

Housing – Supporting People Inspection Report

October 2006

Supporting People Inspection

Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

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Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

The 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.

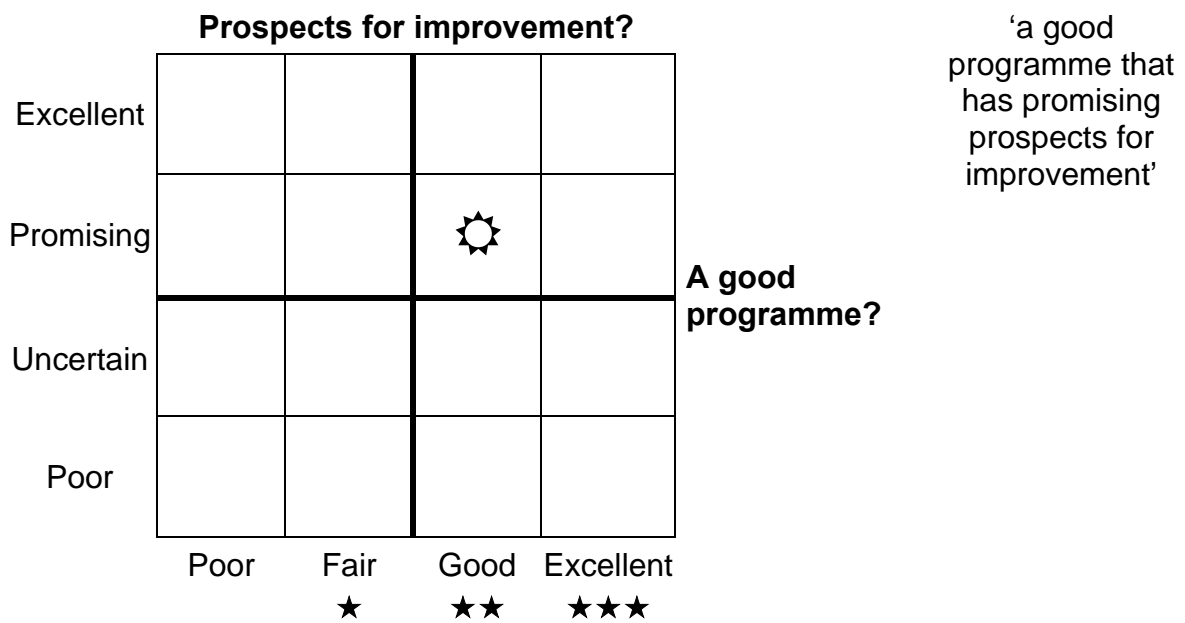
Summary

- 1 Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council (TMBC) serves a population of 211,800, living in 89,300 households. The population is projected to rise by 1.07 per cent by 2010.
- 2 Trafford is situated in the North West of England and comprises of the towns of Altrincham, Partington, Sale, Stretford and Urmston.
- 3 The age, health and economic activity of the population are similar to the national average. The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population of 8.3 per cent, is below the national average of 10.5 per cent.
- 4 The indices of deprivation 2004 place TMBC as the 120th most deprived out of 354 local authorities in England, with 22 neighbourhoods in the 20 per cent most deprived and nine in the 10 per cent most deprived.
- 5 TMBC employs 5,148 full time equivalent staff. In 2005/06 it had a gross revenue budget of £353 million and a capital programme of £44.7 million. The Supporting People grant was £5,428,894.
- 6 The Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in the area and works in partnership with the Primary Care Trust and the Probation service.
- 7 There are 31 providers delivering 132 services through 46 contracts. The largest provision is for people with learning disabilities and older people. There are no services for people with alcohol and/or drug problems, mental disordered offenders, people with HIV/AIDS and travellers.

Scoring the service

- 8 We have assessed Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council as providing a ‘good’ two-star programme 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

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

9 The Supporting People programme is assessed as making good progress because:

- key partners including health and probation are actively involved in governance structures, which are operating effectively;
- the Accountable Officer is sufficiently senior within the Council to effectively champion the programme;
- there are well-established protocols for hospital discharges;
- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are in place;
- the Council provides a range of opportunities for service users, carers and advocacy groups to influence the Supporting People programme;
- providers are highly satisfied with the advice and support they receive from the Council;
- the service review programme has been completed on schedule and service standards are improving through action planning;
- there is a range of accessible information on the Supporting People programme and this has been agreed with service users;
- the housing related support needs of potential service users has been identified;
- culturally sensitive social care and support services are being developed for BME communities;
- new services are being developed in accordance with agreed priorities set out in the five year strategy;
- most service user groups have a choice of floating or accommodation based support;
- support plans are in place for service users and there is a range of relevant support available to help them live independently;
- the value for money methodology is robust giving equal regard to cost and quality indicators; and
- there are effective negotiations with partners regarding retraction planning.

10 Less positive areas of the programme include:

- follow up work is required after service reviews to complete eligibility and value for money assessments;
- needs assessments have not been updated since the five year strategy was agreed;
- there is no conflict of interest resolution protocol for the Commissioning Body;
- the Youth Offending Team (YOT) is not represented on the Core Strategy Group; and
- the Council's approach to procurement for the Supporting People programme has not been formalised through a strategy.

- 11 We have judged the Supporting People programme to have promising prospects for improvement. We found the following strengths.
- Recommendations from internal audit and other inspections have been delivered.
 - Savings from the programme have been identified to invest in additional services.
 - Corporate procurement procedures are embedded within the Supporting People programme and procurement is appropriate considering the size of contracts and the local context.
 - Aims and priorities are clear and service plans are SMART .
 - The Commissioning Body makes sound decisions on the programme.
 - The Council is actively involved in regional and sub-regional work to learn from others and to benchmark services.
 - The Council is restructuring to achieve integrated commissioning including for housing related support services.
 - There are effective arrangements to manage staff performance.
 - IT systems are fit for purpose.
 - Budget shortfalls have been addressed.
- 12 However, improvements are still required in the following areas.
- Savings have not been maximised since value for money and eligibility assessments for some services are still outstanding.
 - Delivery of the five year strategy has not been evaluated and there have been delays in delivering some aims and objectives.
 - The Commissioning Body does not always set clear guidelines for receiving progress reports to ensure that performance is effectively monitored.

Recommendations

- 13 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 Maximise savings within the Supporting People programme by:

- *applying the eligibility criteria to all services and agreeing retraction planning where services are identified as ineligible;*
- *working with providers and commissioners to agree steady state contracts in the context of value for money assessments; and*
- *considering the viability and benefits of joint commissioning with other Administering Local Authorities.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- identification of ineligible services and the release of funding for investment in new services to meet the needs of additional service users;
- greater financial security for providers; and
- administering Local Authorities combine resources to develop new services to meet shared priorities such as specialist services.

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

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 cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R2 Improve information to the public on the programme to improve accessibility by:

- *promoting the availability of information in other formats such as large print, Braille and audio tape;*
- *developing the website to include links to other websites relevant to the programme, including the spkweb and providers; and*
- *including details of service user groups eligible for Supporting People in publicity.*

14 The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the public is informed about the Council's range of health, social care and housing services for vulnerable people;
- publicity targets people most likely to be eligible for Supporting People services;
- information is available in formats required by service users to make it accessible; and
- there is effective signposting to other information available in the housing sector on the programme.

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

Recommendation

R3 Improve service planning and performance by:

- *reviewing the five year strategy and updating needs assessments;*
- *reporting performance against the annual plan to the Commissioning Body;*
- *ensuring the Commissioning Body sets clear guidelines for receiving updates on the delivery of initiatives it has approved;*
- *agreeing a conflict of interest resolution protocol for the Commissioning Body;*
- *agreeing a procurement strategy for the Supporting People programme; and*
- *involving the Youth Offending Team in governance structures.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the robust monitoring of aims and objectives so that they are delivered on time;
- relevant needs assessments to inform commissioning priorities;
- regular reviews of procurement arrangements to ensure they meet best practice and respond to changes in the market place;
- representation of young people who offend within the programme; and
- conflicts of interest at Commissioning Body level being dealt with equitably and transparently.

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

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

Dates of inspection: 17 July to 21 July 2006

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Report

Context

The locality

- 16 Trafford is situated in the North West of England and comprises of the towns of Altrincham, Partington, Sale, Stretford and Urmston. It is one of ten metropolitan councils in Greater Manchester and covers 106 square miles. Trafford is part of the Greater Manchester conurbation situated South West of Manchester City Centre bordering with Cheshire and two fifths of the locality is rural. In contrast the Trafford Park area is home to 1,400 companies, employing in excess of 40,000 people.
- 17 The population is 211,800, living in 89,300 households and is projected to rise by 1.07 per cent by 2010. The population density of 1,979 persons per square mile is four times the regional and five times the national average. The age distribution of the population is similar to the national average. The number of elderly people is expected to increase by 27 per cent over the next 16 years.
- 18 The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population at 8.3 per cent is below the national average of 10.5 per cent. BME communities with the highest population in Trafford are Indian 1.8 per cent, Pakistani, 1.7 per cent and Caribbean 1.4 per cent.
- 19 The indices of deprivation 2004 place Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council (TMBC) as the 120th most deprived out of 354 local authorities in England and 22 neighbourhoods are in the 20 per cent most deprived and nine are in the 10 per cent most deprived. Of the economically active population 75 per cent are in employment which is comparable to the regional average. The Gross Value Added (GVA) per head of population in Trafford is £20,500, significantly in excess of the national average of £15,500 and the regional average of £14,025.
- 20 The health of people living in the borough reflects the national average, with 69.85 per cent describing their health as good. Life expectancy rates are slightly above the national average, as are the percentage of people with limiting long term illness. Teenage pregnancies levels are below the national average.

The Council

- 21 The Council has a leader and cabinet political structure comprising of four scrutiny committees chaired by non-executive members. There are 21 wards which are each represented by three elected members, with 63 members overall. The Council is Conservative led with a majority of 17 seats. Overall the Conservatives hold 40 seats, Labour hold 20 and the Liberal Democrats hold 3.

- 22 The Council has a Corporate Plan for 2005-2008, which includes the main objectives of:
- 'To improve the quality of local services for all people in Trafford.'*
- and
- 'To make Trafford a great place to live, learn, work and relax.'*
- 23 Themes include:
- safe and secure;
 - clean and green;
 - healthy and caring;
 - strong economy;
 - skilled and educated;
 - creative and enjoyable leisure; and
 - proud.
- 24 The Council employs 5,148 full-time equivalent staff and for 2005/06 had a gross revenue budget of £353 million and a capital programme of £44.7 million. The Council has five per cent of its annual budget in reserve within its Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Plan. Cashable efficiency savings of £1.3 million were achieved in 2004/05.
- 25 The Council has had previous inspections:
- under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 2004 performance was judged as 'fair', an improvement on the previous year's assessment of 'weak';
 - under CPA 2005, the harder test, the Council achieved 'two stars' and was considered to be improving well;
 - in 2005 the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) gave an assessment of two stars with promising prospects for improvement, an improvement on the one star achieved in a previous inspection; and
 - under a recent Joint Area Review (JAR) the children and young people's service was found to be providing good, cost effective services for the majority of local young people.

The service

- 26 Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council acts as the Administering Local Authority for the Supporting People programme in the area. The council received a grant of £5,428,894 for 2005/06. This is a reduction of £287,391, 5 per cent, on the previous year. The Council also receives an administration grant of £159,994, a decrease of £39,998, 20 per cent, on the previous year.

- 27 The Supporting People team is located within the Commissioning Unit of the Community Services and Social Care Directorate. It consists of:
- two Joint Lead Officers, one of which is a permanent part time post, with the other being a temporary secondment post;
 - a Service User Involvement Officer, a temporary secondment post;
 - a Review, Commissioning and Partnership Officer;
 - a Supporting People Project Administrator; and
 - a Quality and Monitoring Officer.
- 28 There are 31 providers delivering 132 services through 46 contracts. The largest provision is for people with learning disabilities, 39 per cent and older people, 18 per cent. There are no services for people with alcohol and/or drug problems, mental disordered offenders, people with HIV/AIDS and travellers.

How good is the programme?

Governance

- 29 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the area of governance. Key partners and elected members are effectively involved, with the programme having a high profile within Trafford. The Accountable Officer is sufficiently senior to champion the programme and there are links to strategic partnerships. Decision making is appropriate through the Commissioning Body, although there are gaps in performance monitoring. The Core Strategy Group's responsibility for overseeing key initiatives is increasing and there are opportunities for the voluntary sector to influence the Supporting People programme and represent service users. There are well-established protocols for hospital discharges and Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are in place. The Council is actively involved in regional and sub-regional work to share learning and best practice, although this could be more progressed in some areas. There is no conflict of interest resolution protocol in place for the Commissioning Body and the Youth Offending Team (YOT) is not sufficiently involved in governance arrangements.

