

Supporting People Inspection Report

November 2006



Supporting People Programme

South Gloucestershire 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 former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)¹ 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.

¹ Now the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

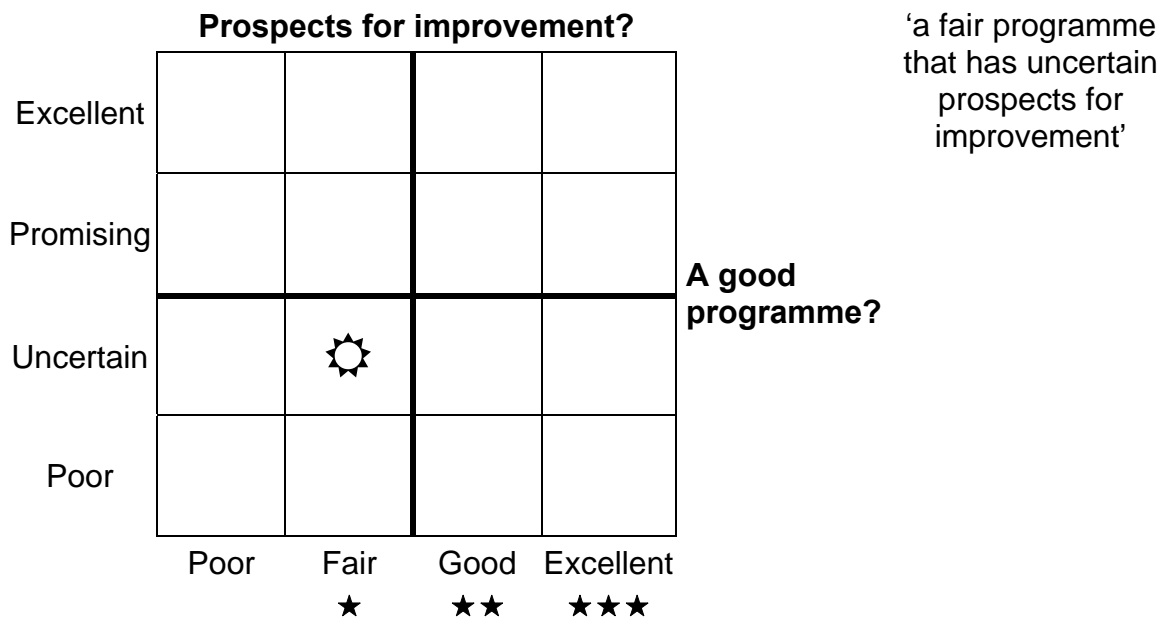
Summary

- 1 Overall, South Gloucestershire Council is providing a 'fair' administration of the Supporting People programme with 'uncertain' prospects for improvement.
- 2 The programme is delivering positive outcomes for service users which is a considerable strength. However, there are limited opportunities for service users to influence the development of services.
- 3 There is good support and leadership for the programme in the Council and partnership working is well developed. The programme is firmly linked to the Council's corporate priorities and there is a wide understanding of how Supporting People services help people to live independent lives. This sits well with national and regional agendas and delivers benefits for local people.
- 4 The Supporting People team are delivering the programme on a day to day basis well, relationships with service providers are strong and there is sound financial management of the programme. Service reviews have led to some improvements in services and the Council has demonstrated its commitment to cross authority working to share good practice.
- 5 The Council has recognised that there are elements of the programme that need further improvement, including the availability of suitable move-on accommodation. There are also weaknesses in access and referral arrangements and information about the programme is not always easily accessible.
- 6 The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills, which are supplemented by training and support from other corporate services and there are plans in place to further increase capacity.
- 7 Service reviews have not been undertaken consistently and robustly, review outcomes were not consistently challenged and action plans arising from reviews are of variable quality. Performance management and securing value for money in the Supporting People programme is not adequate.

Scoring the Supporting People programme

- 8 We have assessed South Gloucestershire Council as providing a 'fair', one-star programme that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart²



Source: Audit Commission

- 9 We have assessed the Council's administration of the Supporting People programme to be 'fair' because:
- the programme is delivering some positive outcomes for service users;
 - there is a comprehensive service directory and range of information leaflets for Supporting People services, and information on the council's website is easily accessible;
 - governance arrangements are well developed with evidence of effective decision-making, and wider partnership arrangements are working well;
 - there are clear links between the Supporting People strategy and the Council's strategic priorities;

² The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the programme is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a programme that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent programme (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the programme, also on a four-point scale.

- the Supporting People team are delivering the programme on a day to day basis well. Relationships with providers are strong and the financial management of the programme is prudent;
 - service reviews have led to improvements in service configuration, there has been some joint commissioning of services and the Council has demonstrated its commitment to cross authority working to share good practice; and
 - a medium term financial strategy has been agreed for the Supporting People programme and service reviews have resulted in savings and efficiency gains.
- 10 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:
- access and referral arrangements are inconsistent, information is not always easily accessible and service users have not been involved in developing information sources;
 - progress with ensuring equality and diversity for service users has been slow, there is variable knowledge about the needs of service users and as a result services are not being tailored to meet individual needs;
 - there are limited opportunities for service users, their carers and advocates to be involved in developing services and establishing priorities and there is no involvement of service users in either governance or performance management arrangements, and there has been limited engagement with hard to reach groups;
 - the choices available for some service users are limited, there are gaps in service provision for some client groups and there is a shortage of suitable move-on accommodation;
 - the effectiveness of the governance arrangements have been adversely affected by a lack of engagement by the Probation Service;
 - service reviews have not been undertaken consistently and robustly, review outcomes were not consistently challenged and action plans arising from reviews are of variable quality and are not being robustly monitored;
 - contract monitoring arrangements are not adequate and there are few steady state contracts in place; and
 - the approach to securing value for money in the Supporting People programme is not robust, cost comparisons have not been updated on a regular basis, benchmarking information has not been used effectively and the approach to procurement is weak.

- 11 The programme has 'uncertain' prospects for improvement because of the following positive factors.
- There are clear aims and objectives for the Supporting People programme and there is strong corporate commitment to and leadership of the programme.
 - The number of services provided and service users has increased during the last three years.
 - The Council has identified areas for further improvement and has supported capital projects that will deliver additional supported accommodation.
 - The Council has taken a prudent approach to the financial management of the programme and it has a positive approach to learning from others.
 - The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills, which are supplemented by training and support from other corporate services and there are plans in place to further increase capacity.
- 12 However, there are some significant barriers to improvement. These include:
- performance management is underdeveloped and contract management arrangements lack robustness;
 - performance on meeting targets is mixed and the service review process was inconsistently managed;
 - the Council's track record in involving service users is poor;
 - the Council is unable to demonstrate sustained improvements in diversity;
 - the Council is unable to demonstrate sustained improvements in delivering value for money from the Supporting People programme;
 - a lack of capacity has affected the team's ability to deliver all elements of the programme on time;
 - the IT system requires improvement; and
 - the current approach to procurement is inadequate.

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 costs³ 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 service users, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improve access to services by:

- *reviewing all information in conjunction with service users and providers and ensure that Supporting People services are adequately described;*
- *ensuring that information about services reach front line staff including service providers;*
- *ensuring that all information includes language straplines and clear guidance on how to obtain it in different languages and formats;*
- *ensuring that information is regularly updated, including information on the council's website;*
- *ensuring information about the complaints procedure is easily accessible; and*
- *ensuring that front line staff across all partner organisations have sufficient knowledge and understanding of services to enable them to sign post and refer service users effectively.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- current and potential service users will understand what support services are available and how to access them;
- all stakeholders will be able to access up to date and comprehensive information in person, by phone and through the internet; and
- front line staff will be equipped to give appropriate advice and guidance on how to access support services.

The implementation of these recommendations will have high impact with medium costs. They should be fully implemented by May 2007.

³ 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 the delivery of the Supporting People programme by:

- undertaking an assessment of the capacity of the Supporting People team to effectively deliver all elements of the Supporting People programme;*
- ensuring the effective engagement of all partners in the delivery of the programme;*
- putting in place arrangements to deliver steady state contracts with robust negotiations on costs and outcomes;*
- reviewing the information and reports presented to the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group to ensure that they include all the necessary information for effective decision-making and scrutinising performance;*
- ensure there are robust arrangements in place to monitor service review action plans and that ongoing contract monitoring are effective;*
- review the annual work plan to ensure it is SMART and that priorities and outcomes can be clearly identified and measured;*
- ensure that the five year strategy is reviewed on a regular basis and includes clearly resourced plans for meeting unmet needs;*
- ensure that robust data is available to enable services to be tailored to meet the needs of individual service users;*
- ensure that all reviews undertaken by Select Committees include a robust assessment of value for money and diversity issues; and*
- ensure that there are robust contingency arrangements in place which meet the needs of vulnerable people.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- there will be sufficient capacity to deliver the Supporting People programme;
- improvements in the effectiveness of contract and performance management arrangements;
- ensuring that grant conditions are met; and
- ensuring that the needs of vulnerable people are met.

The implementation of these recommendations will have high impact with low costs. They should be fully implemented by September 2007.

Recommendation

R3 Improve the engagement of service users, carers and advocates by:

- *researching and implementing best practice in top performing administering local authorities;*
- *developing a structured approach to involving service users in the strategic development of the programme;*
- *ensuring that service users are appropriately involved in contract and performance management;*
- *providing feedback to ensure that service users are told what changes result from their involvement; and*
- *engaging effectively with service users from hard to reach groups.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- the programme will be shaped by service users and services will be developed that service users need and want; and
- service users will feel valued and engaged.

The implementation of these recommendations will have high impact with low costs. They should be fully implemented by November 2007.

Recommendation

R4 Improve the approach to securing value for money by:

- *updating benchmarking data on service costs on a regular basis and using this information to inform decision-making;*
- *adopting the regional value for money indicators and using them when undertaking value for money assessments;*
- *developing a robust procurement strategy for commissioning Supporting People services; and*
- *exploring the possibilities of undertaking further joint procurement with neighbouring authorities.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- service users will receive services that represent value for money;
- efficiency savings which can be re-invested in service provision; and
- progress in achieving value for money can be clearly demonstrated.

The implementation of these recommendations will have high impact with medium costs. They should be fully implemented by November 2007.

Recommendation

R5 Report and publicise the key findings of this report to service users; stakeholders; councillors and staff.

Recommendation

R6 Take action to address all other weaknesses identified in this report.

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

Dates of inspection: 21 to 25 August 2006.

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Report

Context

The locality

- 15 South Gloucestershire Council is a unitary authority in the west of England with a diverse mix of urban and rural population. It covers an area of 497 square kilometres, which includes extensive urban areas around the northern fringe of Bristol, parts of the Cotswold area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) and the Levels along the Severn Estuary, as well as significant areas of open countryside.
- 16 It is also one of the fastest growing economic areas in the country. The 2001 census shows that the resident population of South Gloucestershire was 246,000 and is estimated to have grown at an average rate of 2,000 people per year since then. Between 1991 and 2001, the population of the district increased by 10.7 per cent, much higher than the national average increase of 2.7 per cent. The population is projected to grow by 20 per cent between 1996 and 2011 with 24 per cent of the population being over 65 years. While the majority of the population live in small scale urban areas (Filton, Patchway, Bradley Stoke, Kingswood, Downend, Staple Hill and Hanham), there is a significant minority of people living in rural wards and market towns of Yate, Chipping Sodbury and Thornbury.
- 17 The proportions of young people, people of working age and people of pensionable age are close to the national averages. The proportion of people from ethnic groups other than 'white British' is 4.2 per cent. This compares with 4.6 per cent for the south west, and 13.0 per cent for England.
- 18 South Gloucestershire is among the least deprived districts in England, ranked 298th out of 354 English councils in terms of the DCLG's indices of deprivation, where one is the most deprived. Employment is mostly within the service sector and there are very low levels of unemployment, 1.7 per cent compared with the national average of 2.5 per cent. There has been significant economic growth (30,000 new jobs since 1991) with major employers dominating.

The Council

- 19 The Council has a political structure of a leader with a cabinet. There is a joint administration with no party in overall control. The Leader of the Council comes from the Liberal Democratic Party and there are two Deputy Leaders from the Conservative and Labour parties. The Liberal Democrats have 32 seats, Conservatives 21, Labour 16 and there is 1 Independent.

- 20 Excluding schools staff, the Council employs around 4,200 full-time equivalent staff to plan and deliver its services. In 2006/07, the Council has a revenue budget of £144 million, of which £43.7 million is allocated to community care and £2 million is allocated to strategic housing services.
- 21 In recent years, the Council has received the following assessments on the performance of its services.
- Under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 2003, the Council's performance was rated as 'good'.
 - Under CPA - the Harder Test 2005, the direction of travel was assessed as 'improving well' and the Council achieved a three-star rating (out of a possible four) for its overall performance.
 - In 2005, education, social care and children's services were assessed as 'serving most children and young people well with promising capacity for improvement'.
 - In 2005, adult services were assessed as 'serving some adults well with promising capacity for improvement'.
 - In 2006, learning disability services were assessed as 'serving some people well with promising capacity for improvement'.
- 22 In addition, the Council was awarded beacon status in 2004/05 for training and supporting social care workers.

