

Supporting People Inspection Report

November 2006



# Supporting People

**Merton Council**

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# Contents

<b>Supporting People Inspections</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Scoring the service</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Report</b>	<b>14</b>
Context	14
<b>How good is the Supporting People programme?</b>	<b>18</b>
Is the programme meeting the needs of the local community and users?	19
<b>What are the prospects for improvement to the service?</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Appendix 1 – Performance indicators</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Appendix 3 – Positive practice</b>	<b>58</b>

## Supporting People Inspections

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

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing](http://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 then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.spkweb.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> Now the DCLG, Department of Communities and Local Government

## Summary

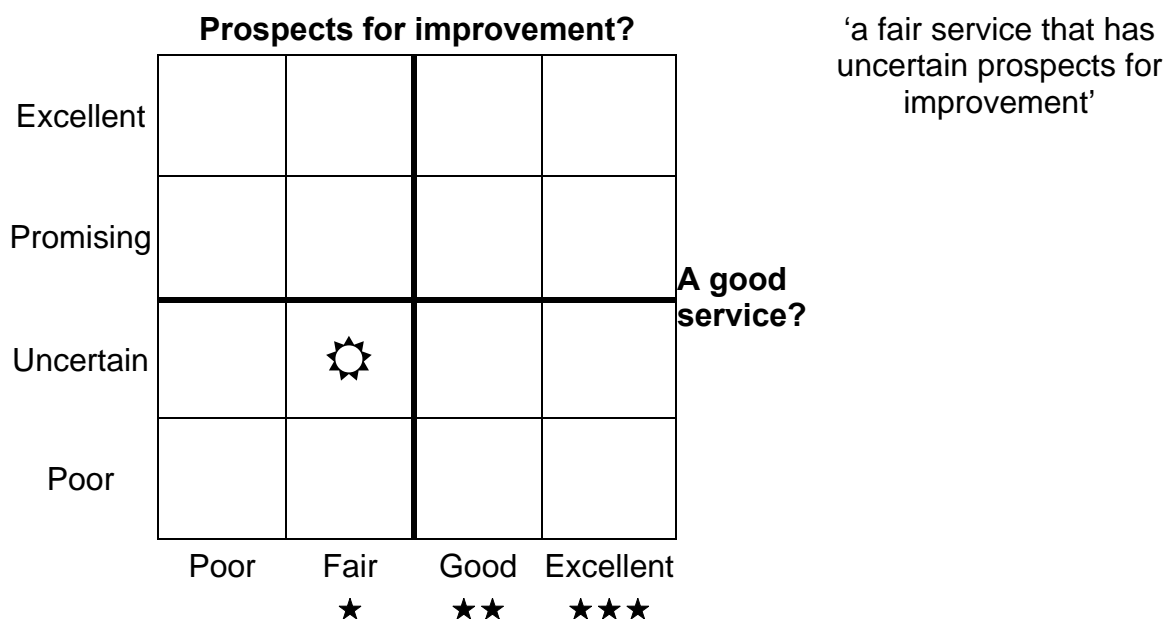
- 1 Overall, the London Borough of Merton (LBM) is providing a 'fair' administration of the Supporting People programme with uncertain prospects for improvement.
- 2 The programme is delivering positive outcomes for services users which is a considerable strength. However, there are limited opportunities for services users to influence the development of services and some client groups are not fully represented in the consultation structures, such as the partnership boards. The Reaching Out programme has had limited success, but there are positive examples of engagement with hard to reach groups such as young people from BME communities, and Gypsies and Travellers.
- 3 LBM has good support for the programme within the Council and the partners work well together. The programme is firmly linked into the corporate and local strategic partnership aims and objectives and there is wide understanding of how support services help people to live independent lives. This sits well with national and regional agendas and delivers positive benefits for local residents.
- 4 Leadership of the programme has been weak in respect of performance management especially in ensuring that providers are delivering value for money and high quality services. Some client groups are not well linked with the programme and the needs of people with mental health, drug and alcohol problems are not well represented in decision making. This is a particular issue as funding for people with mental health problems consumes 34 per cent of the Supporting People grant, but the funding is not well targeted. The impact is less funding for other services and other client groups.
- 5 LBM has recognised the need for better performance and is reviewing governance arrangements and developing a new programme of service reviews including a robust assessment of value for money. However, progress is slow. The Supporting People strategy and action plans do not provide a robust driver for improvement. Linked with capacity issues within the Supporting People team this has resulted in many targets being missed including the negotiation and implementation of steady state contracts for 85 per cent of services. Although the priorities for new services have been identified resources have not been identified and priorities have not been established between client groups. LBM have agreed a framework for considering bids for new services but were slow to implement despite grant resources being available to savings made through service reviews.
- 6 LBM has made positive progress on developing new accommodation for vulnerable people and this is supported by making an annual quota of vacant housing available for a range of client groups. This helps to move people through support housing schemes to greater levels of independence, and provide others with the opportunity of benefiting from specialised support.

- 7 The prospects for improvement have been judged as uncertain as the programme has not achieved the targets it has been set, there is not a robust approach to value for money, performance of related services is variable and LBM has been slow in dealing with some difficult problems. Positively, the programme is well supported by Councillors and senior officers and progress in implementing the programme was improved after a poor start. Service users have benefited from service improvements following the review programme and there is now more choice for them.

## Scoring the service

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

**Figure 1 Scoring chart<sup>2</sup>**



Source: Audit Commission

- 9 We have assessed the Council's administration of the Supporting People programme to be 'fair' because:
- service users we spoke to were happy with the services they received and the environments they live in;
  - service reviews have resulted in improvements and savings of £284,000;
  - service users have been involved in the service review process;
  - access to advice and information for potential service users is good and delivered at a high standard from the main civic centre and through the website;
  - there is regular provision of move on accommodation for a range of client groups maximising the use of supported housing accommodation for those who need it;

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

## 8 Supporting People | Scoring the service

- cross authority working has delivered a scheme for BME elders with the administration of the contract managed by the Council;
- the Supporting People team have forged good working relationships with service providers; and
- the Supporting People programme finances have been well managed allowing for the development of new schemes.

### 10 However, the following areas need to be addressed.

- Knowledge of Supporting People services and referral arrangements by front line staff is patchy and can be a barrier to accessing services.
- The delay in transferring ineligible funding to appropriate budgets has resulted in less Supporting People funding for identified priority groups.
- There has been no analysis of ethnic profiles to establish whether culturally specific service provision is needed especially for those experiencing domestic violence.
- Service reviews were not signed off and completed by the March 2006 deadline and the value for money approach has not been consistent or fully effective.
- Scrutiny of the service reviews by the Commissioning Body has been weak especially in establishing whether schemes are providing value for money.
- Monitoring of performance and the approach to value for money by the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group is weak.
- The Core Strategy Group has not contributed effectively to the Supporting People programme due to inconsistent attendance resulting in weak links with mental health and drug and alcohol services.
- The updating and analysis of needs information is not undertaken systematically and there are still gaps in information.
- Contract negotiation skills within the Supporting People team have not been fully utilised with a result that there were few steady state contracts in place and there has been considerable delay in implementing them following some service reviews.
- Reports to the Commissioning Body are sometimes weak and the performance information provided does not lead to effective scrutiny.
- Supporting People contracts are not being consistently managed and action plans are not being monitored to ensure service users are receiving improving services.

### 11 We have judged the Supporting People programme to have uncertain prospects for improvement because:

- the action plan is weak and there has been slow progress against the targets in the Supporting People strategy;
- plans to strengthen the approach to value for money in the new programme of service reviews are slow in being implemented;

- the linking of strategies and action plans with the programme for people with mental health and drug and alcohol problems is weak;
- decisions on the reconfiguration of support services for older people has been slow in developing with an ongoing impact for Supporting People funding;
- there is a lack of capacity within the Supporting People team to put in place steady state contracts and no firm proposals in place to deal with this;
- few performance indicators have improved or are within the top 25 per cent;
- there are limited examples of learning which would add to the resources available to the programme;
- LBM does not maximise learning opportunities to help build the capacity of the team; and
- there is limited development of performance information and analysis on the quality outcomes for service users to inform the future development of the programme.

12 However, the following areas are positive aspects.

- There is strong support for the programme by Councillors and senior managers.
- Performance information is reliable, although limited, and there has been improvements in performance in some related areas to Supporting People.
- Corporate services have been used to support the programme, such as finance and IT, as well as specialist officers to support service reviews.
- Successful bids have been made to attract inward investment for young people and BME elders.
- Some referral arrangements have been improved to improve access to supported housing particularly for young people.
- There have been improvements in engaging with some hard to reach groups such as Gypsies and Travellers.

## 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 costs<sup>3</sup> and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with customers, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Improve access to services by:*

- *reviewing all information sources in conjunction with service users and providers and ensure that Supporting People services are adequately described;*
- *ensuring information about the services reach front line staff including providers; and*
- *improving the knowledge and understanding of services by front line staff across the partner organisations.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- current and potential service users will understand what support services are available and how to access them; and
- all stakeholders will be able to access up to date and comprehensive information in person, by phone and through the internet.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by April 2007.

### **Recommendation**

*R2 Review governance arrangements by:*

- *reviewing the membership, role and expected outcomes of the Core Strategy Group;*
- *reviewing the approach to value for money and setting clear targets for efficiency savings in discussion with stakeholders and establishing plans on how they are to be achieved; and*
- *agreeing a clear framework for the prioritisation of bids for new services in conjunction with stakeholders.*

<sup>3</sup> 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.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are to:

- ensure that all client groups are effectively represented and able to contribute to the future development of the programme;
- maximise the contribution of all services to needs assessment and determination of priorities; and
- increase resources for support services.

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

### **Recommendation**

*R3 Improve delivery arrangements by:*

- *getting early agreement (by November 2006) to a firm timetable for transferring ineligible costs to appropriate budgets;*
- *putting in place arrangements to deliver steady state contracts with robust negotiations on costs and outcomes;*
- *reviewing the arrangements for updating and analysing supported housing needs information to ensure this takes place in a systematic and transparent way;*
- *reviewing the information and reports presented to the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group to ensure that they include all the necessary information for effective decision making and scrutinising performance;*
- *putting in place arrangements to ensure action plans resulting from service reviews are being implemented and contractual agreements are being met; and*
- *ensuring that information collected about Supporting People service users is analysed to identify the need for culturally specific service provision.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are to:

- increase resources for priority client groups;
- ensure that grant conditions are complied with;
- ensure that Supporting People contracts are delivering value for money linked to clear beneficial outcomes for service users;
- ensure that internal arrangements for developing support services for all client groups are streamlined and improve communication between different service areas;
- ensure that the priorities for supported housing needs are developed from robust needs information and analysis;

## 12 Supporting People | Recommendations

- improve the effectiveness of the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group;
- ensure that providers are continuing to improve services for the direct benefit of service users; and
- ensure that service cultural needs are addressed.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented (unless otherwise indicated) by April 2007.

### **Recommendation**

*R4 Improve the engagement of service users, carers and advocates by:*

- *researching good practice in top performing administering local authorities;*
- *developing a structured approach to involving service users in the strategic development of the programme; and*
- *providing feedback to ensure service users are told what changes result from their involvement.*

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 this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within nine months of publishing the report.