Corporate commitment

- 30 The Council demonstrates corporate commitment for the Supporting People programme. Governance structures have been created to involve partners in the delivery and development of the programme and there are arrangements for the Supporting People team to access support services within the Council to provide additional resources. The elected member with responsibility for Adult Social Services and Health is a champion for the programme and is well informed on priorities through a Supporting People Policy Group and regular meetings with the chair of the Commissioning Body and the Accountable Officer.

- 31 Training and briefings are provided to elected members to enable them to understand the statutory obligations of Supporting People, and several reports have been presented to the Council and the relevant overview and scrutiny committee to report progress on delivery and performance. Members have links with commissioning partners to agree contingency arrangements for decommissioned services and to approve new services for investment.

Commissioning Body

- 32 The key partners of health, probation and the Council regularly attend the Commissioning Body, which meets monthly, and partners are required to provide alternative representation should usual attendees be unable to make meetings. Representatives are of an appropriate seniority, ensuring the programme is given sufficient profile within their respective organisations. There is a memorandum of understanding for the Commissioning Body setting out obligations for achieving the aims of the programme and this includes a terms of reference. It also outlines the membership and role of the Commissioning Body including voting arrangements which comply with DCLG guidelines. Positively, ensuring the Supporting People programme links into other strategic plans is prioritised. It is a weakness that there is no conflict of interest resolution protocol in place to ensure that such circumstances are managed equitably and transparently.
- 33 There is evidence of the Commissioning Body making decisions, including approval of the five year strategy. However, the Commissioning Body accepts that it has not asked for updates on the delivery of the strategy, with a review not planned until 18 months after it was agreed. The Commissioning Body is therefore not formally scrutinising that the strategic direction of the programme is being implemented, although reports on key elements of the strategy, such as the development of new services are received, ensuring performance is monitored in some areas. There are also examples of decisions being deferred with recommendations for further work. This ensures such decisions are based on sound information and best practice.
- 34 Performance monitoring is strong in some areas with the budget robustly monitored at each meeting, plus regular reviews of the risk register. Recommendations of service reviews are reported, although the Commissioning Body accepts its challenge on review outcomes has been limited. Performance monitoring on outcomes of the programme is under-developed as the Council awaits a model being piloted through sub-regional working with other administering local authorities to be concluded. It has not set up any interim arrangements to capture these findings, for example through service reviews, to inform future programme developments.

Core Strategy Group

- 35** The Core Strategy Group, called the Strategic Leads Partnership, is formed from relevant partner organisations providing services to people eligible for housing related support, including providers. This includes probation and the PCT. There is, however, no representation from the Youth Offending Team (YOT), whose involvement is considered best practice. Previously there have been occasional absences from probation, health and other partners due to staff vacancies and organisational restructuring, however, this has now been resolved and bi-monthly meetings are well attended. This ensures that partners responsible for delivering and commissioning Supporting People services have the opportunity to influence the programme using their expertise and local knowledge.
- 36** The Core Strategy Group has a clear role for overseeing the development and implementation of the Supporting People programme, as defined in a memorandum of understanding with the Commissioning Body, which also includes a terms of reference for the Core Strategy Group. Priorities have been set through five objectives:
- to develop shared performance indicators and targets;
 - to develop service user support outcome measures;
 - to monitor the implementation of the Supporting People Strategy;
 - develop joint commissioning arrangements; and
 - promote innovation and share good practice.
- 37** The Core Strategy Group is an effective forum for considering programme developments and their delivery. Supporting People links to other strategies, such as the Local Strategic Partnership, are explored and government proposals out to consultation are responded to. The group has also approved the Supporting People programme's annual plan, assessed performance against key performance indicators, and considered proposals to invest savings in new services to meet the housing related support needs of additional service users. There have been limited examples of work being delegated from the Commissioning Body, however this has recently improved with the Core Strategy Group now having responsibility to oversee several key initiatives, such as mapping partnership working and the development of the provider forum. This will use resources more effectively and enable the Commissioning Body to focus on decision making. Members of the group are required to declare conflicts of interest for matters arising to ensure decisions are made objectively.

Accountable Officer

- 38** The Accountable Officer is sufficiently senior within the Council to effectively champion the Supporting People programme. The Accountable Officer is Deputy Executive Director for Older People, which includes responsibility for the Commissioning Unit for Community Services and Social Care. The Commissioning Unit was established in 2006 in response to the priorities and challenges emerging through the national agenda for the integration of commissioning for housing related support and social care services. This arrangement is compatible with Supporting People responsibilities since the Commissioning Unit will facilitate and lead integrated commissioning in relation to the preventative agenda for Supporting People and Social Care Services accessing a wider range of funding streams.
- 39** The Accountable Officer has a clear understanding of the role for overseeing the programme and monitoring performance. Responsibilities include chairing the Core Strategy Group and attending the Commissioning Body in an advisory capacity. They also provide the link to the lead elected member for the programme, who they meet fortnightly, in addition to occasionally attending the members' policy group for Supporting People. Overall, this raises the profile of the programme throughout the Council and establishes support for proposals as they are being developed.
- 40** The Accountable Officer attends a range of partnership forums relevant to the Supporting People programme. This includes the Older Peoples Local Implementation Team (LIT), which they chair, the falls partnership which includes care and repair, the BME senior management forum, the over 50s partnership board, which reports to the Local Strategic Partnership and a Strategic Investors Group with the PCT. Other staff within the Commissioning Unit are involved in a range of other partnerships relating to services for older people, carers, people experiencing domestic violence and offenders. This ensures priorities for the programme are co-ordinated and agreed with partners. This uses resources effectively to target service development where it is needed most to maximise positive outcomes for service users.

Health and Probation Partnership Arrangements

- 41** Health and social care is regularly and appropriately represented on the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group and representatives confirm there is a greater understanding of Supporting People and the opportunities this provides as a result of this involvement. Probation's involvement has been less effective due to staff turnover issues, particularly at senior management level. This has now been resolved and there has been regular and productive involvement in the programme in recent months, plus arrangements are in place to provide cover should representatives be unable to attend.

- 42 Representatives from health and social care and probation have a clear understanding of responsibilities under governance arrangements and how they are required to contribute. This ensures they are actively involved in the strategic direction and delivery of the programme, particularly the approval of new services and agreeing contingency arrangements, where required, for decommissioned and remodelled services. It is a weakness however that the Youth Offender Team (YOT) remains uninvolved in the programme.
- 43 There are well-established protocols in place for hospital discharge and prevention of admission to hospital with strong performance on the number of people helped to live at home, intermediate care services and timely packages of care to support hospital discharges and provide equipment. The Council has therefore not delayed discharges and has not incurred any fines for delays.
- 44 Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are in place with attendance and commitment from the agencies involved including providers of housing related support. There is also a draft information sharing protocol. The level of high risk offenders is lower than other areas of Greater Manchester and probation considers that specialist accommodation for offenders is not an issue. The role of MAPPA and its links to the Supporting People programme has been widely promoted through governance arrangements and the provider forum. This ensures that information is shared and appropriate action is agreed and taken to work with high risk offenders to ensure public protection.

Cross Authority Partnership Arrangements

- 45 The Council is actively involved in regional and sub-regional work with other administering local authorities and has led on several projects including a model support plan, benchmarking and value for money assessments. Benefits of the work also include electronic workbooks, a guide to service reviews and agreeing supplementary standards for the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). The Council has also carried out joint reviews with one administering local authority to pilot service review processes. These are positive examples of disseminating and learning from best practice. Work could be more progressed in some areas, such as the model to assess outcomes of the programme which is still being piloted and there is no joint commissioning to pool resources to meet shared priorities, particularly for specialist services.

Voluntary Sector

- 46 The Council provides a range of opportunities for the voluntary sector, including carers and advocacy groups, to influence the Supporting People programme and represent service users. This includes attending carer and advocacy forums, involving carers and advocates in service user consultation events, and commissioning advocates to produce information on the programme for service users. Advocates have also trained service users to be involved in the service review programme. Advocates and support groups support service users to represent themselves or will do this on their behalf. Their involvement in the Supporting People programme ensures service users have a real influence, particularly those who find it difficult to communicate their views.

Delivery arrangements

- 47 The Supporting People team has relevant skills and experience to deliver the programme and the annual plan informs personal development plans which are assessed through appraisals. The staffing structure is currently under review to ensure it meets emerging priorities following delivery of the service review programme. Work plans are SMART and are monitored by the Core Strategy Group although the Commissioning Body does not receive updates. Arrangements to agree and apply eligibility criteria are weak with assessments incomplete for some services and the Council has not started to issue steady state contracts. The five year strategy was submitted on time and is signed by key partners, although it does not have a high profile and its delivery has not been assessed. Work is underway to develop new services. Providers were highly satisfied with the advice and support they receive and found the provider forum useful. Cross authority working is well established and outcomes are evident. A comprehensive risk register has been agreed and this is regularly reviewed. DCLG data uploads take place on time and workbook submissions are maximised.

Corporate Commitment

- 48 There is corporate commitment to deliver the Supporting People programme. Elected members are updated on achievements and aims and objectives for the future. Commissioning partners are involved in governance structures and the Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team contribute to a range of partnerships. This ensures effective links between strategies with shared goals and aims identified. Partners have been involved in agreeing needs assessments to inform the five year strategy, and meeting the housing related support needs of some service user groups has been prioritised for service development. Partners confirm these priorities are relevant and work is underway to assess proposals from providers on how these may be met.

Supporting People Team

- 49 The Supporting People team has a range of relevant skills and experience to deliver the programme. This is effectively led by the Accountable Officer who has extensive experience of working with older people, people with learning disabilities and people with mental health problems. Lead officers for the Supporting People team have additionally provided services directly to homeless people, people with HIV/AIDS, people with substance misuse, people with mental health problems, and to general needs council tenants such as older people living in sheltered accommodation. These skills are complimented by other staff in the team who have experience of working with people with learning disabilities and homeless people, the latter of which involved working with offenders and people with substance misuse. Several staff have project and contract management skills including benchmarking and value for money assessments. Overall this range of skills and experience ensures that the Supporting People team can effectively communicate with service users, assess housing related support needs and understand provider working arrangements to deliver services.

- 50 There are effective arrangements to manage the Supporting People team. The joint lead officers have been set clear responsibilities, split into operational and strategic areas. Specific posts are introduced to lead on priority areas such as service user involvement and research. Staff are involved in agreeing the annual plan and this informs personal development plans which are assessed at monthly one to ones and six monthly appraisals. The team has access to corporate resources for health and safety, legal issues, contracts and finance, and these provide additional resources outside of the administration budget. It also has established working arrangements with the fairer charging team. This ensures the work of the team is monitored and assessed, while enabling additional resources to be accessed as required. The staffing structure of the Commissioning Unit is currently under review, and this is positively resulting in a Supporting People team restructure to meet emerging priorities now that the service review programme has been completed and recent appointments reflect this.

Grant Conditions, Eligibility Criteria and Contracts

- 51 There have been delays in agreeing and applying eligibility criteria and this is a serious weakness. The Commissioning Body has only recently approved the eligibility criteria and assessments are outstanding for 40 services. Some elements of these services have been initially assessed through service reviews as ineligible for Supporting People funding, but there have been no changes to funding arrangements to reflect this. Some of the Supporting People grant is therefore being spent on ineligible services and potential savings have not been released to invest in new services. The Council aims to apply the criteria through a programme of assessments later this year. The eligibility criteria clearly sets out support which is eligible, occasionally eligible or ineligible for funding. Providers have been involved in agreeing the criteria. The eligibility criteria was robust when it was being piloted last year, however staff vacancies resulted in delays in this area of work being finalised.
- 52 It is a weakness that the Council has not started to issue steady state contracts following service reviews, and these are not planned until April 2007. This is due to the value for money framework only recently being agreed. Assessments have identified services as high, medium and low risk, but services need to be interrogated to agree how these scores will impact on the terms and conditions of contracts. The Council aims to work with providers later this year to resolve this. Steady state contracts would give providers longer term stability regarding funding commitments.

Five Year Strategy, Needs Mapping, Analysis and Review

- 53 The five year strategy was submitted to DCLG by the deadline of March 2005 and has been signed by key partners. It complies with DCLG guidance in content and structure, although it is not widely accessible since the executive summary is not available separately in a range of formats to give a concise overview to the full strategy.

- 54 Partners, providers and service users have been actively involved in agreeing the strategy and need assessments through questionnaires, interviews, meetings and consultation events. This will ensure that priorities within the strategy are more likely to reflect their needs and expectations. The strategy has also been informed by research and monitoring already undertaken by partners and government agencies, and there has been specific research commissioned by the Council on the housing needs of BME communities.
- 55 The strategy does not have a high profile since the Council has taken the decision not to review the strategy for 18 months. Consequently updates have not been provided to governing bodies and this is a serious weakness, particularly since decisions are now being made on the commissioning of new services. Although work is ongoing to update some, but not all, housing needs assessments these have not been collated to provide a comprehensive position to inform decision making on commissioning.