The Supporting People programme

- 23 South Gloucestershire Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area. The Council works in partnership with South Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust and Avon and Somerset Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 24 The Council received a Supporting People grant of £4.682 million in 2006/07, which is a reduction of £83,000 or 1.73 per cent on the previous year. Despite reductions in annual grant since 2003/04 the Council has accumulated £97,000 in under-spent grant. The Council also received an administration grant of £150,200 in 2006/07, an amount which has remained constant for the last three years. This was supplemented by council funding of £86,000 to give the service an overall administration budget of £236,200 for 2006/07.
- 25 The Supporting People Team is located in a newly created Community Care and Housing Department. The Team consists of five staff made up of:
- Supporting People Services Manager (Lead Officer);
 - two Contracts and Review Officers;
 - Contracting Monitoring and Information Officer; and
 - Administrative Support (part time - currently vacant).

- 26 Forty-six service providers deliver a total of 150 services including a Home Improvement Agency. In total the programme currently funds 2,534 units of housing related support. The highest cost service at £637.43 per unit per week is an accommodation based service for people with learning disabilities. The lowest cost service is £1.06 per unit per week for a community alarm service for older people with support needs.

How good is the Supporting People programme?

What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 27 The Council has a Corporate Service Plan covering the period 2004 to 2007. This is linked to the community strategy 'Our Area: Our Future' which was adopted in March 2003. The Corporate Service Plan contains six improvement priorities linked to specific actions to be undertaken and measures used to judge success. These priorities are also underpinned by a number of promises. The six improvement priorities are:
- strengthening our communities;
 - meeting the needs of, and providing opportunities for our children and young people;
 - understanding and meeting the aspirations of our older people;
 - improving and managing travel and transport;
 - reshaping our housing services; and
 - a well managed council.
- 28 South Gloucestershire Council has a local area agreement (LAA). The agreement is based on 23 strategic aims, outcomes, associated indicators and targets, potential reward elements and freedoms and flexibilities. The strategic aims are divided into six themes, these are:
- Accessibility and Transport;
 - Children and Young People;
 - Healthier Communities and Older People;
 - Safer and Stronger Communities;
 - Economic Development and Enterprise; and
 - Environmental Sustainability.

- 29 The Council and its partners agreed a five-year Supporting People Strategy in March 2005. The strategy contains a vision statement and five key aims which clearly support both local and national priorities for helping vulnerable people. The partnership's vision is to *'Enable vulnerable and older people to live independently in their own homes'* and the five key aims are to provide the following.
- Appropriate Support - to provide appropriate levels of housing related support to improve the health, safety and well being of vulnerable people in South Gloucestershire.
 - Independent Housing - to increase the number of vulnerable people accessing and maintaining independent housing through the provision of support.
 - Preventative Services - to ensure that housing related support services have a preventative focus and complement health and social care services.
 - Equalities - to ensure that vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including black and other minority ethnic groups, are able to access services which promote equality and are sensitive to cultural and religious needs of service users.
 - Community Safety - to improve housing-related support services for vulnerable people at risk of offending and vulnerable people at risk from offending with the aim of reducing crime and disorder and improving the quality of life for all residents in South Gloucestershire.

Is the programme meeting the needs of the local community and users?

- 30 The assessment was based on the following key issues:
- governance and partnerships;
 - grant compliance, strategy and needs;
 - delivery arrangements;
 - commissioning and performance;
 - value for money;
 - service user involvement;
 - access to services and information;
 - diversity; and
 - outcomes for service users.

Governance and partnerships

- 31** This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. There is a strong corporate commitment to the programme and additional funding has been provided. Governance arrangements are well developed, there is evidence of effective decision-making and wider partnership arrangements are working well. However, the effectiveness of the governance arrangements have been adversely affected by a lack of engagement by the Probation Service.
- 32** The DCLG has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process;
 - Inclusive Forum: consults with service providers and service users;
 - Core Strategy Development Group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme;
 - Commissioning Body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme;
 - Councillors: approve key decisions of the Commissioning Body; and
 - Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 33** There is strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme in terms of both resources and time from officers and councillors. Additional funding of £147,000 has been allocated by the Council to the administration of the programme during the last three years to ensure that the programme can be delivered effectively. Councillors have been consistently involved in the Supporting People programme through the Executive Member for Community Care, Housing and Health ratifying all the key decisions made by the Commissioning Body. These arrangements ensure that there are good links between the Supporting People programme and both the Council and its political representatives.
- 34** In addition, the Select Committee for Community Care, Housing and Health has received a number of reports in order to scrutinise the progress of the Supporting People programme and has just completed a review of services for people with learning disabilities that is due to be reported to the Cabinet shortly. This review was wide ranging, but importantly failed to look in detail at both diversity issues and whether the current service provided value for money. This meant that the review was not as effective as it could have been.

- 35 The Commissioning Body is providing clear strategic leadership to the Supporting People Team and the Programme, but its effectiveness is limited by the lack of engagement from the Probation Service. The Commissioning Body meets on a regular basis and its membership is drawn from senior managers from both the council's Community Care and Housing department and from the Children's and Young People's department. It is effectively chaired by a senior manager from South Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT). The members of the Commissioning Body demonstrate a clear understanding of the diverse needs of vulnerable groups and they are ensuring that there are shared priorities in their own organisations to deliver positive outcomes for service users.
- 36 There has been no representative from the Avon and Somerset Probation Area attending Commissioning Body meetings for the last 12 months, despite regular requests to do so from the Council. A report was presented to the July 2006 meeting of the Commissioning Body detailing how the Probation Service would ensure future representation on both the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Development Group. The Offender Accommodation Strategy currently being developed by the Probation Service includes a target of attending 90 per cent of all Supporting People related meetings. Without the active involvement of all partners within the governance arrangements the Supporting People programme cannot be delivered effectively and it is incumbent on all the partners to make an equal contribution to the partnership.
- 37 There is evidence of effective decision-making and the Commissioning Body has made difficult decisions in relation to de-commissioning and reconfiguring long-standing services to improve the service to users. Timely decisions have been taken which have led to the meeting of key milestones set by the DCLG (formerly ODPM) such as the production of the five-year strategy. There are clear terms of reference in place for all the governance groups, with clear voting arrangements and conflict of interest protocols in place to ensure that decisions are made appropriately.
- 38 The Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group are currently reviewing their terms of reference to ensure that they are still 'fit for purpose' and reflect the changing structures in both the Council and the Local Area Agreement. And to ensure that now the service review programme has been completed, that there is an appropriate division of work and responsibility between the two groups.
- 39 Meetings and agendas are well planned in advance with work programmes in place for both the Commissioning Body and the Core Development Strategy Group. Copies of reports and minutes of meetings are available to view and download from the Supporting People pages on the Council's website. This allows service users and other stakeholders to access information about the Programme in an open and transparent manner. However, information available on the website is not being kept up to date. At the time of our inspection, the most recent reports available were December 2005 for the Commissioning Body and February 2006 for the Core Strategy Development Group.

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

- 40 The Core Strategy Development Group is effective. It has a wide membership, regular attendance and provides the necessary support for the Commissioning Body. The Group's membership includes commissioning managers from the PCT, Community Care and Housing, Children and Young People, the Youth Offending Team and the Drug Action Team and more recently a manager from the Probation Service has attended its meetings. There are also three representatives from the Providers Forum and a service user advocate representative from Age Concern. Widespread membership ensures that there is a broad base for policy development and that most points of view are represented.
- 41 Service providers are effectively engaged in the Core Strategy Development Group. There is a clear structure in place for service provider representation. Two elected service providers and one other attend the meetings to provide the service provider perspective and feed back to the Provider Forum. This arrangement provides an important link with the Provider Forum whose views are vital to the development of practical and sustainable policies.
- 42 The Core Strategy Development Group is well informed about the Supporting People programme and is responsible for monitoring progress with achieving the annual work plan. The Group receives detailed reports on progress with service reviews and regular updates on issues affecting Supporting People locally, regionally and nationally.
- 43 The Accountable Officer is the Head of Housing Strategy, a position of sufficient seniority to raise the profile of the Supporting People programme both in the Council and in wider partnerships at a local and sub-regional level. The Accountable Officer in South Gloucestershire has recently changed, until May 2006 it was the Director of Housing, but following the Council's decision to transfer its housing stock, the Council is in the process of integrating its strategic housing services, which include Supporting People into a newly created Community Care and Housing Department. It was therefore appropriate to transfer the role of Accountable Officer to the Head of Housing Strategy who now attends the Commissioning Body and Chairs the Core Strategy Development Group. In her role as Head of Housing Strategy, the Accountable Officer has been able to effectively promote and extend the impact of the programme and has ensured that other corporate strategies contain clear links to the Supporting People programme.

- 44 The involvement and links between the Supporting People programme and partners delivering services to vulnerable people are good. There are a number of service development groups in place for particular clients groups and these are attended by members of the Supporting People team. These include the domestic violence forum, the housing sub-group of the mental health local implementation team, the learning difficulties partnership board, the teenage pregnancy partnership, the DAT commissioning group, the homeless review group, the youth housing partnership and the older persons programme group. There is evidence that the Supporting People team have been able to influence the strategic direction of these groups. For example, the Domestic Violence Forum has adopted a strategy that includes strong links to the Supporting People programme and the mental health local implementation team were involved in service reviews and in deciding future commissioning priorities. These arrangements help to contribute to effective strategic planning for service users.
- 45 MAPPAs (multi-agency public protection arrangements) are in place and are effectively dealing with high risk offenders. There is a comprehensive protocol that sits alongside the MAPPAs Protocol, both of which are regularly reviewed and monitored. All offenders are first discussed at the relevant MAPPAs meeting whose membership includes representatives from housing and floating support services. The most dangerous offenders are usually placed initially in approved hostels and are moved to suitable independent accommodation when it is safe to do so. All local authorities in the Avon and Somerset Probation Area have agreed and signed up to the protocol which, allows for reciprocal arrangements for the transfer of potentially dangerous and dangerous offenders across the area.
- 46 The Providers Forum provides an effective way for service providers to be involved in the governance arrangements. There is an effective and well attended Providers Forum in place which has been meeting regularly on a quarterly basis since the start of the Supporting People programme (initially as an Inclusive Forum). The Forum is provider led with the Supporting People team providing administrative support. Service providers value the forum and it has provided an effective channel for communication and information. Providers were involved in the development of the five-year strategy and are currently discussing the use of performance indicators to measure service improvements.

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

- 47 The voluntary sector has been involved in the development of the Supporting People programme, but the range of their involvement needs to be further developed. There is one representative from an advocacy group on the Core Strategy Development Group and two of the three provider representatives are also from the voluntary sector. Around 40 per cent of service providers in South Gloucestershire are from the voluntary sector and many are active members of the Providers Forum. There have also been representatives from the voluntary sector involved in the recent development of an Accommodation and Care Strategy for Older People and they are engaged through the forums and partnership boards and the Supporting People team attends these. There was also some limited involvement of voluntary sector groups in the development of the Supporting People strategy. However, the Commissioning Body has only recently agreed a service user involvement strategy and this fails to clearly articulate how the Supporting People programme will engage with carer and advocacy groups in order to ensure that they can effectively represent the views of service users.

Grant compliance, strategy and needs

- 48 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The eligibility criteria has been used effectively to ensure that payments are made appropriately. There are clear links between the Supporting People strategy and the council's wider strategic priorities and information on support needs is being updated at appropriate intervals. However, there is a lack of suitable move-on accommodation for some vulnerable people and the strategy fails to clearly articulate how it will meet identified needs.
- 49 There is a detailed eligibility criteria in place which reflects government guidelines. This criteria has recently been updated and agreed by the Commissioning Body as the previous document, while comprehensive, did not provide the clarity needed to ensure that all stakeholders could easily identify which services were eligible to be funded by the Supporting People programme. The Council was late in developing its eligibility criteria, with the original criteria not being adopted until September 2005. It was not applied in the first phases of service reviews and the Council relied on guidelines issued by the DCLG (formerly ODPM).