### **Recommendation**

*R5 Analyse the information generated through the programme to inform future development by:*

- *considering the outcomes of the service reviews on a client basis to draw out the main themes; and*
- *considering the information on service users' ethnic background to establish whether culturally specific services need to be developed.*

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- better inform the future planning of services on a client basis.

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

**Recommendation**

*R6 Report and publicise the key findings of this report to service users, stakeholders, Councillors and staff.*

**Recommendation**

*R7 Take action to address all other weaknesses identified in this report.*

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

Dates of inspection: 15, 21 to 24 August 2006

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# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 15 The London Borough of Merton is a south west London borough bordering on Wandsworth, Lambeth, Croydon, Sutton and Kingston-upon-Thames. There are three main population centres, Morden, where the council offices are located, Mitcham and Wimbledon.
- 16 The area has a population of 192,300<sup>4</sup>, an increase of 2.3 per cent since 2001. Twenty five per cent of the population come from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. This is low compared with 40.2 per cent average for the rest of London, but higher than the national average of 13 per cent. The largest minority group at 8 per cent are from 'other white' backgrounds.
- 17 The population is a youthful one with a high level of people of working age. The age profile of the population is:
  - 0-15 years - 18.6 per cent which is in line with national and regional averages of 19.5 per cent;
  - 16-64 years - 69 per cent which is above the national average of 64.6 per cent but is in line with the London region; and
  - 65+ years 12.4 per cent this is below the national average of 16 per cent.
- 18 A number of health issues have been highlighted in the census that are similar to other London areas:
  - 3.1 per cent of the population are permanently sick or disabled;
  - 13.8 per cent have a limiting long-term illness;
  - 7.1 per cent say their general health is 'not good'; and
  - 8.1 per cent of people are providing unpaid care.
- 19 Unemployment is 2.5 per cent, in line with the national average, although this rises to 5.4 per cent in the east wards of the borough where there is a higher level of deprivation. The overall rank of the area in the deprivation index<sup>5</sup> is 220 with no wards in the ten most deprived in England. However, for the east wards the average household income is 23 per cent lower than the borough average, there is a higher proportion of people without any qualifications and a greater concentration of people with a long-term limiting illness.<sup>6</sup> Black African and black Caribbean households in particular have average incomes which are significantly lower than the borough average.

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<sup>4</sup> ONS census 2004

<sup>5</sup> Out of 354 local authority areas where 1 is the highest

<sup>6</sup> London Borough of Merton Business Plan 2006-2009

- 20 There are approximately 77,000 households in the borough of which 85 per cent are privately owned or rented, 9 per cent are owned by the Council and 6 per cent are owned by registered social landlords. Affordable housing is an issue for those on low incomes; the average house price is £293,238<sup>7</sup>, an increase of 2 per cent on April to June 2004.
- 21 The Business Plan for 2006-2009 (BP) has identified that the main issues for residents are the level of Council tax, street cleanliness, crime and anti-social behaviour.

## **The Council**

- 22 The Council has no overall control following the May 2006 election. This follows a Labour administration since 1990. The Conservative party has formed an administration with the support of Independent Residents. There are 30 Conservative Councillors, 27 Labour and three Independent Residents. The Labour Mayor has the casting vote. The Leader and cabinet governance model has been retained together with the principle of delegation with exception. This means that all functions are delegated to officers unless they are specifically reserved to the Council or the Cabinet as its executive.
- 23 There are five council departments. The Supporting People team is located in the Community and Housing department. In 2002 the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) classified the Council as 'weak'. This has been upgraded in 2005 to improving well and demonstrating a two-star overall performance. Housing and Benefits both scored three in the CPA 2005. These are areas of significant support for the Supporting People programme.
- 24 The Council employs 2,897 staff (excluding schools). The revenue budget for 2006/07 is £222.9 million, an increase of 6 per cent from the 2005/06 budget of £209 million. The revenue budget for Community and Housing is £53.6 million for 2006/07, an increase of 5 per cent from the 2005/06 budget of £50.9 million.
- 25 Adult services were assessed by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) in November 2004 as two-star (out of a possible three), serving most people well with promising prospects for improvement. A service inspection on mental health by CSCI in October 2005 judged the service was serving some people well with uncertain prospects.
- 26 An inspection by the Audit Commission of the Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation service in June 2006 was judged to be a one-star, fair service with promising prospects for improvement.

## **The Supporting People programme**

- 27 The Council acts as the Administering Local Authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in its area.

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<sup>7</sup> Land Registry - April/June 2005

- 28 The Supporting People programme is designed to meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable people, including homeless people, older people with support needs, people with a learning disability, people with mental health problems, those with substance misuse problems, refugees, travellers and ex-offenders.
- 29 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the Council in 2006/07 is £3,287,911. This is a 2 per cent reduction on the grant for 2005/06 of £3,345,767. The Council also receives an administration grant of £141,362, a 40 per cent reduction over three years on the grant at the implementation of the programme in 2003/04 of £234,578. The Council has supported the administration grant with additional funding of £45,000 in 2004/05, and £50,000 in successive years.
- 30 There are 55 interim contracts and five steady state contracts with providers, all signed, providing 64 Supporting People services in the borough. These services provide 1,288 units of supported accommodation and 147 units of floating support.
- 31 The breakdown of spending across client groups from a total of £3,287,911 at 1 April 2006 is shown in the following table. This highlights that 34 per cent of the funding is focussed on 11 per cent of service users (those with mental health problems) 59 per cent of service users are older people with support needs supported by 10 per cent of the funding, largely directed at sheltered housing.

**Table 1 Profile of percentage spend and percentage of units per client group**

Percentage spend	Client group	Percentage units
34	Mental health	11
27	Single homeless	7.3
10	Learning Disabilities	3.5
7	Older people	59.3
5	Young people at risk	3.1
4	Domestic Violence	1.4
4	Alcohol problems	0.7
3	Frail elderly	included in Older People
2	Offenders	0.5
1	Teenage parents	0.8
1	Homeless families	3.7
1	Physical or sensory disabilities	3.1
1	HIV/Aids	0.6

Source: Supporting People Strategy 2005-2010

- 32** Current service provision does not include accommodation for people with drug problems and refugees. Gypsies and Travellers are not mentioned in the strategy, although work has been undertaken during 2005. All other groups are under provided for when compared with the then ODPM supply profiles, although this information is now dated.
- 33** The Council has identified the following priorities for commissioning new services:
- drugs and alcohol, offenders and domestic violence through the South West London Cross Authority Group (SWLCAG);
  - floating support for young people leaving care/at risk;
  - extra care housing for older people; and
  - generic floating support services for a number of client groups.
- 34** The highest cost service is for people with mental health problems at £355.06 per week. This has been reviewed and remodelled for reduction in October 2006. The lowest cost service is sheltered housing for older people at £2.23 per week.
- 35** The London Borough of Merton was inspected in the fourth year of the programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the Council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money offered by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

## How good is the Supporting People programme?

### What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 36 The Council's vision is set out in the Business Plan:

*'Merton - A great place to live, work and learn'.*

- 37 This is supported by an ambition:

*'To be excellent in the delivery of the services that matter most to our residents and to provide leadership to the community through effective citizen engagement and partnership working'*

and underpinned by six strategic themes:

- children and young people;
  - healthier communities;
  - safer and stronger communities;
  - sustainable communities;
  - older people; and
  - corporate capacity.
- 38 The Supporting People programme is linked to three of those strategic themes; healthier communities, sustainable communities and older people. The objective is to deliver improved options for people with support needs. To monitor how successfully LBM deliver against these objectives a range of targets have been set by the local strategic partnership. There are four which the Supporting People programme contributes towards: to increase independent living for adults with physical disabilities, older people, people with mental health problems and those with learning disabilities by 2016.
- 39 The Supporting People five year strategy 2005-2010 supports the corporate and LSP approach. The strategy was produced for the then ODPM<sup>8</sup> for the deadline of March 2005. It includes the Council's vision and objectives for the Supporting People programme:

*'To enable vulnerable people to maximise their independence, building safe and fulfilling lives in the community through support to their housing circumstances that meets their needs'.*

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<sup>8</sup> ODPM - Office of the Deputy Prime Minister now the Department of Communities and Local Government

- 40 The following key objectives were established.
- Improve the needs analysis with a special emphasis on people excluded from services and services to the BME community.
  - Improve our partnership working with service providers, stakeholders, support agencies and services users.
  - Work with other boroughs to develop accessible services for people across borough boundaries.
  - Increase resources towards generic floating support services and get the balance right between accommodation-based services and floating support.
  - Improve communications with an emphasis towards services users and access to services.
  - Set high standards for quality and value for money in the service review programme and performance monitoring.
  - Use the budget creatively, linking with other funding streams for multi-dimensional needs and ensure the overall programme is cohesively linked into other corporate plans and wider partnerships.
- 41 There are also a number of housing strategies which are in various stages of development. These are linked with the above and the priorities are well co-ordinated.

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

- 42 The assessment was based upon 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

- 43** This area is a balance of strengths and weaknesses for the Council. There is a good level of support by Councillors for the programme and the benefits of the programme are well understood. There are good relationships across some service areas such as housing and children's services. The partners in the Commissioning Body work well together but it is not a fully effective group. There are weaknesses in the governance structure, in particular in the operation of the Core Strategy Group which is not effectively supporting the programme. Mental health and drug and alcohol service users have not been consistently represented in the development of the programme and links to the strategies for these client groups are weak.
- 44** 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 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.
  - Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 45** Supporting People Commissioning Bodies are a requirement under grant conditions for non-excellent authorities<sup>9</sup> and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. Each named representative has one vote, although the administering local authority has a veto where there is a demonstrable financial risk to the administering local authority.

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<sup>9</sup> Non-excellent authorities - those councils not judged to be excellent through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment undertaken by the Audit Commission

- 46 There has been strong support for the Supporting People programme by Councillors. They have been briefed on the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme. Both the previous and current lead member with responsibility for Supporting People have been routinely briefed on the programme. The former Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Care has also undertaken visits to Supporting People funded services, helping to build understanding of the programme. Other initiatives to raise awareness of the programme among Councillors include a briefing to the Labour Group and new Councillors. There is awareness among lead Councillors of the role of the programme in supporting independent living. They have agreed additional financial support for the programme in 2006/07, £56,530 towards the administration grant and £50,210 for support services.
- 47 This support is clearly linked to the five cross cutting themes of the local strategic partnership (LSP) specifically through the three, sustainable communities, healthier communities and older people themes. The key outcome of improved options for people with support needs has been adopted by the LSP in the Community Plan 2006-2015 and by the Council in the Business Plan 2006-2009. This plan contains four targets to increase independent living for adults with physical disabilities, older people, people with mental health problems and those with learning disabilities by 2016 from the baseline position established in the plan. A wide range of agencies operating in the borough are signed up to delivering the concept of independent living.
- 48 The current arrangements for the Commissioning Body have been in place since November 2003. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Terms of Reference are in place and have been updated to reflect the changes in the development of the programme. There are four voting representatives:
- LBM: Head of Community Care (Chair) and Head of Strategy and Business (Accountable Officer);
  - Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust (PCT): Assistant Director for Older People and Physical Disability; and
  - National Probation Service: Assistant Chief Officer Merton and Sutton.
- 49 Although the balance of voting is weighted in favour of LBM, partners have agreed that decisions will not be passed without a majority and there is a reasonable process for dealing with disputes. There has not yet been any incidence of the Commissioning Body failing to agree on decisions.