The strategy identifies clear priorities for service delivery, review and development ranking service user groups in three categories of priority. There are strategic links with other strategies and these are explicit for homelessness, learning disabilities and offenders. Health partners confirm awareness is increasing but links between strategies remains an area of development. Joint working with partners to identify shared priorities is crucial to ensure that resources are targeted effectively to provide the types and levels of services required to meet the needs of service users. Work is underway to develop new services and these will meet the housing related support needs of service user groups prioritised within the strategy.

Work Planning and Performance Monitoring and Management

- 56 The Supporting People team has a work plan in place and this is SMART. Previous plans are assessed to evaluate achievements and aims and objectives have clear timescales for delivery and allocate officers to lead on implementation. Aims and objectives reflect priorities within the five year strategy and links are made to partnerships and statutory requirements where relevant. Monitoring on the delivery of the plan is primarily the responsibility of the Core Strategy Group which is appropriate, however the Commissioning Body does not receive progress reports which is a weakness. Staff are fully involved in agreeing the work plan and monthly team meetings are used to assess performance. The work plan also informs targets set for staff performance and these are assessed through regular appraisals.
- 57 All providers are required to submit performance information, including occupancy and staffing levels quarterly. The Council is using this information innovatively to produce management reports that collate the data, particularly for move on and occupancy. This flags up where problems may be potentially developing so that the Council can offer early support and guidance. The Council is able to identify services experiencing low occupancy rates and offer support to attract referrals from other statutory bodies and elsewhere in the voluntary sector. Performance and the budget position are regularly reported to the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group.

Fairer Charging

- 58 There is a leaflet on fairer charging available to service users and the Council's website also promotes the scheme. However these do not include information on the service user groups most likely to qualify, such as older people. Without this information service users are less likely to identify its relevance to their own circumstances and be prompted to make an application.
- 59 The fairer charging policy was reviewed in 2005 and brought in line with the Social Services fairer charging policy. Arrangements are in place to ensure assessments are dealt with efficiently by the Social Services fairer charging team for which there is a service level agreement setting out responsibilities with timescales to deliver key actions.
- 60 The Council is committed to improving the take up of fairer charging assessments which are low with only 59 assessments to date and only 19 resulting in a fairer charging payment. This is evident through partnership working with the work and pensions department, welfare benefits, its largest provider and the Social Services fairer charging team. An analysis of take up in 2005/06 identified accommodation where there was low take up and these have been targeted with promotion campaigns. Further work is planned to raise awareness with sheltered accommodation wardens and rent recovery staff of the Council's main provider, although there has been limited promotion to other providers. Positively, the Council is using assessments as an opportunity to check housing benefit entitlement to maximise the income of service users.

Relationships with Providers

- 61 The Council has contracts with 31 providers, and they are primarily involved in the Supporting People programme through the provider forum which is well attended. Two providers have been elected on to the Core Strategy Group, although arrangements to represent the views of providers and give feedback from meetings attended were undeveloped. Providers were highly satisfied with the advice and support received from the Supporting People team, and training is available on a range of areas within the programme, including workbooks. New members of the provider forum were less knowledgeable about the role of the group and how they can get support. The Council offers a half day induction for new staff, but this is not widely publicised. Providers found the forum productive as an opportunity to be consulted on new initiatives and updated on programme developments.
- 62 Providers considered the service review process to be robustly and consistently applied, regardless of the size of the service or whether it is provided internally by the Council or externally by a housing association or the voluntary sector. Overall, they considered QAF scores to be appropriate and found action planning helpful for raising standards and improving scores.

Cross Authority Working

- 63** Arrangements to work with other administering local authorities within the region are well established, particularly on a sub-regional basis in Greater Manchester. TMBC regularly attends meetings and there are effective arrangements to manage projects between the partners. Councils take it in turn to lead on projects and this involves co-ordinating working group meetings and information submitted by each partner to inform proposals. They also consider best practice identified from existing working arrangements and national guidance. Positive examples include a model for assessing outcomes of Supporting People programmes being piloted, a minimum standard for support plans, and benchmarking of costs and services to inform value for money assessments. On a regional level electronic workbooks are being piloted as part of a DCLG initiative. This is a strong approach for combining resources and learning for shared outcomes.
- 64** There are currently no jointly commissioned services and this is a weakness. This would enable Administering Local Authorities to combine Supporting People grants to meet the needs of service users across several local authority areas, including for specialist services. Current provision across the region has not been mapped to identify gaps in services to inform commissioning or where there is potentially over provision.

Risk Management

- 65** There is a sound approach to risk management. A comprehensive risk register has been agreed which includes an extensive range of risks graded by likelihood, impact and severity. Action points have been agreed for each risk to increase their likelihood of being averted and staff and partnership forums have been designated to lead on each risk to ensure clear accountability. The register has been reviewed and this has been approved by the Commissioning Body. It continues to be regularly updated in response to emerging issues and there are strong links to the Council's corporate approach to risk. A particularly positive example is the Supporting People team's input into the Council's emergency planning of the flu pandemic risk assessment and contingency plan. Overall this ensures that potential risks to the effective delivery of the Supporting People programme and the delivery of housing related support to service users are acknowledged with aversion and contingency arrangements identified.

DCLG Supporting People Local System (SPLS) Data Upload

DCLG data uploads take place on time and include full extract submissions. Workbook submissions from providers are operating effectively, with 100 per cent returns for the last 18 months. The robustness of the data is cross checked with providers quarterly to ensure that information on provider staffing and payment details remain relevant. There have been training sessions for providers, who report this to be valuable support. These accurate data uploads will contribute to the DCLG's assessment of the Supporting People programme on a nationwide basis.

Service reviews

- 66 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in the area of service reviews. The Council has completed its programme of reviews on time, but follow up work is required to complete eligibility and value for money assessments. The Supporting People team has the necessary skills and capacity to carry out reviews, predominantly through validation visits. There have been joint reviews with another administering local authority to pilot approaches and Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) systems are in place. Arrangements to keep providers informed about progress with the review programme are effective. There have been improvements to services with the number of providers meeting the minimum standard increasing. An appeals process is in place for providers and this includes an independent review. Sub-regional work has awarded accreditation status to several providers and the group is sharing learning although review outcomes are not systematically discussed for shared providers. Reviews have resulted in improved configuration of services to meet housing related support needs and local priorities, although outstanding eligibility assessments suggest there is greater capacity within the programme.
- 67 The Council has delivered its service review programme on time, but eligibility and value for money assessments are incomplete for some services and this is a serious weakness. Of the 138 service reviews carried out for the programme there are outstanding eligibility assessments for 40 services. This affects 28 external services and 12 internal services, mainly for learning disability services. The first review programme did identify potentially ineligible services using basic criteria, but this was not considered robust enough to make a full assessment and these services were identified for inclusion in a follow up programme being planned. This means that some of the Supporting People grant is still funding ineligible services. Similarly, value for money assessments were introduced late in the programme and post review assessments are planned for some services to inform steady state contracts, which are subsequently being introduced later than recommended by the DCLG. The Council has therefore only partly met the DCLG guidance for completing reviews and crucially has not maximised savings from the Supporting People programme. This will reduce its capacity to invest in new services to meet the needs of other people requiring housing related support.
- 68 The service review process is based on DCLG guidance using a four stage process covering performance, cost, quality and service user involvement and outcomes. Positively, of the 138 reviews, only four have been completed through desktop assessments, and this was appropriate due to their obvious ineligibility as registered care homes. The extensive use of validation visits ensures that front line services provided to service users are robustly observed and assessed. The Council is in the process of improving its service review process by tailoring its approach to reflect the main issues for different service user groups as defined by the three provider forums it is establishing.

- 69 The Supporting People team has the necessary skills and capacity to assess services across all service areas and for vulnerable people. However, staff vacancies midway through the programme resulted in delays in finalising eligibility criteria and value for money assessments, and this contributed to the follow up work required for some reviews outside of the DCLG deadline.
- 70 The Council has not involved any partners in validation visits to provide additional expertise and to externally validate the process as consistent and fair. However it is a strength that the Council did carry out joint reviews with a neighbouring administering local authority to pilot approaches and identify improvements to processes.
- 71 Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) systems are in place to ensure consistency and this has been applied robustly in reviews. This is demonstrated by improvements in the performance of providers following validation visits. The following table provides this information in detail, with key improvements being an increase in services meeting the minimum standard of level C or above from 32 per cent at the first validation visit to currently stand at 88 per cent. Services exceeding the minimum standard have risen from six per cent to 11 per cent, during this period. Eight services do not currently meet the minimum standard and action plans are in place to address this. However, providers meeting the minimum standard are not encouraged to agree action plans to further raise standards in service delivery.

Table 1 QAF assessments

	Level D	Level C	Level B	Level A
Results of initial validation visit	69%	26%	4%	2%
Current results	12%	77%	7%	4%

- 72 The findings of reviews are regularly reported to the Commissioning Body, however it accepts it does not robustly challenge the outcome of reviews. This is a weakness which could potentially result in inadequate scrutiny of recommendations or consideration of the implications this may have on providers and service users, particularly where services are decommissioned or remodelled.

- 73 An appeals process for providers is in place to enable review decisions to be challenged within a clearly defined timeline. This provides three stages with the provider moving on to each stage if they continue to be dissatisfied with decisions made. It includes an independent review involving co-opted representatives to offer independent scrutiny or additional expertise, which is best practice. The Council has not received any appeal requests.
- 74 The Council has been involved in sub-regional work to agree an accreditation questionnaire and has awarded accreditation status to five providers for other administering local authorities to passport. The Council is also awaiting awards to two providers from other administering local authorities to enable it to passport. The Council has been involved in developing the sub-regional passporting approach for sheltered housing services. Joint accreditation of providers streamlines processes and reduces the administrative burden for providers.
- 75 With the exception of the pilots at the beginning of the programme the Council has not carried out joint reviews with other administering local authorities using the same providers to further reduce this burden, to share resources to work more efficiently and to ensure consistency in review approaches. Outcomes of reviews are not systematically discussed with neighbouring authorities with shared providers to identify best practice or weaknesses in service delivery. Administering local authorities do inform each other of any proposed decommissioning in the event that this may increase demand for similar services in neighbouring areas. The sub-regional group is sharing best practice and learning to develop a guide for future service reviews. It is also developing supplementary QAF standards around living environment and service user reviews.
- 76 Arrangements to keep providers informed about progress with the review programme are effective. An annual timetable of reviews is publicised at the beginning of the financial year and a letter is sent six weeks before each review is due to begin. The review process is explained through a pre-review meeting, and this includes agreeing mutually convenient times for validation visits and arrangements to involve staff and service users in the process. Ongoing communication is in place between the Supporting People team and providers throughout the review process. Positively, the provider has two weeks from when the draft report is issued to submit additional evidence to improve their assessment before the report is considered by the Commissioning Body. Providers are informed in writing within two weeks that reports have been signed off and a certificate is issued as recognition when minimum standards have been achieved. Delivery of action plans is effectively monitored by the Supporting People team and providers have been set a deadline of 28 days to address high risks to give clear priorities for improvement.

- 77 Positive outcomes from service reviews are demonstrated through improved configuration of services to meet housing related support needs and local priorities, however the grant eligibility assessments outstanding for 40 services means this could potentially be more extensive. Following reviews three ineligible services have been decommissioned, saving £148,500, and six services have been remodelled to provide services to an additional 27 service users. Three additional services have already been commissioned and this will provide floating support to six service users with physical disabilities from BME communities, accommodation-based support to 40 frail elderly service users and accommodation based support to 20 service users with substance misuse. These projects will meet priorities within the five year strategy and address shortfalls in provision.
- 78 In addition, £100,000 has been reserved to develop pilot schemes up to a period of two years. These are services for young people, people with drug and/or alcohol misuse, offenders and people with HIV/AIDS. Meetings have been held with providers invited to submit proposals to be assessed by a panel of partners including the Drug and Alcohol Team (DAT) and probation. The Commissioning Body will make the final decision for commissioning projects and this will meet one, some or all of the top five priorities within the five year strategy.

Service user involvement

- 79 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the area of service user involvement and this is an area of strength for the Council. Service user, carer and advocate forums are involved in agreeing the Service User and Carer Involvement Strategy, and this provides a range of opportunities for service users to get involved in the Supporting People programme, including through service reviews. Several highly successful consultation events have taken place to involve service users, carers and advocates in the programme and films documenting outcomes have been shared with others by DCLG in recognition of this best practice. Projects are also underway to recruit and train service users to assess improvements to services following service reviews.
- 80 The Council has comprehensively mapped established groups for service user, carer and advocate involvement and it is involving these and other service users to agree its three year Service User and Carer Involvement Strategy. The draft strategy is aimed at service users to access and is written in plain language, including easy to understand information about the Supporting People programme. It also gives a range of ways service users can get involved and asks for feedback through a questionnaire to inform the final strategy. Positively, this will identify service user preferences for consultation on the programme using ways which meet their needs and expectations. This work will comply with the Council's overarching consultation policy which co-ordinates consultation across the Council to ensure best practice and statutory obligations are considered, links to other strategies are identified and duplication is avoided.

