair commissioning process;
- a robust and appropriate procurement strategy;
- the release of cost savings to resource services to meet identified needs; and
- improved provider security and market stability.

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

Recommendation

R5 Strengthen service user involvement by:

- *asking service users about the ways in which they would prefer to be consulted about Supporting People, social care and health services;*
- *developing a choice of approaches to consultation, in addition to locally based meetings; and*
- *building the capacity of users and advocacy organisations in respect of the Supporting People programme.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved strategies and processes that reflect service users' concerns and those of carers and advocates; and
- demonstrating to all partners that service users lie at the heart of the Supporting People programme.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within six months in order to inform the revised five-year strategy.

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

Dates of inspection: 8 -16 June 2006

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Report

Context

The locality

- 14 Cornwall is the south western peninsula of England and is characterised by small towns and villages separated by large tracts of protected open spaces. It is a major holiday destination, with its population of 517,000 supplemented by 5.5 million visitors each year.
- 15 Cornwall is the county with the lowest population density in the south west, with only ten settlements of over 10,000 people and 227 of less than 1,000. The largest settlement is Camborne and Redruth with 40,000 residents, followed by St Austell, Penzance and Truro, each with around 22,000. It has the fourth highest population of people aged over 65 years of any county and an increasing population of over 85 year olds. The population of under 45 year olds is consistently below the national average. The 2001 census identified a very low black and minority ethnic population of one per cent. Of the small proportion of non-white ethnic groups, the Chinese, Black Caribbean, Black African and Asian/Other are those most represented in Cornwall. The overall population is expected to increase significantly to 620,000 by 2028.
- 16 The local economy is heavily dependent upon the relatively lowly paid industries of tourism, agriculture and the care sector. Wage levels are 20 per cent below the national average and there has been a significant increase in migrant workers. A recent study has found that there remain skill shortages within the healthcare sector.
- 17 Based on the national index of deprivation 2004, four of Cornwall's six districts were rated among the 30 per cent most deprived of the 354 districts in England and the remaining two had average levels of deprivation. Levels of deprivation in Penwith exceed those of Leeds, Coventry and Portsmouth, for example. Between 2000 and 2005 the County and the Isles of Scilly received £255 million of Objective One funding from the European Union to fund economic regeneration. Alongside this, house prices are very high compared to local incomes, fuelled in part by the demand for second homes, which, in the most sought after places, such as St Ives, account for as much as half of all of the housing stock.

The Council

- 18 Cornwall County Council is a Liberal Democrat controlled Council. There are six district councils of Caradon, Carrick, Kerrier, North Cornwall, Penwith and Restormel, whose political leadership varies between Independent, Liberal Democrat and no overall control. There are also 203 Town and Parish Councils across the County.

- 19 The County Council is the administering authority for Supporting People. It adopted a Leader, Executive and Committee model of governance in 2003 and is administered by the Liberal Democrats. There are 48 Liberal Democrat, 19 Independent, 9 Conservative and 5 Labour councillors.
- 20 The overall revenue budget for the County Council was £508 million in 2005/06 and this has risen to £540 million for 2006/07. The 2005/06 Community Care service unit budget was £80 million and this has risen to £86 million for 2006/07.
- 21 In 2002 the Audit Commission rated the Council as 'excellent' as a result of a Corporate Performance Assessment. This was reviewed and downgraded to 'good' in 2005 under the new 'harder test' methodology. In 2005 adult social services were awarded two stars, 'serving most people well' and promising prospects for improvement, while children's services were awarded one-star 'serving some people well' and promising prospects.
- 22 The overarching plan for the county is the Community Plan. The main aims of the community plan are:
- improved individual wellbeing – including tackling substance misuse;
 - strong communities – including a reduction of youth offending and increased affordable and social housing; and
 - a quality living environment – including the increased cost effectiveness of local service delivery.
- 23 A Local Area Agreement (LAA) was agreed by the Council, its partners and the Government early in 2006. The LAA provides all of the major public bodies with an agreed set of shared targets around which they can direct their resources. The targets include some 'stretch' targets, the achievement of which will attract additional funding and freedoms from central government. The increased provision of high quality housing related support is one of 34 specific targets, and Supporting People also plays an important role in the targets that underpin the objectives below.
- Improve the quality of life and independence of older people.
 - Reduce the harm created by alcohol.
 - Increase support for the survivors of domestic violence.
 - Reduce the harm caused by drugs.
 - Reduce the number of offences by young people.
 - Improve the quality of life in the most deprived neighbourhoods.
 - Reduce the social exclusion of migrant workers.
 - Improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.
 - Increased social cohesion.
 - Increase the independence of vulnerable people through the provision of high quality housing related support.
 - Phasing in the production of a gypsies and travellers strategy.

24 The County Council is a signatory to both the community plan and the LAA and has a raft of its own plans and strategies. The overall vision of the Council is for 'a strong, sustainable community for one and all.' The key corporate priorities for the period 2006/09 are:

- to ensure that the County Council focuses all its activities around the people we serve;
- to maintain a well qualified and motivated workforce;
- to embed a culture of sustainability throughout the organisation; and
- to make sure that the County Council is fit for purpose.

The key service priorities are:

- to ensure that key services are accessible;
- to improve the environment;
- to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people; and
- to make Cornwall a more prosperous place.

25 Our inspection coincided with the completion of a joint investigation by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Commission into the abuse of people with a learning disability in a range of NHS Trust homes and inpatient services. While this inspection considers the response of the Supporting People team to the original allegations of abuse, the majority of the investigation, published in July 2006, focused on concerns about the quality of care provided within the homes.

The service

26 The mission of the Supporting People programme for Cornwall is:

'to help vulnerable people from across the whole of our community remain as independent as possible by providing a range of housing related support services, as part of a comprehensive range of publicly funded services.'

The aims and objectives of the programme, according to the five-year strategy, are as follows.

'Ensure that service users receive the level of support they need which leads to positive outcomes, in short term accommodation, longer-term supported housing or their own homes as appropriate.'

Provide for a diverse group of service users, from all parts of the community with fair access to all.

Ensure that all services are aimed at helping service users to achieve the maximum possible degree of independence.

Address both newly identified, as well as existing, needs and redistribute resources available in line with the needs we identify.

Ensure that Supporting People complements, but does not duplicate, the care, counselling, advice and other services that each individual service user needs.

Make sure we have a broad range of services with large and small providers, and specialist or general providers, who can deliver the services that are required.

Link Supporting People subsidies to other funding sources where possible.'

- 27 The Supporting People team is part of the Adult Social Care Department. The Accountable Officer is the Director of Adult Social Care. The Supporting People team consists of 13.5 full-time equivalent staff, with an estimated additional £43,000 of corporate support. There is also £10,000 in short term funding for a value improvement project (VIP) that draws in external consultancy support. The purpose of this project is to establish a consistent approach to the specification and procurement of floating support across the County. The experience from the project is intended to inform the procurement of services across the whole of the Supporting People and Adult Care Services market.
- 28 A Commissioning Body has been established to oversee the delivery of the programme. This is made up of representatives from across the Supporting People statutory partnership of health, housing, social services and probation. The voting membership is comprised of the following representatives:
- the administering authority (Cornwall County Council) - one elected member;
 - each of the District Councils - one elected member;
 - the Probation Service - one Chief Officer grade or Board member; and
 - the Primary Care Trusts - one Director representing the three existing PCTs, shortly to be merged into one.
- 29 The total budget for Supporting People for 2006/07 is £14.1 million, which includes an administration grant of £0.5 million. This total has reduced by £0.2 million from the total grant allocation of £14.3 million in 2005/06. The budget helps to fund 395 services and a caseload of 7,645 service users (March 2006). Of these, schemes for older people, people with a learning disability, people with mental health problems and single homeless people accounted for 77 per cent of the budget and 94 per cent of all services. Eighty-one per cent of expenditure is on accommodation-based services, accounting for 66 per cent of service users. Nineteen per cent is spent on floating support and home improvement agency services, though this accounts for 33 per cent of all service users. There is a mixed market of 94 providers, with £5.1 million invested in housing associations, £3.5 million in other charitable/not for profit organisations, £2.6 million in NHS Trusts, £1.6 million to individuals, £1.4 million to district councils and £0.5 million to private companies.
- 30 The cost of administering the programme in 2005/06 was £532,000 for the Supporting People team, £10,000 for the VIP and £43,000 in corporate support. This was funded by £534,000 in administrative and value improvement grants.

Table 1 Supporting People expenditure in Cornwall, 2003/04 to 2006/07

Cornwall	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Final Supporting People grant inc pipeline allocation	£14.1m	£14.4m	£13.8m	£13.6m
Pipeline allocation	£461k	£924k	-	-
Administration grant	£483k	£509k	£524k	£524k

How good is the Supporting People programme?