- 50 The Commissioning Body works well in some respects. There are good working relationships between the partner members. There is a history of consistent attendance from mid 2005 by of the PCT representative. A Probation representative has attended regularly from early 2004 although recent staff changes have disrupted this in the early months of 2006. Timely decisions have been taken which have led to the meeting of key milestones set by the then ODPM, such as the production of the five year strategy. The Commissioning Body have adequately dealt with a challenge to a decision to decommission a Supporting People funded service and agreed governance policies such as the Supporting People risk management strategy. The Commissioning Body has developed cross-agency ownership of the overall strategic direction of the programme.
- 51 However, the effectiveness of the Commissioning Body is undermined in the following ways. Service reviews have not routinely been signed off by the Commissioning Body which would enable the Commissioning Body to have an overview of the service reviews. This would inform their strategic direction of the programme and enable robust scrutiny on the basis of an overview and exception reporting and have an overview of any subsequent improvement planning. Otherwise this limits the effectiveness of their performance management (see Commissioning and Performance for more detail).
- 52 The Commissioning Body has not been challenging the delivery of the programme. For example, value for money assessments in service reviews has not always been sufficiently robust. Further work is now being undertaken to strengthen the quality of analysis. The Commissioning Body has only just started to consider how some key areas of the programme can be managed effectively. This includes the framework for developing and evaluating new schemes and assessing service outcomes. The leadership of the Supporting People programme has been weak in these areas.
- 53 The Core Strategy Group has been in place with effective from June 2003. Terms of reference are agreed in place and have been reviewed. Membership of the group is restricted to officers of the Council and other agencies, including one representative of BME residents who attends on a regular basis. There are no representatives from the providers or service users, carers or advocates. Their input at the decision and policy making level is currently restricted to limited and arms length involvement through the partnership boards, and through the consultation process for the development of the Supporting People strategy.
- 54 The Core Strategy Group is not an effective resource for the Supporting People programme. Information flows to the Commissioning Body are weak, and there has not been a consistent representation of all client groups in particular for mental health and older people. This has undermined representation of their needs in respect of Supporting People priorities. The Council has recognised that the role and membership of the Core Strategy Group needs to be reviewed. A revised arrangement has been agreed by both the Core Strategy Group and approved by the Commissioning Body subsequent to the inspection. There was no formal date for implementation at the time of the report.

- 55** The Accountable Officer role is being delivered effectively. He has provided a stable influence for the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group. Leadership of the Supporting People team had a poor start with a number of managers temporarily in post before the present job holder. The Supporting People manager has been in post from July 2004. The Accountable Officer has guided the implementation of the programme, is knowledgeable and has actively advised both groups and Councillors. Together with the Chair of the Commissioning Body he has raised the profile of Supporting People through membership of the four partnership boards, and links with the LSP. Internally to Housing and Communities department, he chairs the group which co-ordinates plans and strategies aiming to improve services and housing options for vulnerable people. Notably this does not include representation from mental health.
- 56** The involvement and links between the Supporting People programme and some community care services are patchy. There is an established framework to support joint working between housing and social services. For example, there are a range of joint protocols covering mental health, domestic violence and aids and adaptations. They have been in place since December 2002, but have not been reviewed. Supporting People is not mentioned in the domestic violence protocol although key services are funded through the programme. This means the protocols are unlikely to be wholly relevant to the way the services operate today. In addition, training needs have not been established to ensure staff are kept up to date. The Council has recognised the need to revise the protocols but the timetable for their completion is not clear.
- 57** There are examples of effective working relationship between the Council's housing service and other partners to address the needs of vulnerable residents. These include:
- a good protocol and working relationships with the local women's refuge;
  - good working relationships with the learning disability team which resulted in redesignating low demand temporary accommodation for people with learning disabilities; and
  - good links with the youth offending team (YOT), provider and probation to provide services to vulnerable teenagers (see item of positive practice).
- 58** The children and social care department is engaged with the Supporting People programme. There is regular representation on the Core Strategy Group and clear lines of communication and reporting are in place. This has promoted effective discussion of service needs and developments.
- 59** By contrast, the links with the drug and alcohol team (DAT) and community mental health team (CHMT) have been weak. There is a lack of understanding in the DAT of the Supporting People programme, how funding operates, and the role of the Core Strategy Group. Attendance has only occurred at the last two meetings of the Core Strategy Group. Separate discussions on drug and alcohol schemes take place in the Substance Misuse Management Board and the links between the two groups are weak. This undermines the effectiveness of strategic planning for these service users.

- 60 The lack of effective representation on the Core Strategy Group of mental health issues means that Supporting People is not adequately represented in the draft Mental Health strategy. This is a particular problem because there are significant gaps in the supply of housing related support for people with mental illness. In part, this is because the current supply is largely accommodation based.
- 61 MAPPA arrangements are in place and working effectively to deal with high risk offenders. Written policies and procedures are updated as required with new legislation. A recent example of a placement is for a violent ex-offender who was placed in generic temporary accommodation because there was no other specialist accommodation. This person was supported by both the CMHT and temporary accommodation worker who operates on site and was able to visit regularly.
- 62 The effectiveness of the provider forum is mixed. A provider forum has been meeting regularly on a quarterly basis since mid 2005. It is positively viewed by most providers and has been an effective channel for communication and information. However, there was no involvement in the development of the five year strategy, although providers were consulted on the draft prior to submission to the then ODPM. Attendance has not been consistent and there is limited opportunity to feed into the development of the programme. This will reduce opportunities for LBM to learn from providers' experience of day-to-day management of support services.
- 63 There is some involvement with the voluntary sector and this is a developing area with respect to Supporting People. The voluntary sector has been involved in the development of the older people's strategy and is engaged through the forum and partnership boards. There is involvement in the domestic violence forum. The Supporting People team meets with organisations such as Faith in Action and Care Connect. The involvement with Care Connect has resulted in the provision of needs information, for example the need for more generic support services. This has been gathered from their web site and through dealing with enquiries, between 62 and 123 per month (2004/05 figures). This indicates that LBM are making efforts to make use of a range of resources to support vulnerable people.

### **Grant compliance, strategy and needs**

- 64 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area for the Council. There is a positive approach to providing move on accommodation and there has been some good work on updating housing support needs information and analysis. Although some ineligible services have been addressed LBM have delayed dealing with those for people with mental health problems and have still not developed consensus on the definition of care and support despite having established a local eligibility criteria. There are strong links between housing and Supporting People strategies which will drive further improvement. The links are weaker for older people, people with mental health issues and those with drug and alcohol problems.

- 65 There is a well defined and plainly written local eligibility criteria in place which was discussed at the Core Strategy Group and agreed by the Commissioning Body. It is based on one developed by a three-star authority together with related guidance. It is understood and accepted by providers and is easily available through the Supporting People page of the Council's website. However, it was late in being developed and not adopted until September 2005. It was not applied in the first phases of service reviews (see further detail in Value for money Section). LBM relied on the guidance issues by the then ODPM with grant conditions in 2003. If the local eligibility criteria had been available it would have strengthened the Commissioning Body's position at an earlier stage in tackling ineligible services for people with mental health problems.
- 66 LBM has successfully addressed ineligible service provision through the service review process for other client groups. For example, one scheme for people with learning disabilities is now jointly provided with the social services learning disabilities section which funds some elements of care and support. Close working between the housing benefit service and the Supporting People team prior to implementation has ensured that ineligible costs were challenged. This has led to relatively low levels of ineligible service provision being included in the initial 'pot'. Other ineligible expenditure identified in an adult placement service run by the in-house housing support team is being phased out. This will help to ensure that the programme provides support in accordance with grant conditions.
- 67 However, in other areas LBM has been slow to transfer ineligible services to appropriate budgets. Ineligible services were identified during service reviews of mental health services at the end of 2004. The plans to transfer £100,000 in 2006/07 and a further £100,000 funding to community care budgets had not been carried out at the time of the inspection: the detailed timetable has yet to be approved. This funding could have been made available to refocus services on those client groups identified as a high priority.
- 68 The strategic approach is a mix of strengths and weaknesses. The five year strategy for Supporting People meets the DCLG requirements in setting out the needs and supply issues for all client groups, and identifies the need for further research. The strategy is linked into the regional priorities of the south west London Supporting People group and is set against the national context. The shadow strategy was judged to be poor by the then ODPM; the current strategy is fit for purpose. A concise summary has been widely distributed and is available on the Council's website.
- 69 There are clear links between the Supporting People programme and the Council's wider housing priorities. Supporting vulnerable people and preventing homelessness is one of the five key themes in the current housing strategy. The development of the Supporting People strategy is identified as a way to work in partnership to address gaps in support. Key outputs from the Supporting People programme, such as new services and strategy development are also reflected in the action plan for the housing strategy ensuring that overall progress is monitored.

- 70 A series of housing strategies have been developed for older people, people with learning disabilities and homeless people. These link well with the Supporting People strategy and make use of needs information and analysis for example, 86 clients with learning disabilities are known to be in need of housing related support over the next five years.
- 71 The vulnerable people's board, chaired by the Accountable Officer, is helping to ensure a more joined up approach to the development of services for some vulnerable groups including those with learning disabilities. The group bring together a range of key stakeholders within the housing and community directorate, including the Supporting People manager, and has overseen the development of some new initiatives such as the use of under-utilised sheltered housing schemes for people with learning disabilities. It is also helping to promote a consistent approach to policy priorities. However, the approach is not comprehensive; the community mental health team do not attend and have a separate process as do the drug action team. This dual approach can lead to confusion and a lack of transparency in decision making about the development of support services because all appropriate interests are not represented.
- 72 There are a number of weaknesses in the development of the Council's approach to support services for vulnerable people. The Supporting People strategy is limited its effectiveness as a driver for future improvement.
- The action plan is weak, focussed on process with vague target dates (see detail in How well does the service manage performance).
  - The strategy has been supplemented by a separate detailed needs analysis in May 2006. The analysis has positively considered wider strategies and targets for groups related to reducing re-offending, teenage pregnancies and Valuing People. Work is underway for people with physical and sensory disabilities, people with HIV/AIDs, homeless families, teenage parents and offenders not eligible for probation services, although the extent of progress is unclear.
  - Priorities for new service development are highlighted but are not resourced and the relative priority between client groups is not prioritised. As highlighted earlier there is no framework in place for the Commissioning Body to assess bids and therefore fails to give providers a sufficient lead on what schemes they should be developing. This is leading to wasted effort and is a missed opportunity.
- 73 The strategic framework for older people's housing is still developing. Recent work on an older people's housing strategy has provided an overview of current provision and needs. However, while some broad priorities, such as the development of extra care housing, are emerging, the work has not yet included an overview of how existing Supporting People services for older people could be reconfigured to meet needs more effectively. For example, current work has not explored how floating support could be developed to meet emerging needs and whether existing Supporting People funding for older people could be used more effectively.