- 81 The Council is already highly effective at involving service users, their carers and advocates in the Supporting People programme. Particularly impressive is a series of films produced involving socially excluded groups, older people and people with learning disabilities. These have been partly funded by the DCLG and other administering authorities in the North West of England, with TMBC managing the events and film production. The DCLG recognises these initiatives as best practice and of particular relevance to the national Supporting People programme. DVDs have been nationally distributed to other service users, carers, advocates, providers, commissioners and administering local authorities in recognition of this. Copies have also been distributed to the service users taking part to provide feedback on the project and to inform them of outcomes resulting from their contribution.
- 82 The films are highly accessible for service users since their visual format ensures they are easy to understand for people with limited literacy skills. Information is presented by service users who describe the housing related support they have received and how this has had a positive impact on their life, including moving on from accommodation based support to live independently in their own home. This approach has relevance to existing and potential service users who can directly relate to such circumstances which they may potentially share. It also encourages them to get involved in consultation initiatives for their local programme.
- 83 The Council and the other administering local authorities in the North West have been creative in the ways they involve service users, carers, advocates and partners. A recent event to consult on national guidance for the programme included theatre to explore personal circumstances eligible for housing related support, work shops to discuss options available from the perspective of the audience, and a facility for participants to make a video diary about their own experiences, including how Supporting People services had assisted them to live independently. The film resulting from this event is particularly effective for sharing positive outcomes for service users through the programme with others.
- 84 Service users, their carers and advocates have been effectively involved in service reviews. Providers are consulted about the most appropriate and convenient way to consult service users during reviews, usually through meetings or individual interviews, and family members and advocates are invited to be involved. All service users receive a postal survey as an alternative option to give their view and positively a learning disabilities advocacy service has been used to assist in interviews with service users and to produce a pictorial version of the questionnaire. This ensures that service users are consulted at times and in ways which suits their needs and preferences, and encourages service user input into the review process to ensure it is robust.

- 85 Service users are also assessing services through peer review projects. An advocacy service for older people has identified and trained service users to assess whether services have improved following reviews in sheltered accommodation schemes. The Council is also recruiting other service users through advertisements and provider nominations to extend assessments to other services. A housing association has produced a training package funded by the Supporting People programme to develop the skills of service users to carry out this work.

Access to services and information

- 86 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in the area of access to service and information. Information is available on the Supporting People programme and fairer charging. Information is accessible through public access points and the website, and translation in to different languages is available, although information in other formats is not offered. It is a strength that service users and carers have been involved in producing information. The website is easy to navigate and pages relevant to the programme are clearly signposted, however links to related sites are not comprehensive. There are clear referral routes and allocations arrangements for some service users have been revised to improved fairness and accessibility.
- 87 There is a range of information on the Supporting People programme for existing and potential service users, and these are widely available through public access points, the Council's website and at some accommodation schemes. It is a strength that service users and carers have been involved in producing information through a working group. This ensures information is relevant, meeting their needs and expectations. However, with the exception of the website information does not actively promote service user groups eligible for housing related support. This would make it very difficult for potential service users to identify the opportunities presented through the programme for independent living.
- 88 Information includes strap lines in different languages to offer translation, although its is a weakness that other formats such as large print, Braille and audio tape are not promoted to ensure they are accessible to people with disabilities. Leaflets have been produced in colours compatible with the needs of people who are visually impaired and text type links are given for people who are verbally impaired. Positively, the website has the facility to translate web pages into other languages or convert them in to large print or audio formats.
- 89 There are two directories of services covering supported housing and services for people over the age of fifty. Both are comprehensive, listing providers including contact details, voluntary agencies available for advice and the national directory through the spkweb website. They also promote consultation and involvement and invite feedback on content. Agencies are regularly contacted to verify that information is up to date and relevant. The directories of services publicise housing related support options available to potential service users.

- 90 The Council's website contains relevant information on Supporting People including directories of services and leaflets promoting the programme and fairer charging. It is easy to navigate and information pages for the programme are accessible through a search facility and an A-Z of services. There are web links to the national directory of services but not the homepages for spkweb or providers, should service users want to know more about the Supporting People regime and housing related support available. The Council has plans in place to expand the website to improve the range of information available.
- 91 It is a weakness that the Council does not currently have a Better Care: Higher Standards publication. This was last produced in 2002/03 and is no longer in circulation for the public to access. Better Care: Higher Standards sets out the range of health, social care and housing services for vulnerable people, including Supporting People services, for potential service users to access.
- 92 The fairer charging scheme is publicised through a leaflet which is easy to follow through a range of frequently asked questions. This invites assessments through the Supporting People and Fairer Charging teams whose contact details are clearly signposted. It also explains how to make a complaint should service users be dissatisfied with how claims have been assessed.
- 93 There are clear referral routes for potential service users to access services. This is mainly through the directories of services where providers and the types of housing related support offered are publicised, with contact details for making enquiries. It is a strength that the Council has worked with partners to revise the allocations policy for people with learning disabilities and set targets for lettings to older people from BME communities in sheltered accommodation. This is improving accessibility to accommodation and support services and ensures referral arrangements are fair and accessible to applicants.

Diversity

- 94 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the area of diversity. Housing related support needs have been identified through needs assessments and research projects are identifying the types and levels of housing related support required, particularly for vulnerable people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. Partnership working has promptly responded to findings by developing culturally sensitive social care and support services. The Supporting People programme has access to additional resources within the Commissioning Unit to assist with projects to reduce barriers to access for BME communities. Information on the Supporting People programme is accessible, with translation available in main languages, although other formats, such as audio tape, Braille and large print are not offered. Service reviews robustly assessed whether services reflect different cultures and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliance is being evaluated through a supplementary service objective within the QAF.

- 95 The housing related support needs of vulnerable people have been identified through needs assessments carried out to inform the Supporting People five year strategy. This has been further developed through several research projects to identify the types and levels of housing related support required by service users where there is currently limited or no provision. Priority has been given to identifying the diverse needs of vulnerable people from BME communities in response to barriers to access identified through service reviews.
- 96 The Council actively involved providers, stakeholders and service users in identifying housing related support needs, considered research already available on levels of demand for services and mapped current provision within the borough to identify any gaps. However, it is a weakness that mapping was not extended to surrounding areas in Greater Manchester to assess whether provision within the locality is sufficient to meet demand to inform priorities for development.
- 97 Robust research on the housing and related needs of BME communities in Trafford has been completed and this has set clear objectives to improve access to services and information, consultation mechanisms, health, employment prospects and the housing stock. The research involved working with the community to interview 65 people. The BME Service Improvement Partnership has been set up to respond to these findings and a service improvement plan has been agreed. Positively a representative of the Supporting People team chairs this partnership. The partnership efficiently co-ordinates commissioning priorities to agree investment in services involving housing associations, social care providers, carers and representatives from health, education, and childrens services.
- 98 The partnership has set clear objectives which include developing culturally sensitive social care and support services for BME communities within the own homes. This has been promptly responded to by investing savings from the Supporting People programme into a BME floating support service for adults with physical disabilities. This should benefit up to 20 service users and is an effective example of joint commissioning with Adult Services, also investing in the project. It also aims to develop providers so that they have the skills and facilities to meet the needs of BME communities more effectively.
- 99 Other achievements include the development of a day care centre for people over fifty from BME communities in partnership with voluntary organisations. This is not funded by Supporting People but does promote and provide advice on services provided through the programme. A worker at the centre is part of the Commissioning Unit and the Supporting People team have accessed this additional resource, free of charge, to assist with research and translation. This includes locating over a hundred South Asian people over the age of 60 to involve in future consultation, providing outreach to improve access to services for South Asian Elders and carers, and to raise awareness of services available from Social Services, housing and health care provision.

- 100 The Commissioning Unit has recruited a BME Community Enterprise and Learning Development Officer to lead on projects to reduce barriers to access for BME communities identified through service reviews. The post will develop the BME consultation forum involving local people eligible for services provided by the Council. The forum will be consulted on strategies and is looking to develop volunteers within the community. It has already agreed the role of the BME Community Enterprise and Learning Development Officer. The BME Community Enterprise and Learning Development Officer is also involved in a BME task group working to develop a community based forum to be launched later this year. Overall, these initiatives will further improve the Council's understanding of the needs of BME communities to inform commissioning priorities.
- 101 The Council has used a consultant to research lettings to BME service users in sheltered schemes and compared this to other administering local authorities in the region. The results have been considered by a strategic review of community alarms and sheltered accommodation and targets have been set for BME lettings in areas with significant BME communities. This will prioritise improving accessibility to ensure that service users are representative of the local demographic population. Some schemes already exceed targets and the Council is working with providers to identify best practice to share with others.
- 102 The Council has worked with partners to ensure services are more accessible for people with learning disabilities. This has resulted in a revised criteria for lettings and providers are now involved in the panel assessing referrals. This should ensure a more equitable process.
- 103 Information on the Supporting People programme is accessible to people who do not speak English as a first language. Leaflets and the directories of services include strap lines offering translation in main languages. The website also has the facility to convert web pages into other languages. However, it is a weakness that other formats, such as audio tape, Braille and large print are not offered. Pictorial leaflets for people with limited literacy skills and films produced on the Supporting People programme and service user involvement also ensure information is accessible to a range of service users.
- 104 Service reviews robustly assessed whether services reflect the cultures of the communities they serve and are welcoming and accessible to all. Reviews evaluate diversity policies and procedures, training to staff on diversity issues, and whether services are culturally sensitive to service users. Gaps in provision are clearly identified within review reports and areas for improvement are included within action plans.
- 105 DDA compliance of accommodation based support services has not been assessed by the Supporting People programme, for example through reviews. However, through its sub-regional work the Council has issued a supplementary service objective to the QAF to providers on the living environment. This will shortly assess whether buildings are accessible to people with disabilities and identify any remedial action required to ensure compliance with statutory obligations.

- 106** The Council currently achieves level 2 of the equality standard and impact assessments are assessed quarterly. Impact assessments consider the likely effects of proposed policies on people, depending on their ethnic origin. The Council has a corporate cohesion and diversity group which a representative of the Supporting Team attends and this receives updates on the BME service improvement plan and ensures links to other work within the Council. There is also a BME senior management forum which offers the opportunity for housing associations and social care providers to challenge the Council on performance and its response to the national agenda. Positively, the Supporting People team is involved in a learning disabilities sub-group, which aims to develop the Council's workforce to work more effectively with BME communities.

Outcomes for service users

- 107** Strengths outweigh weaknesses in the area of outcomes for service users. New services are being developed in accordance with agreed priorities set out within the five year strategy and service users, carers and advocates are fully involved in the Supporting People programme. Services have been evaluated against the QAF and action plans have driven improvements to services. Most service user groups have a choice of floating or accommodation based support, although levels of floating support in Trafford are below the regional and national average. The Council performs well in the number of people with physical disabilities helped to live at home and reductions in the number of residential/nursing care admissions. Support plans are in place and service users have access to a range of relevant support to help them live independently.
- 108** Plans to reinvest savings are improving how services meet local need. Several new services are already under development and the Council is in the process of inviting bids from existing providers to design additional services to meet the housing related support needs of service user groups prioritised within the five year strategy. This will address some of the gaps in provision for people with alcohol and/or drug problems, mental disordered offenders, people with HIV/AIDS and travellers. Research is being carried out to update needs assessments for some services user groups. However, it is a weakness that all needs assessments have not been updated within the five year strategy to ensure they remain relevant for commissioning purposes.
- 109** Service users, carers and advocates are fully involved in the Supporting People programme through consultation events, service reviews and surveys. They have also helped to agree information on the programme for the public to access. This will ensure that the programme is meeting their needs and expectations.
- 110** There have been robust assessments of services against the QAF and action plans have been agreed where minimum standards have not been met. This has resulted in service improvements with most services now meeting or exceeding the minimum standard.