Governance

- 31 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in the governance of the Supporting People programme. There is a high degree of political and corporate commitment to the programme across the County. The Commissioning Body has an appropriate membership and has helped to ensure that key deadlines have been met. However, there is not yet a clear and shared vision of the pattern of services that will be needed in the future and understanding of the programme among members of the Commissioning Body is variable. The Core Strategy Group (known as the Advisory Group) is playing an important role in developing policy and monitoring progress, though its work could be managed more effectively. The Accountable Officer has played a critical role in driving forward the programme and increasing the capacity of the Supporting People team. Probation is a strong partner while the engagement of the health sector is weak.
- 32 There is a high degree of political and corporate support for Supporting People among both the County and the District Councils. This is best demonstrated by the adoption of Supporting People targets as part of the Local Area Agreement (see paragraph 24) and high profile support for sensitive developments that meet the needs of excluded groups. This includes the commitment of a tenth of the County Council's total capital budget for improvements to a Gypsy site, in the face of opposition to the site itself. District councils have also provided clear leadership and support for the programme. For example, Restormel Borough Council has committed its own land and financial support to develop a scheme for ex-offenders with drug and alcohol problems and North Cornwall District Council offered support towards the development of the five-year strategy in previous years. The County Council has also committed additional funding to the administration of the programme. This includes all legal, finance, audit, committee services, personnel and IT support. Adult Social Care staff also carry out fairer charging assessments and provide specialist support for service reviews.
- 33 The membership of the Commissioning Body complies with national guidance, with an appropriate mix of senior councillors and managers. It meets on a regular basis every three months and more frequently as the need has arisen, for example to sign off the service reviews. It is well attended by the six district councils, the County Council, the Chief Executive of the lead Primary Care Trust and the Assistant Chief Probation Officer. The meetings are used to keep members up-to-date on national issues and to project manage key activities.

- 34 While training has been provided for Commissioning Body members, their degree of expertise is variable. Some district councillors were able to demonstrate a detailed understanding of their brief, while others were less clear about their role. Some felt it was difficult to understand the rationale for decisions reached by the Advisory Group and that more training and support was needed to promote fuller scrutiny of decisions. Discussions on key issues, such as the priorities within the five-year strategy, have largely taken place at the Advisory Group rather than the Commissioning Body. This suggests that the Commissioning Body is yet to develop a fully effective leadership role.
- 35 The Commissioning Body has nonetheless been prepared to make difficult decisions on the decommissioning of services and support for sensitive new services. It has ensured that the national targets for the production of strategies and completion of service reviews have been achieved and has adopted a memorandum of understanding to ensure that the business of the Commissioning Body is conducted in an appropriate manner.
- 36 The Commissioning Body has not yet ensured that there is a shared vision for the future development of Supporting People services across the County. The weaknesses in the five-year strategy, which are detailed later in this report, have not been demonstrably challenged by the group and there are few cross-cutting plans for all of the Supporting People service user groups. While good quality work is taking place to develop an older persons' strategy, this has been slow to progress. Without clear shared plans, the ambitions of the programme will not be met satisfactorily.
- 37 The Core Strategy Group (known as the Advisory Group) is playing an important role in policy development and progress monitoring. The group has clear terms of reference and it has played an important role in driving forward the programme. Members of the group told us that they had been able to have an important influence on the programme, both through making recommendations to the Commissioning Body on investment priorities and in monitoring progress against the five-year strategy. It has also made recommendations arising from service reviews. It is a well established group, with expanding membership that includes representation from the Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT).
- 38 The Advisory Group recognises the need to identify and address conflicts of interest. It debated this in 2004, when some District Council representatives were also providers. Provider representatives are now invited to attend the open session of Advisory Group meetings and are excluded from the discussion of issues such as service decommissioning.
- 39 The work of the Advisory Group could be better managed. We observed a number of ways in which the work of the group could improve.
 - The agendas for each meeting are very long and are not always sent out well in advance of the meetings. Providers were clear that this made it difficult to for them to prepare for meetings.

20 Supporting People Programme | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- Conclusions and recommendations arising from some reports could also be clearer. An example of this is a report into a recent mystery shopping exercise. This includes several appendices listing the questions asked (more than once) and suggesting ways of improving each agency's response. However, it does not state clearly what weaknesses have been identified and how they will be addressed; for example the poor response to reports of domestic violence.

These are 'easy wins' that would help to improve the effectiveness of the Advisory Group and, possibly, other groups whose workings we did not observe.

- 40 The Accountable Officer has worked hard to improve the management of Supporting People in Cornwall. The Director of Adult Social Care was appointed in 2004 when the programme was behind schedule and had been given little priority by the County Council, with the team initially based in a district council. Since the appointment of the Director, the resourcing of the team has increased and key deadlines have been met. The Adult Social Care Directorate itself is in the process of transformation. The creation in 2003 of a unique 'authorised officer' position held by an Assistant Director, has ensured that there has been a high degree of management focus on both the overarching challenges faced by the department and the acceleration of the Supporting People programme.
- 41 Attendance at the Advisory Group is variable. The membership of the group was expanded in 2004 to include representation from the Adult Social Care department and from 2005 the Children, Young People and Families department and Drug and Alcohol Action Team. There have been other attendees for specific issues including the Drug and Alcohol Action Team and the Travellers Officer who have been able to increase the group's understanding of these issues. However, the Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) have had limited influence on decision-making. While the PCT representative regularly attends the Commissioning Body, there has been little input into the Advisory Group meetings and the response to consultations has been poor, limiting their impact on the programme.
- 42 Probation involvement has improved in the last year with increasing attendance at both the Commissioning Body and Advisory Group. The Supporting People Service Improvement Manager has also attended MAPPAs since January 2006, but this has not yet ensured that providers play an active role in this area. The Youth Offender Team (YOT) has yet to play a significant role. There are gaps in services for young offenders and young people at risk of offending, including access routes into Foyers. However, a YOT representative does not attend the Advisory Group and there is no reference to Supporting People in the YOT business plan for 2006/07. The potential for a co-ordinated approach to meet the needs of young offenders may improve with the planned involvement of a YOT representative from September.
- 43 District council engagement with the programme is relatively strong, in spite of the gaps in the knowledge of some councillors and mixed levels of attendance. Their influence is strongest in the development of new affordable housing schemes through the long-standing special needs accommodation panel (SNAP).

- 44 The links between the Advisory Group and providers forums are weak, due to the different frequencies with which each group meets. Providers on the Advisory Group have been able to influence the eligibility criteria, VFM toolkit and the current work on the measurement of outcomes. However, the number of providers who attend the Advisory Group is very limited and provider representatives expressed difficulty in being able to consult other providers because of the short amount of time allowed at the quarterly provider forums. Providers that are not on the Advisory Group told us that they felt unable to influence policy. The Supporting People team has made attempts to address this by offering to host the provider forums on a monthly basis and the Advisory Group has increased the numbers of provider representatives to enable the workload to be shared out. Consequently the solution to some extent lies in the hands of the providers themselves.
- 45 The degree to which users and the voluntary sector have been involved in governance to date is weak. User involvement was one of the guiding principles of Supporting People (and before that, community care), but Cornwall has not yet involved users in the strategic development of the programme. The absence of a range of service user forums across adult social care has also made it difficult to rely on existing structures to promote consultation and involvement. An exception to this has been in the area of advocacy services for people with a learning disability, but in most respects, including the relationship with the Disability Forum, there is little engagement. The Supporting People team and SNAP partnership have tried to address user involvement through the creation of self governing 'all inclusive forums', but these have failed to engage users. The Council recognises this weakness and is addressing this corporately through the creation of a network of local user groups facilitated by Age Concern, for which external funding has been secured.

Delivery arrangements

- 46 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The Supporting People team has emerged from a long period of change, a legacy of understaffing and poor management support. It is now well managed and well regarded by virtually all stakeholders. All of the financial systems and processes required for Supporting People and a performance management framework are in place. However, the ambitions for the development of Supporting People, are not based upon comprehensive research and consultation and there are not specific targets against which the success of the five-year strategy can be measured. Risk management and contingency arrangements are in place, but have not been applied effectively. Operational relationships vary in their effectiveness.