- 74 The arrangements made for the development of the mental health housing strategy had gaps. Links between the strategy co-ordinator and the community mental health team could have been improved, and analysis was focused on current service users. The steering group set up to oversee its progress did not include key stakeholders, and there were difficulties in achieving consensus about priorities. The needs analysis and data collection was not well managed and consultation has been limited. Some key stakeholders do not have confidence that the draft strategy is sufficiently robust to guide service development.
- 75 The systems for updating housing related support needs for all vulnerable groups is not fully effective. Housing support needs information has been updated through the members of the Core Strategy Group in May 2006 to inform the Supporting People strategy. However, there are still gaps with a need for further research. For example, the drug and alcohol team are unclear about what needs analysis has taken place to inform current priorities. Current needs information is basic, although action is being taken to improve data capture. Work has been duplicated on identifying people with mental health problems for suitable for move on because staff working in this area do not work from the same definition of mental health support and housing options. The impact for service users is a fragmented approach to meeting needs by LBM.
- 76 The Council has taken a positive approach to making move on housing available to those in supported accommodation. It has not established a strategy for move on accommodation. Instead there is a quota system which for 2006/07 makes 56 units of accommodation available for a range of service users. Need is taken into account and the quota has been reviewed to include six units for ex-offenders in 2006/07. In addition, some move on accommodation is arranged through providers, and one contract has move on with support for people with mental health problems. This approach reduces the incidence of people remaining in supported accommodation they do not need and frees up place for others who do.

### **Delivery arrangements**

- 77 This area is a mix of strengths and weaknesses. The Supporting People team have established the day to day operation of the programme well. Relationships with providers are strong and the direction for the programme has been established by the timely delivery of the five year strategy. The financial management of the programme is prudent and will allow for new scheme development. However, information, work planning and reporting to the Commissioning Body is sometimes weak, and Supporting People contracts are not being consistently managed.

- 78 The Supporting People team is located in the Community and Housing Directorate. The team comprises 3.5 full time equivalent officers:
- Supporting People Manager;
  - Finance and IT Officer - part time;
  - Programme and Development Officer; and
  - Monitoring and Review Officer (temporary contract).
- 79 The team has a number of strengths. After a poor start with a high turnover of Supporting People managers, the team stabilised in July 2004 with the present Supporting People manager. From that time the programme is being effectively delivered and there are policies and practices in place covering the team's activities. The Supporting People strategy was delivered to the target time of March 2005. Relationships with providers are positive and payments are made accurately and on time. Team members have a range of appropriate skills that have been further developed through training such as Supporting People monitoring and review and Learning disabilities - quality and cost effectiveness<sup>10</sup>. The team have been supportive to providers and provided training and support in the completion of workbooks. 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.
- 80 Additional resources have been used to supplement the team to assist with service reviews, and provide administrative, financial and IT support. Marketing services have been used to help develop service user consultation, and the team have drawn on the SWL CAG to provide an objective view in the service review of in-house services.
- 81 However, there are some weaknesses.
- The Commissioning Body has recognised that the information contained in some reports is inadequate. Members expect the presentation of clear options and proposals which are costed rather than still receiving reports which require further work.
  - Non-priority schemes have been presented to the Commissioning Body for discussion due to the lack of a framework and criteria for the prioritisation of new scheme bids.
  - Contract monitoring meetings have not been taking place consistently and with all providers. The team have undertaken meetings only where steady state contracts are in place.
  - Although 60 service reviews have been undertaken there are only five steady state contracts in place due to a lack of capacity in the Supporting People team. This is a requirement of the Supporting People grant and provides certainty for providers.

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<sup>10</sup> Training sponsored by the ODPM now the DCLG

- Action plans agreed with providers following the service reviews are not being followed up to ensure that services are being improved for the benefit of service users.
  - Legal services have been used to advise on the development of steady state contracts but there are limited contract negotiating skills within the team. (see the section on value for money).
  - Service reviews were not completed by the deadline of 31 March 2006. There are three outstanding for mental health support services and they were not completed by 30 June 2006. In addition, although the offender floating support project changed provider in April 2005, no Supporting People review has been undertaken and the Council recognise that it is overdue.
  - Service reviews have only been reported to the Commissioning Body as overviews rather than individual reviews to be signed off. In addition, the programme of service reviews has not been used as an opportunity to review services on a strategic level for client groups.
- 82** Work planning is co-ordinated for the Supporting People programme but is undermined by weak outcome measurement (see further detail in How well does the service manage performance). The work plan in the five year strategy is updated annually. It provides the plan for the team, Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group and is reported quarterly to the Housing Performance Review Board and the lead councillor. Detailed targets are included but resources are often not shown and would appear to be work for the Supporting People team. What is missing are measurable targets and clear outcomes. This makes activity difficult to monitor effectively, identify why targets are not being met and take positive action to remedy.
- 83** LBM has taken a prudent approach to the financial management of the Supporting People programme to date. Over-spends in 2003/04 and 2004/05 have reflected the need to control expenditure, given wider uncertainties about the future funding of the national programme and the financial pressures facing both the Council and the Primary Care Trust. Some additional service developments have been identified for 2007/08 totalling £349,400, which will reduce the amount projected to be carried over from £308,648 in 2006/07 to £124,300 in 2007/08. Inflation payments have been made in October 2005 and April 2006 against savings in the Supporting People grant.
- 84** 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. The team perform checks on the performance indicator workbooks, and samples reports to make sure that the data does not change as it is processed through the system. This ensures that good quality of information is maintained.

- 85 The financial information about the programme received by the Commissioning Body is limited and does not identify areas of slippage or performance shortfalls. The reports give details of projected annual expenditure, broken down by client group as well as the projected annual under or over spend. However, they do not provide any information about whether expenditure is in line with estimated quarterly projections. The Commissioning Body has requested less financial information in the future which could further undermine their ability to effectively manage performance.
- 86 Performance information presented to the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group is limited leading to weak scrutiny of the programme. Headline performance information data is presented on service utilisation and move on. However, there has been no analysis to compare LBM performance against that of other members of the SWL CAG, or to explore reasons for shortfalls in performance by client group, such as fluctuations in performance of planned move on. In addition, there are no local performance indicators or outcome measures for the programme. Although some outcome measures are being developed by SWL CAG, this work is at an early stage and a clear monitoring framework is not expected to be developed until December 2006.
- 87 The approach on fairer charging for Supporting People clients is not fully effective and promotion of the facility has been limited. There are clear arrangements in place for carrying out fairer charging assessments through social services finance assessment team. They will assist Supporting People clients on request. Information was shared with providers at an inclusive forum in 2003, and a leaflet was sent out at the time to all providers providing subsidy schemes for service users. The leaflet is also available on the Council's web site. However, the level of assessments has been low: four to date. The Supporting People team have not carried out any analysis to understand the reason for this, or how the demand for assessments in Merton compares with levels in other similar boroughs. They are not in a position to demonstrate that all those eligible are receiving the financial help they are entitled to.
- 88 Although the risk management strategy has been recently reviewed, it is confusing to read and there is no supporting contingency plan. At present staff will rely on the arrangements currently in place for homelessness, social services or disaster planning. However, this may not be sufficient to cater for people's special support needs.

### **Commissioning and performance**

- 89 This is an area where strengths balance weaknesses. There has been some effective cross authority working and joint funding of schemes which meet a range of objectives. LBM has built up positive relationships with providers who understand the Council's approach to Supporting People although involvement in policy decisions is not as strong as it should be, particularly in respect of the introduction of the value for money workbook. Service reviews were not completed by the March 2006 deadline and there are matters outstanding at the time of the inspection. The scrutiny of completed reviews has been weak including value for money assessments. Few steady state contracts are in place.

- 90 Providers are well informed and have a clear understanding of the present contractual arrangements. They are positive about the approach LBM has taken to the service reviews, and felt that reviews had been carried out in a supportive, constructive way. They believe that the quality assessment framework (QAF) is driving up standards in the local area. This has led to an increased emphasis on service user consultation and support.
- 91 Feedback to providers following service reviews has been timely. Initial feedback is given at the end of the validation visit. The outcome of reviews is fed back to providers within two to four weeks of the review; this includes feedback from service users and stakeholder questionnaires. Providers are asked to complete a satisfaction questionnaire about the experience of the review. Eight have been received to date and providers have been positive about the Supporting People team's approach to preparation, validation visit process and feedback and outcomes.
- 92 The reviews have led to improved configuration of services; examples include services for drug and alcohol users and for young people, which have led to improved outcomes for the service users. (see further information on improved services in the section on Outcomes for service users).
- 93 However, not all services reviewed have been given a time frame for the action plans. Action plans are detailed and follow a format based on the core objectives of the QAF. However, where dates are not included this leaves some providers unclear about what they have to achieve by when and could lead to residents waiting longer for improvements than they need to.
- 94 LBM has agreed with SWL CAG members that although they have agreed to share paperwork, independent site visits will be undertaken where properties serve more than one borough. This has been highlighted by providers as a concern, and led to inconsistent approaches and mixed messages on performance and good practice. This has the potential to hinder service improvement and undermines other areas of positive joint working.
- 95 The Supporting People appeals process has been used effectively, although providers are encouraged to raise any concerns during the service review process. There has been one formal challenge to a review decision and a CAG member examined the paperwork and validated the decision. An outcome of the process was a review of the process and changes were made.
- 96 LBM has drawn up a second phase of service reviews over 2006-2009 which will require the completion of a recently developed value for money workbook. The workbook has been approved by the Commissioning Body but LBM has been slow in undertaking the consultation process with providers.
- 97 Although the Supporting People team have reported to the Commissioning Body that the service reviews were completed by the 31 March 2006, three service reviews are outstanding. They are the subject of negotiation with the mental health Primary Care Trust who deliver the services, and require the transfer of care to other funding streams. The work of the Supporting People team has been completed on these service reviews, but the delay in finalising the negotiations is a value for money issue (see the section on Value for money).

## 32 Supporting People | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 98 The Commissioning Body have only signed off service reviews where there is to be a change in the contractual arrangements. This means that service review outcomes have not been challenged or scrutinised and the partners cannot be sure that reviews have been rigorously undertaken, services are appropriate for Supporting People funding or that value for money is being achieved.
- 99 LBM have been slow to put steady state contracts in place. For example, the Housing Support Service had a service review in late 2004 but do not yet have a steady state contract. To date there are five contracts in place with a further four under negotiation. The delay in putting steady state contracts in place reflects a lack of capacity to progress this work in the Supporting People team. In addition, more detailed work on value for money is also needed before some contracts can be issued. This does not promote stability in the provider market or support long-term planning.
- 100 There has been positive progress on jointly funded contracts which achieve shared targets and objectives. Contracts have been agreed with the Learning Disability Partnership and Children, Schools and Families department. Joint commissioning and monitoring arrangements have been developed for some schemes. LBM manages payments for all sixteen units within the new BME elder's scheme, and is also responsible for overall performance monitoring. This helps to reduce the administrative demands on the provider. Quarterly joint contract meetings are held with one provider who is co-funded by the Supporting People and learning disabilities teams. These activities help to promote a joined up approach to monitoring and minimise duplication.
- 101 Cross authority working with the SWL CAG has produced some positive outcomes. LBM took the lead in setting up a CAG inclusive forum which meets annually. The group provided peer officers on in house service reviews to promote objectivity and provide a level playing field with external providers. Joint accreditation is developing and so far five service providers have been passported with other CAG members. The group has also agreed a joint approach on contract management and the continued use of the QAF. This offers a consistent approach for providers, particularly those who are working across a number of local authority areas, and should contribute to consistent standards for service users. However, this has yet to be implemented.
- 102 The Supporting People complaints procedure has not been adequately publicised. A written policy has been developed explaining the role of the Supporting People team in handling complaints from service users. However, the policy is not on the Supporting People website, has not been consulted on with providers, and has not been distributed to Supporting People service users. This may explain why no complaints have been received over the last three years.