- 111 The Council offers choice to service users regarding services available. Most service user groups catered for under the programme have a choice of floating or accommodation based support. However, levels of floating support are below the regional and national average. The Council has remodelled two health and disability accommodation based projects into floating support services to provide more flexibility in housing related support available.
- 112 The use of direct payments provides service users with the opportunity to procure their own housing related support services and so far 73 service users have benefited from this scheme. People with physical disabilities helped to live at home has increased and is above average for similar councils. The Council has also achieved greater than planned reductions in the number of residential/nursing care admissions and is rated as a very good performer in this area.
- 113 Support plans are in place for most service users and these are regularly reviewed with service users, who have the option to keep a copy. The Council has worked with providers where support plans have been absent or where there have been concerns about their quality. Support plans are crucial for agreeing with service users the housing related support they require to help them to live independently. They also assist providers to design and deliver services.
- 114 Service users receive a range of relevant support to help them live independently and deal with difficult situations. This includes:
- benefits and budgeting advice;
 - advice on accessing training courses;
 - life-skills including cooking and healthy living;
 - courses on self-esteem and confidence building;
 - assistance with health care;
 - assistance to access local schools when service users have children;
 - advice on re-establishing relationships with family members; and
 - help with employment options.
- 115 The Council does not comprehensively assess outcomes of the Supporting People programme and this is a weakness. It is however involved in piloting a framework produced by the sub-regional group to address this. No shared targets or performance indicators have been agreed with other administering local authorities to give a clear focus on outcomes for the programme. The Council is assessing outcomes of the service through the performance indicators submitted. This looks at outcomes for service users in terms of moving on to appropriate accommodation.

- 116** Mystery shopping by the inspection team found the Supporting People team to be very helpful and efficient, offering comprehensive and appropriate advice. Enquiries were also dealt with effectively through public reception points. Staff had access to relevant information to appropriately sign post to other agencies for assistance if required. However, a serious weakness was found when advice was sought for people suffering domestic violence. On this occasion staff signposted to the Police for assistance rather than agencies specialising in providing confidential advice and support available through the Supporting People programme.

Value for money

- 117** There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in the area of value for money. Average unit costs are lower than the regional and national average for most services and costs are regularly reviewed. There is a robust approach to assess value for money and this complies with DCLG guidance. Low and high risk services are identified to inform future review programmes, although this does not recognise that high costs may be justified for some services. High and low cost services have been subject to early review. Discussions have been carried out with providers and partners regarding remodelling and decommissioning decisions and retraction planning arrangements are in place. Procurement arrangements for new services are appropriate given the local context. Arrangements have not however been formalised in a procurement strategy and eligibility and value for money assessments were incomplete for some services. There has been no specific training session on value for money for providers who did not always fully understand the approach.

How do costs compare?

- 118** Average unit costs for Supporting People services in Trafford are 36 per cent lower than the regional average and 25 per cent lower than the national average. When community alarms and sheltered housing are excluded average unit costs are 35 per cent higher than the regional average and 44 per cent higher than the national average. This is due to the high proportion of learning disability services it provides, which traditionally attract higher costs. Such services represent 33 per cent of the Council's Supporting People grant.
- 119** When unit costs are broken down by 13 service users groups the Council is below the regional and national average for nine services and below the national average for two others. Unit costs exceed the regional and national average for people with physical and sensory impairment, up to 9 per cent higher and young people leaving care, up to 33 per cent higher.

- 120** A breakdown of unit costs and how they compare with regional and national averages is provided in the following table. These cost comparisons are to be viewed with caution since they are based on data provided by administering local authorities to the DCLG in 2003. The Council has continued to monitor unit costs and these have risen to £24.70 per unit and £41.49 per unit excluding community alarms. This will be influenced by inflationary uplifts awarded to providers. The unit costs excluding community alarms and sheltered accommodation has fallen to £139, influenced by the decommissioning of high cost services following reviews.

Table 2 Unit Costs for Supporting People services 2003/04

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Trafford	£ 0.51	£ 21.62	£ 21.62	£ 140.66
Region	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

How is value for money managed?

- 121** The administration grant has been benchmarked with neighbouring administering local authorities. Participants assessed how much of the Supporting People grant was spent on staffing and results ranged from between 1.7 per cent and 2.6 per cent, of which TMBC was the highest. This did not identify any weaknesses in working practices due to relatively small staffing levels involved in delivering programmes of this size.
- 122** There is a clearly defined and agreed approach to identifying value for money in the Supporting People programme and this is robust. It is based on learning from another administering local authority. The framework complies with DCLG guidance and considers costs against recommended levels where this is available, for example, overheads. A strength of the approach is the equal weighting of quality and cost. The approach scores services on value for money and points are awarded for strategic relevance, performance, and service user and stakeholder feedback. The total points scored will determine whether the service has been evaluated as red, amber or green, with red reflecting poor quality services with high costs and green reflecting high quality services with low costs.

- 123** Positively, this approach will be used to effectively identify high and low risk services to inform the Council's next service review programme. This will enable resources to be targeted efficiently to prioritise services for assessment. It is a weakness that the approach does not recognise that high costs may be justified for some services, for example, those which are specialist, requiring staff with extensive qualifications and experience. These services would be assessed as amber under the approach.
- 124** Providers have had the opportunity to comment on the value for money framework individually and through the provider forum. Providers understand the spreadsheet they have to complete to submit information to inform assessments, but their understanding of the overall approach is not always comprehensive. There have not been any specific training sessions to providers to launch this initiative, and this is a weakness, however providers have benefited from individual support from the Council if requested. Formal training gives providers greater opportunity to self-assess against the criteria to identify efficiencies or justify service delivery arrangements for high cost services.
- 125** High and low cost services have been subject to early review. This prioritises high costs as potentially providing poor value for money and low costs as a potential indicator of unsustainable services. The review of one low cost service confirmed under-funding and an increase in the Supporting People grant was approved to ensure sustainability.
- 126** Services, including legacy services, have been interrogated in the context of DCLG data and cost outliners however this is not comprehensive for eligibility and value for money. The eligibility criteria and value for money framework have recently been revised and are now robust, but approaches used during reviews were basic.
- 127** Value for money assessments were incomplete for some services during reviews. Decisions on the eligibility of some services with above average costs have been deferred until a follow up programme of eligibility assessments using the new criteria can be carried out. Decisions have therefore not been made as to whether it is appropriate to fund these services through Supporting People or alternative funding streams. This has delayed decommissioning and funding for investment in new service being released.
- 128** Reviews scrutinised costs and made comparisons with similar services in Trafford and unit cost averages regionally and nationally, as is best practice. Quality was assessed using the QAF. The Council has since introduced its value for money framework to co-ordinate these assessments and consider other indicators to determine value for money scores. These have been completed outside of the review process and therefore have not influenced review recommendations to inform remodelling and decommissioning.

- 129** Where services are confirmed as not representing value for money discussions are carried out with providers to agree remodelling or decommissioning decisions. The Council is also effective at negotiating with partners regarding retraction planning where this is required. There is a contingency plan of £138,000 to fund decommissioned learning disability services. Funding responsibilities of services identified as ineligible have been transferred with immediate effect with minimal disruption to service users who continue to receive necessary care and support of appropriate standards.
- 130** The Council is not working on a cross authority basis to achieve consistent approaches to procurement or to actively pursue joint procurement. However, considering its modest budget for developing services this is understandable. The Council has taken the decision to recognise providers who have at least met the minimum standards against the QAF as an approved list of providers eligible to bid for contracts. The Supporting People programme is able to tender contracts through the approved list since contract values are below European Union competitive tendering thresholds.
- 131** The council is confident that the range of providers it works with will have the skills and capacity to deliver these services and this approach will provide greater opportunity for small and specialist providers to compete. This will be particularly relevant for the development of its BME floating support service. Overall this does not competitively test the market or combine resources with other administering local authorities to invest in specialist services. However for the time being this would seem an appropriate approach for a Council of this size beginning to develop new services, particularly since it intends to open its tendering process to other providers if initial proposals do not meet the Council's expectations. It is a weakness however that this approach has not been formalised in a procurement strategy for the Supporting People programme so that arrangements are fair and transparent. This would also ensure arrangements are regularly reviewed and reported to the Commissioning Body so it can decide whether they remain compatible with the strategic direction of the programme and developments in the market place.

Summary

- 132** Overall we judge the Council is delivering a good Supporting People programme.
- 133** Governance structures are operating effectively involving partners, elected members are well informed regarding programme developments and the Accountable Officer is sufficiently senior within the Council to champion the programme. There are a range of opportunities for service users, carers and advocacy groups to influence the Supporting People programme, including information to the public.

- 134** Providers were positive about the advice and support they receive and considered service reviews to be effective for driving up standards in service delivery. The housing related support needs of potential service users have been identified and the review programme was delivered on time. Savings have been identified and there are effective negotiations with partners regarding retraction planning. New services are being developed in accordance with five year strategy priorities, and this includes culturally sensitive services for service users from BME communities. Support plans are in place and there is relevant support to assist service users to live independently.
- 135** Eligibility assessments and decisions following value for money evaluations are outstanding for some services and needs assessments have not been reviewed to ensure they remain relevant. The Youth Offending Team (YOT) is not represented on the Core Strategy Group and there is no procurement strategy for the Supporting People programme.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 136** Drivers outweigh barriers in this area. The programme has been evaluated by internal audit and recommendations from this and other inspections have been effectively implemented to drive service improvements. Overall, there is a track record of improving assessments through previous inspections. Savings for the programme have been identified and this is enabling the Council to meet the financial commitments of the programme and invest in additional services. A comprehensive value for money framework is in place but implications for services assessed as high risk have not yet been agreed. Savings within the programme have therefore not been maximised. Procurement procedures are embedded and sub-regional work is beginning to evaluate outcomes of the Supporting People programme. There have been implementation delays in some key areas such as eligibility criteria assessments.
- 137** The Council has a track record of implementing change within the Supporting People programme. There has been a comprehensive assessment of the programme by internal audit and service review processes have been tested through a peer review involving a neighbouring administering local authority. The Council also has a strong track record of involving service users, carers and advocates in service developments. It has responded to findings from other inspections assessing services provided to the people it serves with improving scores evident. The Council has effectively implemented recommendations from these initiatives to drive service improvements.

- 138** The Council is making improvements through the achievement of service aims. It has scrutinised the eligibility of some services and this has identified £482,285 in savings. This has enabled the Council to meet the financial commitments of the programme by bridging a significant overspend resulting from the platinum cut. It has also been able to award inflationary uplifts to providers to improve their capacity to sustain and improve housing related support to service users. New services are being approved by the Commissioning Body and capital funding has been secured for a substance misuse/homelessness project and a frail elderly scheme. An additional £100,000 has been reserved for further service developments and these will meet the housing related support needs of service user groups given priority within the five year strategy. The Council is meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups. Culturally sensitive services are being developed for BME communities and more detailed research on the housing needs of travellers is underway.
- 139** There have been implementation delays in some key areas and this is a weakness. Comprehensive value for money assessments have recently been carried out for services, but this should have been earlier to fully inform service review outcomes. Eligibility assessments of 40 services remain incomplete although plans are in place to address this. Savings within the programme for investment in new services have therefore not been maximised. The Council has also delayed issuing steady state contracts. These would give longer term security to providers on funding commitments.
- 140** The Council has capitalised on opportunities for additional resources for the programme and has secured £477,720 in pipeline funding since the shadow strategy. This has resulted in increased provision by a total of 75 units, some of which are floating support, benefiting teenage parents, people with physical disabilities, older people and the frail elderly. This is enabling more people to live independently in their homes or move on accommodation.
- 141** Some services have been remodelled to increase the capacity of the Supporting People programme, but this is not extensive. Six services have been remodelled to provide additional units of housing related support under existing contracts. One of these now offers more choice to service users through the introduction of floating support.
- 142** The Council is robustly assessing whether Supporting People services represent value for money, but its response to these assessments is underdeveloped. The Council has recently agreed a comprehensive value for money framework based on best practice guidelines from the DCLG and learning from another administering local authority. This has effectively scored services to inform whether they are low, medium or high risk, and these assessments will determine future service review programmes. However, the Council is only just beginning to work with providers to determine whether any action is required in response to these findings, particularly for high cost services. This will be determined using the eligibility criteria, which has not been fully applied to all services. The Council will not have a full understanding of potential savings within the programme until this work has been completed.

- 143** The Council has had a lead role in developing benchmarking data through cross authority working. This has achieved significant outcomes, enabling administering local authorities to compare the cost of services with others on a regional and national basis. This has informed value for money assessments as part of service review programmes.
- 144** There is a clear focus on value for money within the Supporting People team's annual plan and the five year strategy. The Council is also involved in a value improvement project receiving DCLG funding to explore joint procurement of services through cross authority working. The Council's corporate procurement strategy complies with Gershon principles and responds to best practice such as developing e-procurement. The Council has met its efficiency target of 2.5 per cent and all directorates have contributed to this. There are procurement champions at elected member and executive management team level and there is a procurement and commissioning forum involving representatives from all directorates. These arrangements ensure that procurement procedures are embedded within the Council so that there is compliance with best practice and corporate priorities.
- 145** Sub-regional work is beginning to evaluate outcomes of Supporting People programmes, including for service users. A model is being piloted involving TMBC, and this focuses on the type of housing related support provided to service users including referrals to external support agencies, financial assistance and activities to encourage social inclusion. This will address current arrangements to assess outcomes which are under-developed.
- 146** The Council has a track record of improving assessments through previous inspections. Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) have improved from 'weak' to two stars and the Council is considered to be improving well. Adult social care scored 3 out of 4 and is improving. Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) assessments have improved from one to two stars with promising prospects for improvement. A recent Joint Area Review (JAR) found the children and young people's service to be providing good, cost effective services for the majority of local young people.