The Supporting People team

- 47 The first few years of the Supporting People team were difficult, but the team has now matured and is well regarded by virtually all stakeholders. In its early years it was located in a district council and did not have the full support of the County Council. The service was re-located to the County Council in 2002, but at one point it had to seek additional support on the development of the five-year strategy from another district. Management of the service has been the subject of a high degree of turnover.
- 48 Changes in the location and membership of the team have now helped to improve its capacity. From December 2002 the team was relocated from a District Council to the Social Services department. In August 2005 this department became the Department of Adult Social Care and a separate department for Children, Young People and Families was formed. From this time the team has been located within the new directorate. This, coupled with the appointment of the new Director and Assistant Director, as well as operational changes, has strengthened the links between the Supporting People team and other teams within the directorate. The membership of the team has changed in order to achieve more focus on outcomes for service users and address some skills gaps. In May 2005 a finance manager post was created to improve performance monitoring and reporting and to develop a value for money methodology. In June 2005 a Customer Development Officer post was established to improve service user involvement and provider engagement.
- 49 Providers recognised that the early under-resourcing of the team has now been addressed. They told us that they now receive advice and information more promptly from team members and were almost unanimous in their praise of the enthusiasm and partnership approach of the team.
- 50 External expertise has been drawn in to address skills gaps in the team. Adult Social Care staff have participated in reviews of schemes for people with learning disabilities. An external consultant was employed to support the review of women's refuges. Both compensated for a lack of service management experience among service review officers in these areas. This has helped to ensure that the reviews of these services were conducted professionally, with providers expressing satisfaction in this respect.
- 51 The Supporting People team has been provided with a broad range of training, and future needs have been identified through the appraisal process. Team members have received extensive training over the past three years, covering specific users groups, IT skills, legislation and business skills. There is a comprehensive listing of the skills required for Supporting People against which each member of staff has been assessed. This shows that the main skills gaps are in the experience of front line service provision and management, commissioning and procurement, quality assurance, project management and advanced IT. There is a range of training being developed to address these gaps, notably in procurement and project management.

Needs assessment and the five-year strategy

- 52** There are clear ambitions for the development of Supporting People services. The five-year strategy sets clear aims and objectives. These are for:
- the provision of a comprehensive range of support services with fair access to all;
 - continuous improvement;
 - value for money;
 - resource redistribution;
 - a robust and diverse provider base; and
 - effective joint commissioning arrangements.
- The strategy aims to increase the supply of floating support, improve move-on arrangements and address the needs of excluded groups and those on the 'fringes' of care.
- 53** However, the aims are not based upon comprehensive research. A report by De Montfort University was published in the spring of 2004. This comprised an analysis of secondary data on the needs of vulnerable people, along with focus groups of service users and providers. The research to date has however been patchy, with some of it confined to the district councils that were able to commission it. There has been no research into the needs of rough sleepers, ex-offenders, minority ethnic groups and people with HIV/Aids. The researchers were able to consult with some groups, but the number of users interviewed was very limited and in some instances (people with HIV/Aids and victims of domestic violence, for example) no service users were contacted. Without comprehensive research, it is difficult for the Council to assess the scale and range of services that are needed and for transparent decisions to be made about which groups to prioritise.
- 54** More recently there has been some high quality countywide research into the specific needs and demographics of older people and this has helped to prompt further work, which in turn will inform an older persons' strategy and the five-year Supporting People strategy.
- 55** The five-year strategy does not make clear what influence service users and other stakeholders have had. Although the draft strategy was widely circulated and promoted via the website, there is little detail about the outcome of consultation and how feedback was used to shape the final document. We found that the draft version had in fact been replaced by a completely new strategy. Providers have not been advised why changes were made to the strategy following the consultation period and, as a result, some did not feel any sense of ownership of the final document. In spite of this 83 per cent of those we surveyed expressed satisfaction with the strategy.
- 56** The degree to which the Supporting People strategy is aligned to those of each partner is varied.

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- Cornwall's community strategy and the 2005/06 action plan make few significant references to Supporting People. 'Individual wellbeing' is one of three priorities for the community. Within this there are objectives to 'improve quality of life for young people', 'improve the independence for older people' and 'improve the well being of socially excluded groups, all of which the Supporting People programme could support. However, within the 'young people' and 'excluded groups' headings no Supporting People or housing role is recognised. By contrast there is much greater recognition of the role that Supporting People can play for older people. Within the 'strong communities' section there is the objective to secure 'sufficient good quality and affordable housing locally' but no reference is made to the role of supported housing. By contrast we have already noted the extent to which Supporting People targets feature in the Local Area Agreement.
- All of the districts make substantial references to Supporting People within their housing and homelessness strategies. It has had the greatest impact in Kerrier, North Cornwall and Penwith, where it is a top level priority within each strategy and where there is an extensive range of actions in support of the programme. For example, North Cornwall identifies the local priority groups and these groups are also recognised as high to medium priority groups in the Supporting People strategy. North Cornwall also supports the development of more floating support across its area. The role of the County, the Commissioning Body and the importance of SNAP is clearly recognised within most strategies, showing that the districts recognise the role that they have to play in the planning process. There remain some important areas in which a countywide consensus has not yet been agreed: the districts have not yet signed up to a countywide approach to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation and the degree to which the longstanding problem of the design and quality of sheltered housing has been considered varies greatly from district to district.
- The degree to which the Supporting People programme is co-ordinated with the work of Adult Social Care and Children's services is mixed. The Council has ambitious plans to integrate the commissioning of health, care and support services, but there is not yet a set of joint strategies in place to inform commissioning decisions. A strategy for older persons' housing is in the latter stages of development, but there is an absence of housing strategies for people with a physical or sensory disability and people leaving care. There is a housing strategy for people with a learning disability, which the Learning Disability Partnership Board is to review as part of its work plan. There is not a clear fit between the housing priorities identified by the Mental Health All Inclusive Forum and the Supporting People Strategy. For example, the top priority within the mental health housing strategy - to increase county-wide provision by five units year-on-year - is not reflected in the Supporting People strategy. Equally the Supporting People strategy makes no reference to a further priority to review and re-designate the balance of short, medium and long-term housing for people with mental health problems. This strategy is also under review, but presently reflects a weak degree of integration between the Supporting People programme and wider social care planning.

- The work of the Probation service is not well integrated into the programme at both the strategic and operational level. Although Devon and Cornwall Probation Service have produced a tenancy sustainment strategy, this has not been referred to in the five-year strategy. There is no offender accommodation strategy. At the operational level MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangements) have not been developed in partnership with the Supporting People team or providers. Providers are not yet signed up to the partnership therefore there is no framework within which to share information, develop staff and raise cases of concern from users of Supporting People Services.

The integrated planning and commissioning of services is still in its infancy in Cornwall. The Council recognises that this is a high priority and that all agencies need to work in partnership to achieve this.

- 57 A key weakness of the strategy is that it is not backed up with specific outcome targets, stating the scale of the changes in support services, in terms of numbers, locations and expenditure that are being sought. There is, for example, a target to increase floating support, but it is not clear whether this means a 10 per cent, 100 per cent or greater increase and what the anticipated reduction in accommodation based support might be, if any. Research has suggested that 5,000 extra care sheltered housing units may be needed, but it is not clear what a realistic response to this may be and what role the Supporting People programme will play in any new developments. Nor does it say whether this may be addressed through the redesign of existing housing or new development. In reality this reflects the fact that the strategies that are needed to inform the Supporting People strategy have not yet been agreed. The approach being developed through the VIP will help to address this, but at present this makes it difficult for a strategic - as opposed to a scheme by scheme - approach to be taken.

Financial and risk management

- 58 The Supporting People team has successfully established the majority of the financial and risk management systems.
- All payments to providers have been made in a timely manner.
 - There are clear eligibility rules that providers understand. They are being applied through service reviews to decommission those services that are not eligible for Supporting People funding. This is being managed in a sensitive manner, to avoid destabilising the market and generating fear and uncertainty among service users and their carers.

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- All interim contracts were issued in time to meet the deadline set by the government. There have also been four steady state contracts agreed, though others are dependent upon improvements in the QAF rating of providers. Eight out of ten providers are satisfied with the application of contracts. The steady state contract has been developed in conjunction with the South West Regional Implementation Group and a small group of three providers and broadly reflects good practice. It does not specifically require providers to adopt multi-agency adult protection policies and procedures, which is a weakness, though service reviews do look closely at protection from abuse policies and practice, including compliance with 'No Secrets' guidance and whistleblowing practices.
- A fairer charging policy has been adopted and there had been 99 assessments by the end of 2005.

59 A risk register has been developed and is reviewed on a regular basis, but has failed to incorporate adult protection issues. A risk register was established for the first time in October 2005. An initial 'traffic light' rating reflects the position for each risk at the start of the year. The risk register is formally reviewed quarterly and as risks are mitigated by further action, the register is amended and updated. The Commissioning Body receives a quarterly report highlighting key risks, and noting progress. A new risk register was developed for 2006/07 to reflect the different context and circumstances relating to the 'steady state' phase of the programme, and in particular the risks associated with the major re-commissioning of floating support services.