## Value for money

- 103** This is a weak area for the Council. The Council has not delivered consistent and effective value for money assessments through the service review process although they have achieved substantial savings through one service review for young people. Efficiency savings have only been obtained in the last 18 months, and contract monitoring is weak and inconsistent. Benchmarking and the value for money approach in the Supporting People programme are under-developed and limited outcomes have been achieved.

### How do costs compare?

- 104** The Council has benchmarked the cost of the administration grant against others in the CAG and shows low costs. It has compared the overall cost and number of Supporting People staff against the numbers of services, providers, contracts and users (excluding community alarms). This shows that the Supporting People team in LBM has the lowest number of staff and second lowest overall administration budget among the group. This relates to having the smallest number of services. The number of providers, contracts and users is also low. This would be a positive approach but needs to be considered against the inability of the team to achieve the targets set in the five year strategy. (See How well is performance managed?)
- 105** The Council did not make good use of the pipeline allocation for new schemes in advance of the implementation of the Supporting People programme. LBM compares poorly to other London boroughs (see Appendix 1). Only £2,871 was secured in 2003/04 and £2,995 in 2004/05.
- 106** The costs per unit, set out in the table below (excluding community alarms) compare well against other London boroughs and other English authorities. However, these figures should be treated with some caution as there has been a number of changes since the platinum cut data<sup>11</sup> was produced.

**Table 2 Unit costs comparison of SP grant per head of population - 2003/04**

This shows the very low level of unit costs per head of population by comparison with both London and other English councils indicating a low level of services in the borough

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Merton	£0.36	£36.46	£36.46	£56.96
Region	£0.97	£42.37	£48.73	£68.40
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37

Source: Platinum cut data, former ODPM, November 2003

<sup>11</sup> Former ODPM 'Platinum cut' figures, November 2003

## 34 Supporting People | How good is the Supporting People programme?

- 107 At the outset of the programme the Council compared themselves to other London boroughs from the ODPM platinum cut data and found that Supporting People services are under-provided for all potential service users.

### **How is value for money managed?**

- 108 The service review process has helped to secure some efficiencies in service delivery. For example, there has been a reduction in the grant for the YMCA to better reflect the level of support provided. Funded placements (42) now benefit from a more structured support programme. Other efficiencies include the provision of additional placements for the same costs for a service for alcohol users, Equinox, and re-provision of a service for offenders. This service provider offers the support at lower cost. Overall, annual efficiencies of £284,000 have been achieved from 1 April 2005; £270,000 (95 per cent) of this was achieved from the review of YMCA together with service improvements.
- 109 High service costs have been addressed to improve value for money. The Commissioning Body has agreed a limit of £400 per service users per week although exceptions will be considered on a case by case basis. The CAG have agreed to undertake further scrutiny on services which have costs above £25 per support hour. Services are profiled against national and London borough costs.
- 110 However, the approach to assessing the value for money of Supporting People is still developing. The value for money workbook is a relatively recent development which is due for implementation in the 2006-2009 programme of service reviews the Commissioning Body has decided to undertake. Value for money assessments in earlier service reviews were less rigorous, with only outcomes from major reviews discussed by the Commissioning Body. This means that potential savings have not been maximised.
- 111 This is further demonstrated in the way service reviews of some mental health services have been dealt with. They were reviewed in December 2004 and ineligible costs were found. However, Supporting People funding is not going to be reduced until October 2006: overall £200,000 savings of Supporting People funding will be achieved by April 2007. This approach is being taken to minimise the impact on existing service users, but has yet to receive formal agreement.
- 112 Benchmarking of cost and quality of Supporting People services is still in its infancy. To date the Council has only compared average costs across whole user groups, without separating out into different levels of support. It is using the dated DCLG information on London quartiles which is based upon 2003/04 submissions. The CAG is bringing together more up to date information through a dedicated sub group, but this will not be available until September. The age and quality of the information undermines the whole approach.
- 113 Contract management is weak and inconsistent. Regular contract monitoring is only taking place with providers who have steady state contracts and action plans are not being monitored. This means that LBM are not taking the means to ensure that improvements are implemented and that strategic relevance is maintained.

- 114 LBM do not yet have the means to assess bids for new schemes despite having savings for reinvestment. The lack of a framework can lead to a delay in establishing new schemes together with failing to maximise the use of available funding. The impact is for potential services users who will have to wait longer to receive services. A framework is in development and due to be considered by the Commissioning Body in the late autumn 2006.
- 115 There are limited contract negotiating skills within the team. There are other skills within the department which could be drawn on to supplement the team members, but there were no clear plans in place to do so. With limited skills and experience in this area, LBM are less likely to deliver robust value for money as they implement the steady state contracts.

### **Service user involvement**

- 116 This is a weak area for the Council. There are limited opportunities for involvement in developing services and establishing priorities for services users, their carers and advocates. There are no arrangements for participation in governance and partnership arrangements. There has been some success in engaging with hard to reach groups.
- 117 LBM has utilised some existing consultation frameworks to involve services users and carers, in particular in the development of the housing strategies for older people and those with learning disabilities. A range of methods are used. One example is the development of the Older Peoples' housing strategy. This has been developed with stakeholders using a bottom up approach working with the voluntary sector. This included Merton action for pensioners who organised the completion of a thousand questionnaires.
- 118 LBM has co-ordinated the outcomes of the consultation processes for housing related strategies to ensure consistency. The housing strategy and review group co-ordinates the development and monitoring of strategies and manages the consultation process including the Supporting People strategy. This group shares relevant findings, enables the use of consistent information and ensures strategic aims do not conflict.
- 119 Service users have been involved in service reviews which have been reflected in the action plan for improvements to services. Examples include improved user information published about services available locally. All service users are sent letters by the team notifying them about meetings during the service reviews. At the meetings users are informed they should expect feedback about the review from the provider. However, the Supporting People team do not monitor to ensure that this is taking place.
- 120 Not all client groups are fully represented through the consultation structures. They are not represented on the Core Strategy Group, with the exception of a representative of the BME communities, and there has been limited attendance at the annual sub regional Inclusive Forum. This limits the ability of service users, carers and advocates to influence policies and priorities closer to a decision making level.

- 121 The role of partnership boards in shaping the Supporting People programme is limited. There is a network of boards which feature service user and carer representation. However, although the boards have played a positive role in developing some new supported housing services and engaging service users, there are no specific examples of how the boards have shaped and influenced Supporting People strategic priorities, or contributed to the development of the Supporting People needs assessments or the five year strategy. Supporting People staff recognise user involvement as an area for development.
- 122 The Supporting People team has taken action intended to improve service user involvement, but this has had limited success. A programme of 'Reaching Out' visits to Supporting People funded schemes have been undertaken by members of the Commissioning Body, Core Strategy Group and Cabinet portfolio holder. Although the approach has been welcomed by the providers, attendance has been low and engagement with service users has been limited.
- 123 'Friends of Supporting People' network is another idea to improve engagement with service users. There has been support for the aims of the programme from within the Council and partners and has been discussed at the Provider forum. The Commissioning Body has agreed an action plan to establish the initiative by April 2007.
- 124 LBM has had some success in engaging with hard to reach groups. Examples include working with 25 young people from BME communities were involved in the development of the Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy. They were given research skills training which were jointly funded by LBM and partners engaged in undertaking a quantitative research project on the needs of BME elders. LBM hosted a Gypsies and Travellers conference involving Gypsies and Travellers as well as representatives from national organisations and local agencies who work with them. Following the conference, a standing forum has been set up which has achieved positive outcomes. These include reviewing collection of information on BME groups to include Gypsies/Roma and of Irish heritage, reviewed site licences and considered support needs for homeless people.
- 125 Service users have been able to influence providers in the development of policies, procedures and service development within their own schemes. Examples of this include:
- service users groups within the YMCA;
  - user involvement on the board of Wandle Housing Association including staff recruitment training; and
  - focus groups run by MASCOT and Community Support Services Group.

## Access to services and information

- 126** This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. Referral arrangements are not consistent and information on Supporting People services is limited. Front line staff are not fully aware of the benefits of the services or how people can access them. Call handling is variable, information on local services is missing from the directory, and the positive aspects of the web site are undermined by weak links to Supporting People and housing services. However, the directory is accessible by front line staff and the Council provide a supportive Housing Benefit service for homeless people.
- 127** The arrangements to enable potential service users to access to support services are not consistent.
- 128** There are a number of weaknesses which constitute barriers to accessing services.
- Front line staff have limited understanding of the benefits and range of housing support services. There has been a recent briefing session about Supporting People services, but some staff believed that services were only available to older people.
  - Training on accessibility, deaf awareness, diversity and aggressive customers have been held, but not all front line staff have attended: only half of the staff we spoke to.
  - The outcome of a mystery shopping call to the community mental health team was not well handled. After several referrals the call was disconnected. Each time the phone was answered staff did not identify who they were or which section they were with. This was a poor quality response and poor customer care.
  - The outcome of a call during the inspection to the housing needs service was poor. The service was not handling calls at that time on the day. It took two different telephone numbers and over 45 minutes before we received an answer.
  - The outcome of a call to the refuge did not demonstrate effective support. We did not receive any helpful advice. Lack of good advice could prevent a person leaving a violent situation.
  - Referral arrangements into Supporting People funded services are not consistent for all service users. There are no formal referral arrangements for clients experiencing mental health problems. LBM are developing a panel arrangement which will include relevant stakeholders and review cases for vacancies arising. The target date for the first mental health accommodation panel is January 2007. A common referral form is planned but is not yet in place. Currently arrangements are negotiated on a case by case basis.

129 However, there are a number of strengths.

- Front line staff are experienced in making referrals to social services and other agencies if there is a request for a support service especially for older people, domestic violence, drug abuse and anti social behaviour. The social services assessment team are seen as the main agency for referrals.
- All staff can access information about the Supporting People programme through computers and the Council's website, and a hard copy of the service directory held in council offices, libraries, day centres, doctor's practices and support agencies.
- The Council provide a good service to homeless people who need housing benefits. A gold standard service is offered which allows all housing benefit claims to be verified by housing needs staff and processed within two weeks. This means that landlords and supported housing providers who accept homeless people get payments through quickly and this reduces uncertainty for service users.
- Mystery shopping calls we made about accessing domestic violence and learning disabilities services were well handled by front line staff. Referral arrangements were explained and, in the case of the domestic violence call, the caller was transferred to Council staff with more detailed information and given the telephone numbers for the national women's aid service and the local refuge.