- 50 The Council has successfully addressed ineligible service provision through the service review process. There were relatively low levels of ineligible service provision being included in the initial 'pot'. Where costs had been inappropriately apportioned to the Supporting People programme, they were identified and were found to be mainly in services for people with learning disabilities which represent 40 per cent of grant spent but only about 5 per cent of service users. For example, one scheme for people with learning difficulties has been decommissioned and is to be funded by the community care budget from October 2006. A number of other services have been de-commissioned or had termination notices served in order to restructure them to ensure that their service provision meets the eligibility criteria. Also, where service users are jointly funded by the Supporting People programme and community care and has a high level of support funding, the annual review of their care plan is attended by the Supporting People Review Officer to ensure that the continuing level of support is still appropriate. These measures help to ensure that the programme provides support in accordance with grant conditions.
- 51 The five-year Supporting People strategy is accessible and easy to read, it contains clear links to other corporate strategies, but it fails to clearly articulate how services will be developed to meet unmet needs. The Strategy was delivered on time after full consultation with a wide range of partners. There are clear links between the Supporting People programme and the Council's wider strategic priorities and these links are clearly identified in the Supporting People strategy. For example, the Council has identified understanding and meeting the aspirations of its older people as a key improvement priority. The Council and the PCT have undertaken a wide ranging review of services for older people and have recently agreed a Joint Accommodation and Care Strategy for Older People. The Supporting People team were involved in the development of this strategy which proposes the development of 15 extra care schemes by 2016 which helps to address a number of the five key aims contained in the Supporting People strategy. However, while the Supporting People strategy does highlight unmet needs, for example there is currently no specific service provision for refugees or people with HIV/Aids, the strategy fails to clearly articulate how these needs will be met and what priority is being given to the different client groups within the strategy. Without clearer prioritisation it is difficult to see how competing needs will be met during the life of the strategy.
- 52 There are systems in place to ensure that information on the support needs of vulnerable groups is being updated. A thorough needs analysis was undertaken as part of the development of the five-year Supporting People strategy. Additional work to update the needs information of individual client groups has been developed as part of individual sector work. For example, Safer South Gloucestershire (the community safety partnership) has just completed an analysis of the housing related support needs for people with drug and alcohol problems. This has resulted in a proposal being agreed by the Commissioning Body that these services are re-configured from April 2008 to better meet the needs of this particular client group. In this way the Council is ensuring that services are being planned and delivered based on the needs of vulnerable people.

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- 53 There is currently a lack of suitable move-on accommodation for some vulnerable people in the South Gloucestershire area. The lack of and access to suitable move-on accommodation has been identified as an area for improvement in the Supporting People strategy. There have been some local problems which has included the letting of accommodation on assured tenancies for short term supported housing schemes, making it difficult to move people on when their support needs change. Where tenants have been unwilling to move, the Council taken the positive step to de-commission or reduce the extent of the accommodation service and provided a floating support service (for those in the scheme and the wider community) where there is a demonstrated need.
- 54 The Council has undertaken a comprehensive Access to Housing Review which has examined the council's whole approach to accessing housing accommodation, including introducing a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme. The Cabinet has recently agreed to establish a sub-regional CBL scheme in conjunction with its three neighbouring West of England (WOE)⁴ authorities from April 2008. Within the CBL scheme it is proposed to give the highest priority to people who need to move on from their supported housing, thereby freeing up accommodation more quickly. There are also provisions in place to ensure that vulnerable people will have appropriate assistance in 'bidding' for empty properties.
- 55 Increasing the amount of affordable housing is also being addressed through a clear requirement that there should be at least 33 per cent affordable housing on new development sites within South Gloucestershire. Access into accommodation in the private rented sector is also being encouraged through the use of rent deposit bond schemes. These approaches are aimed at reducing the incidence of people remaining in supported accommodation they do not need and frees up places for others who do.

Delivery arrangements

- 56 There is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths The Supporting People team are delivering the programme on a day to day basis well. Relationships with service providers are strong and the financial management of the programme is strong. But the team's ability to deliver all elements of the programme has been adversely affected by a lack of capacity, performance management is underdeveloped and there are no detailed contingency plans in place.

⁴ West of England authorities are:- Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset Councils

- 57** The team has a number of strengths, but its limited capacity is impacting on the team's ability to deliver all elements of the programme effectively. The team's capacity has been affected by staff vacancies and turnover of agency staff used to cover these vacancies. This led to delays in completing service reviews and in one case, a review having to be undertaken again because the original paperwork was lost. It has also affected the team's ability to deliver all elements of the annual work plan and a number of uncompleted actions have been rolled forward into the 2006/07 plan. Additional resources have been used to supplement the team, for example consultants were used successfully to undertake some service reviews and to complete the accreditation process for service providers. Resources have also been provided from in the Council to help with support on financial, legal and IT issues. The membership of the team has been more stable in recent months. Without appropriate and consistent staffing resources the team are unable to ensure continuity in programme delivery.
- 58** There are a number of strengths, the Supporting People team ensured that the strategy was delivered to the target time of March 2005, relationships with service providers are positive and payments are made accurately and on time. Team members have a range of appropriate skills which have been further developed through training such as procurement and project management. The team have performed well in the submission of data extracts, milestones and additional requests for information to the DCLG. Submissions have been in the required format and on time.
- 59** Performance management is underdeveloped. The work plan in the five-year strategy is updated annually. It provides the plan for the team, Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group and is reported regularly to the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group and bi-annually to the Community Care, Housing and Health Select Committee and to the Executive Member. But the plan is not fully SMART⁵, as there are a lack of measurable outcomes. This makes it more difficult to monitor outcomes effectively, to ensure they are meeting the needs of service users.
- 60** In addition, there is little reporting on progress against the programme's overarching aims and there are no local performance indicators or outcome measures for the programme. Without suitable measures in place and regular reporting, it is difficult to determine what outcomes the programme is achieving for vulnerable people and to systematically address areas of under-performance.
- 61** The Council has taken a prudent approach to the financial management of the Supporting People programme to date. There are robust systems in place for the financial management of grant payments and these are monitored through the Commissioning Body on a quarterly basis. Despite reductions in annual grant since 2003/04 the Council has accumulated £97,000 in under-spent grant which has been carried forward into 2006/07. Despite wider uncertainties about the future funding of the national programme and the financial pressures facing the Council it has supported the commissioning of new services which have been funded through savings made as part of the programme of service reviews.

⁵ SMART - specific, measurable, approved, realistic and timebound

- 62 Supporting People has strong links to three of the themes of the South Gloucestershire Local Area Agreement (LAA); healthier communities and older people, safer and stronger communities and children and young people. Positively, there have been discussions at both the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group about how the Supporting People programme can be aligned with the LAA. Agreement has now been reached that the Supporting People Commissioning Body will report to the Health and Wellbeing Partnership Board of the Local Strategic Partnership which is responsible for the implementation of the LAA as it relates to the role of the Health and Wellbeing Partnership.
- 63 There are clear arrangements in place for carrying out fairer charging assessments through the community care fairer charging team. Assessments are undertaken quickly, normally within 18 working days. Information about charging arrangements is available for service users and their carers in the form of two leaflets that are available on request and via the council's website. Where a service user is not entitled to housing benefit, they receive a letter advising them of their right to apply for a fairer charging assessment. So far, 36 assessments have been completed, but no analysis has been undertaken to see how this compares with neighbouring authorities and so the Council is not in a position to demonstrate that all who are eligible are receiving the financial help they are entitled to.
- 64 There is a risk register in place for the Supporting People programme that is updated annually, but there are no detailed contingency plans in place. The Commissioning Body has recently updated the risk register that also includes a confidential appendix containing known risks about service providers. The risk register and the de-commissioning strategy identify the need for both a contingency plan and a contingency service, but so far, no work has been undertaken to progress this. There are clear links to the community care departments' protection of vulnerable adult's procedure and this has been used successfully on one occasion. Without appropriate contingency arrangements in place, the Council cannot ensure that there are sufficient and appropriate resources available to cater for people's support needs in the event of a service failure.

Commissioning and performance

- 65 This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. Service reviews have led to improvements in service configuration, there has been some joint commissioning of services and the Council has demonstrated its commitment to cross authority working to share good practice. However, service reviews have not been undertaken consistently and robustly, review outcomes have not been consistently challenged, action plans arising from reviews are of variable quality, monitoring arrangements lack consistency and robustness and few steady state contracts are in place.

- 66 Providers are well informed and have a clear understanding of the present contractual arrangements. Most providers are positive about the approach the Council has taken to the service reviews and most felt that reviews had been carried out in a supportive and constructive way. They believe that the quality assessment framework (QAF) has been used effectively to drive up standards in the local area.
- 67 Not all service reviews were undertaken in a consistent and robust manner. Early reviews were very detailed and service providers were given clear timetables showing when reviews would start and key milestones within the review process. However, it became apparent that the review process was too detailed and some reviews were taking much longer than anticipated. A lack of staffing resources also led to reviews being delayed and completing reviews within a strict timetable became unachievable. Extra resources, such as the use of consultants to undertake some reviews were applied successfully. However, the use of some agency staff was less successful and led to confusion among some service providers about the progress of their review and in one case, as previously mentioned, the review had to be undertaken again because the original paperwork was lost. Review paperwork was found to be of variable quality and content, with some stored in review files and some electronically, making it difficult to verify that the review procedure had been clearly followed for all reviews.
- 68 There was a lack of challenge to the outcomes of many service reviews by the Commissioning Body. The outcomes of all service reviews were reported to the Commissioning Body and there is evidence to show that the Commissioning Body effectively challenged a number of review outcomes. However, in order to meet the deadline of completing all reviews by March 2006, 50 service review reports were taken to the Commissioning Body meeting in March. In these circumstances, it would have been impossible for the members of the Commissioning Body to have given each service review the required level of scrutiny before agreeing to a recommendation for the review. There was also a lack of external challenge to service reviews, with only one review on an internally provided service being examined by a neighbouring authority. Because of a lack of independent scrutiny the Council cannot clearly demonstrate that the outcomes of its service reviews were challenged in a consistently robust manner.
- 69 Despite these issues, the reviews have led to the improved configuration of some services; examples include services for women at risk of domestic violence and people with mental health issues, which have led to improved outcomes for the service users.

- 70 Service providers were able to challenge the outcomes of reviews and there is a clear appeals procedure in place, which was developed sub-regionally by the four west of England authorities, which allows for appeals to be heard by members of a neighbouring authority's Commissioning Body. However, no appeals have been made to date in South Gloucestershire and service providers were able to successfully challenge the outcome of their service review without needing to use the formal appeals procedure. There is no specific complaints procedure in place for Supporting People, complainants can use the council's corporate complaints procedure, the outcomes from which are reported to ensure that the organisation learns from complaints. There has been one complaint about the Supporting People team since 2004 which was resolved appropriately.
- 71 Action plans arising from reviews are of variable quality and monitoring arrangements lack consistency and robustness. Review action plans are not SMART and do not follow a format based on the core objectives of the QAF. Some providers were unclear about when their actions plans were due for review and when required actions should be completed by. Monitoring arrangements are of variable quality, with clear and well documented arrangements in place with some providers; however, there is a lack of evidence to show that performance in completing action plans has been closely monitored in all cases. Without a consistent approach to monitoring action plans the Council cannot ensure that service improvements are being made in a timely and effective manner.
- 72 Following the completion of service reviews, the Council has developed an approach for ongoing contract management which was agreed by the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group in December 2005. The Council does not intend to routinely review services using the service review mechanism, but it intends to retain the right to undertake a service review if it has concerns about the performance of that service. The Council intends to adopt an annual monitoring meeting approach similar to that used by other teams in the community care department. Where a service is jointly funded by a number of partners, one meeting would be arranged, involving all partners. A key issue for these meetings will be the delivery of action plans. Where there are concerns about the performance of a particular service, arrangements will be made to meet with the provider more frequently. Providers are also expected to annually review their processes and systems against the QAF and a sample of QAFs will be selected for validation by the Supporting People team. The Supporting People team is also collecting and monitoring performance information on a regular basis. Where there has been sustained under performance they have sought improvement and have recovered contract sums.
- 73 South Gloucestershire has been slow to put steady state contracts in place. To date there are only five contracts in place with a further 11 under negotiation. The delay in putting steady state contracts in place reflects a lack of capacity in the Supporting People team to progress this work and also a lack of an agreed procurement strategy to determine how services will be procured in the future. This does not promote stability in the provider market or support long-term planning.

- 74 There has been some progress on jointly funded contracts which achieve shared targets and objectives. Joint commissioning of the Care and Repair service has been undertaken with the community care department and some services for people with learning difficulties have also been jointly commissioned with contract management being undertaken by the learning difficulties team in the community care department. The four WOE authorities have jointly procured a service for offenders which is a positive development, and research into the need for a 'complex needs' project is currently underway, which could result in a funding bid for a cross authority project. However, there are no further plans to undertake more joint procurement on either a regional or sub-regional basis. This is a wasted opportunity given that South Gloucestershire has identified the need for small scale service provision in conjunction with a neighbouring authority to meet unmet needs for groups such as refugees and people with HIV/Aids.
- 75 South Gloucestershire has demonstrated its commitment to cross authority working, which has produced some positive outcomes. It is a member of the South West Regional Implementation Group (SW RIG) and also the WOE Housing Group. Local authorities in the SW RIG have jointly funded a Regional Co-ordinator to develop projects and share good practice across the region, for example a regional de-commissioning protocol has been agreed and joint accreditation has been developed and South Gloucestershire has used this effectively to 'passport' a number of its service providers and a RIG-wide accreditation database has been established. This offers a consistent approach for providers, particularly those who are working across a number of local authority areas.