Partnerships

- 60 The quality of partnership at the strategic level has already discussed and is mixed. Operational partnerships with the districts, the DAAT and providers are generally strong while with Adult Social Care and Probation they are improving. The community mental health team are engaged at the operational level with existing clients, but providers find it difficult to make new referrals.
- 61 There is a positive relationship between providers and the Supporting People team. Only one provider - whose services were being decommissioned - was critical. The relationship has strengthened as the team has bedded in. Providers expressed most satisfaction with the service review process and how it had helped them to improve, of the information provided in the re-launched Supporting People newsletter and web pages, of the provider forums and of the involvement that they have had in the VIP. A range of training opportunities have been offered to providers, though take up has not always been high. Some providers felt that the time taken to provide advice and support is excessive, though our focus group felt that this had improved significantly.

- 62 There are improving working relationships between the Supporting People team and Adult Social Care at an operational level. The relocation of the team within the directorate has helped to promote this, along with the changing culture within the social care service. Internal communications have improved with link officers established between members of the Supporting People team and each Adult Social Care office. Supporting People managers are now members of the extended management team for Adult Social Care and the commissioning budget group. A joint approach to consultation on fairer charging enabled the consultation exercise to reach a wider group of people across the County than it would have if the Supporting People team had undertaken it alone. Staff are also working together to review home and domiciliary care packages across the County. There is also a greater recognition among senior managers of the need to strengthen the approach to adult protection and a multi-agency team has been established to address this.
- 63 The degree of engagement of the community mental health team varies. Providers spoke of good support from the team if the service user was already known to them, but of a lack of response where the service user was not previously known. One Women's Refuge was particularly concerned about the difficulties of obtaining support for women with mental health problems. Weak links at this level risk both the health of service users and those they live alongside.

Service reviews

- 64 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The original timetable of service reviews was logical, but it has not been reviewed to take account of the risks associated with new providers or the management of some services proposed for decommissioning. The reviews themselves are well regarded by providers. There are some gaps in the capacity of the Supporting People team, but these are being addressed by external support and training plans. The actual decommissioning of services is being handled sensitively and the reviews are leading to positive outcomes.
- 65 The service review timetable was drawn up in a logical order, with flexibility built in to bring forward services which present a high risk. The original timetable was structured around the time needed to review the high volume of schemes for people with a learning disability and sheltered housing in the County, over the period 2003-2005. Intertwined among these are reviews of each of the other sectors, over shorter time periods. Both the overall timetable and any early reviews were risk-based. This was clearly defined as being where there were significant complaints; where the self assessment highlighted health and safety or potential for abuse; where performance data was weak; where a service was previously unknown; or where costs were above £250 a week.

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- 66 The risk-based approach to the timetable has been implemented well in some ways, but less well in others. Complaints about a service for people with a learning disability helped bring forward the reviews of this service. The reviews in turn provided the evidence of abuse that triggered the referrals to the Adult Care team in accordance with 'No Secrets' guidance and informed a joint investigation by CSCI and the Healthcare Commission³. Prior to the introduction of Supporting People there had been no quality assurance framework in Cornwall for these services, nor any assessment of the community care needs of the individuals living in each of the homes. The service reviews and work of the Supporting People team played an important part in helping to address the serious weaknesses of a service that had not previously been the subject of any form of regulation.
- 67 However, this approach has not taken enough account of the risks arising when schemes have been, or are in, the process of being decommissioned. We visited one scheme whose contract has been transferred to another organisation following a service review in 2004 that highlighted overcrowding, poor quality housing conditions and poor quality management. The new provider was appointed without any form of competition. While this appointment did meet the Council's own standing orders, due to the immediacy and emergency of the situation, it has highlighted some weaknesses, as the quality and financial checks being inadequate compared with a full tendering process. We would have expected the Supporting People team to have monitored the new service closely but found that, two years on, the condition of the property was still poor. Poor referral arrangements had placed one resident potentially at risk and unable to afford the accommodation. This new provider had not been timetabled for an early review, as a result of which the poor quality of service was allowed to persist for too long. We also found that the Supporting People team was not receiving updates on the quality of housing related support being provided to residents in services where funding needed to be withdrawn, including the schemes for people with learning disabilities where serious concerns have been highlighted.
- 68 Where schemes have been awarded interim contracts following reviews we found that robust action plans have been adopted, are being monitored effectively and are leading to improvements. Examples of these are given in the section on outcomes for service users.

³ Joint investigation into the provision of services for people with learning disabilities at Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust, Commission for Social Care Inspection and Healthcare Commission, June 2006

- 69 The strengths of the review process outweigh the weaknesses. There is a good quality review workbook that provides clear guidance to reviewing officers. It has been constantly updated in order to learn from previous experience and best practice. The way in which users are involved and the feedback from providers are both positive. Advocacy organisations have been involved effectively to obtain service users' views as part of the review of services for people with learning disabilities. The team recognised that it lacked experience in the areas of learning disability and domestic violence and has drawn in expertise from social services and advocacy groups to help fill these gaps. The key weakness of the review process has been the unsophisticated approach to the relative value for money of different services. This is discussed in more detail later in this report.
- 70 Desktop reviews are targeted effectively. The team has used these for the many, but low risk, floating support services that will be the subject of a common specification and tendering arrangement as a result of the VIP in the longer term. This avoids duplication of effort and ensures that the resources of the team are better focused.
- 71 The actual process of decommissioning is being handled sensitively. Service reviews are reported regularly and signed off by the Commissioning Body, which has requested early warning reports of any decommissioning. The timing of the withdrawal of funding is negotiated to protect the welfare of service users. For example, the decision to decommission the CPT service was made in September 2005 and allows for a three-year withdrawal of funding. This helps providers to plan for de-commissioning and re-commissioning and reduces the risk of stress among service users. The majority of decommissioning has occurred where the service is ineligible for Supporting People funding. For most this has not involved a change of provider but simply obtaining funding from other sources, such as the independent living fund or the community mental health team. In one example the provider served notice to terminate the contract before the review had been completed and, as well as advising service users promptly a multi-agency task force was established to seek out alternative choices for each service user. All service users were subsequently provided with alternative accommodation and support.
- 72 Until this year the time taken to complete reviews was lengthy for some providers and a source of uncertainty and dissatisfaction among these providers. For example, there were significant delays in concluding service reviews of the Home Improvement Agencies. Although the reviews took place in December 2003 and January 2004, the decisions of the Commissioning Body were not reported until February 2006. This delay was caused by the decision to draw up a single service specification before the Commissioning Body signed off the service reviews. Similar delays occurred for some sheltered housing reviews because of the development of the older persons' strategy. This gave rise to dissatisfaction among some service managers, particularly as some of their requests for feedback met with no response. The Supporting People team has since introduced a more streamlined approach and this has reduced the time taken to around three months from commencement to a decision by the Commissioning Body.

- 73 Providers are given reasonable time to contribute to service reviews. Some, mainly smaller, providers have struggled to meet a deadline of three weeks to respond to the draft report. This appears to us to be a reasonable timeframe, since it is a minimum period and the Supporting People team advises that more time is allowed where possible. The team has also made visits to small providers to ensure that the contents of the report are understood and any queries or representations addressed.
- 74 An appeals procedure is in place, although this was only formalised in December 2005. While informal appeals were dealt with via negotiation previously, two appeals have been made since December, one of which has been withdrawn. It is therefore too soon to judge how effective the appeals procedure is.
- 75 The service reviews have led to some positive outcomes. Three quarters of providers were satisfied with the review arrangements, with any dissatisfaction focusing on the quality of on-site feedback. Slightly more are satisfied with the outcome of the review, even though virtually all services were graded as 'D', which is below the minimum standard, using the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). Providers that we met felt that it had helped them to be more professional in their approach to matters such as health and safety, user involvement and record keeping. This in turn is leading to improvements in the QAF rating, with 119 schemes moving from 'D' to 'C', reflecting improved outcomes for service users. The reviews have also identified large numbers of services that are not eligible for funding and this will provide a substantial source of future investment for new services.

Value for money

- 76 Weaknesses outweigh strengths in this area. A significant number of services developed with the use of transitional housing benefit do not provide housing related support and so do not currently provide value for the Supporting People budget. While services generally cost below the regional and national average, this is not in itself a reflection of value for money. Until recently efficiency savings and contract negotiations have focused heavily on cost reduction, with insufficient focus on quality. The comparative costs of the administration of the service are not routinely compared and the approach to procurement is under-developed. This is now changing as a result of an interim procurement strategy, the VIP and the appointment of the Business Finance Manager, all of which is beginning to deliver improvements.
- 77 A substantial proportion of the Supporting People budget is not paying for the services for which it was intended. £1.8 million of the £14 million budget is spent on the provision of care to highly vulnerable adults. This was as a result of the 'cost shunting' of elements of services from the healthcare budget, during the period of transitional housing benefit (THB) that preceded Supporting People, with insufficient scrutiny of, and challenge to, services allocated to THB. This issue has now being addressed through the service review process, with the decisions made to decommission the majority of these services over the next two years.