How does the service manage performance?

- 147 There is a balance of drivers and barriers in this area. Aims and priorities are clear and these link to other Council and partnership strategies. Plans are SMART and particularly effective at assessing the delivery of previous plans. It is a weakness that the delivery of the five year strategy has not been assessed, and there have been delays in delivering some objectives, such as steady state contracts. Elected members are well informed about the programme and the Accountable Officer is of an appropriate senior level to raise the profile of the programme. Key partners are involved through the governance structures which are well attended and operating appropriately. The Commissioning Body has made appropriate decisions on key elements of the programme, although it does not always set clear guidelines for receiving progress reports. Benchmarking data demonstrates that costs are below average for most services and the quality of services has been robustly challenged against the QAF. The Council is actively involved in regional and sub-regional work to learn from others.
- 148 The Council has set clear aims and priorities through the five year strategy and the annual plan, and there are links within other Council and partnership strategies. This raises the profile of the Supporting People programme and joins up resources to meet shared priorities and streamline services for service users. The five year strategy and the Supporting People team plan include a range of objectives to develop the programme. Plans are highly effective at assessing the delivery of previous plans and reporting achievements. Plans are SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time based) with objectives clearly delegated to staff, governance structures and partners to deliver, with timescales for completion. However, it is a weakness that the delivery of the five year strategy is not being assessed until later this year. The Commissioning Body has therefore not been fully informed of whether the Supporting People programme is on course to deliver against the strategic priorities it has agreed.
- 149 The five year strategy is ambitious, largely reflecting aims set by the DCLG for Supporting People programmes. The Council has made progress in carrying out service reviews to identify savings and assess the quality of services. It is also developing new services to meet additional housing related support needs, involving service users, carers and advocates in the programme and researching the housing needs of BME communities. It is however behind in other areas, such as steady state contracts which are not being introduced until 2007.
- 150 Elected members are informed about the aims and achievements of the programme and a cabinet member acts as a champion to ensure there is elected member involvement. The Accountable Officer is of an appropriate senior level to promote the programme within the Council and through partnerships. This enables investment to be linked for shared priorities. The Chair of the Commissioning Body is the lead officer for delivering the capital investment programme for the Council and this positively enables Supporting People commissioning priorities to be delivered in partnership with potential providers.

- 151** The involvement of key partners through the Commissioning Body is effective, with meetings well attended. Overall, representatives have a clear understanding of the Supporting People regime and their expected contribution. The Commissioning Body has made appropriate decisions on key elements of the programme and priority has been given to developing new services and monitoring budgets. However, the Commissioning Body has on occasion not set clear guidelines for receiving progress reports, for example the five year strategy and eligibility criteria, for it to assess whether aims and objectives are being effectively delivered against agreed timescales.
- 152** Partners and providers are also engaged through the Core Strategy Group, and this has recently been delegated more responsibility for areas of work by the Commissioning Body. This supports the Commissioning Body so it can focus on decision making. Providers are additionally involved through the provider forum, which is well attended. Participants find the forum useful for being consulted on the programme and its developments. The forum is being developed into three groups designed around service user groups with similar housing related support needs. This will make the work of the forums more focused, involving providers supporting these service user groups.
- 153** There are effective arrangements to manage performance. IT systems are set up to monitor key performance indicators set by the DCLG, data required for the SPLS upload and contract payments, which are made on time. Performance is regularly reported to the Commissioning Body and there are examples of additional information being requested before decisions are made to ensure they are based on a robust understanding of key issues. Risks to the programme are regularly reviewed and reported through a comprehensive risk register.
- 154** Recent arrangements to drive and deliver value for money services are robust, although initial assessments carried out through service reviews were not as comprehensive. The Council has a key role in agreeing benchmarking data as part of its sub-regional working and this has resulted in costs being compared with other Administering Local Authorities regionally and nationally. This demonstrates that costs are below average for most services.
- 155** It is positive that the Council is challenging the quality of services through service reviews. Services meeting or exceeding the minimum standard of the QAF have increased from 32 to 88 per cent, since the first validation visit, through action planning. Providers agree this process is helpful for driving up the quality of services.
- 156** There is learning from other administering local authorities. The Council is actively involved in regional and sub-regional work and this has demonstrable outcomes such as the development of electronic workbooks, a guide to service reviews, supplementary standards for the QAF and a pilot to assess outcomes resulting from Supporting People programmes. The Council has also carried out joint service reviews with one administering local authority to pilot its process. These are positive examples of sharing information and learning from others to inform service developments.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 157** Drivers outweigh barriers in this area. The Council is expanding the Commissioning Unit to achieve integrated commissioning using a range of funding streams. Staff vacancies are used as an opportunity to identify additional skills for recruitment in response to emerging priorities and there are effective arrangements to train staff and manage their performance. Memorandums of understanding are in place for governance arrangements to clarify roles and responsibilities. IT systems are effective for managing budgets and monitoring performance and budget shortfalls have been addressed. Savings are available for investment in new services and a contingency fund is in place for decommissioned services. The corporate procurement policy complies with government guidelines and efficiency targets have been achieved. Procurement is appropriate considering the size of contracts and the local context and the Council can evidence some inward investment. Cross authority working has not resulted in any joint commissioning.
- 158** Human resource planning is effective. The Council is currently carrying out a comprehensive review of the Community and Social Care directorate's structure. This will move away from current arrangements determined by the age of service users being catered for. Positively, new arrangements will significantly expand the commissioning unit to include mental health, learning disability and housing strategy responsibilities. They will also respond to developments in the national agenda for health and social care to achieve integrated commissioning using a range of funding streams.
- 159** The Supporting People team ensures it has the right skills to meet the aims of objectives of the programme. Staff vacancies are used as an opportunity to consider whether additional skills are required to meet emerging priorities and posts have been redesigned to reflect this. The team has access to additional resources in the Council's IT, finance, contracts and legal departments. It can also access specialist posts within the Commissioning Unit, for example to assist with research and to engage with BME communities. The Council has responded to gaps at a management level within the Supporting People team by seconding an additional lead officer to support the other lead officer who works on a part time basis. Priority areas for development have been delivered through the introduction of specific posts, such as the recruitment of a service user involvement officer. This approach to staffing enables the Council to operate flexibly, recruiting additional staff to meet new commitments within the programme and allowing the team to draw upon resources from across the council and its partnerships, as required.
- 160** There are effective arrangements to manage staff performance through regular one to ones and appraisals, and there are monthly team meetings to assess the progress of the programme and share learning. Staff have received training in areas relevant to their work areas and this is supported by peer support from other departments in the Council and sub-regional partners. This enables staff to carry out their roles and implement Supporting People initiatives.

- 161** Memorandums of understanding are in place for governance arrangements, and these clarify the roles and responsibilities of partners to ensure effective and productive relationships, although there is no conflict of resolution protocol for the Commissioning Body. This would ensure such situations are managed equitable and transparently. The memorandum of understanding between Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body clearly sets out how resources are used to support decision making at Commissioning Body level.
- 162** IT systems are being effectively used to manage budgets and monitor performance and there are a range of proformas available to ensure work is carried out consistently. Spreadsheets have been set up to score services in terms of value for money by calculating cost and quality indicators.
- 163** Financial planning is robust. The Supporting People programme has prioritised addressing budget shortfalls carried forward from the early years of the programme, plus £100,000 has been set aside for new services being developed. A modest sum of £20,000 has been reserved for emergencies, should any arise. A contingency fund of £137,000 has been agreed to provide alternative funding for decommissioned learning disability services, and this will ensure service delivery is not disrupted. The Council is investing in the financial capacity of providers to sustain service delivery arrangements by awarding an inflationary uplift of 1.5 per cent for 2006/07. The Supporting People budget for 2006/07 is projected to balance.
- 164** The Council has prioritised meeting the needs of BME communities, and comprehensive research has taken place to identify housing need and related support. This has been promptly responded to through partnership working, and outcomes include the development of the floating support service for adults with physical disabilities from BME communities. Service reviews consider equality and diversity by ensuring equality and diversity policies are in place and assessing whether services have been designed around service user cultural and religious requirements. Reviews have not assessed whether accommodation is DDA compliant however, work is underway to assess this through supplementary standards for the QAF. A Social Inclusion Framework is being agreed and this is considering housing related issues with links to Supporting People.
- 165** The corporate procurement policy complies with government guidelines and efficiency targets have been achieved. The Supporting People programme has sought advice and expertise from the Council's procurement specialists and this has informed its approach when developing new services, which are appropriate considering the size of contracts and the local context. Cross authority working has not resulted in any joint commissioning and this is a missed opportunity to combine resources to develop specialist services across several local authority areas.
- 166** The Council has attracted inward investment for pipeline services, service user consultation events and through its participation in cross authority working, for which several grants have been received to develop initiatives. The Council is working with providers to develop accommodation using capital investment and it has committed to funding the housing related support of service users benefiting from these schemes.

Summary

- 167** We consider that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement.
- 168** The programme has an effective track record of delivering improvements. Recommendations from internal audit and other inspections have been implemented and there are improving assessments through inspections. Savings for the programme have been identified to invest in additional services, although these have not been maximised since value for money assessments on some high risk services are incomplete. Procurement procedures are embedded and outcomes from the Supporting People programme are beginning to be assessed.
- 169** Performance management is mixed. Aims and priorities are clear and plans are SMART. There are effective arrangements to assess delivery of previous plans and reporting outcomes, however delivery of the five year strategy has not been assessed and there have been delays in delivering some objectives. Elected members are well informed about the programme and the Accountable Officer is of an appropriate senior level. Governance structures are operating appropriately involving partners and providers. The Commissioning Body makes sound decisions on the programme, although it does not always set clear guidelines for receiving progress reports. Benchmarking data indicates most services are low cost and the quality of services has been assessed against the QAF. The Council is actively involved in regional and sub-regional work to learn from others.
- 170** The Council has the capacity to improve. Crucially, it is restructuring to achieve integrated commissioning using a range of funding streams. There are effective arrangements to manage staff performance and IT systems are appropriate. Budget shortfalls have been addressed and savings are available to invest in new services. Procurement is appropriate considering the size of contracts, although there are no plans for joint commissioning with other administering local authorities.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

Table 3

Measure	Trafford	England
Population (mid-2004) ³	212,700	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	18.7	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than white British 2004)	8.4	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁴	1.8	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁵	146	-

³ Source: midyear population estimates (2004).