130 Supporting People team members have attended staff meetings to give an overview of the programme and recently on the client groups receiving support and what services have been remodelled. This should help staff to be aware of services which can help potential service users. However, it is not clear this is being done consistently and for all front line services. Lack of awareness could prove to be a barrier to access to services.

131 The Supporting People team make good use of a quarterly newsletter and the corporate magazine to update a wide range of agencies including providers. The newsletter is available to download from the Council's web site, and is sent to providers electronically. However, not all providers we spoke to had seen it and staff were not being kept up to date in the way the team intended.

- 132** However, LBM provide limited information about support services. This includes a service user leaflet about Supporting People, fairer charging and sheltered housing. The Better Care: Higher Standards document is up to date and includes comprehensive information on Supporting People services. Front line staff are able to refer to leaflets on domestic violence and anti-social behaviour. There is easy access to the directory of services, although this is for all council services rather than Supporting People. None of the staff were aware of the general Supporting People leaflet explaining what the programme is all about, and about charging arrangements. Staff rely on word of mouth knowledge and the intranet when unsure of what advice to provide. 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. There are potential dangers for some service users if they are given the wrong information, for example, those fleeing domestic violence.
- 133** Information about Supporting People services for victims of domestic violence is not included in the new directory of local services for victims of domestic violence, published in February 2006. The directory does include contact details for a range of local services, including the police some local voluntary groups and children's services, as well as useful national contacts. This is a missed opportunity to promote awareness of local refuge provision.
- 134** The Council's website has a Supporting People site which contains comprehensive information which is up to date, easy to read and to navigate. There are links to relevant external web sites. However, the home page on the LBM website has no direct link to Supporting People or to housing: information on Supporting People is not easy to find.
- 135** There has been no input from service users or providers into the design and content of Supporting People leaflets or the web site. This means that the current range of information may not fully meet the needs of recipients.
- 136** The team are making positive efforts to expand the range of potential service users. They have recently placed an advertisement in the St. Helier Hospital Radio handbook about Supporting People services. As every patient has access to this handbook, it will raise the profile of the services offered and highlight more detailed information on the directory website. This advertisement appeared in August 2006 so the team have not had an opportunity to analyse any outcomes.
- 137** The London Probation Area is supporting access to information through their intranet and training. They have a housing issues page on their intranet and events for staff have been provided to help probation staff understand housing issues. In Merton, a housing advice workshop takes place each month.

## **Diversity**

- 138** This is a mix of strengths and weaknesses for the Council. There is a corporate commitment to understanding the needs of communities and shaping services accordingly. This is not being dealt with well by Supporting People with a lack of analysis of ethnic profile information which has been gathered. However, positive outcomes have been obtained from engagement with some hard to reach groups.

- 139** The Council has a well developed approach to equality and diversity. There are dedicated resources in place, the diversity and community engagement team which co-ordinates the Council's approach is responsible for:
- developing, implementing and monitoring policy and strategy;
  - working in partnership with statutory bodies, community groups and the voluntary sector;
  - reporting on performance against diversity targets and plans; and
  - providing advice and support to council departments and supporting staff networks.
- 140** The Council has attained level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, aiming to achieve level 4 by March 2007 and is DDA<sup>12</sup> compliant in the main civic centre. Consultation takes places on a regular basis with a range of groups including the Joint Consultative Committee (strategic plans including the Supporting People strategy), Race Equality Partnership (advocates for service users), and Disability Alliance Merton (inform strategy development and training).
- 141** Equality impact assessments were introduced across all council departments during 2004. The Supporting People team completed one covering Supporting People services in February 2006 and identified four actions for improvement which involved setting equality targets and monitoring levels. Progress is monitored through a departmental steering group. Internally, there are support networks for staff such as the Disabled Staff forum, LGBTN<sup>13</sup>, Ethnic Minority Staff Network and the Christian Staff Network. A positive promotion and support of diversity within the organisation can help staff understand and respond well to client needs.
- 142** The Council has used a number of approaches to draw together demographic and ethnic background information to inform the Supporting People strategy and development of services. Those sources include the census, housing needs survey of June 2005, social care records, and the housing register. This information has been used to develop the Ethnic Minority, and Older People's Housing Strategies, and to inform ongoing work on young people's issues.
- 143** However, although the needs analysis for the Supporting People strategy has looked at the ethnic breakdown of different client groups, this has not influenced service development proposals. For example, the needs analysis shows that BME groups are disproportionately represented among single homeless people with support needs, and that 35 per cent of people experiencing domestic violence are non-white European. There is no analysis of whether these groups require culturally specific service provision.

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<sup>12</sup> DDA - Disability Discrimination Act

<sup>13</sup> LGBTN - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Network

- 144** Although there is a good range of information about the profile of Supporting People service users in Merton, it is not clear how this has been used. At present, the team has three monthly client record data on the ethnicity, age and gender of all new service users, as well as a profile of all Supporting People users based on a one-off census in February/March 2006. However, this information has not been used to highlight areas of concern or inform the delivery of the programme.
- 145** LBM has analysed the profile of new Supporting People service users during 2004-2005. This demonstrates that the breakdown of access to housing related support services, 53 per cent White, 37 per cent Black, 7 per cent Mixed Race and 3 per cent Asian. While this demonstrates the accessibility of services to those from BME communities, it also highlights the over-representation of those communities in need of support services, and this point is not being addressed.
- 146** The Supporting People team have been responsible for developing some culturally sensitive services. The team has worked with its partners to develop a cross-authority sheltered housing scheme for African and Caribbean elders with Wandsworth, Sutton and Croydon Councils. Through one of the service reviews the YMCA have developed catering facilities in line with cultural needs of the young service users. This demonstrates some practical approaches to meeting cultural needs.
- 147** The Council has undertaken some work to engage with hard to reach groups. Gypsies and Travellers are supported more effectively following a conference in July 2005. A dedicated forum has been established involving the Primary Care Trust, local registered social landlords (RSL), the police and council representatives. Additional funds of approximately £400,000 have also been secured for the refurbishment of the existing site. However, while this is positive, this group has not been well-represented in the Supporting People needs assessment of the five year strategy.

### **Outcomes for service users**

- 148** This is an area of strength for the Council. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for service users and there are high rates of satisfaction with services. The programme is driving change for some service users so that services better reflect the priorities in the area. There is corporate support for support services and services have been developed without Supporting People funding which reduces the overall pressure on grant which has been reducing over the last two years. Performance measurement is still in development and there is a need to put in place ways of ensuring service standards are continuously improved.
- 149** 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 supported housing has been provided by LBM in line with priorities over the last three years; seven flats for ex-offenders, 11 flats for people with learning disabilities and eight flats for young people. Two schemes benefited from additional funding which allowed for an increase in units of accommodation.

- 150 The Council is developing additional support services without Supporting People funding by using revenue funding from community care budgets. Schemes are being developed for people with learning disabilities with linked supported housing units in the community rather than residential care; a sheltered housing scheme is to be reconfigured to provide extra care alongside an existing sheltered scheme. These and other schemes will be developed with Housing corporation funding, for example, there is an allocation in the development programme for street properties to provide move on accommodation for people with mental health problems.
- 151 Service improvements have been driven by the QAF and service reviews and resulted in benefits for service users. Examples include:
- changes to service eligibility criteria mean that some services now meet higher priority needs. Two services for single homeless people now take more high priority needs and 16/17 year olds;
  - support provision in temporary accommodation for young people is changing poor behaviour through budgeting advice and help with shopping and provision of advice on sexual health;
  - a contract to provide services for people with mental health problems has been renegotiated to provide additional self-contained move-on accommodation together with support within the existing contract price. This enables people to take a planned approach to independent living;
  - an HIV/Aids project has been remodelled, following changes in service user's support needs. The project provides floating support together with additional support for people with physical disabilities and sensory impairment for the original contract price;
  - the incidence of street homelessness is now very low and access to accommodation can be arranged usually be arranged in two days. Service users can stay for up to two years which means they can be re-housed in a planned way;
  - support workers for older people have improved the support they give and are able to better access information so that they can provide advice to service users. The requirements of the QAF have made them more aware of health and safety issues and review their services accordingly; and
  - the temporary support service improved their complaints process by giving service users a complaints form at the lettings stage and making the form available in temporary accommodation.

- 152** Performance on the two key performance indicators for Supporting People over the last two years has been positive. LBM have achieved a consistent 100 per cent for KP1, service users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living. An average of 78 per cent has been achieved for 2004/05 and 2005/06 for service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements. An independent survey of service user satisfaction undertaken in 2004 found that the majority of service users rated their services as good or very good. Service users felt that they received the support they needed and that the providers took account of their views in providing services.
- 153** Merton SP has developed the initiative to have a direct payment policy for Supporting People service users. Under this initiative a learning disabilities service user has had the opportunity to choose his support worker and this has resulted in more independence and greater control. It has also resulted in less intervention by his care manager and greater stability in maintaining his tenancy.
- 154** However, LBM has yet to put in place outcome measures for service users with targets developed with partners. This is being developed by the SWL CAG and LBM are reliant on the outcome of this work.
- 155** 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 support plans in place. Staff were generally helpful, knowledgeable and appreciated by the service users.
- 156** However, one visit we undertook highlighted poor support services and staff using inappropriate language. Support plans were of poor quality with few details, for example, setting out what support was being given, and a lack of progress against the targets that were set. This scheme had achieved a C rating in the service review which raises concerns about the robustness of the original service review.
- 157** From other visits we made to a range of providers we found that the support plans were of variable quality. Some, such as the example above, were of a poor quality.
- 158** Examples of individual testimonies and cases 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 the borough of Merton as set out overleaf.

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## Case study 1

Service user moved into mental health service provision. He was 22 years old. He came directly from a lengthy stay in hospital, where he had been given a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. Prior to this he was half way through a university degree and living in student accommodation. He progressed well from being too anxious to leave the building and not able to manage his own finances. Through regular key work sessions a budget plan was put together and regularly reviewed. For several months, staff went shopping with him, until he felt confident enough to go on his own. He had problems in his relationships with some of the other tenants. There were several altercations in the early months, and he could be verbally abusive at times. This was an area where great changes took place. By the time he left the service and moved to his own flat eighteen months later he was popular and sociable with other tenants. He has been supported to set up direct debits for his rent and all utilities as he still has some budgeting problems. He is also involved in music and undertaking voluntary work. He is considering returning to university.

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## Case study 2

An ex-offender service user was interviewed about a floating support service. He was very positive about the benefits he had had. His life beforehand was in and out of prison, committing crime to secure a roof over his head. For the past two years things had improved considerably for him and he is no longer involved with the probation service. He enjoys an excellent relationship with his support worker and is positive about the idea of move on accommodation. He considers that he may still need some support to get settled, and that is within the scope of the project.