- 78 Efficiency savings have until recently focused upon cost reduction, with insufficient attention to service quality. Until 2006/07 there were no 'rate of inflation' increases in contracts in order to achieve the efficiency savings required by the government. The Commissioning Body and Supporting People team benchmarks the costs of services against national and regional averages, but not their quality. The cost per unit of Supporting People services in Cornwall falls well below the average for the rest of the region and for England as a whole, but this may reflect the proportion of low level sheltered housing within the County, as well as comparatively low unit costs of services for people with a learning disability, people with alcohol problems and people with a physical or sensory disability. It is clear that the cost of these services is relatively low, and the Commissioning Body recognises that this does not in itself demonstrate value for money.

Table 2 Unit costs of Supporting People services 2003/04

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Cornwall	£ 0.54	£ 22.80	£ 24.92	£ 52.49
Region	£ 0.73	£ 33.33	£ 36.46	£ 80.42
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

- 79 In 2006/07 another bar has been imposed on rate of inflation contract price increases, but a contingency sum of £90,000 has been established to help those providers who can demonstrate that this is not sustainable.
- 80 The approach to contract negotiations following service reviews has until recently been unsophisticated. Negotiations used as a basis the local average cost for the type of service. Providers were unclear as to the meaning of this figure and felt there was no clear view of what a C or B rated service might cost. Providers view is that value for money has been crudely interpreted with hourly rates not varied to reflect the level of support needed within each user group. However, the service average calculation was made on a client group and service type basis.

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- 81 A more sophisticated approach is being developed through a 'value for money toolkit' and the recruitment of a business finance manager to oversee negotiations. Recent negotiations have shown a greater balance of cost and quality. Of the nine most recent contracts, three have resulted in additional funding for the same service (for example to ensure that a loss making Women's Refuge was able to break even), two have resulted in increased capacity for additional grant (including the provision of six extra Foyer places) and four have resulted in the same service for less cost, in one example due to excessive corporate costs. Value for money is one of three pre-conditions for the award of a steady state contract. The attainment of QAF level C is the measure of quality being applied. Four providers have so far been awarded steady state contracts, including one whose costs are relatively high, but who has achieved level B in a number of areas.
- 82 The Council does not routinely compare how much it spends on staffing, support and corporate costs with other similar administration authorities. It has nonetheless shown a willingness to invest in the customer development officer and the business finance manager posts to strengthen these areas of work. At a corporate level the Council is investing in improved IT systems in order to address this area of weakness.
- 83 The Council has been slow to develop a corporate procurement strategy and there is a long legacy within social services of 'spot' purchasing. All services are procured in this way, which is costly in administration and in diseconomies of scale. Supporting People provides an exception to this with its experience of developing block contracts and the capital development of new supported housing schemes, which have been guided by the priorities of the multi-agency Special Needs Accommodation Panel (SNAP). But where there has been no requirement for Housing Corporation funding, such services have been generally developed on the basis of their ability to attract transitional housing benefit or address a crisis, rather than on a targeted, strategic basis. A positive exception to this has been the proactive approach to the development of floating support.
- 84 An interim procurement strategy was agreed in December 2005. The purpose of this is to align bids for new services with the five-year strategy and the SNAP approach and to invite competitive bids for the highest priority services. This is beginning to take effect - some recent applications for funding have been turned down on the basis that they do not meet priority needs and have not been the subject of competitive tendering. This new approach will enable the Supporting People team to show that new services offer improved value.

- 85 The government sponsored value improvement project (VIP) will help to modernise the way that the Council procures services. The aim of the project is to secure greater value for money from floating support services across the County. The outcomes of the project, so far, include a procurement toolkit, common specification for floating support services, commissioning strategy and common assessment and support planning framework. Invitations to tender have been issued and contracts should be let by the end of September. By drawing up a common specification it will be clearer what the funding is to pay for and the quality of provision will be more consistent. By seeking tenders for the work the Council will be better able to demonstrate that the service is competitive in terms of cost. The project has not yet delivered changes in the value for money of these services, but is in the later stages of development and the intention is ultimately to roll it out to each sector and to the wider market of joint health and social services procurement.

Service user involvement

- 86 The quality of service user involvement is mixed. At the operational level there are some good examples of users being influential, through service reviews and the complaints system. Service users have however had limited influence in the production of policies and strategies.
- 87 Customer involvement in service reviews has led to improvements in the services that they receive. Seventy-nine per cent of providers who responded to our survey were satisfied with the involvement of service users and stakeholders in service reviews. This has led to some immediate improvements. For example, at one scheme for mental health users where they expressed concerns about people visiting their property without notice, a diary in the communal lounge is now used to record details of people who will be visiting, for example, to carry out repairs. In another scheme, a public complaints book has been replaced with complaints form, allowing the privacy of complainants to be protected.
- 88 The experience of the early reviews led to the growth of an advocacy service for people with a learning disability. A sum of £9,000 was paid to fund a part-time worker in Cornwall Advocacy Services for one day a week in 2005/06. The worker provided feedback on the questionnaires issued to service users and carried out more detailed interviews with around fifty service users as part of service reviews. This led to some recommendations to improve services, such as the development of more information in easy-read formats and increased user awareness of adult protection policies. By employing advocates with the right communication skills the reviews have been able to identify some of the weaknesses of these services.

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- 89 Improvements are being delivered as a result of the complaints system. In the broadest sense, service reviews have been brought forward as a result of significant complaints. All complaints are reported to the Commissioning Body along with the changes that have been instigated as a result. These include the reduction in the time taken for service reviews and changes to the way that individual services are managed. The volume of complaints dealt with is modest, at around one a month, but they are being dealt with appropriately and systematically.
- 90 The Supporting People team has had limited success in consulting service users over the raft of policies for Supporting People, including the five-year strategy. Discussions with a small number of service user representatives indicated a lack of understanding of the programme and its objectives and low awareness of the five-year strategy and future priorities. There was no knowledge of the some recent user-focussed developments cited in the self assessment (such as the appointment of the customer development officer and mystery shopping programme). Overall, the group did not feel they had any real influence on the development of the programme.
- 91 One off consultation has had some success. A 'snapshot' survey by the Priority Estates Project of 45 individuals in 2002 highlighted the shortage of affordable housing generally and the need for more supported housing including a Foyer and scheme for people who are substance misusers. Improved information and an increase in floating support were seen as the solutions to the geographical barriers to access within Cornwall. The study also advocated the recruitment of supportive private landlords and a rental deposit scheme. It found most users to be satisfied with the service provided but seeking more skills related training, social contact, advocacy and attention to health and safety matters. Some of these issues have been or are in the process of being addressed - the development of the Foyer, advocacy and floating support being positive examples. The 2004 De Montfort research involved some focus groups of users, but attendance was low and some client groups were not consulted at all.
- 92 The VIP has been successful in gaining customer views. Questionnaires were sent to over 1,500 floating support users. Around 480 responses were received and analysis has allowed the Supporting People team to identify areas for improvement and assess the relative performance of providers. The exercise has found that there is a need for more collaboration between floating support providers and other services to reduce duplication of effort, better follow up by other agencies, and wider advertising of the service.

- 93 The Supporting People team has struggled to engage with users on a continuous basis. Outside of two Partnership Boards, covering Older People and Learning Disability, there were no service user consultation mechanisms prior to the inception of Supporting People. The team has attempted to address this through the creation of all inclusive forums (AIFs), but this has met with little success. There are one off successes, such as the Mental Health AIF which held service user and carer question time sessions in June and July 2004. Priorities identified through these sessions, including more flexible support and more intensive support on discharge, have been reflected in the SP five-year strategy. However, this approach was not replicated by other AIFs and there has been virtually no attendance at the forums by service users and carers.
- 94 Health and Social Care Partnership Boards have only had a limited impact on Supporting People. The Learning Disability Partnership Board was given the opportunity to comment on the easy read leaflet, leading to some rewording, and the content of the website was informed by a local mental health advocacy group. However, the Partnership Boards were not consulted on key plans, including the five-year strategy. This was a missed opportunity to use one of the few pre-existing mechanisms.
- 95 An even greater challenge is presented in consulting with non-users of services. The people who are given the opportunity to comment on policies and practices are already users of services. Advocacy groups consider that more needs to be done to contact the hardest to reach groups who are eligible for but do not use the services that are available.
- 96 Overall, there have been two main weaknesses of the approach to date. The first is that the Supporting People team has tried to establish and manage a consultation framework in isolation. Senior managers recognise that a more corporate approach for the whole of adult services is the only sustainable way forward. The second is the high degree of emphasis upon centrally held meetings as the means of consultation. The focus is moving to a more localised approach, with funding secured for voluntary sector organisations to begin facilitating this work, but other less time consuming methods, such as the use of telephone surveys, have not been explored. The Council recognises the issues of remoteness and isolation that face Cornwall and have started to tailor their approach with, for example, the VIP carrying out one to one interviews and telephone surveys.