Value for money

- 76 This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. There is a strong corporate approach to securing value for money and a medium term financial strategy has been agreed for the programme, the service review process has resulted in savings and efficiency gains. However, the approach to securing value for money in Supporting People is not robust, cost comparisons have not been updated on a regular basis, benchmarking information has not been used effectively and the approach to procurement is under-developed.

How do costs compare?

- 77 Cost comparisons show that the cost of Supporting People services are higher in South Gloucestershire when compared to both regional and national figures, while the level of funding is lower, however, this information has not been updated on a regular basis. South Gloucestershire carried out a benchmarking assessment of its Supporting People services in February 2004. This showed that the Council was the 26th lowest funded authority, out of 150 ALAs. It was estimated that an extra £3 million would be needed to provide the same level of service as the average authority. Regionally, the Council is the second lowest funded both per head of population and in cash terms. This comparatively low level of funding is compounded in South Gloucestershire by higher than average service costs, being regionally the fifth most expensive per unit for all services and the sixth most expensive, excluding sheltered and community alarm services. This results, overall, in less people receiving support than in other ALAs. However, this benchmarking exercise has not been repeated, so the Council is unaware of how it current costs compare with other ALAs both regionally and nationally.
- 78 The costs per unit, set out in the table below (excluding community alarms) illustrate some of the findings from the benchmarking exercise. However, these figures should be treated with some caution as there has been a number of changes since the platinum cut data⁶ was produced.

Unit costs comparison of SP grant per head of population - 2003/04

This shows a higher level of unit costs by comparison both regionally and across England indicating more expensive services, but a much lower level of funding per head of population.

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
South Gloucestershire	£0.39	£35.95	£35.95	£93.33
South West Region	£0.73	£33.33	£36.46	£80.42
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37

⁶ DCLG (formerly ODPM) 'Platinum cut' figures, November 2003

How is value for money managed?

- 79** The Council has a strong culture of ensuring value for money (VFM) and councillors and managers actively seek to challenge their approach to VFM. Senior managers are accountable for delivering value for money and the Council was one of only a few unitary authorities at the end of 2005 to be scored as a three out of four for VFM as part of their Use of Resources judgement.
- 80** A robust medium term financial strategy has been agreed for the Supporting People programme. In developing this strategy in 2004, the Commissioning Body agreed to use the Government's proposed distribution formula and the client group clusters as a basis for determining long-term funding between client groups. It also agreed that the transition period to introduce these changes should be April 2009. The Commissioning Body has revisited the strategy on a regular basis since it was first agreed to ensure that the assumptions made in the original strategy were still sound, the most recent updating of the strategy was in July 2006. This strategy provides the basis for future spending decisions.
- 81** The situation for South Gloucestershire is not just about rebalancing the programme to ensure that funding is appropriate for each of the client groups, but also the likelihood that future funding will fall in cash terms. The challenge for the Council is to reduce total annual spending by around £750,000 by 2009/10 in order to reach convergence with the anticipated distribution grant target. Of this, the disabilities group is likely to see the biggest reductions, with significant savings of £665,000 needed over the next four years.
- 82** The service review process and other savings have helped to secure efficiencies in service delivery. A number of contracts have been renegotiated with resulting increases in the numbers of service users being supported at no extra cost. Overall savings of £322,000 were achieved in 2005/06, which included an efficiency gain of £122,000. Savings of £260,000 are forecasted for 2006/07, with similar amounts for future years in order to meet the anticipated levels of grant funding. Recent analysis undertaken for the Commissioning Body shows that the average weekly unit cost has fallen from £41.25 in 2005/06 to £36.88 in 2006/07, an overall reduction of 10.59 per cent and for some client groups costs have fallen substantially, for example, services for people with mental health problems, where average costs have fallen by 49 per cent during the last 12 months.

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- 83 However, the approach to assessing and scrutinising the VFM of the Supporting People programme is weak. The Commissioning Body did not agree an approach to securing VFM until July 2005, so early service reviews were undertaken without a clear approach to VFM. The approach agreed was to introduce a benchmark of £20 per hour for support costs, although exceptions are considered on a case by case basis. The benchmark was introduced initially as a short term measure, but has continued to be used. Using this type of cost capping as a measure of value for money fails to recognise the differing needs of vulnerable people who are being supported by the Programme and it also lacks any assessment of quality compared to costs. There has been no involvement of service users, their carers or advocates in scrutinising the impact of decisions or determining the overall approach to VFM, which means their views on the cost and quality of services have not been considered.
- 84 South Gloucestershire has participated in a regional benchmarking exercise, but the outcomes from this were not used to inform service reviews. The SW RIG undertook a VFM project, the aim of which was to establish a range of indicators against which benchmarks can be set for use in VFM assessments. However, the benchmarking information arrived later than anticipated and has not been used to inform later service reviews, which was a missed opportunity to use a more sophisticated approach to assessing VFM.
- 85 The Council's approach to procuring Supporting People is weak. There is no procurement strategy in place to determine how services will be procured in the future. The annual work plan recognises this as an area for improvement and an approach to re-commissioning services has been agreed by the Commissioning Body, which allows for re-negotiation of contracts until procurement options have been developed and agreed. There has been some cross authority procurement with the four WOE authorities jointly procuring a service for offenders, but there are no agreed plans to undertake more joint procurement on either a regional or sub-regional basis, this is a wasted opportunity to share expertise and best practice. The Care and Repair service has been jointly procured by both the Community Care contracts team and the Supporting People team as have some services for people with learning difficulties.

Service user involvement

- 86 This is an area of weakness for the Council. There are limited opportunities for service users, their carers and advocates to be involved in developing services and establishing priorities, so there have been limited outcomes to date. There is no involvement of service users in either governance or performance management arrangements and there has been little engagement with hard to reach groups.

- 87 Service user involvement in the Supporting People programme has been recognised by the Council as an area for improvement. Service users had limited input into the development of the Supporting People strategy. As part of the consultation on the draft strategy, the Supporting People team attended a number of meetings with stakeholder groups, some of which have service user membership. However, this approach lacked robustness and there was no clear plan for involving service users from all client groups in the development of the strategy. Without the input of service users, the Council cannot demonstrate that the current strategy adequately reflects users' priorities.
- 88 The Council has utilised some existing consultation frameworks to involve service users and carers, but these have not been used consistently to ensure effective engagement with Supporting People service users. Examples include, the development of the Joint Accommodation and Care Strategy for Older People, which involved both service users and advocacy groups and led to the strategy being widely accepted and the Supporting People team have engaged with the Black and Other Minority Ethnic Communities Liaison Group (BoME). However, the Supporting People team has not used these frameworks to develop an effective way of involving service services in policy development.
- 89 Service users have been involved in service reviews and their views have been reflected in action plans for improvements to services, however, their involvement has been variable. Examples include feedback from service users about the use of temporary staff with limited knowledge of the service for overnight cover, following investigation by the Supporting People team, a default notice was served requiring the service to reduce the use of agency staff and only use staff who had been inducted into the project. In another service, feedback from service users highlighted the need for staff to be based at refuges at regular times to ensure that service users could see their support worker. However, service users were not involved to the same degree in all reviews undertaken and evidence showed minimal service user involvement in some reviews. It was also evident that not all service users were aware of the outcome of their review. Providers should have notified their service users about the outcome of reviews, however, the Supporting People team did not check to ensure that this had happened.
- 90 Service users are not involved in monitoring the performance of service providers. There are no robust systems in place to allow service users to give regular feedback on the service they receive from their service providers. Individual service providers may collect customer satisfaction information, but this is not passed onto the Supporting People team in any systematic way. The Council does plan to introduce a service user questionnaire, but it has not yet been through a consultation process with providers. Service users are not effectively represented in Supporting People governance structures. The Core Strategy Development Group has a representative from an advocacy group, apart from this, there are no other representatives from service users or their carers taking part in decision-making that affects vulnerable people.

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- 91 The Commissioning Body has recently agreed a Service User Involvement Strategy and a service user involvement day has been scheduled for September 2006, at which a DVD will be launched, giving service users and their carers and advocates a better understanding of the services available. Service users have been actively involved in planning this event. The Core Strategy Development Group is leading on plans to establish a service user involvement panel and this is due to be established by December 2006.

Access to services and information

- 92 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. There is a comprehensive service directory and information leaflets for Supporting People services and information on the council's website is easily accessible. However, access and referral arrangements are inconsistent, information is not always easily accessible and service users have not been involved in developing information sources.
- 93 The arrangements to enable potential service users to access support services are not consistent. Staff can access information about the Supporting People programme from the council's intranet and a hard copy of the service directory is held in council offices, at service provider's offices and at advice and support agencies. However, the outcome of service reviews for floating support service indicated that there is an under representation of some client groups accessing these services. As a result a post of Floating Support Co-ordinator has been commissioned by the Supporting People programme whose role it will be to provide a direct referral route, target underrepresented groups and monitor the usage and demand for floating support services, thereby improving access to these services, the postholder is due to commence in September 2006.
- 94 Mystery shopping enquiries we made about accessing domestic violence and drug and alcohol services were handled inconsistently. We received good advice about how to access services for a young person who had a drugs problem. However, the advice we were given about how to access housing for a woman suffering domestic violence was poor, with incorrect information given about the need to demonstrate a 'local connection' with South Gloucestershire before help could be provided. This demonstrated a need for further training for front-line staff. Supporting People team members have recently briefed staff working in the council's contact centre about how to access services. However, it is not clear this training is being done consistently and for all front line services. Potential service users can be discouraged from seeking assistance if they do not have confidence that front line staff are well informed about the services they may need.

- 95 South Gloucestershire provides a number of leaflets about support services, but these are not always easily accessible in all council offices. They include a service leaflet about Supporting People and leaflets about fairer charging. There are also two leaflets specifically designed for service users with learning disabilities which use pictorial information effectively. The Better Care: Higher Standards document is informative and up to date, but contains no specific information about Supporting People services, which is a missed opportunity for the Council. None of the leaflets contain language straplines, so service users who first language is not English, would find it more difficult to obtain translated copies of this information. Leaflets are available in other formats such as large print and on CD. Mystery shopping also revealed that these leaflets were not readily available at each of the council's one-stop shops. This is a barrier to accessing services.
- 96 A comprehensive directory of Supporting People services was published in May 2006. The directory includes useful information about support services in South Gloucestershire including number of units available for each client group and referral arrangements for each service. It also provides contact details for other useful services and agencies such as 'spot-on', an online directory of services for people with learning difficulties. Feedback about the directory has been positive.
- 97 The council's website has Supporting People pages, which are easy to access and navigate and contain comprehensive information, including an accessible summary of the Supporting People strategy. Information on the website is mostly up to date and easy to read and there are links to relevant external web sites. However, the new eligibility criteria is not yet available on the website and the old criteria is still being displayed, which is confusing for service users and providers. There is no information about how to make a complaint in the Supporting People pages on the council's website or on the Supporting People information leaflets and as a result it is unclear for service users who they should contact if they are unhappy about the service they are receiving. The Supporting People team have made positive use of newsletters, produced three times a year to update service providers with new developments and to seek feedback from providers.
- 98 There has been no input from service users, their carers or advocates into the design and content of Supporting People leaflets, service directory or the web site. Service providers were involved in the development of the service directory. This means that the current range of information may not fully meet the needs of recipients.

Diversity

- 99 This is an area of weaknesses for the Council. Overall progress in this area has been slow, there is variable knowledge about the needs of service users and as a result services are not being tailored to meet individual needs. Not all staff have received equality and diversity training and there have been missed opportunities to consult with services users from BME communities.

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- 100** Corporate leadership of the equality and diversity agenda has been inconsistent and consequently overall progress has been slow. The Council has only just achieved level two of the Equality Standard, despite its original target to achieve it in 2003/04. While the Council has been responsive in developing its Race Equality Scheme, the quality of its action plans is variable. In 2004/05 the Council's performance on promoting race equality placed it in the worst 25 per cent when compared to all councils nationally. Performance in other areas of diversity are mixed, for example in 2004/05, 80 per cent of Council buildings had facilities for people with disabilities, missing the government target, which was to achieve 100 per cent compliance by October 2005, but performing among the best 25 per cent when compared to all councils nationally. In 2005/06 the Council increased this to 83 per cent accessible buildings, but this is below its own target of 85 per cent.
- 101** There is variable knowledge of the diversity of service users and non users amongst departments. One stop shops and some contact centres do not monitor the diversity profile of users. Departments' monitoring of service take up by the diversity profile is varied. The Supporting People team are aware of the profile of new service users from information on client record forms. In 2005/06, 7.6 per cent of new service users came from BME communities, this is higher than the general population, which the Council sees as a positive sign that people from BME communities are able to access Supporting People services.
- 102** There is one culturally sensitive service in South Gloucestershire - this provides two sites for Travellers and following a service review, the service is to be restructured as the current service was not 'strategically relevant'. Two other service providers have also been commissioned to provide services to refugees as a secondary group. The QAF framework has been applied to all services and has been used to provide a focus on diversity and DDA compliance has been addressed appropriately in service reviews.
- 103** The Supporting People team have used client record data to assess access to short term services. However, no work has been undertaken to establish the diversity of existing service users in both short and long term services to determine if the current level of service provision is appropriate, as a consequence the Council cannot demonstrate that services are being delivered to meet the specific needs of service users and are culturally sensitive.
- 104** Racial Equalities Impact Assessments found that in certain areas of the Council's work there is a lack of data on how policies and services impact on the general duty to promote race equality and on the needs of BME communities. The Supporting People team have undertaken an equalities impact assessment and this is included as an appendix to the Supporting People strategy. A more wide ranging Equalities and Diversity Impact assessment has also been carried out, but this did not result in an action plan being developed, so we are unable to judge the effectiveness of the impact assessment.