## Summary

- 159 We have assessed the administration of the Supporting People programme by the London Borough of Merton to be a 'fair', one-star service.
- 160 The delivery of the programme is a mix of strengths and weaknesses throughout the areas we have inspected, with the exception of outcomes for service users which is an area of strength. Service users are generally happy with their environments and services and there are good examples where services have substantially improved their quality of life. Good working relationships have been established with providers and the programme is being effectively managed on a day to day basis. LBM show a high level of commitment to the programme through senior officers, Councillors and partners in the Commissioning Body who work well together. There are some strong links between the Supporting People strategy and housing strategies developed for specific groups, and positive examples of working with hard to reach groups.

- 161** However, although some ineligible services have been addressed there has been a significant delay in dealing with some mental health services which has reduced available funding for appropriate services. Overall the approach to value for money is weak. The involvement of service users is under developed and representation at decision making level is limited. Access to services is inconsistent, information on Supporting People services is limited and customer care is variable. The service reviews have not been consistent, completed by the deadline, or are robust Scrutiny of performance and service reviews has been weak. Consistent contract monitoring is not in place and the team are slow in negotiating steady state contracts. The Core Strategy Group is not supporting the programme effectively and links with mental health and drug and alcohol services in particular are weak.

## What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

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

- 162** This area is a mix of strengths and weaknesses. Savings have been achieved from the first programme of service reviews, and service user involvement has improved, particular with some hard to reach groups. Some referral arrangements have been improved, but improvements those for people with mental health problems are still not in place. Some related performance indicators related to Supporting People have improved although most have not. The Commissioning Body has been slow to transfer ineligible funding from some mental health services.
- 163** The administration of the programme had a poor start without stable management until July 2004. The achievements of the programme have been obtained since that time. This includes a raised corporate profile for the programme which has delivered a better awareness of the services and benefits for service users.
- 164** The programme has delivered additional services for a number of client groups who are identified as a priority. This expands the choice available for potential service users.
- 165** Through the service review process some services have been reconfigured to better meet the needs of service users. The most significant example of this is the YMCA services for young single homeless people. In addition, the changes were developed in consultation with residents and delivered, for example, meals which took into account people's cultural needs.
- 166** Membership of the SWL CAG has delivered benefits for LBM and they have contributed to the work of the group. They have led on the regional inclusive forum, and provided the management of the BME elders sheltered housing scheme which was developed on a cross authority basis. Culturally specific choice has been extended for older residents in LBM as well as neighbouring boroughs.
- 167** Savings have been delivered through the service reviews, £284,000, although £270,000 relates to one service and savings have only been obtained since April 2005. The value for money element of the reviews has been recognised by LBM as weak, particularly in the early part of the programme of service reviews. To address this a value for money workbook and further programme of reviews over the next three years has been developed. This is expected to deliver further savings.
- 168** A new programme of reviews is also being undertaken to ensure that standards of service are being improved in accordance with the agreed action plans. However this approach is being undermined by the lack of consistent and effective contract management of the present, interim contracts.

- 169** Service user involvement has been improved. LBM have established a standing forum with Gypsies and Travellers which has delivered beneficial outcomes for this group. Services users have been involved in service reviews and have influenced changes in services, for example, in the YMCA contract. The voluntary sector has assisted with a survey for the older people's housing strategy. Services users have more say in the services commissioned on their behalf.
- 170** Some referral arrangements for support services have been improved. Merton Youth Single Homeless Forum has been established to manage nominations into vacancies. This provides young people with a structured process for housing options that supports tenancy sustainment. This is a relatively new arrangement which is working well.
- 171** However, referral arrangements to supported accommodation for people with mental health problems are dealt with by the community mental health team and have not been working well. LBM has developed new arrangements which will allow referrals to a multi-service nominations panel, but this was not in place at the time of the inspection.
- 172** The Commissioning Body has been slow to implement changes in some mental health services where Supporting People funding has been used for ineligible, care services. Funding should have been transferred at an earlier stage to more appropriate budgets. This has resulted in £200,000 Supporting People funding per year since 2003 which could have been used for other housing support priorities. However, the impact has been lessened by LBM support to Supporting People grant totalling £106,740 per year made up of £56,530 towards the Supporting People administration grant, and £50,210 towards grants.
- 173** Related services to Supporting People have shown improved performance over time. Homelessness services have improved on delivering decisions within 33 days. Performance was about 50 per cent in April 2005. This has improved to approximately 85 per cent in December/January 2006, although the average is slightly below this level in the year to date. Performance on housing benefits is currently above government target levels with new claims processed in an average of 21 days and changes of circumstance processed with seven to eight days.

- 174 Performance on other best value performance indicators for 2004/05<sup>14</sup> and 2005/06<sup>15</sup> show more mixed results.
- Average length of stay for homeless households is within the best 25 per cent.
  - Energy ratings in council owned homes have improved over the last two years but have failed to meet the Council's own targets and remain at average performance.
  - Average length of stay in hostel accommodation has worsened from 13 weeks in 2004/05 to 19 weeks in 2005/06 although the 25 weeks target has been exceeded. The top 25 per cent performance measure is no weeks in hostel accommodation.
- 175 The Council's social services performance on indicators relevant to Supporting People improved in 2004/05 compared with 2003/04 by one banding in the following four out of twelve areas:
- adults and people with learning disabilities helped to live at home;
  - percentage of adults and older people receiving statement of needs;
  - adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service; and
  - average number of delayed transfers of care.

### **How does the Council manage performance?**

- 176 This is a weak area for the Council. The action plan is weak and unlikely to drive improvements and delivery of targets has been slow especially in the implementation of steady state contracts. Service reviews in the early part of the programme were weak in respect of value for money and plans to rectify this are slow to be put into place. There is a robust performance management framework but reporting is weak and is undermined by the lack of representation from mental health. LBM does not make use of learning from others which would maximise resources available to the programme. However, the programme is well supported by Councillors and senior managers, and the performance information produced is reliable.
- 177 The aims and objectives for the programme are set out in the five year strategy and are well integrated with those of the Council and of the wider local strategic partnership - the promotion of independent living. A five year action plan is included in the strategy which links actions and targets to a set of seven objectives which underpin the overall vision. It is updated each year.
- 178 Progress against the action plan for the five year strategy has been hampered during the early part of 2006 by the loss of a Supporting People team member. LBM responded quickly and brought in a resource to cover on a temporary basis.

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<sup>14</sup> Figures provided by London Borough of Merton - Best Value Performance Plan 2006

<sup>15</sup> Performance indicators have yet to be audited

- 179** However, delivery of targets has been weak. Significantly, only five steady state contracts are in place following the completion of sixty service reviews. Four others are in negotiation. Of 48 targets identified in the 2006/07 action plan, 26 are shown as amber rated<sup>16</sup> and three rated red. This indicates that over 50 per cent of targets potentially could be unmet by the end of the year. Thirty five per cent of targets from the 2005/06 were brought forward and have been included in the updated action plan.
- 180** In addition, a programme of service reviews to address a weak assessment of value for money in the initial programme of reviews has only recently been finalised and has been delayed until October 2006. This means further delay in undertaking robust value for money assessments, and the extended use of interim contracts. LBM cannot demonstrate that the programme is achieving value for money and there will be further delays in negotiating any further savings.
- 181** The Supporting People strategy action plan is weak and unlikely to drive improvements for the following reasons.
- The relative weight of targets is not shown which would indicate the impact for service users and the programme where they are likely not to be met.
  - The action plan is process focussed and not linked to measurable outcomes. It is often difficult to know what the outcomes are meant to be from the activity shown.
  - Target setting is weak with vague deadlines (year 1 to 2; year 2 to 3) which make it difficult to see if performance is failing or targets are slipping. There are no mechanisms in place to show whether the services are under resourced or not effectively targeted.
  - Targets are not clearly aligned with deadlines. This is confusing and does not help to show when activities are meant to be achieved. For example, 'benchmarking costs for each service' is shown as to be achieved year 3 to 5 although some of this work is already in place. This could indicate a lack of ambition. The activity of 'agree statement on value for money efficiency and value improvements' shows year 1 to 2 although these discussions are only just starting with the SWL CAG. This does not lead to effective performance monitoring.
- 182** There is a robust framework in place to monitor the progress of targets in the Supporting People strategy action plan. Quarterly reports are presented to both the Core Strategy Group and Commissioning Body. The Housing Performance Review Board also meets quarterly and reviews performance indicators and the implementation of services plans. This is further supplemented by the Vulnerable People's group which is chaired by the Accountable Officer and includes officer representatives from Supporting People, Housing, and Learning disabilities. The group review action plans from a number of related strategies and co-ordinates activities and forward planning.

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<sup>16</sup> Using a traffic light system where green denotes targets met, amber denotes targets likely to fail and red denotes failure to meet targets

- 183** Unfortunately this positive approach is undermined by a lack of representation from mental health services. This is of particular concern given the tense relationship between the Supporting People team and the CHMT, and that one third of Supporting People grant is directed to this client group.
- 184** The performance monitoring report on the Supporting People strategy to the Commissioning Body is weak and does not promote effective scrutiny. The report shows the percentage of actions not completed which lacks transparency as the relative weight of actions not completed is not made clear. For example, the slow rate of negotiations on steady state contracts was identified to us as a result of a lack of capacity within the Supporting People team. However, this has not been raised as an issue by the Commissioning Body and there are no agreed plans in place to deal with this. This activity is an expectation of the Supporting People grant conditions. It is also good practice as it provides a degree of certainty of service delivery for providers and, most importantly, service users.
- 185** There is strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme. An elected councillor is the Supporting People champion as well as the cabinet member for health and Adult Social Services. There is also a cabinet member for Housing and Regeneration. There has been a history of support at cabinet level for the programme and regular briefings for Councillors. This support has been maintained following the local elections of May 2006. There is cross party support for the direction of the programme which links with other corporate objectives.
- 186** The Supporting People team takes reasonable steps to ensure that the quality of work book data supplied by providers is accurate. Checks take place as part of the service reviews, for example, the number of staff hours is checked against the timesheets of staff. They also check that move on and moves into independent living are genuine. The majority of work books are returned on time and these are sample checked. There are also triggers on the IT system to highlight unusual variations in hours, utilisation and turnover. The outcome is reliable information on which to manage performance.
- 187** This information is further supported by monitoring of performance in related areas. For example, LBM have a target of no more than 15 vulnerable adults in bed and breakfast at any one time with all placements to be made within the borough. This target has been maintained over the last three months prior to the inspection with only three vulnerable adults in bed and breakfast. Annual quotas for move-on accommodation are monitored through the housing services management team monthly performance report. An additional quota for ex-offenders has been included for the first time this year with an existing service supplying support. This demonstrates a corporate commitment to delivering support services for vulnerable people.
- 188** LBM has not taken a proactive approach to learning from the Supporting People programme. Specific examples of how LBM learns from external sources and internally are limited, but include the following.
- The temporary accommodation support service undertakes exit interviews and is part of a consortia with six other authorities who undertaken mystery shopping exercises.

- The local eligibility criteria was based on the LB Hounslow model.
  - There is a high reliance on learning from the SWL CAG in respect of policies and practice, benchmarking and the development of the Supporting People programme.
  - Service reviews have provided learning for specific services although LBM have not used this at a strategic level to inform the approach for client groups.
- 189** The recent bid for supported lodgings did not demonstrate effective learning. For example, there was no consideration in the proposal to the Commissioning Body about how well these schemes have worked elsewhere, even those it is recognised that other administering local authorities have sometimes struggled to identify landlords who are willing to participate in these types of schemes.
- 190** The Council are missing out on the opportunity to learn from top performing councils and to apply that learning to a local context. This is especially the case in respect of robustness of service reviews with respect to value for money and dealing with the transfer of ineligible funding.