Access to services and information

- 97 This is an area in which weaknesses significantly outweigh strengths. The County Council is not yet working effectively in partnership with the Districts and Parishes in order to distribute information on Supporting People. It is not ensuring that people seeking help can access it easily via the telephone or the internet.

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- 98** The quality of written information on Supporting People in Cornwall is mixed. There is a leaflet, which is produced in both a standard format and, for people with a learning disability, an 'easy ready' format. Both provide a clear explanation of the services available, with colour illustrations in the 'easy read' version. Service users were consulted on the design and content of the leaflet. There is also a combined 'better care high standards' and service directory booklet, which is also written in plain language. However, the booklet contains limited references to Supporting People, with the range of services available not explained in full and contained within the section on services for people with a learning disability, rather than in every section or on its own. There is a complaints leaflet, but parts are written in bureaucratic language. There is a Supporting People newsletter, but it is written for providers rather than service users.
- 99** The Council is not working well internally or with its partners to distribute the information. There is no mechanism for deciding which leaflets to distribute, where and in what frequency. Despite leaflets and directories being supplied by the Supporting People team to all partner agencies, we were unable to obtain copies at any of the libraries, health offices, social services offices or District Council offices we visited.' Social services receptionists advised on how to access social services via the assessment process, but none were aware of Supporting People when prompted. All advice staff tried to help but the only receptionist who displayed a reasonable awareness of supported housing worked for Carrick District Council.
- 100** The Council has already identified that telephone access to services is a weakness. It has recently (May 2006) undertaken a series of mystery shopping exercises, using some well thought out scenarios. It also provided comparisons between the quality of responses from different agencies. It found, among other matters, a particularly poor response to the fear of domestic violence when this was reported to District Council reception staff - a cause for concern given that districts have responsibility for homelessness. The Supporting People team should be given credit for identifying this weakness, but the mystery shopping report does not state plainly enough how great some of these weaknesses are and the Council's partners have not yet demonstrated their commitment to anything more than a series of awareness raising sessions. A more systematic series of actions, that each agency is signed up to, is needed if the issue of telephone access to Supporting People (and possibly other services) is to be addressed properly.
- 101** The County Council website and the pages that the Council has on the national Supporting People website (the 'SPKweb') are aimed at providers and there is little for service users. The search facility was unable to help with commonly used words such as 'hostel', 'refuge' 'disability' and 'mental illness'. The Council recognises that more needs to be done in this area.

- 102** Given that the Council and its partners recognise the issues of remoteness and isolation that exist, it is disappointing that insufficient focus has been placed on pooling resources and working together much more closely to improve face to face, telephone contact and internet access. Although much can be addressed within the Supporting People programme, some of these issues reach beyond the Supporting People remit and need to be acknowledged and resolved by all of the Council's partners.
- 103** Access and referral arrangements into supported housing are not working effectively. The level of awareness of Supporting People among front line staff who have the power to refer people to services is limited. We also encountered concerns among providers about the quality of referrals and an example of a vulnerable young man being unhappy at being referred to a service for drug and alcohol users. The Council acted promptly to review the appropriateness of the referral, but did not indicate that there had been any consultation with the individual concerned.

Diversity

- 104** Weaknesses currently outweigh strengths in the planning and delivery of Supporting People services to address the full range of needs of the community. The Council has not undertaken comprehensive research to enable it to better understand the support needs of the whole community. The five-year strategy does not state what actions will be taken to ensure that the whole community is able to access and receive services in a consistent way. There is however a top level commitment to address these and other weaknesses. There are a number of good, recent examples of services targeted at previously excluded groups and the accessibility of the Council's buildings has improved significantly in the last year.
- 105** The Supporting People team's knowledge of the wider community is limited. As has already been noted, research to date on the needs of vulnerable people has been patchy, with some of it confined to the district councils that were able to commission it. There has been no research into the needs of rough sleepers, ex-offenders, minority ethnic groups and people with HIV/Aids. Without comprehensive research it is difficult for the Council to assess the scale and range of services that are needed and for transparent decisions to be made about which groups to prioritise. The Council has been slow to develop a robust approach to ethnic monitoring, a race equality plan and the impact assessment of services.

- 106 The proportion of council buildings that are accessible to disabled people has improved significantly to 90 per cent in the space of the last year. This has been as a result of a significant investment in ramps and other facilities during this time. This is relatively late given the fact that the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act have been known for several years (and should have been implemented by October 2004), but will make it easier for disabled people to obtain face to face advice and access employment with the County Council, itself one of the largest local employers. At present the number of disabled people employed by the County Council is also relatively low at 1.7 per cent. This means that there are few people within the organisation who can reflect the views of disabled people informally and who can best understand the needs of this group. The recently produced service directory and migrant workers pack are one of only a few publications that include reference to their availability in Braille, large print, tape or community languages. More generally, the Council's current performance measured by the Local Government Equality Standard is at level one, which is average compared with what other Councils were achieving in 2004/05.
- 107 The Council's leadership recognises that this needs to change. A Councillor now acts as a member champion on equalities and all Councillors and staff are being provided with diversity training. Conferences have been held with local black and minority ethnic communities and the gay and lesbian community. The Director of Adult Social Care now acts as the lead manager for diversity. One of the 40 local area agreement targets is to 'build a cohesive society based upon equality of opportunity'. This commits the Council and its partners to:
- a detailed mapping exercise to establish existing groups and communities of interest;
 - engagement in two way dialogue with groups and communities of interest;
 - production of a Diversity and Equality Action Plan across all sectors; and
 - effective information and monitoring systems and across all sectors.
- 108 This top level commitment is reflected in an overall aim within the Supporting People objective to 'provide for a diverse group of service users, from all parts of the community with fair access to all ', but it is not yet backed up with specific targets. This is partly because the Council has not identified what needs and gaps in provision exist for the most excluded groups and so does not know how much it needs to do. Consequently while there have been some very positive new initiatives, these have been ad hoc. The most high profile of these has been the use of Supporting People funding to employ a support worker for Gypsies and Travellers. The worker provides a range of help, from securing loans for the purchase of replacement caravans to tackling domestic violence. A survey of the support needs of travellers is in progress and this will inform a Gypsy and Traveller Strategy for the County. There is some uncertainty over the degree to which all parties will take on their responsibilities, particularly over the provision of new sites. But equally there also has been some leadership shown in support of the extension of one site in the face of public opposition.

- 109** The Council can demonstrate positive practice in the degree to which it has identified and responded to the needs of its migrant workers community. For example, it has produced an information pack for migrant workers that is fully translated into three European languages. Although it covers a very wide range of rights and responsibilities, it includes explanations of social services, the zero tolerance of domestic violence and help for drug users. There are extensive telephone and internet contacts provided for all services. Migrant workers are an increasingly important feature of economies that are reliant upon agriculture, tourism and healthcare. This is a strong example of County and District Councils along with health, educational and employment agencies, providing community leadership and taking action to meet the specific needs of potentially excluded groups.
- 110** Other actions that reflect a commitment to improve in this area are the provision of HIV awareness training for service providers, a set of actions to improve access to services by care leavers and the requirement for providers to have an equal opportunities policy.

Outcomes for service users

- 111** There are a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. Transitional housing benefit triggered a growth in services, but some have since been found to be ineligible. There was also a reasonable degree of growth in housing related support and since then a shift in the pattern of services in line with the five-year strategy. Service reviews have helped to improve the quality of management of existing schemes, including resident involvement. However, insufficient attention is paid to new providers and services in the process of being de-commissioned, while some move-on arrangements are not yet working effectively.
- 112** There was a moderate growth in the Supporting People budget between the 'golden cut' in 2002 and the 'platinum cut' in 2003. During this period it grew from £13.2 million to £14.3 million, which represents growth of 8.7 per cent. Of this, 57 per cent can be directly attributable to new services.
- 113** Service reviews have identified that £1.86 million was transferred through transitional housing benefit into the Supporting People budget in respect of ineligible services. These are the unregistered homes for people with a learning disability. While there were quite stringent checks on new claims for transitional housing benefit from the housing association and private sector, the change in funding for care homes was not challenged. Some growth has also been due to increases in the charges levied by providers for existing services and it has not been possible to assess the justification for these increases until the service reviews took place.