- 105** Equality and diversity training has been variable. Feedback from staff and councillors suggests that while training has been well received there is an appetite for further in-depth training. Presently, councillor challenge to equalities and diversity is not fully effective across the Select Committees. And while the senior management of the Council have completed a one day course and a further programme has been delivered to managers - the required cascading of the equality training to all staff has been inconsistent. Members of the Supporting People team and colleagues in the community care and housing department have received training. Some departments are less advanced than others and hence there is variable knowledge of equality and diversity issues among staff which may affect their ability to deliver services equitably.

Outcomes for service users

- 106** This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for service users and driving change for some client groups so that services better reflect the priorities for the area. The number of people accessing services has increased substantially. However, the choices available for some service users are limited, there are still gaps in service provision for some client groups and there is a shortage of suitable move-on accommodation.
- 107** The range of Supporting People services is beginning to better meet local needs as a result of some service reconfiguration through service reviews and additional service provision. Gaps in service provision have been identified in the Supporting People strategy. Additional support services has been provided by the Council in line with priorities over the last three years, these include the following.
- Supported housing for young people - provided supported accommodation for 15 homeless young people and care leavers.
 - Homeless to Home scheme - a floating support scheme for homeless families aiming to reduce the risk of repeated homelessness by providing support to vulnerable families to establish themselves in permanent housing.
 - Care and Repair - working in partnership with Community Care, have increased funding for this service to provide more support to older and disabled people with adaptations and housing repairs, enabling them to live at home for longer.
 - Cross authority criminal justice service - working in partnership with Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol and North Somerset, supported the development of a support service for ex-offenders. Referrals come from Probation and Youth Offending Teams.
 - Housing Support Worker for people with drug problems - funding has been provided to employ a housing support worker to support former drug users, who have been through treatment, to resettle in South Gloucestershire.

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

- Domestic violence - have commissioned a floating support service to assist women at risk of domestic violence stay in their own home.
- Mental health services - a small supported housing project for homeless people with mental health problems.

- 108** Service improvements have been driven by the QAF and service reviews and have resulted in benefits for service users. A number of contracts have been renegotiated with resulting increases in the numbers of service users being supported at no extra cost. Services have also been reconfigured to provide more floating support services, leading to a 14 per cent increase in the number of service users accessing floating support, while at the same time, reducing the number of accommodation based services that offered little flexibility in terms of move-on opportunities for service users. The numbers of new service users accessing Supporting People services have increased from 442 in 2003/04 to 744 in 2005/06.
- 109** However, the choices available for some service users are still limited. The emphasis in South Gloucestershire is still on accommodation based services with around 85 per cent of service users living in these type of services. The needs of some user groups, particularly those who are harder to reach, have yet to be addressed. For example, there is still no service provision for people with HIV/Aids or refugees, although some refugees have accessed existing floating support services and the current service for Travellers requires further development to ensure that it is meeting the needs of that particular client group. There is still a shortage of suitable move-on accommodation and accessing it can still be a problem for some service users. The Supporting People strategy has identified these as issues that need addressing and they are included in the annual work plan.
- 110** Performance on the two key performance indicators for Supporting People over the last two years has improved. South Gloucestershire has achieved an increase from 91 per cent in 2004/05 to 94.76 per cent in 2005/06 for KP1 -service users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living. For KPI 2, an average of 57 per cent was achieved for 2004/05, increasing to 86 per cent for 2005/06 for service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements. However, as previously mentioned, the Council has yet to put in place outcome measures for service users with targets developed with partners. These are currently being developed by the SW RIG and until this work is completed, the Council is unable to effectively measure improvements in outcomes for service users.
- 111** We visited a range of schemes and found the environments generally to be homely, welcoming and comfortable. Residents we spoke to were happy with the services they receive. They were appropriately supported, aware of their needs and requirements and had good quality support plans in place. Staff were generally helpful, knowledgeable and appreciated by the service users.

- 112 However, service users from the council's sheltered housing schemes have only had support plans in place since September 2005 and these have not been reviewed or updated. The way in which support plans were developed varied from scheme to scheme, one scheme having a 'self assessment' type proforma while at other schemes the Residential Scheme Manager completed the support plan in conjunction with the service users. This service had achieved a 'C' rating in the service review, which raises concerns, previously highlighted in this report, about the robustness of the original service review.
- 113 Examples of individual testimonies and case studies provided show that some service users have achieved positive outcomes from Supporting People funded services. This is achieved through the support offered by the provider and links into employment, training, counselling and therapeutic services. In some cases, service users have moved into independent accommodation provided by housing associations with ongoing support helping them to maintain their tenancy. Two case studies illustrating the benefits of the Supporting People programme in South Gloucestershire are set out below.

Case study 1

Service user aged 17 became homeless when his mother asked him to leave. He has severe dyslexia and as a result he cannot read or write. He has also been diagnosed with ADHD and has difficulty managing his anger. He was in contact with the Police and the Youth Offending Team due to his anger.

He was staying with friends when he was referred to a specialist support provider by Connexions. He was first placed into a Bed and Breakfast and then offered a self-contained flat at a supported housing project where he sustained periods of training that led him to employment.

He was referred back to the service provider following an incident, which resulted in him being given notice to leave. By now he had gained sufficient points on the housing register to be offered permanent accommodation and he was offered a new build housing association flat close to his work, which he accepted.

He has continued meeting his support worker in the evenings after work. The support is focused around budgeting and money management, paying rent, dealing with challenges at work, getting on with his neighbours and understanding letters and bills. His support worker has worked closely with his Connexions advisor and his housing officer.

He has furnished his flat by saving his wages and help from his family. He has a job as a labourer and is due to start a bricklaying apprenticeship. With support he has sustained his tenancy, re-established a relationship with his family. He is committed to getting trained for a profession and hopes one day to be able to earn a good wage and buy his own home.

Case study 2

Service user is a refugee from Somalia. She is a single parent with two children and required a high level of support due to their lack of knowledge of life in this country.

First of all the service user was helped with typical problems such as fundraising for household items and establishment of connection and payment methods with utility companies. A specialist support worker was allocated to help her children settle into school where they were the only non-white children attending. She was very positive and determined to train as a nurse.

A few months on, the support worker noted a marked deterioration in her mental health. She became very depressed to the point of being suicidal. She disclosed that she was being racially harassed and withdrew herself from the community. She was prescribed anti-depressants and was referred to a psychiatrist.

Her support worker contacted the housing needs team at the Council for permanent accommodation and SARI (Support Against Racist Incidents). With the support of information gathered from her GP, the application for permanent housing was successful. She participated in DIY skill share service and went onto decorate a room on her own.

Six months after she moved to her new accommodation she began to experience some harassment from one of the neighbours. She worked with her support worker to establish ways of managing the problem and dealing with her neighbour. She started English lessons again and is now volunteering to work with Refugee Action and is also taking computer courses with Learn Direct.

Summary

- 114 We have assessed the administration of the Supporting People programme by South Gloucestershire Council to be a 'fair', one-star service.
- 115 The delivery of the programme is a mix of strengths and weaknesses throughout the areas we have inspected. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for many service users and driving change for some client groups. Good working relationships have been established with service providers and the programme is being effectively managed on a day to day basis. The Council shows a high level of commitment to the programme through senior officers, councillors and the governance arrangements are well developed with evidence of effective decision-making and wider partnership arrangements are working. There are some strong links between the Supporting People strategy and other corporate plans and strategies. A medium term financial strategy has been agreed for the Supporting People programme and service reviews have resulted in savings and efficiency gains.

- 116** However, the lack of involvement of service users is a serious weakness, access and referral arrangements are inconsistent, the choices available for some service users are limited, and there are gaps in service provision for some client groups. Progress on diversity has been slow and as a result services are not being tailored to meet individual needs. The effectiveness of the governance arrangements have been adversely affected by a lack of engagement by the Probation Service. There was a lack of consistency and robustness in the way service reviews were undertaken, review outcomes were not consistently challenged, action plans arising from reviews are of variable quality, monitoring arrangements also lack consistency robustness and few steady state contracts are in place. The Supporting People team's ability to deliver all elements of the programme has been adversely affected by a lack of capacity, performance management is underdeveloped and there are no detailed contingency plans in place. The overall approach to value for money is not robust, cost comparisons have not been updated on a regular basis, benchmarking information has not been used effectively and the approach to procurement is under-developed.

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

What is the Council's track record in delivering improvement?

- 117 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The number of services provided and service users has increased during the last three years. The Council has identified areas for further improvement and has supported capital projects that will deliver additional supported accommodation. However, the Council's track record in involving service users is poor and the Council is unable to demonstrate sustained improvements in diversity and value for money.
- 118 The Supporting People programme in South Gloucestershire has delivered additional services for a number of client groups who are identified as a priority in the five-year strategy, for example, additional services for women suffering from domestic violence have been developed as well as a supported housing scheme for young people and care leavers. Some services have also been re-configured through service reviews, to better meet the needs of their service users, including changing provision from accommodation based support to more flexible floating support schemes. As a result the number of service users accessing floating support has increased by 14 per cent and the number of new services users has increased annually for the last three years.
- 119 Despite ongoing concerns about the future levels of grant funding, the Commissioning Body has supported five capital-funded supported housing projects which has resulted in £6.9 million Housing Corporation investment to provide support to an additional 87 households.
- 120 The Council is realigning its services to reflect changes in organisational structures. Following the Council's decision to transfer its housing stock, the Council is the process of integrating its strategic housing services, which include Supporting People into a newly created Community Care and Housing Department.
- 121 The Council's self-assessment of its progress so far with delivering the Supporting People programme was honest and self aware, it highlighted both the strengths and successes achieved to date, but also areas for further improvement. For example, the Council and the PCT have developed a comprehensive Accommodation and Care Strategy for Older People which proposes the delivery of 15 extra care housing schemes by 2016. When developed, these schemes will improve the choice available to service.

- 122** The Council has also recognised that the lack of and access to move-on accommodation remains an area for improvement. A comprehensive Access to Housing review has been undertaken which has recommended the introduction of a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme by April 2008, which will give greater priority to people needing to access move-on accommodation and introduce safeguards to ensure that vulnerable people get the help they need in order to successfully 'bid' for empty properties. It has also invested resources to improve access for client groups who are finding it difficult to access floating support, a floating support co-ordinator has been recruited who will provide a direct referral route and monitor the usage and demand for floating support services, thereby improving access to these services.
- 123** The Council's track record in involving service users in the Supporting People programme has been poor with very limited outcomes achieved and it has also been identified as an area for improvement. A Service User Involvement Strategy has recently been agreed by the Commissioning Body, but this strategy fails to clearly articulate how the Supporting People programme will engage with carer and advocacy groups in order to ensure that they can effectively represent the views of service users. Without the involvement of service users in the programme, the Council cannot demonstrate that it is effectively meeting their needs.
- 124** The effectiveness of the governance arrangements for the Supporting People programme have been adversely affected by a lack of involvement of the Probation Service. However, the Probation Service is now fully committed to playing a more active role in the Supporting People programme. At the last Commissioning Body meeting, the Probation Service gave a commitment to attend 90 per cent of Supporting People related meetings and has so far achieved this. The Probation Service has commissioned a cross-authority offender survey which will provide up to date information of the needs of offenders so that future service provision can be effectively planned.
- 125** The Council cannot demonstrate a sustained track record in its approach to improving equality and diversity and its performance on meeting its equality and diversity targets are mixed. The Council has only just achieved level 2 of the Equalities Standard, despite a target to achieve level two by 2003/04, thereby missing its target for two consecutive years, placing it in the worst 25 per cent of council's nationally. In 2004/05 the Council's performance on promoting race equality placed it in the worst 25 per cent when compared to all councils nationally. In the same year the percentage of disabled employees was also in the worst 25 per cent of councils nationally. It is uncertain if the Council will meet its LPSA target to improve the employment rate of people with disabilities. The percentage of staff with disabilities did not meet the 2005/06 LPSA target of 2.1 per cent. A Disability Employment Support Officer has been recruited to improve performance in this area.