### **Does the Council have the capacity to improve?**

- 191** Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. After a poor start to the programme the management of the programme has made progress in the last two years. There is good capacity in the IT system which is well supported and the team have a range of appropriate skills which have been augmented from other areas of the Council as needed. The Council has been successful in attracting inward investment. However, the track record of delivering against action plans is weak due to a lack of capacity.
- 192** The continuing involvement of the Accountable Officer in the management of the programme and related governance forums is providing some continuity of leadership and direction. There are linkages between the Accountable Officer and wider departmental and inter-agency forums also ensure that the programme is reasonably integrated with some other work around vulnerable groups, for example, older people and people with learning disabilities.
- 193** The Supporting People team benefits from good quality IT software. It is integrated into the social services, ledger and payments systems and has reporting software that can be used to produce DCLG data, internal management information and ad hoc reports. A team representative attends the user group and is active in developing the system further to meet the needs of the programme. The IT system is well regarded by the staff who use it, and it supports their work well.

- 194** 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 a draft steady state contract. Other specialists have assisted in the service reviews and peer officers from the SWL CAG officers have been used for internal service reviews. The team reports good support from IT services, helping to ensure that payments and budget reports are produced on time.
- 195** The Supporting People team members have received training to develop their skills. The staff development and appraisal system is used to identify appropriate training. One example is health and safety training organised by the SWL CAG. All permanent staff have undertaken appraisal interviews and targets are linked to the strategy action plan.
- 196** The capacity of the Supporting People team to deliver future improvements is questionable for the following reasons.
- The team has not yet been reviewed to ensure that the right approach is being adopted to deliver the programme efficiently and effectively in the future despite the low level of administration grant and the change in the delivery of the programme from implementation to steady state. This review took place subsequent to the inspection with additional resources planned in the team.
  - The team has been slow to deliver the action plan targets of the Supporting People strategy over 2005/06 and over 50 per cent of actions in the 2006/07 revised plan are at amber showing a likelihood that they will not be met in the current year.
  - Only 15 per cent of steady state contracts have either been issued or are under negotiation and the team lack the capacity and contract negotiation skills to deliver them including robust value for money savings.
  - Budget projections for the programme through to 2008/09 show a projected over-spend of £158,517 in 2008/09. Given wider financial pressures, LBM are reliant on savings being achieved through the new programme of service reviews which are already delayed.
  - Contract management is not taking place consistently, only where there are steady state contracts in place.
- 197** Moving forward on analysis of ethnic profile information and how this impacts on services and whether culturally specific service provision is needed.
- 198** Supporting People have backed successful bids to bring in additional funding. One was a successful bid by Jigsaw to develop a cross authority teenage runaway scheme, which will provide mediation and help with getting access to housing. Funding was obtained from Association of London Government and Lottery grant totalling £103,000 over two years.

- 199** A joint bid for funding with the London Borough of Sutton was successful from the Homelessness Innovation Fund. This has provided funds for a video to be made by young people from BME backgrounds to encourage involvement. A property shop has been set up close to the civic offices and has recently been opened with the aim of generating private rented housing lets. It is expected that this will benefit local people including those who are homeless and potentially homeless as well as vulnerable people.
- 200** The Commissioning Body has recently discussed plans to strengthen the role of the Core Strategy Group. An away day to discuss the role of the governance forums is planned for the autumn of 2006. In addition, tentative consideration is being given to the possibility of adopting a similar model to Lambeth's housing board for vulnerable people. However, there are no agreed proposals to secure improvements.

## **Summary**

- 201** Our judgement is that the Council's Supporting People programme has 'uncertain' prospects for improvement.
- 202** Service reviews were not completed by the target date and are not expected to be until October 2006. LBM do not have a robust approach to value for money in the programme and potential savings from the service reviews have been lost. The Commissioning Body has been slow to transfer some ineligible funding. The action plans of the Supporting People strategy are not effectively driving improvement and performance against targets is weak. There are weak links with some client groups, in particular mental health and drug and alcohol teams. Performance across related services to Supporting People is patchy with some areas of improvement but not consistently across all areas.
- 203** However, the Supporting People programme is well supported by Councillors and the programme was implemented after a poor start. Good working relationships have been established with providers, and payments for services have been made regularly and accurately. Key dates have generally been made with the exception of the completion of the service reviews. The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills and good support from the IT systems. The process of service reviews has delivered improvements for the benefit of service users. New and remodelled services have been delivered which has expanded choice for people.

## Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

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:

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

### 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.

<b>Merton</b>	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26) Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27) 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) Delayed transfers of care (D41) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)

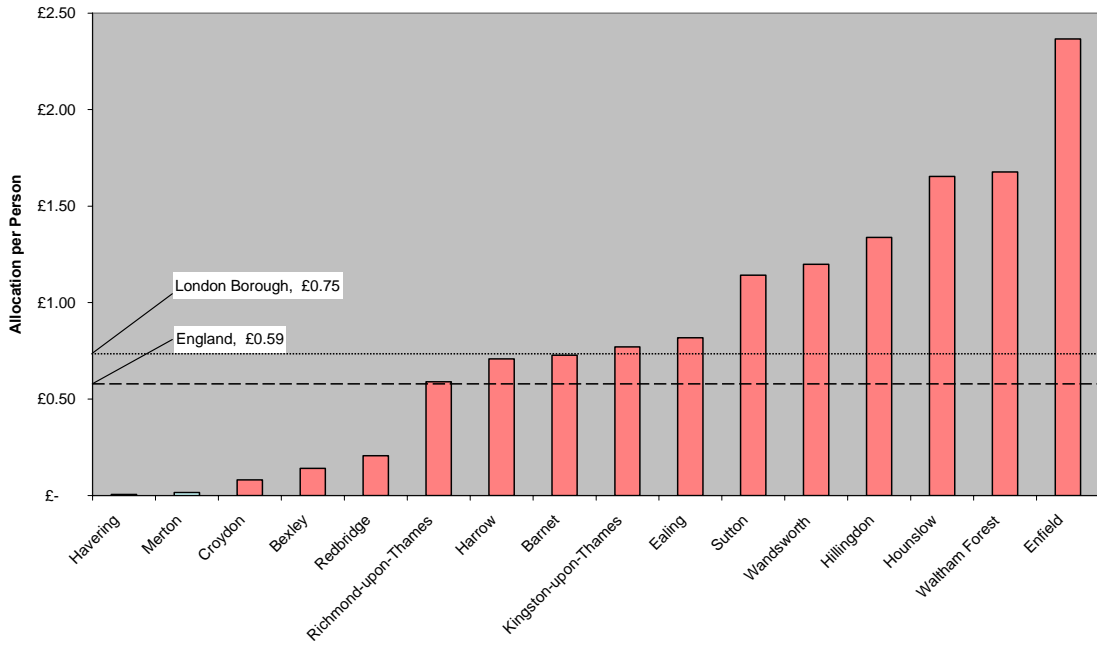
<b>Merton</b>	
Below average (••)	<p>Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40)</p> <p>Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29)</p> <p>Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30)</p> <p>Older people helped to live at home (C32)</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51)</p>
Significantly below average (•)	<p>Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5)</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39)</p>

## Best value performance indicators

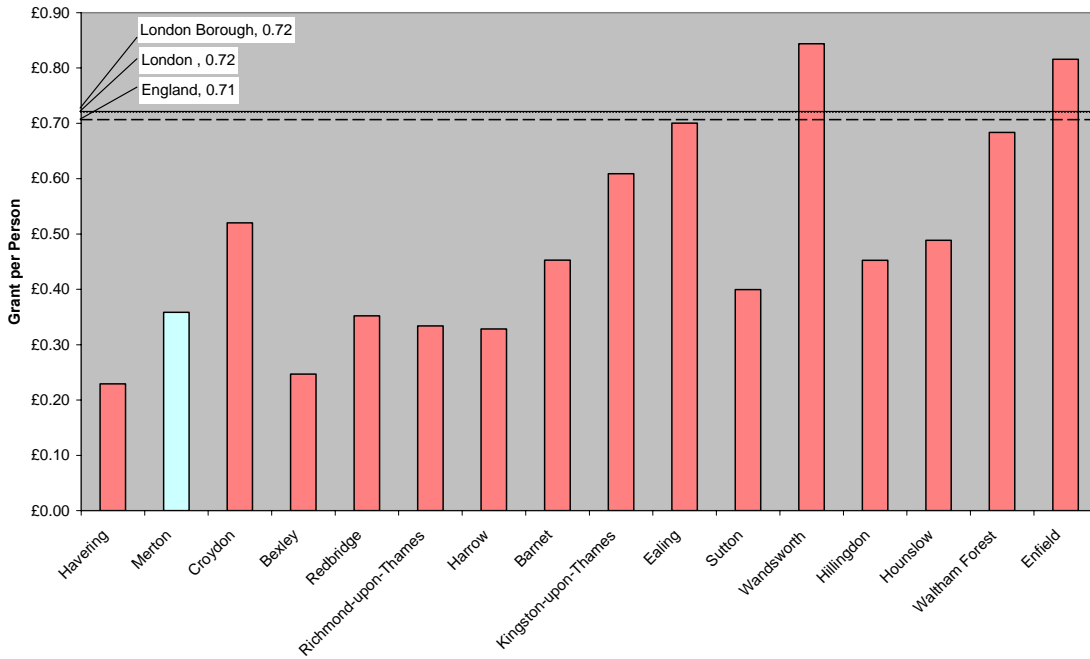
### Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with London boroughs

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

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



Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours<sup>17</sup>, all London boroughs and all English councils (2004/05)



Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with London and English councils 2004/05

<sup>17</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

## 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:
  - interviews with key personnel, including the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group representatives, Supporting People team members, senior managers, partner organisations, and lead Councillors for related areas;
  - visits to a range of services funded by Supporting People grant including interviews with managers, staff and service users;
  - questionnaire to service providers funded by Supporting People grant in the London Borough of Merton;
  - mystery shopping telephone calls;
  - focus groups with providers from a range of services, service users and front line staff;
  - visits to public access point in Morden; and
  - review of leaflets and the Council's website.

## Appendix 3 – Positive practice

### **Streamlining cross agency activity for homeless 16-17 year olds**

There is a protocol between the youth offending team and housing for 16-17 year old homeless people which emphasises trying to reintegrate with family, identifies when the responsibility lies with social services and describes a process to be followed. There is a named housing officer who links with the youth offending team for any accommodation queries. The housing department are made aware by the youth offending team of any young person in custody for whom housing has been recognised as an issue.

### **Direct payments for Supporting People service users**

Merton SP is the only authority within SW region to have a direct payment policy and a learning disabilities service user who uses this policy. The benefits for the service user have been the opportunity to choose his support worker and this has resulted in more independence and greater control. It has also resulted in less intervention by his care manager and greater stability in maintaining his tenancy.