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- 114** Between 2002 and 2003 there was a reasonable growth in new services, but major gaps in services for the most excluded groups remained. Expenditure on new services grew by £659,000, serving 663 additional users. By this time (known as the 'platinum cut') older people (other than the frailest), people with mental illness, people with a learning disability, those with alcohol problems and teenage parents were well served by the volume of services. But there were many more groups for whom the supply of services remained either below the national average or non-existent. There were no support services available for travellers, people with HIV/AIDs, extra care sheltered housing schemes for older people or accommodation for mentally disordered offenders. Some of this is due to the lead-in time for the creation of new services and the time needed to de-commission existing services and meet the needs of current service users.
- 115** Some gaps in service are now being filled, with new provision meeting some important strategic priorities. Between 2003 and 2005/06 new services have been provided to a total of 363 users. While the number of services that were closed, at 375, slightly exceeded this, the overwhelming majority of these were schemes that were not eligible for Supporting People funding. A third of the new services developed during this period were of floating support, which begins to address this strategic priority. There has been an increase in services for three of the top five priority groups - with schemes for drug and alcohol users, vulnerable young people and women at risk of domestic violence. A first extra care sheltered housing scheme is soon to open and the travellers support service has been launched, so some important gaps are beginning to be filled. Floating support now accounts for a third of all support services and the Supporting People team were described as 'playing a pivotal role' in extending coverage of home improvement agencies across the county. As a result of this rural isolation should now be less of an obstacle to the provision of support.
- 116** Service reviews have led to a measurable improvement in services within at least 119 schemes. These are the schemes that have moved from a QAF rating of D to C. This significant improvement in service quality means that 221, or two thirds of services, are operating either at or above the minimum standard of level C. The remaining services are subject to robust improvement plans and the Council has shown that it is prepared to de-commission those schemes that are unable to improve. The review process also helped to highlight and address the serious weaknesses in the service for people with a learning disability.

- 117 The majority of the schemes that we visited (15) provide a satisfactory service, which demonstrates improving performance. Three positive examples from the schemes we visited are provided below.

Case studies

1. Supported housing scheme for young homeless people

This is a fairly isolated scheme, but this enables residents to be taken out of environments where they are at risk of exploitation or committing anti-social behaviour. At the time of our visit the scheme was taking delivery of a minibus that had been donated and the subject of the next residents meeting was to be which places they would like to visit. The scheme had been reviewed in 2005 and QAF rated as D. The Supporting People team had agreed an improvement plan and helped the owner to attract Objective One and charitable funding. This served two purposes; firstly to expand the scheme and secondly to provide additional employment. Doubling the size of the service has helped reduce the Supporting People charge from £156 to £118. The service has also been able to link into education and training services, with a meeting and training room as well as an associated horticultural business. One resident that we interviewed spoke very highly of the service and the owner told us how the review had helped him to provide a more professional service. The scheme has been re-graded to a C rating.

2. Women's refuge

The most important feature of the Refuge that we visited is that residents feel safe and supported. Staff are cheerful and professional and the service welcomes people from all backgrounds. Residents are supported to enable their return to independent living. There are high levels of resident satisfaction with all aspects of the service apart from the size of the accommodation.

3. Bungalows for disabled people

This scheme consists of eight paired bungalows interspersed among an estate of general needs lifetime homes. The bungalows were built in 1993 and have two bedrooms to enable carers to stay overnight. Life skill training is provided, enabling residents to move on to greater independence within housing association or local authority housing. The review action plan has been fully complied with, apart from one item which requires input from other agencies.

118 Two services we visited gave us cause for concern.

- Although conditions and support for residents have improved following the change of a provider at a drug and alcohol service, there remain weaknesses in the quality of the service. Our visit found that the quality of the property was very poor, with no disabled access and shared facilities, and a mix of male and female residents. The Supporting People team initially proposed this service as an example of improvement partially because there had been a change of provider. What it actually showed was that the approach to risk management had not identified the need to prioritise visits to new and untested providers. It also showed that insufficient attention was paid to the references and financial standing of the new provider during the re-commissioning process, even though the Council's financial standing orders were complied with. The Supporting People team has acted promptly in respect of both the specific provider and the wider issues that this case study highlights.
- In a scheme for people with learning disabilities we concurred with the decision of the Commissioning Body to de-commission the service. But it was clear to us that while the level of care was being closely monitored, there were no arrangements to monitor the quality of housing related support in the period between the review and its closure, which could be as much as three years. Here too we found an example of an inappropriate nomination; in this instance of an elderly resident from a long stay hospital being moved into this scheme even though it is to be decommissioned, possibly necessitating another traumatic move. The Council has taken immediate action through the arrangements for the protection of vulnerable adults to address this.

119 The monitoring of services earmarked for closure remains a shared responsibility. This is because Supporting People funds the service, while the actual level of support includes social care and healthcare. While we would not wish to see any duplication of effort, at an operational level there were no liaison arrangements to ensure that the quality of related support was of an acceptable standard.

120 Move on accommodation from short and longer stay supported accommodation is a major issue in Cornwall. Access to affordable accommodation is a barrier to independence for service users. Providers complained of the difficulty of transferring residents into mainstream housing, as a result of which schemes are 'silting up' with people who no longer need the level of support provided. Part of the reason for this is the acute shortage of affordable housing in Cornwall for all low income households, of which those with support needs are just a fraction. A target of five per cent of all lettings to be used to enable vulnerable people to attain greater independence has not so far worked well. Work is taking place to address this by developing a countywide move-on strategy during 2006/07.

Summary

- 121** Our judgement is that Cornwall is providing a fair, 'one-star' Supporting People service.
- 122** Some aspects of the programme are strong. There is a high degree of political and corporate commitment to the programme across the County. Service users have been involved well in service reviews and complaints are being used to improve services. There are improved outcomes for service users, both in the overall supply of services, the quality of services provided and the way in which individual schemes are managed.
- 123** Some aspects of the quality of the delivery of the Supporting People programme are mixed. The quality of strategic and operational partnerships is varied. There are clear ambitions for the development of Supporting People services, but these are not based upon comprehensive research and consultation. The timetabling of service reviews has been logical, but does not take account of the risks associated with new providers or decommissioned services. The approach to diversity has until recently been poor, but there are some good individual examples of services being tailored to meet the needs of the most excluded groups. There is also the leadership and framework in place to improve the responsiveness of Supporting People services to the needs of the whole community.
- 124** Other aspects of the programme are weak. Information and signposting to enable access to services is poor. The Council has struggled to involve users and advocacy groups in policy making. Key stakeholders have not yet signed up to challenging targets and plans, both in terms of what the success of the five-year strategy should look like or in critical areas such as the future of hard to let sheltered housing. Some Supporting People services do not yet demonstrate value for money.

What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?

What is the track record in delivering improvement?

- 125 There is not yet a track record of sustained improvement in Cornwall. Corporate, adult social care and partner district councils' housing performance indicators that impact on the delivery of the programme are mixed. There have been improvements in the range and quality of services that vulnerable people can receive, but some important weaknesses, such as in access to services, are still being addressed. Some of this is because the Council was initially slow to respond to the requirements of the Supporting People programme and changes are not yet fully embedded.
- 126 The quality of performance measured by best value and PAF (social care) indicators is mixed. Audited best value performance indicators for the past three years show the following.
- BV53 the number of households receiving intensive home care – worst quartile performance (down from 8.3 to 8.2 per thousand over the last three years).
 - BV54 Over 65s helped to stay at home – average (down from 89 to 72 per thousand).
 - BV56 Percentage of minor adaptations delivered in seven days – best quartile, but fallen from 94 to 92 per cent.
 - BV195 Speed of assessments – above average and improving (but the subject of concerns expressed below).
 - BV196 Speed of care packages – best quartile and improving, though also tempered by concerns expressed below.
 - BV176 Refuge places – Carrick, Restormel, Kerrier and North C are worst quartile while Penwith and Caradon are best quartile.
 - BV2b Race equality – average at level 1.
 - BV16a Disabled employees – improved from a worst quartile figure of 1.27 per cent to a well below average figure of 1.7 per cent.
 - BV156 Disabled access – much improved from 4 per cent (although this figure is believed to be inaccurate) to 90 per cent in the past year.