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

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

Figure 2 Percentage of the population⁶ in each age group compared with England

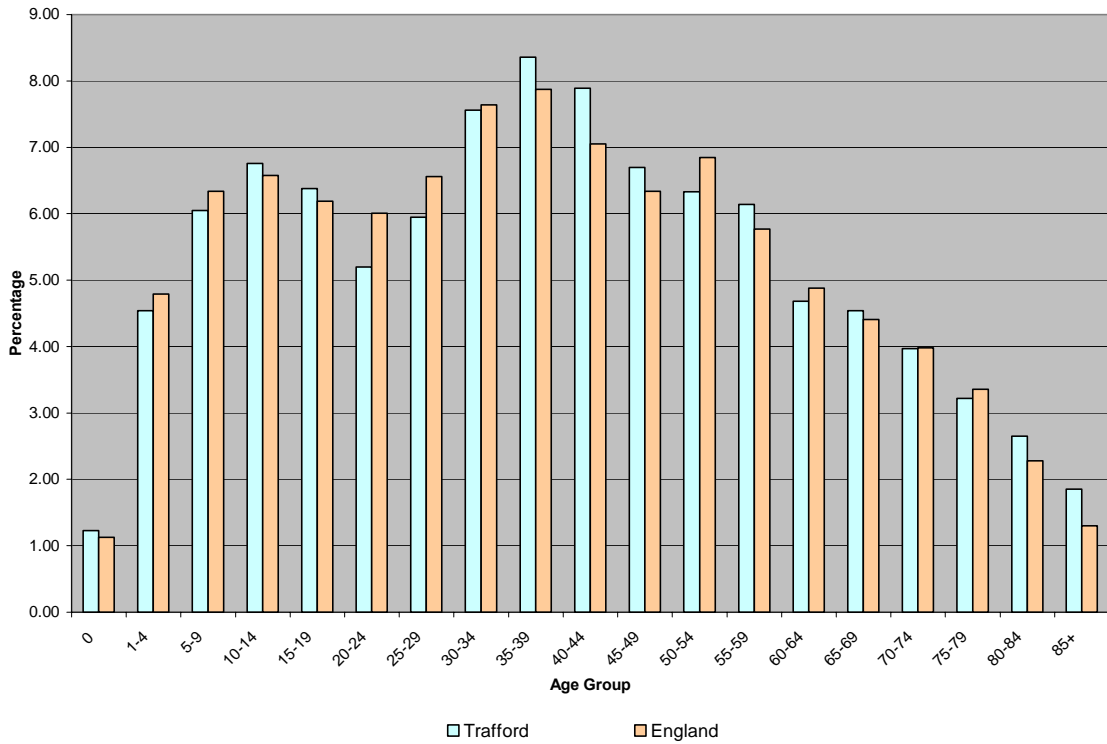
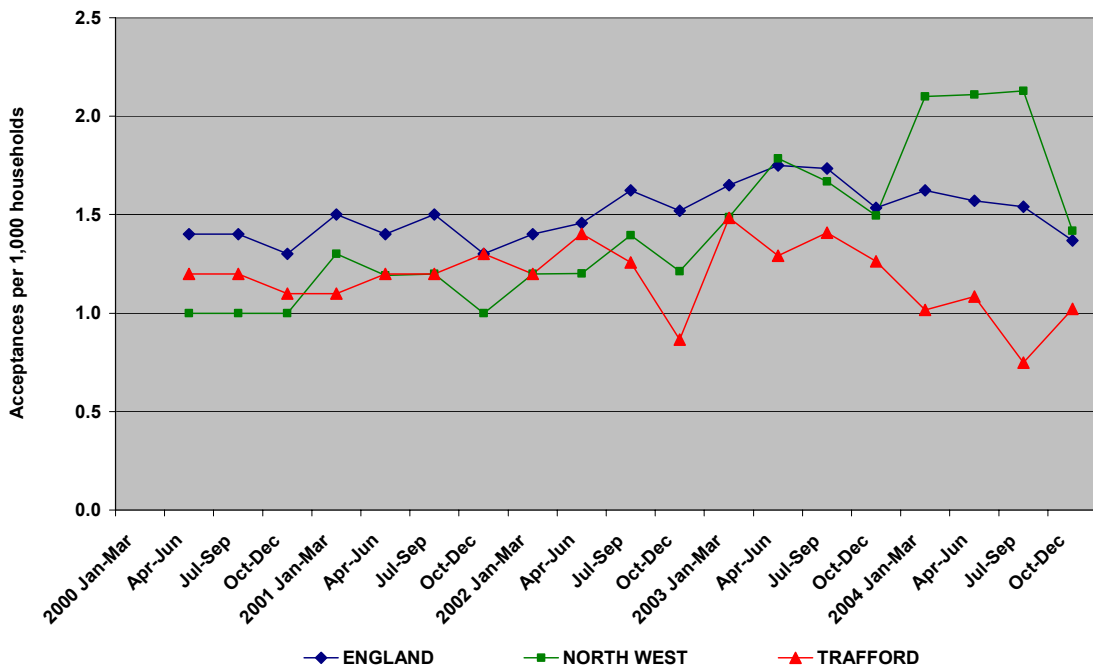


Figure 3 Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



⁶ Source: mid-year population estimates (2004).

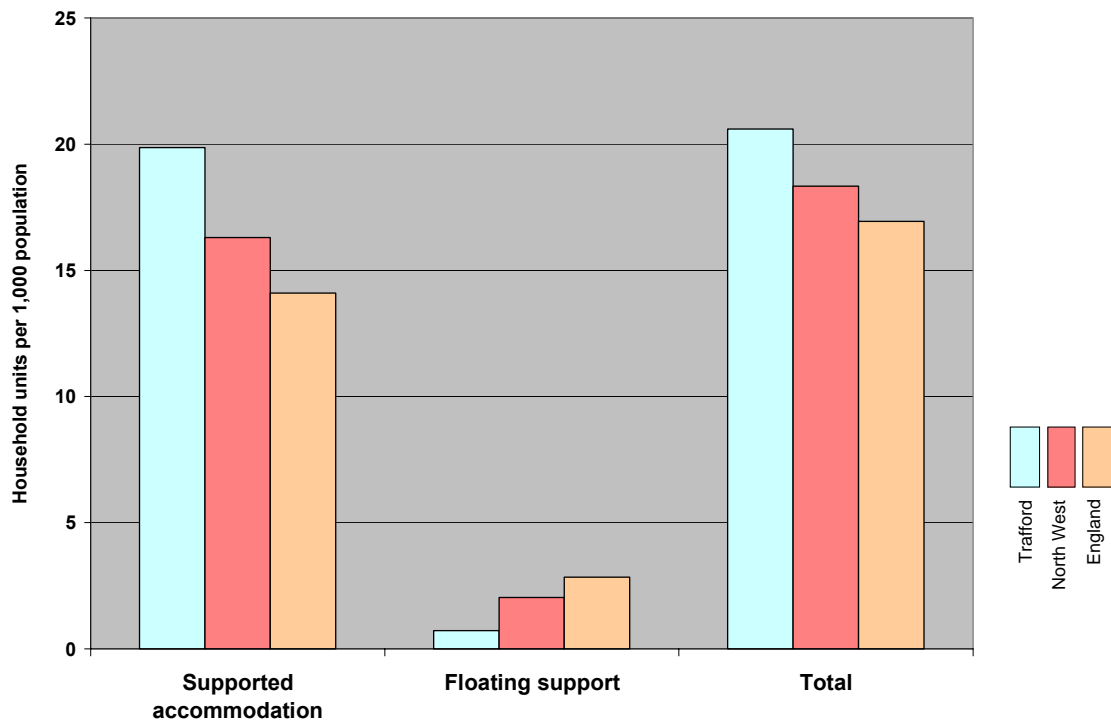
Performance information

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

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

Supporting People data

Figure 4 Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁷



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

Figure 5 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁸

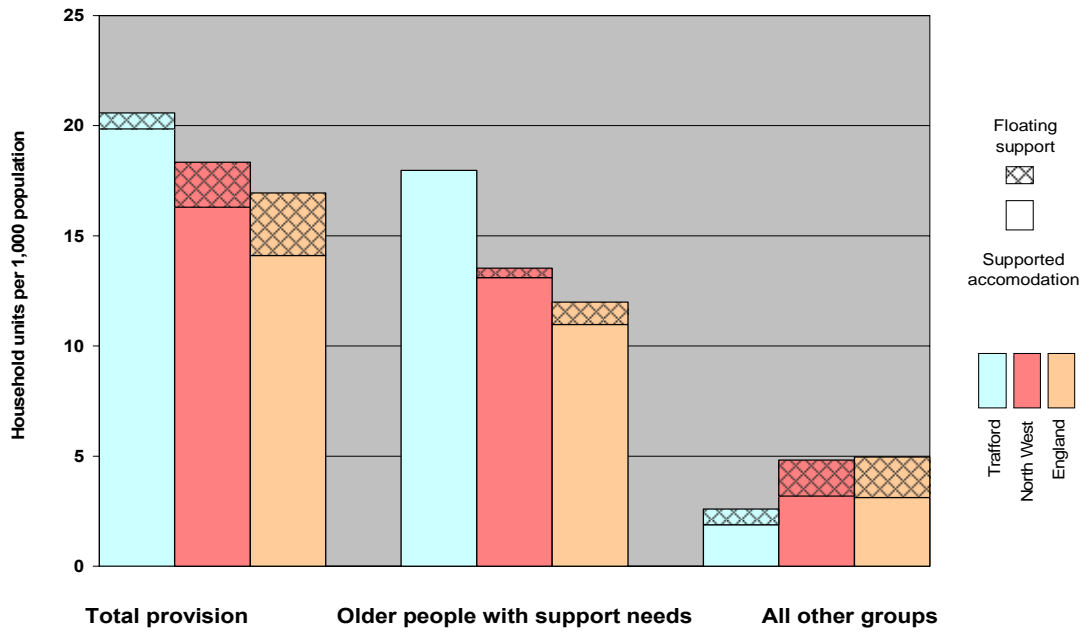
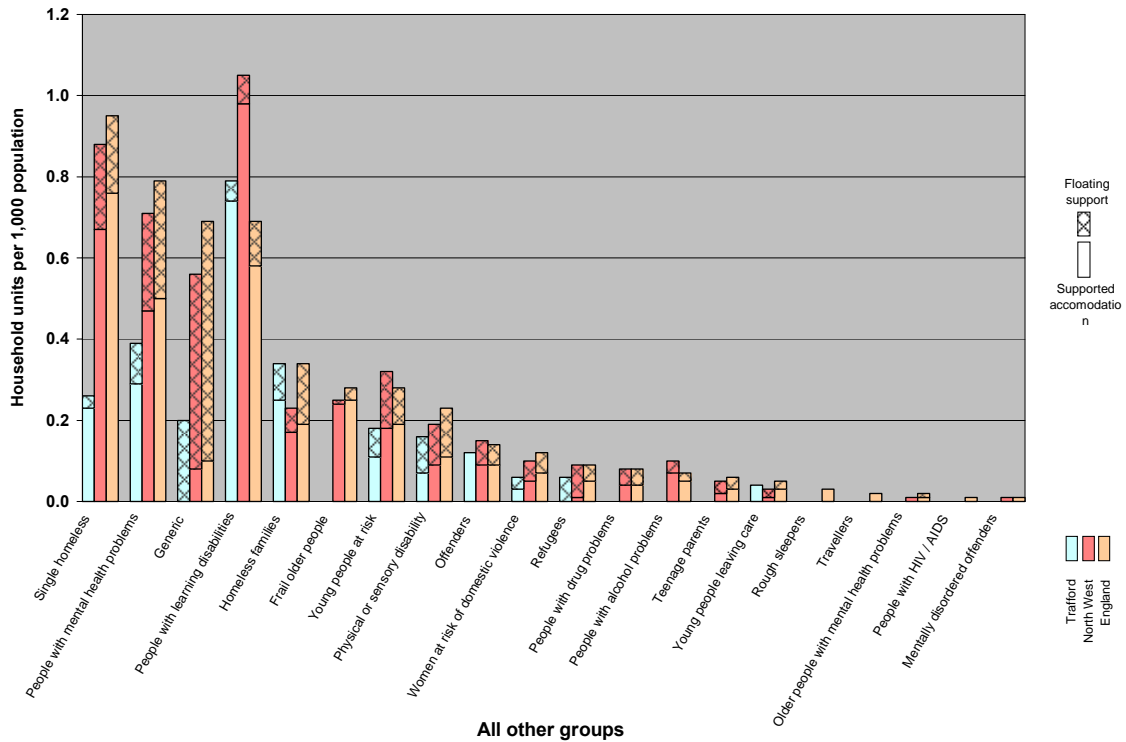


Figure 6 Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁹



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

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

Table 4 Funding for Supporting People¹⁰

Trafford	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 5,612,217	£ 5,716,285	£ 5,428,894
Pipeline allocation	£ 135,688	£ 342,032	£ -
Administration grant	£ 231,731	£ 199,992	£ 159,994

Table 5 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹¹

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Trafford	£ 0.51	£ 21.62	£ 21.62	£ 140.66
Region	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

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

¹⁰ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

¹¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003.