44 Supporting People Programme | What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?

- 126** In 2004/05, 80 per cent of Council buildings had facilities for people with disabilities, missing the government target, which was to achieve 100 per cent compliance by October 2005, but performing among the best 25 per cent when compared to all councils nationally. In 2005/06 the Council increased this to 83 per cent accessible buildings, but this is below its own target of 85 per cent. In 2004/05 the Council performed among the best 25 per cent of councils nationally on percentage of top 5 per cent earners that are women. Percentage of BME employees was just above median when compared to councils nationally in 2004/05. Corporate equalities targets have yet to be translated into operational service plans which may hamper pace of change.
- 127** Performance indicators for Supporting People services have improved. For KP1 - service users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living, there has been an increase from 91 per cent in 2004/05 to 94.76 per cent in 2005/06. For KPI 2 - service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements, an average of 57 per cent was achieved for 2004/05, increasing to 86 per cent for 2005/06.
- 128** The Council is unable to demonstrate a track record in improving value for money (VFM) in its Supporting People programme. The approach to assessing VFM is not robust, early service reviews were undertaken without a clear approach having been agreed. A short term measure of a £20 per hour benchmark on support costs was introduced, until a regional VFM project was completed. However, the outcomes from the project have not been used to inform later reviews and the cost benchmark remains in place. This approach is flawed as it fails to measure both quality as well as costs and makes no differentiation between the differing needs of the various client groups. The Council has also failed to update its benchmarking information on the costs of providing support services, so it is unaware of how its current costs compare with other local authorities.

How does the Council manage performance?

- 129** This is an area where there is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. There are clear aims and objectives for the Supporting People programme and there is strong corporate commitment and leadership to the programme. The Council has taken a prudent approach to the financial management of the programme and it has a positive approach to learning from others. However, performance on meeting targets is mixed, the service review process was inconsistently managed and performance and contract management arrangements lack robustness.

- 130** The aims and objectives for the programme are set out in the five-year strategy and the strategy contains a clear vision which focuses the programme on enabling vulnerable people to live independently. The aims and objectives are well integrated with the wider strategic priorities of the Council; they also address key national priorities for the Supporting People programme. However, while the Supporting People strategy does highlight unmet needs, it fails to clearly articulate how these needs will be met and what priority is being given to the different client groups within the strategy. Without clearer prioritisation it is difficult to see how competing needs will be met during the life of the strategy.
- 131** There is a framework in place to monitor the progress of targets in the Supporting People strategy work plan, but performance on meeting targets is mixed. The work plan in the five-year strategy is updated annually. It provides the plan for the Supporting People team, Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group and progress with delivering the plan is reported regularly to the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group and bi-annually to the Community Care, Housing and Health Select Committee and to the Executive Member. Despite this scrutiny, a significant number of actions were not completed during 2005/06 and have been rolled forward into the 2006/07 plan and a number of targets in the current plan have also been missed, leading to uncertainty about the Council's capacity to deliver improvements as planned.
- 132** The work plan for 2006/07 is not fully SMART, however, it is comprehensive and will assist the Supporting People team in delivering improvements. The work plan uses project planner methodology to provide a detailed list of tasks to be completed within clearly defined timescales and with appropriate resources defined. Actions programmed to be completed so far have mostly been achieved. However, the relative priority of individual targets is not shown, which would indicate the impact for service users and the programme if they were not met and the plan is process focussed and not clearly linked to measurable outcomes.
- 133** The service review process was inconsistently managed. Not all reviews were completed in a timely manner, with delays caused by a lack of staffing resources, this lead to duplication of effort, with some work having to be repeated. Not all service providers were well informed about the progress and outcomes from their reviews and service users were not routinely notified of the outcomes by the Supporting People team. Outcomes from reviews were not consistently challenged by the Commissioning Body and there was also a lack of external challenge. Action plans arising from reviews are of variable quality and monitoring arrangements lack consistency and robustness. Actions plans are not SMART and monitoring arrangements are of variable quality, with some service providers having regular meetings with the Supporting People team to discuss progress with their action plans, but other providers are unclear about when their action plans will be reviewed.

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- 134** Performance management for the programme is weak and lacks clear measurement of outcomes for service users. There is regular reporting on progress against the work plan, finance and government performance indicators, but there is little reporting on outcomes for service users or progress against the programme's overarching aims. In addition there are no local performance indicators or outcome measures for the programme, which are currently being developed by the SW RIG. Without suitable measures in place and regular reporting, it is difficult to determine what outcomes the programme is achieving for vulnerable people and to systematically address areas of under-performance.
- 135** Newly established governance arrangements will support the work of the Commissioning Body by the explicit inclusion of Supporting People in the Council's Local Strategic Partnership. The Supporting People programme is well embedded in the Local Area Agreement and will be performance reported through the Partnership structure and its agreed performance management arrangements.
- 136** Contract management arrangements lack robustness. There are very few steady state contracts in place, only five to date, with others currently being negotiated. The Council has introduced performance measures into both its interim and steady state contracts which service providers are expected to achieve in order to receive their contracted payments. The performance measures are based on information provided by service providers in their quarterly returns and in order to set the required level of performance in areas such as availability and utilisation of accommodation, the average performance during the last two years has tracked. However, a number of service providers are concerned that the targets set are unachievable and have been set without due regard to the chaotic lifestyles of some client groups. The Supporting People team see the setting of challenging targets as a means of driving further improvement. However, for targets to be effective, they need to be both challenging and achievable.
- 137** The Council has taken a prudent approach to the financial management of the Supporting People programme to date. A medium term financial strategy has been agreed for the programme, which is positive and the service review process and other savings have helped to secure efficiencies in service delivery. Despite reductions in annual grant since 2003/04 the Council has accumulated £97,000 in under-spent grant which has been carried forward into 2006/07. Despite wider uncertainties about the future funding of the national programme and the financial pressures facing the Council, it has continued to support the commissioning of new services.

- 138** Leadership of the Supporting People programme is effective and there is strong corporate commitment to the programme. The Commissioning Body is providing clear strategic leadership to both the Supporting People team and the programme. The members of the Commissioning Body demonstrate a clear understanding of the diverse needs of vulnerable groups and they are ensuring that there are shared priorities in their own organisations to deliver positive outcomes for service users. There has been a history of support at Cabinet level for the programme and all key decisions are ratified by the Executive Member. There is cross party support for the direction of the programme which links with other corporate objectives. Both Accountable Officers have raised the profile of Supporting People both corporately and in wider partnerships at a local and sub-regional level thereby ensuring that the programme receives appropriate recognition.
- 139** The Council has a positive approach to learning. There are good examples of learning from both the WOE Supporting People group and the SW RIG. For example, the WOE Supporting People teams provided a stand at the recent Private Landlords 'Expo'. The intention of this was to raise the awareness of Supporting People services and to increase the confidence of landlords to let their properties to vulnerable people, thereby increasing access to this sector for service users. Both groups have developed policies and procedures that ensure a consistent approach is being taken across the region, for example, the appeals procedure and the accreditation database that has enabled the 'passporting' of service providers. Members of the Supporting People team have also attended events at local authorities who have been given 'Beacon' status for their Supporting People services in order to learn from high performing organisations.

Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

- 140** There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills, which are supplemented by training and support from other corporate services and there are plans in place to increase capacity further. However, a lack of capacity has affected the team's ability to deliver all elements of the programme on time. The IT system requires improvement and the current approach to procurement lacks robustness.
- 141** The members of the Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills, but their ability to deliver all elements of the programme successfully has been hampered by the level of staff vacancies and turnover of agency staff used to cover these vacancies. This has led to delays in completing service reviews and has contributed to the slow progress in negotiating and agreeing steady state contracts. Additional resources have been used to supplement the team, for example, consultants have been used to complete the accreditation process for service providers. The membership of the team has been more stable in recent months.

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- 142** Plans are in place to improve the capacity of the Supporting People team. The Council is in the process integrating its strategic housing service into a newly created community care and housing department, following the Council's decision to transfer its housing stock. Integration will take place by December 2006. This will create opportunities for the Supporting People team to benefit from a broader base of contract development, commissioning expertise as well as utilising the existing quality assurance mechanisms and recently updated service monitoring tool. Planned outcomes from this integration will include improved contract monitoring, better information sharing, improved IT systems and clearer information for service users. Management capacity within the wider community care and housing department is appropriate.
- 143** The programme has a reasonable level of support from corporate services. For example, finance officers routinely attend the Commissioning Body to provide guidance, while legal services have provided assistance on contractual matters and the development of the steady state contract. Other specialists have assisted in the service reviews.
- 144** The current IT system is inefficient and expensive to maintain. The IT system used by the Supporting People team has had a number of problems and a consultant has been employed to address some of the weaknesses. This has proved to be expensive and supporting the IT system consumes about a quarter of the annual administration budget. The Council is now looking at integrating the Supporting People IT system into the one used by community care as a longer term solution to these problems.
- 145** The Supporting People team have received training to develop their skills. The staff development and appraisal system is used effectively to identify training needs. Training has included procurement and project management. All staff receive appraisals and targets are linked to the annual work plan.
- 146** The Council's approach to procuring Supporting People is weak. There is no procurement strategy in place to determine how services will be procured in the future. The annual work plan recognises this as an area for improvement and an approach to re-commissioning services has been agreed by the Commissioning Body, which allows for re-negotiation of contracts until procurement options have been developed and agreed. There has been some cross authority procurement but there are no agreed plans to develop this further, which is a wasted opportunity to share costs, expertise and best practice. The integration of Supporting People into the community care and housing department will create opportunities for sharing best practice, knowledge and resources in procuring services for vulnerable people.

Summary

- 147** Our judgement is that the Council's Supporting People programme has 'uncertain' prospects for improvement.
- 148** There are clear aims and objectives for the Supporting People programme and there is strong corporate commitment and leadership to the programme. The number of both services provided and service users have increased during the last three years. The Council has identified areas for further improvement and has supported capital projects that will deliver additional supported accommodation. The Council has taken a prudent approach to the financial management of the programme and it has a positive approach to learning from others. The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills, which are supplemented by training and support from other corporate services and there are plans in place to further increase capacity.
- 149** However, the Council's track record in involving service users is poor, the Council is unable to demonstrate sustained improvements in diversity and value for money. A lack of capacity has affected the team's ability to deliver all elements of the programme on time. The current IT system requires improvement and the approach to procurement lacks robustness. Performance on meeting targets is mixed, the service review process was inconsistently managed and performance and contract management arrangements lack robustness.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Demographic information

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

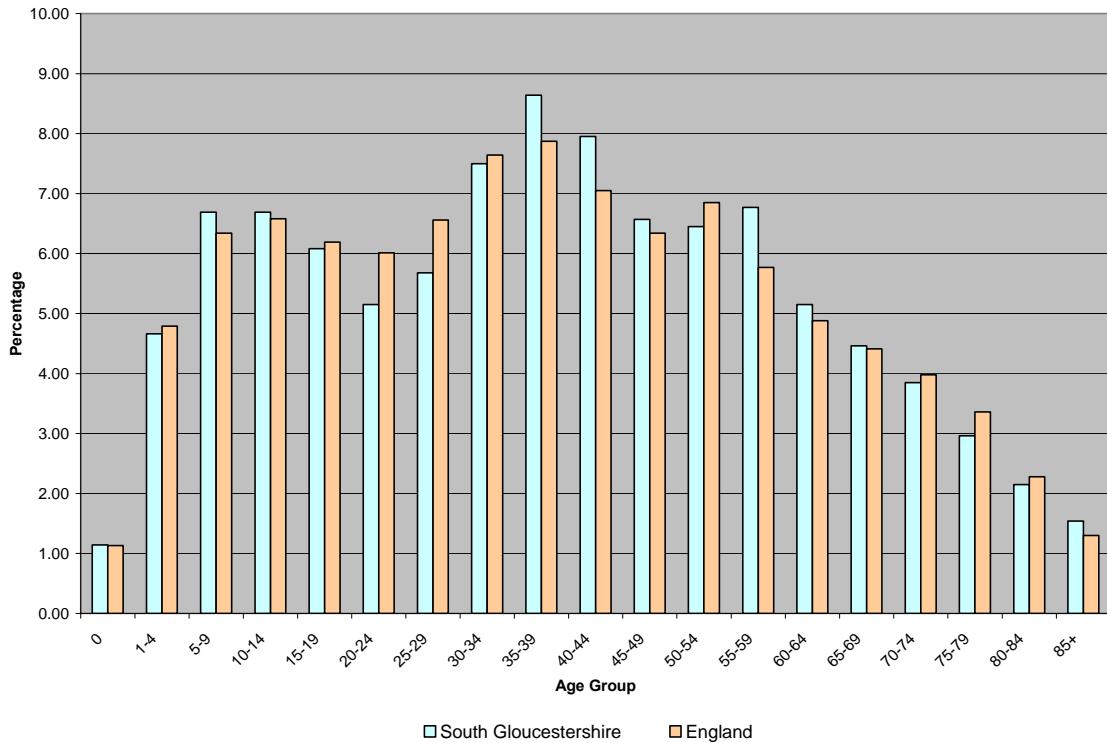
Measure	South Gloucestershire	England
Population (mid-2004) ⁷	247,500	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	20.3	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	2.8	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁸	2.7	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁹	278	-