- 127** A full list of PAF indicators for the three years to 2005/06 also shows mixed performance, with two deteriorating, one improving and seventeen unchanged. Of 24 measures, nine represent high levels of performance, eight above average and none represent poor performance, making improvement measured in this way more challenging. However the speed of community care assessments and care packages needs to be considered alongside the concerns that the CSCI has expressed regarding the quality of the assessments.
- 128** There have been improvements in the range and quality of services available. These are discussed above in 'outcomes for service users'. Key strengths are the creation of new services for 663 people between 2002 and 2003, with some progress in meeting gaps in services for drug and alcohol users, young people, women at risk of domestic violence and extra care sheltered housing. With floating support accounting for a third of all services, access to services is improving throughout the County, regardless of tenure. Service reviews have led to measurable improvements in the quality of existing services, as has the use of the complaints system.
- 129** Less positively, there has been little improvement in some critical areas. Information to enable access to services is poor and user involvement has not improved at the rate expected when the Supporting People programme was initially launched by the government six years ago.
- 130** The Council has been relatively slow to establish some of the important features of the programme. Comprehensive research, including the assessment of the needs of the most excluded groups, has only recently commenced and it is not clear when the needs of some groups will be researched. Work on the value for money toolkit is not yet complete. The service directory has only recently been produced.
- 131** Effective work planning is ensuring that weaknesses are being addressed. The actions in the first year (2005/06) of the five-year strategy focused on the completion of the service review process in order to meet the national deadline and the adoption of eligibility criteria, the absence of which was a weakness. The work plan contains a mix of actions to address weaknesses such as the quality of data, routine activities such as the completion of appraisals and forward-looking activities such as the VIP. These are all helping the Council to catch up on some of the ground that was lost in the first few years of Supporting People.
- 132** The track record on improving value for money is not clear. The average unit cost of contracts has fallen, while at the same time the quality rating of 119 services has improved from 'D' to 'C'. However, the degree of analysis is not yet sophisticated enough to show whether the unit costs have fallen where quality has been maintained or improved.

How is performance managed?

- 133 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The plans for Supporting People address the key weaknesses of the programme. These plans link well into team and individual targets and are increasingly reflected in top level targets and corporate performance management arrangements. The Council has ensured that it is not geographically isolated by the 'peninsula effect' by engaging in regional and national events and professional groups, as shown by examples of learning and the sharing of good practice.
- 134 The Council recognises what the key weaknesses are of the current approach and has plans in hand to address them.
- The five-year strategy - the 2006/07 work plan contains a commitment to conduct more extensive research and to update the strategy by January 2007. The emerging countywide strategy for older people is one example where more extensive research has been completed.
 - Access to services - a common assessment and support planning framework is one of the objectives of the Adult Services Portfolio Plan (though this will not deliver early improvements).
 - Value for Money - procurement training, the VIP, VFM toolkit, the development of outcome measures and a new joint commissioning and procurement strategy should all help to achieve improvements in this area.
 - User involvement - a new service user involvement strategy linked to corporate improvements in consultation is aimed at addressing this weakness.
 - Outcomes for service users - there are clear ambitions for all providers to have attained level 'B' of the QAF rating by late 2007 and a move-on strategy is being developed.
- 135 There is a robust performance management framework in place. There are regular financial and operational performance reports provided to the Commissioning Body and Advisory Group. The operational targets for the programme are reflected in the annual plan of the Supporting People team and the work plan of the Advisory Group. These flow through to the individual targets for staff, all of whom are aware of the overall contribution of their work. Supporting People targets are embedded within the overall Adult Services Portfolio Plan and performance against five Supporting People targets is starting to be reported at senior management level. The inclusion of targets within the Local Area Agreement will ensure that senior management attention will continue to focus on Supporting People over the medium to longer term.

- 136 The performance management of providers is hampered by weaknesses in the quality of data. An audit of providers' returns has identified serious weaknesses in the quality of the information that they produce on occupancy, staffing and other activity, all of which contributes to the returns that the Supporting People team provide to the Department of Communities and Local Government. The audit found that 57 per cent of all returns checked were incorrect and that some providers had been deliberately overstating their performance. The Supporting People team deserves credit for identifying this and taking action to address it. However, not all providers have changed their approach: an example that we found was that of a young person who had returned home, which was reported as 'moved to independent living.'
- 137 The geographically isolated location of Cornwall has not prevented the Supporting People team from learning from, and sharing learning with, other councils. The main forms of contact are through the regional Supporting People implementation group, a regional cross authority group and the VIP. This has led to good practice in passporting providers accredited elsewhere in the region and in a shared approach to leaseholders. The Council has also learnt from providers at the end of the review process. This has resulted in changes to the way in which reviews are undertaken and to increased feedback to providers on the review findings.
- 138 The Supporting People team sometimes confuses progress with the achievement of outcomes that service users would recognise. One example of this is that in its submission to the inspection team the outcomes from the sheltered housing sector review are described as the introduction of menus of services in eight of fourteen services from April 2007, of recommendations to complete stock audits and of the potential to re-model schemes. As none of this has yet happened, these are not outcomes that service users would recognise or experience in terms of any impact on the quality of housing related support received.

Is there capacity to improve?

- 139 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The early problems with the establishment and management of Supporting People have now been addressed and there is now a fully staffed team supported by strong financial management systems and improved IT. The capacity of the programme has been improved by additional investment by the Council and by the drawing in of substantial external funding. There is a risk that the significant challenges faced elsewhere in Adult Services will take some attention away from Supporting People and the capacity of the service could be improved by better partnership working.

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- 140 The Supporting People team has recovered from an early period of high staff turnover and a lack of corporate support for their work. The team is now well established, enthusiastic and fully resourced, supported by strong leadership from the Director of Adult Social Care. There is equally corporate support, both for the objectives of the programme and in terms of the administrative and technical support it receives. Additional investment in the team has resulted in the appointment of the customer development officer and finance manager posts. This is helping to transform the team from one that was struggling to one that is highly regarded by providers.
- 141 The Supporting People team has been provided with a broad range of training, and there is evidence of an ongoing programme of training to build upon this.
- 142 The service is financially strong. It has achieved the savings targets required of the programme and the phased withdrawal of ineligible funding to a major provider of services for people with learning difficulties from the Supporting People budget could provide a windfall income of £1.8 million. This is equal to an increase in grant of 15 per cent on the budget. Proposals for integrated commissioning have been drawn up jointly by partners and formally approved by the County Council.
- 143 IT capacity is also much improved. Until relatively recently the IT system of the County Council was poor, with only a handful of computer screens available for adult services' staff to access. While the corporate IT system remains quite dated, the Supporting People team is able to use up-to-date software. This has helped to ensure that payments are made promptly to providers.
- 144 The capacity of the service is enhanced by successful bidding for external resources. The Council has drawn in revenue funding of £10,000 for the VIP and helped some providers to access EU Objective One funding as well as £5,000 of charitable funding for training. It has been particularly successful in drawing in £5 million of capital funding for new supported housing schemes, all of which are on track for completion between June 2007 and February 2008.
- 145 While the external bids would not have been so successful without the active support of the Council's partners, it has already been shown that partnership working could be stronger. The benefits of Supporting People in terms of hospital discharge, crime reduction, community cohesion and quality of life have not been well publicised or understood. Budget pressures faced by health partners and the continued reorganisation of the NHS are reducing the ability of the Trust(s) to play a wider role in partnership working. Consequently some of the most important stakeholders including the primary care trust(s) are not fully engaged.

Summary

- 146 We judge the Supporting People service to have promising prospects of improvement. The plans for Supporting People address the key weaknesses of the programme. There are some good examples of learning from other Councils and regional partnerships. The Council can evidence improved outcomes from action plans.

- 147** There is now a fully staffed team supported by strong financial management systems and improved IT. The capacity of the service has been improved by additional investment by the Council and by the drawing in of substantial external funding.
- 148** Cornwall's track record does not yet demonstrate sustained improvement over time. Performance against corporate and adult social care performance indicators is mixed, with little positive improvement recorded over the past three years. There have been improvements in the range and quality of services that vulnerable people receive, but important weaknesses, such as those around access to services and service user involvement in strategy development, have yet to be addressed. The capacity of the service could be improved by better partnership working and there are plans in place to address this.

Appendix 1 – Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on-site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
 - a self assessment completed by Cornwall County Council;
 - the Supporting People five-year strategy;
 - work plans for the Supporting People team and Advisory Group;
 - minutes of the meetings of the Commissioning Body, Advisory Group and All Inclusive Forums;
 - the housing strategies of the six District Councils;
 - interim and steady state contracts; and
 - service review documentation.

Appendix 2 – 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:
 - focus groups of service users and advocates;
 - visits to fifteen services;
 - mystery shopping in each of the districts;
 - checks on the quality of the County Council website and SPKweb pages for Cornwall; and
 - observation of the Advisory Group.

Appendix 3 – Positive practice

'The Commission will identify and promote good practice. Every inspection will look for examples of good practice and innovation, and for creative ways to overcome barriers and resistance to change or make better use of resources'. (Seeing is Believing)

Migrant workers' pack

Cornwall is ahead of the field in the degree to which it has identified and responded to the needs of its migrant workers community. For example, it has produced an information pack for migrant workers that is fully translated into three European languages. Although it covers a very wide range of rights and responsibilities, it includes explanations of social services, the zero tolerance of domestic violence and help for drug users. There are extensive telephone and internet contacts provided for all services. Migrant workers are an increasingly important feature of economies that are reliant upon agriculture, tourism and healthcare. This is a strong example of County and District Councils along with health, educational and employment agencies, providing community leadership and taking action to meet the specific needs of potentially excluded groups.