Figure 7 Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹²

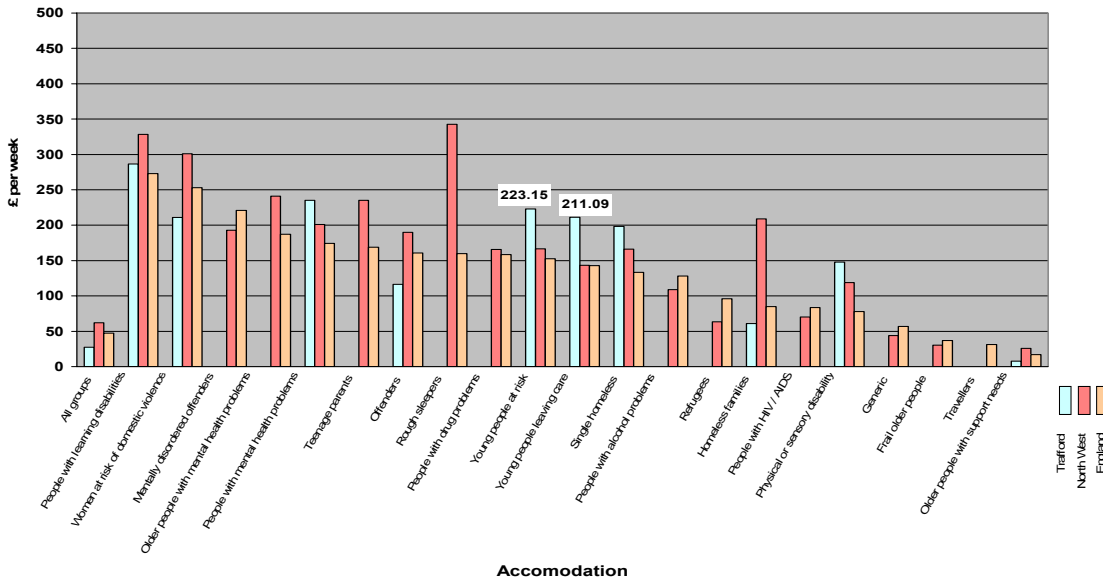
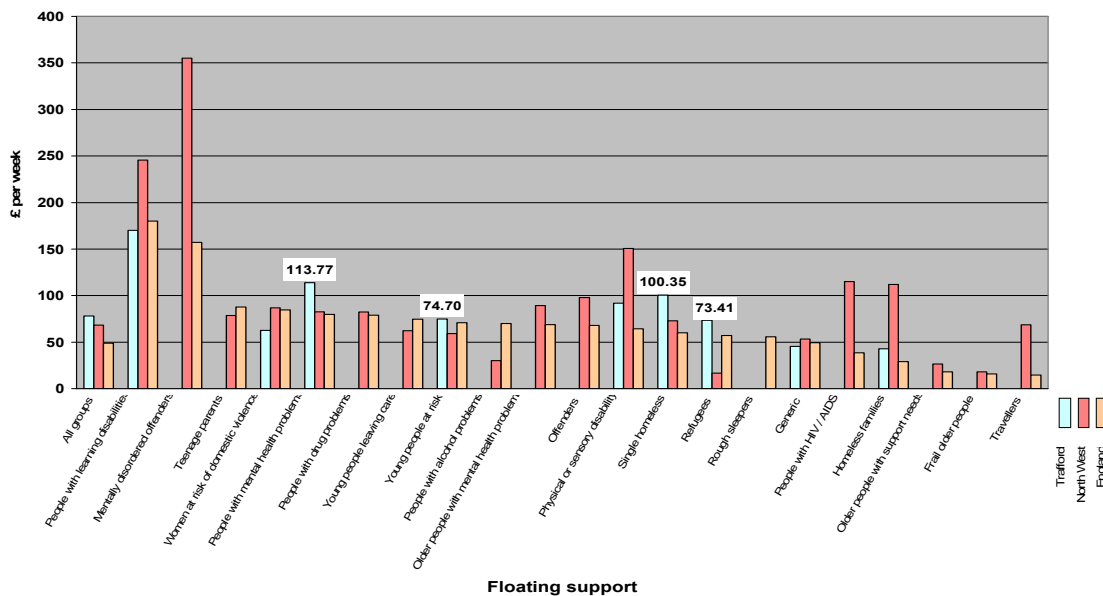


Figure 8 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹³



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

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

Figure 9 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours,¹⁴ all metropolitan boroughs and all English councils (2004/05)

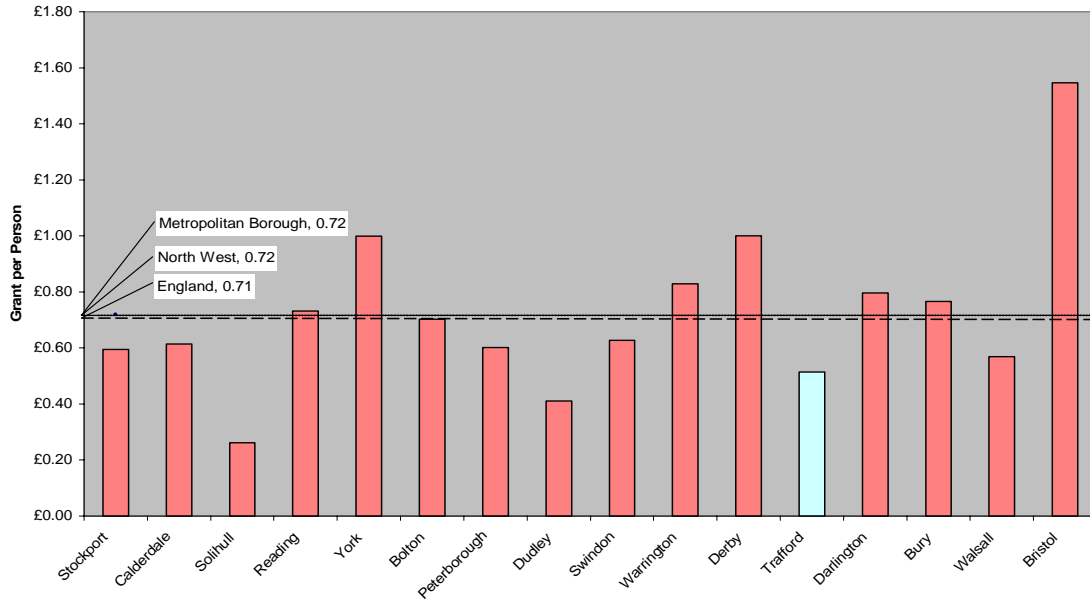
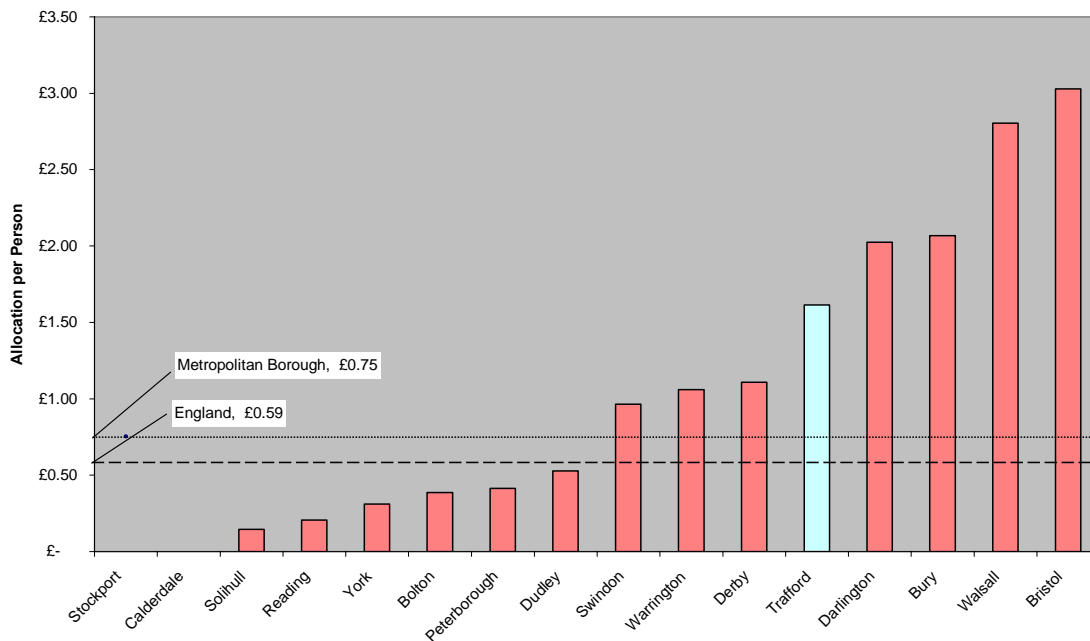


Figure 10 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours,¹⁵ all metropolitan boroughs and all English councils



¹⁴ A comparator group of similar councils.

¹⁵ A comparator group of similar councils.

Figure 11 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)¹⁶

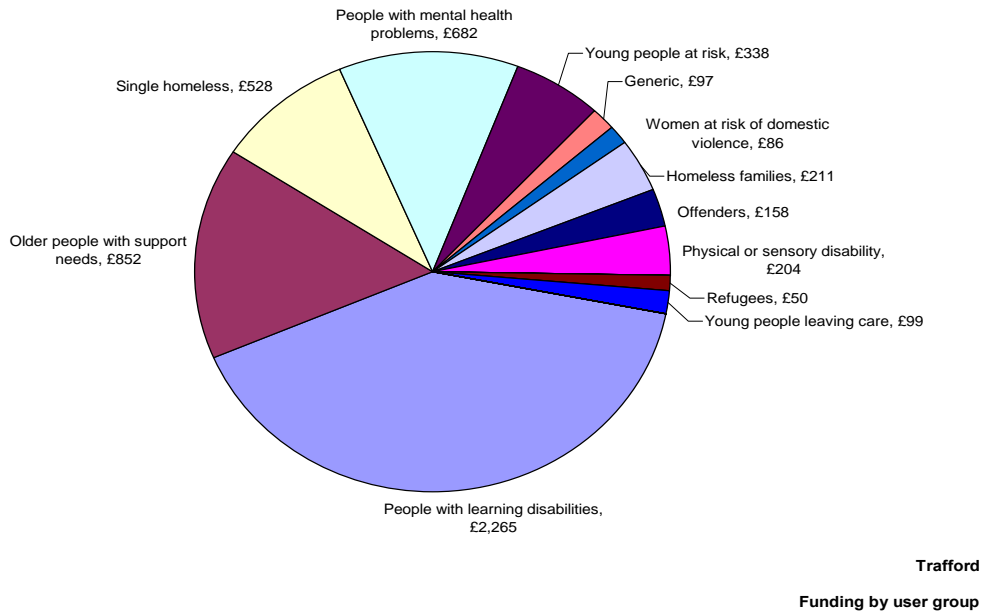
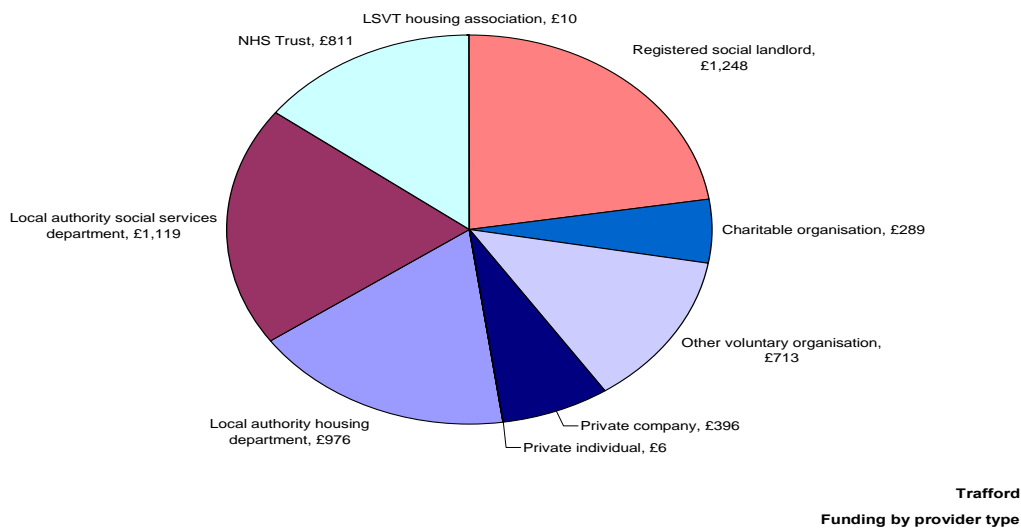


Figure 12 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)¹⁷



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

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

Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

Table 6

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

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

Table 7

Trafford	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31)
Above average (●●●)	Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Delayed transfers of care (D41) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)

Trafford	
Average (***)	<p>Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40)</p> <p>Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6)</p> <p>Admissions of supported residents aged 18 to 64 to residential/nursing care (C27)</p> <p>Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30)</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51)</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)</p>
Below average (**)	<p>Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39)</p> <p>Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29)</p> <p>Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57)</p>
Significantly below average (*)	<p>Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5)</p>

Best value performance indicators

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

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

Table 8

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

Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on-site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
 - corporate strategies impacting on the Supporting People programme;
 - plans and strategies of partner agencies impacting on the Supporting People programme;
 - research on housing related support needs;
 - the five year Supporting People strategy;
 - the 2005/06 Annual Plan;
 - service review reports;
 - information considered by the Commissioning Body, Core Strategy Group, provider forum and elected members;
 - financial information on the Supporting People programme including the value for money methodology; and
 - information to service users and other stakeholders on the Supporting People programme.

Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - visiting supported housing schemes to talk with service users, managers and frontline staff;
 - visits and phone calls to public access points to assess information available for service users;
 - demonstration of the Council's website;
 - a questionnaire survey and focus group of providers of housing-related support services;
 - meetings with Supporting People lead officers and support staff;
 - meetings with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive;
 - meetings with Social Services commissioning managers, representatives of the Probation service and the Primary Care Trust; and
 - observing meetings of the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group.

Appendix 4 – Positive practice

- 1 The Council is highly effective at involving service users, their carers and advocates in the Supporting People programme. Successful initiatives include:
 - producing films on Supporting People for older people and people with learning disabilities. Service users present the information, talking about the housing related support they have received and how this has had a positive impact on their life. This is effective for informing service users about Supporting People programmes and its potential benefits;
 - a consultation event for service users took place which included theatre to explore personal circumstances eligible for housing related support. Attendees participated in work shops to discuss options available in these scenarios and they were able to make video diaries about their own experiences, including how Supporting People services had assisted them to live independently. The film resulting from this event shares these positive outcomes with others; and
 - service users are being trained to assess whether services have improved following service reviews. An advocacy service is assisting service users to help them understand and engage with this project.