⁷ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

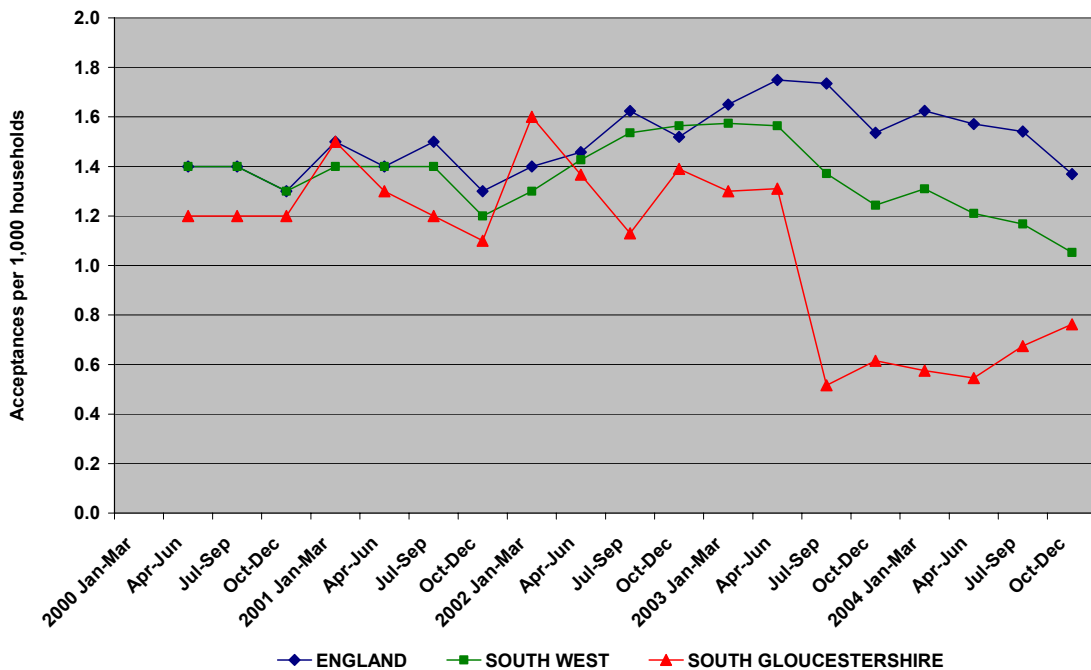
⁸ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (August 2006)

⁹ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

Percentage of the population¹⁰ in each age group compared with England



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



¹⁰ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

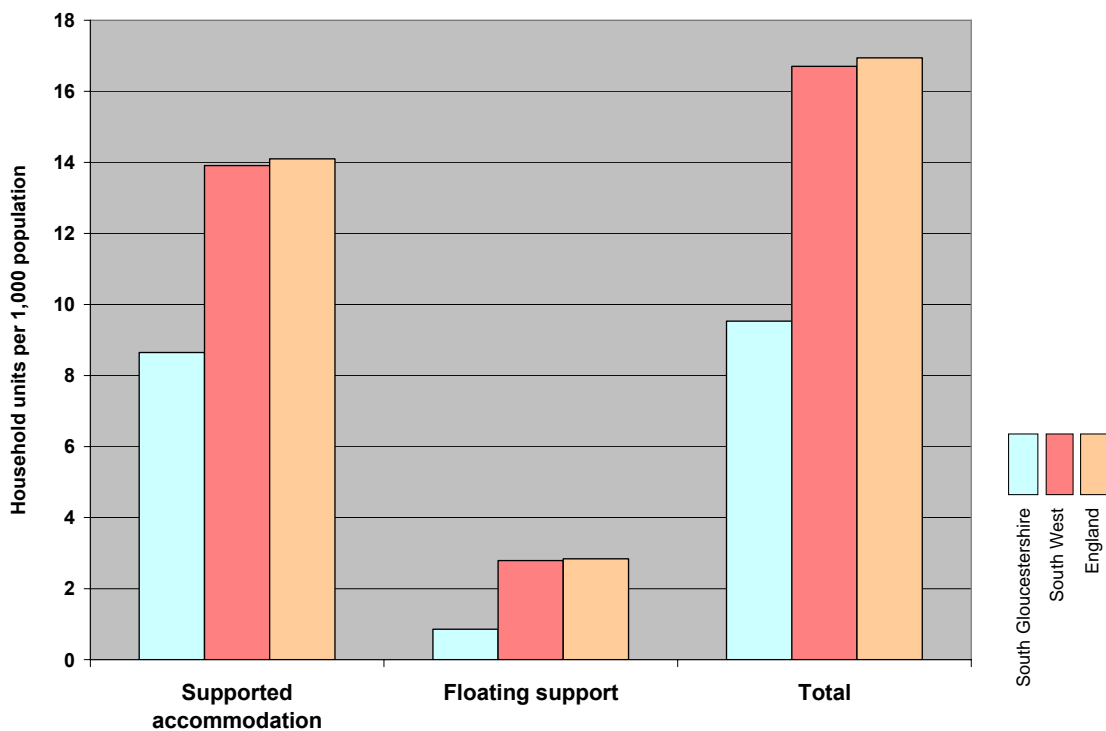
Performance information

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

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

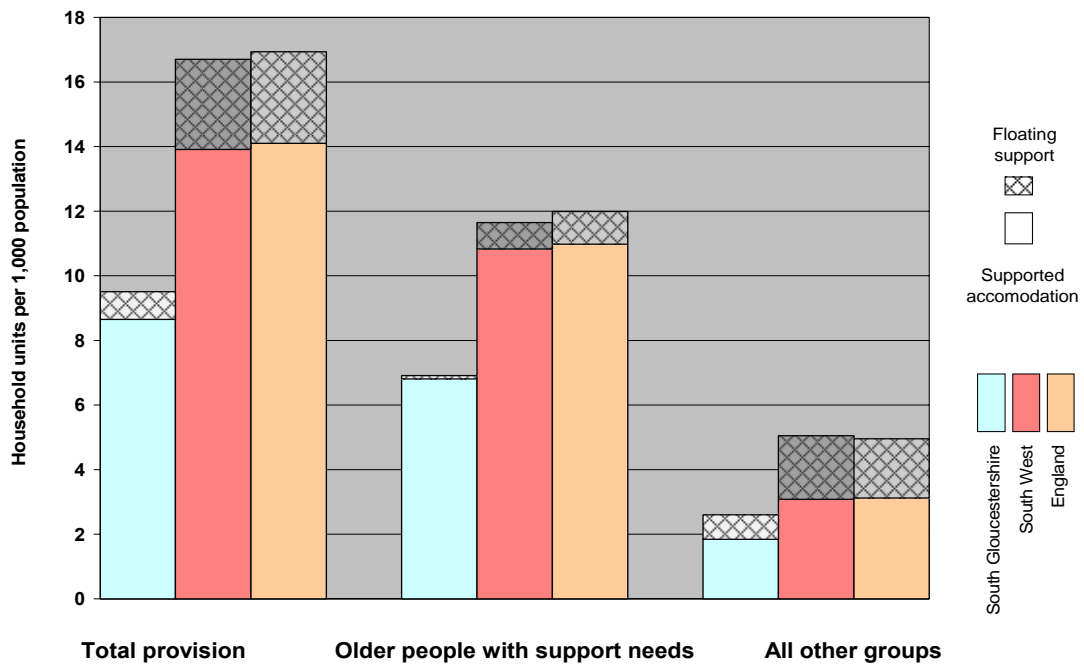
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People¹¹



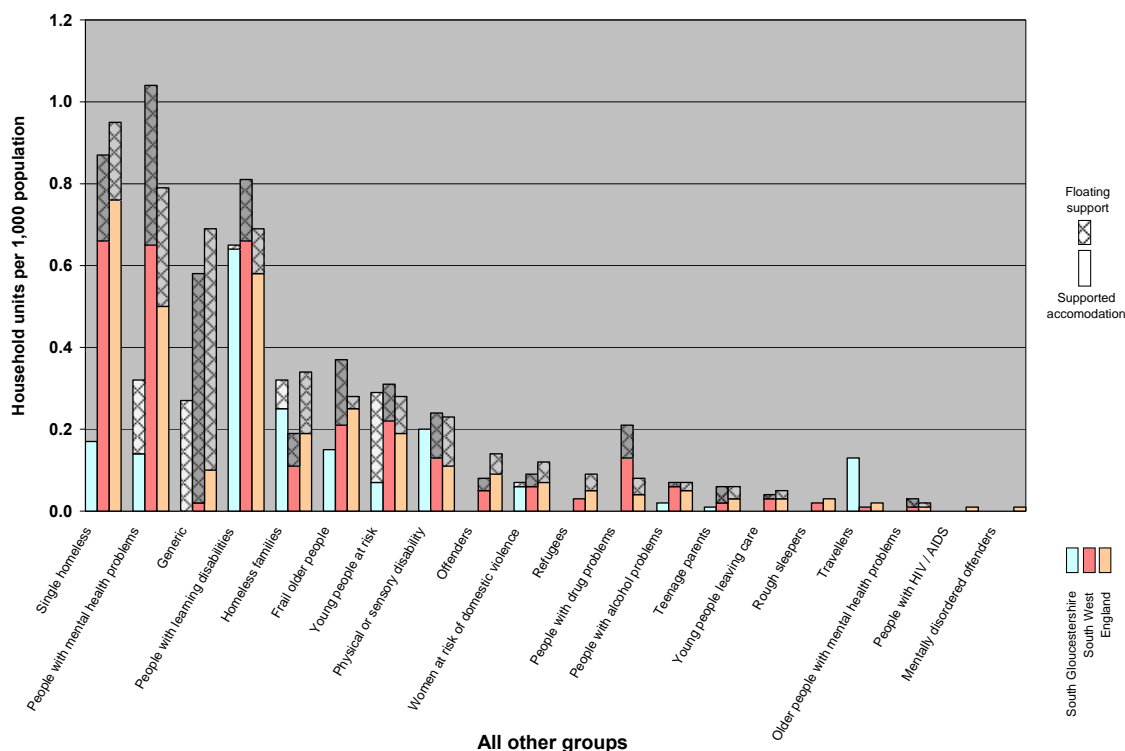
¹¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹²



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

Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹³



Funding for Supporting People¹⁴

South Gloucestershire	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 5,034,638	£ 5,017,199	£ 4,764,505
Pipeline allocation	£ 64,474	£ 134,485	£ -
Administration grant	£ 206,768	£ 182,584	£ 150,177

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

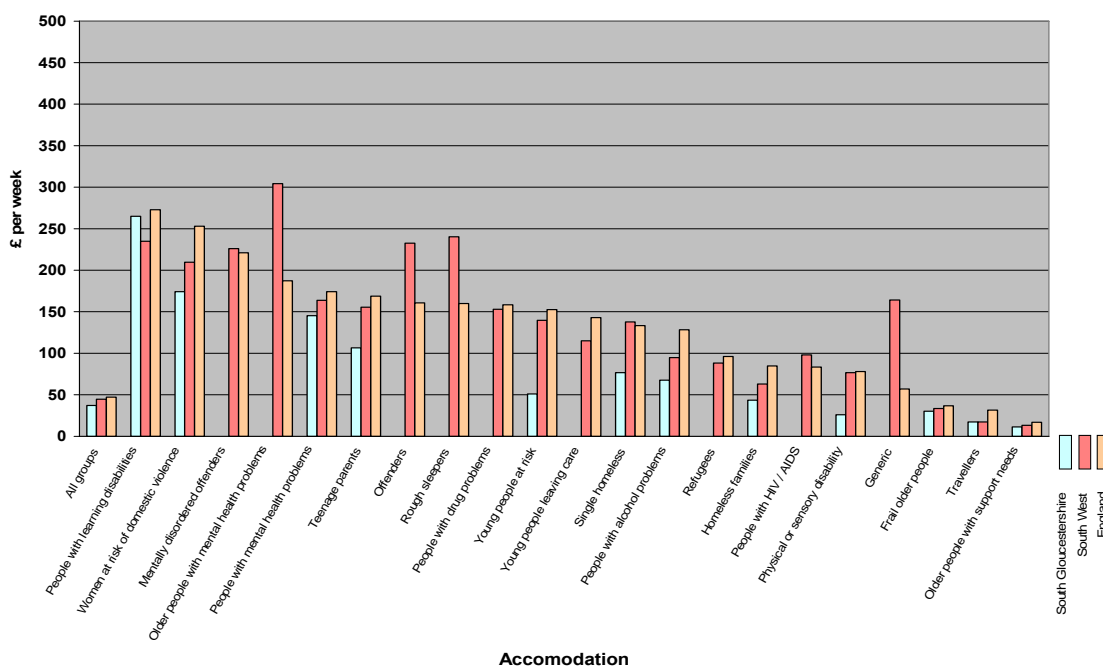
¹⁴ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹⁵

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
South Gloucestershire	£ 0.39	£ 35.95	£ 35.95	£ 93.33
South West	£ 0.73	£ 33.33	£ 36.46	£ 80.42
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

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

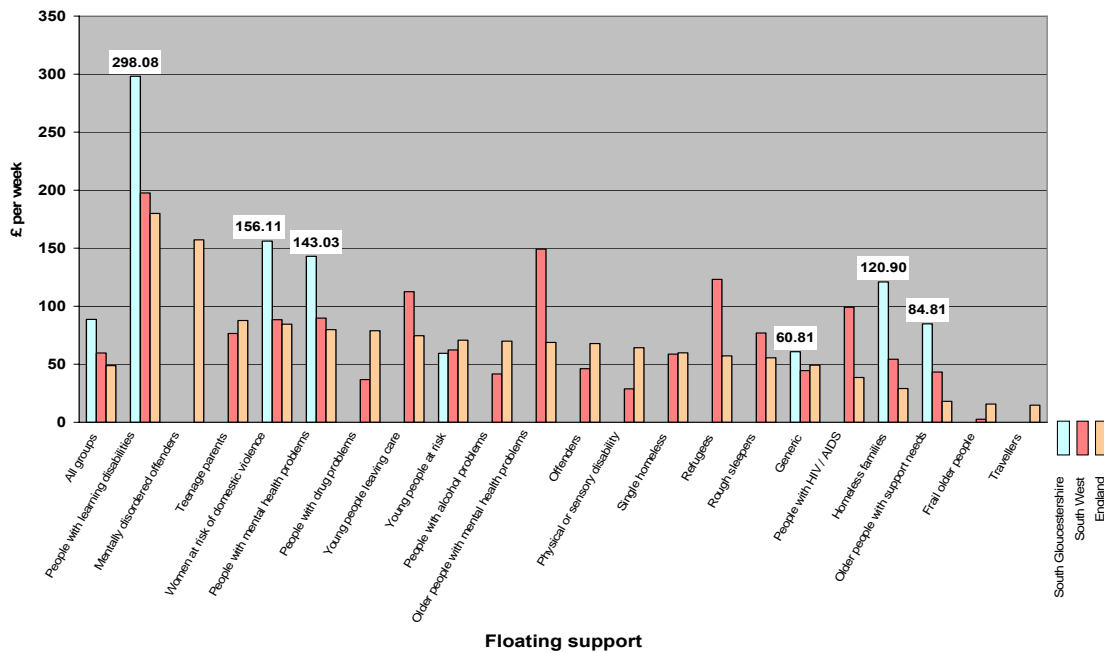
Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁶



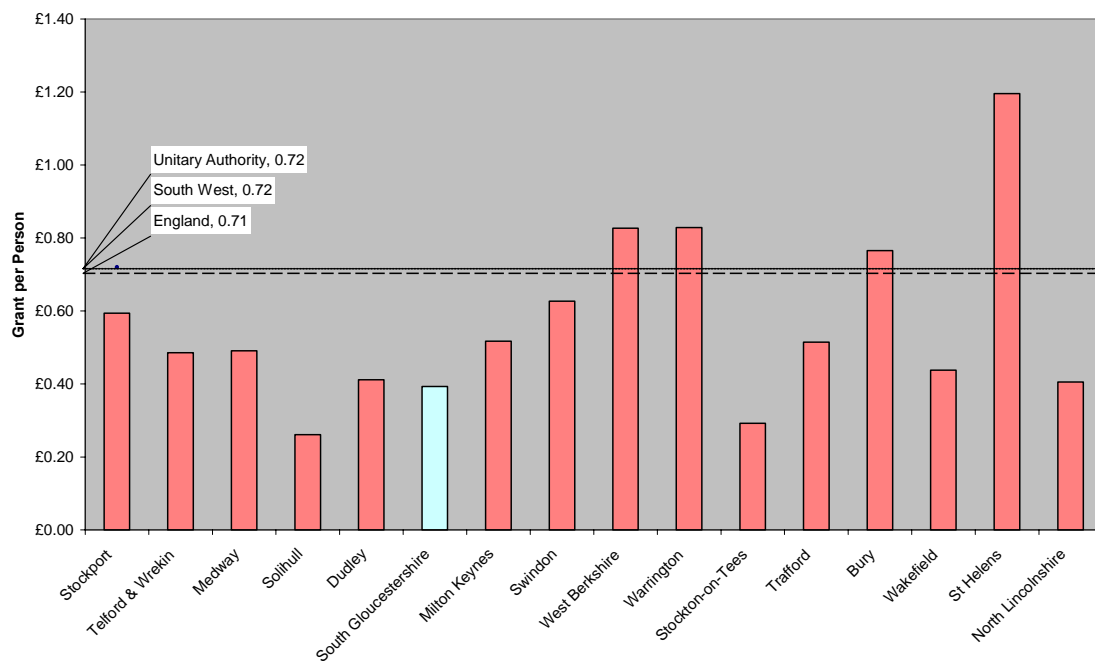
¹⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

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

Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁷



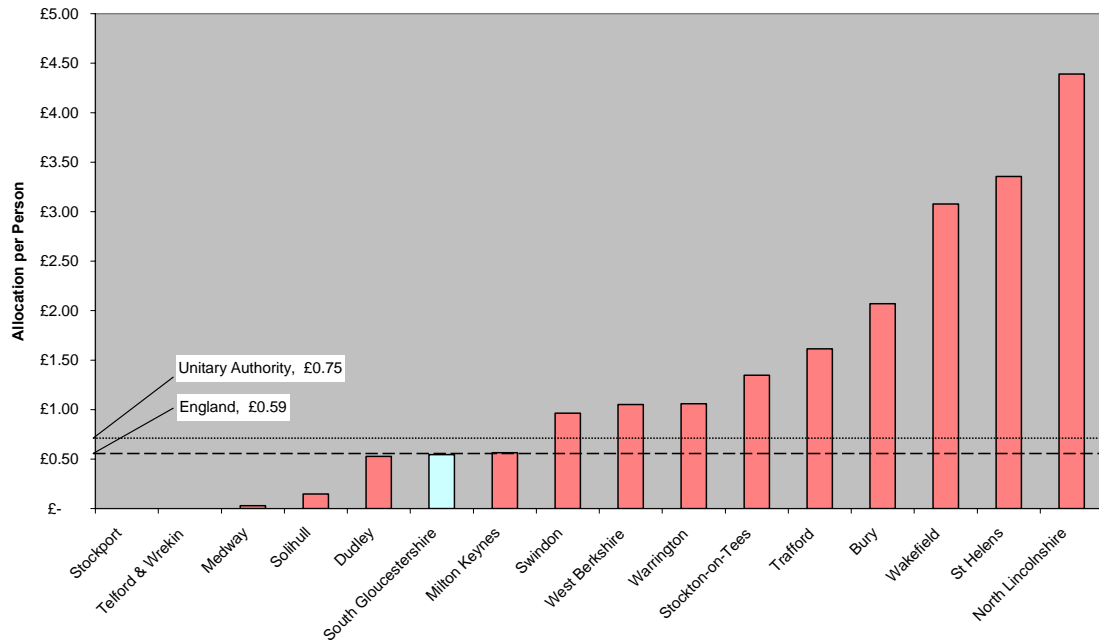
Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁸, all unitary councils and all English councils (2004/05)



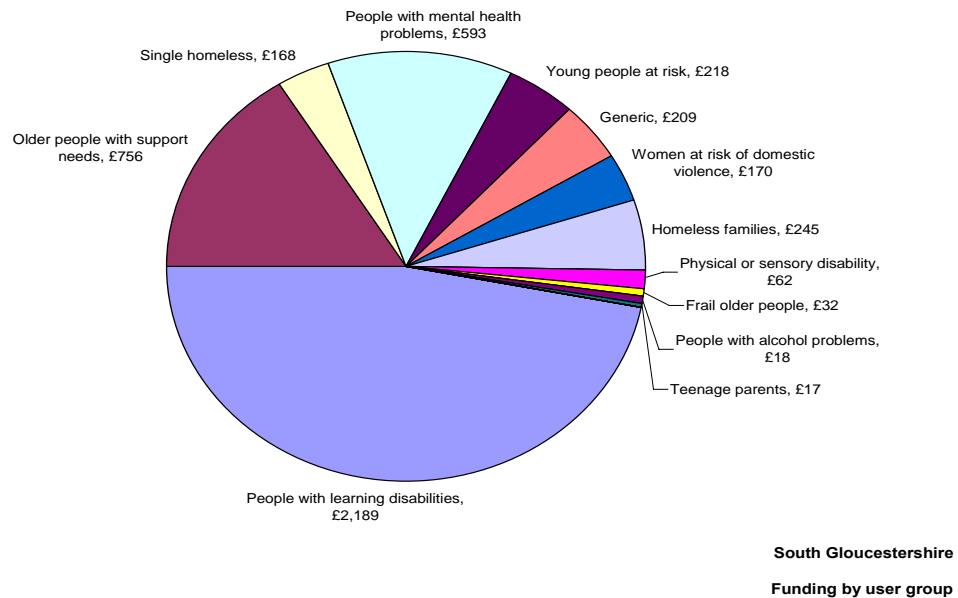
¹⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹⁸ A comparator group of similar councils.

Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours¹⁹, all unitary councils and all English councils



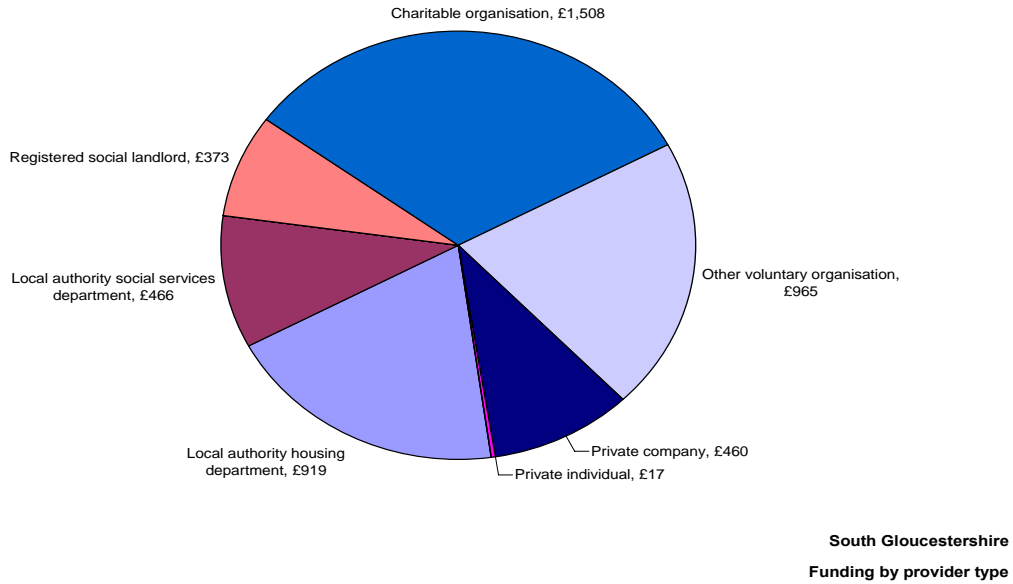
Share of spending between user groups (£000s)²⁰



¹⁹ A comparator group of similar councils.

²⁰ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)²¹



Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

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

²¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

South Gloucestershire	
Significantly above average (*****)	Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26) Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)
Above average (****)	Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)
Average (***)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51) Delayed transfers of care (D41) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)
Below average (**)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Older people helped to live at home (C32)

South Gloucestershire	
Significantly below average (•)	Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57)

Best value performance indicators

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

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

South Gloucestershire	
Within the best 25 per cent	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)
Within the worst 25 per cent	Energy efficiency of local authority owned dwellings (BV63) Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a) Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a) Domestic violence refuge places (BV176)

Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - a questionnaire survey which was sent to all providers of housing-related support services;
 - focus groups with members of the Core Strategy Development Group, Providers Forum and Service Users;
 - visits to supported housing schemes, to talk to service users, scheme managers and front line staff;
 - file checks of service reviews;
 - mystery shopping exercises to test how easy it is to access services;
 - review of leaflets and the council's website;
 - interviews with members of the Supporting People Team;
 - interviews with members of the Commissioning Body and the Accountable Officer; and
 - interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Chief Executive, Executive Members, members of the select committee, managers from the Probation Service, the YOT and the DAAT, commissioning managers from Community Care and the PCT.