

Supporting People Inspection Report

January 2007



# Supporting People

**Warrington Borough Council**

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# Contents

<b>Supporting People Inspections</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Scoring the Supporting People programme</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Report</b>	<b>11</b>
Context	11
<b>How good is the Supporting People programme?</b>	<b>15</b>
What has the programme aimed to achieve?	15
Is the programme meeting the needs of the local community and users?	16
Summary	35
<b>What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?</b>	<b>37</b>
What is the Council's track record in delivering improvement?	37
How does the Council manage performance?	39
Does the Council have the capacity to improve?	41
Summary	43
<b>Appendix 1 – Performance indicators</b>	<b>44</b>
Demographic information	44
Performance information	45
<b>Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Appendix 4 – Positive practice</b>	<b>56</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 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 former 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).

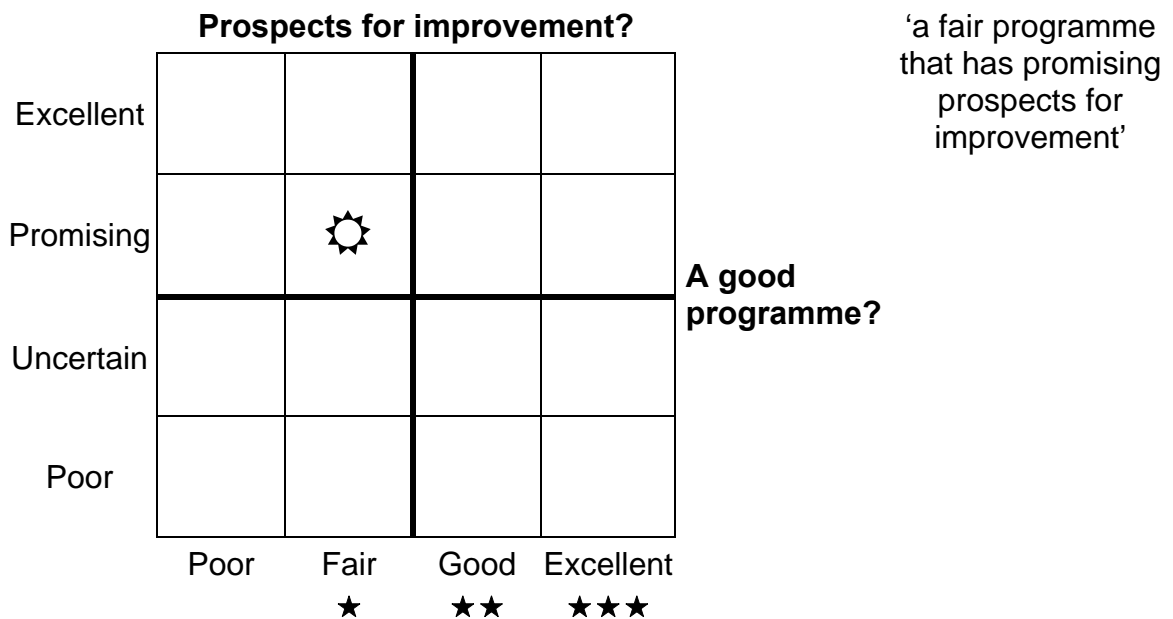
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<sup>1</sup> Now the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

## Scoring the Supporting People programme

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

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



Source: Audit Commission

- 2 We found the programme to be fair because it has strengths including:
  - service provision is changing to reflect changing needs and aspirations of service users;
  - local needs information has been established and is kept up to date;
  - diversity issues are addressed and BME groups access services;
  - governance arrangements are generally effective and a five year strategy has been agreed;
  - effective partnerships have been formed leading to a number of improvements;

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

## 6 Supporting People | Scoring the Supporting People programme

- there is a stable, skilled and well-established Supporting People team which effectively administer the programme and meet all key milestones;
- good relationships have been developed with providers with appropriate support given when required;
- service reviews were completed in an effective manner and led to service improvements;
- an eligibility criteria has been agreed with service providers and effectively applied leading to large savings for the SP programme; and
- the Council has worked well with other local authorities in sharing expertise and joint funding research and staffing costs.

### 3 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:

- service users are not effectively involved in the programme;
- attendance at governance meetings is inconsistent and drawn from a narrow section of providers and no service users;
- the provider forum is ineffective;
- the relationship between value for money and quality has not been thoroughly explored;
- no steady state contracts have been agreed; and
- the take up of fairer charging is limited and the Council are unsure of the likely take up rate.

### 4 The programme has promising prospects for improvement because:

- there is an impressive track record of improving the service;
- service reviews were used to drive improvements and were completed on time;
- the Council learns from and shares information with other administering local authorities;
- priorities and strategies are aligned with other Council and key stakeholder strategies;
- financial and human resource management is effective and has developed staff and services;
- leadership is strong and shows imagination when developing services through PFI and assistive technology grants;
- working with partners has improved access to services and provision such as for young single homeless;
- additional resources have been levered in to improve services; and
- procurement arrangements are generally sound and have helped secure value for money.

5 However, there are some barriers to improvement. These include:

- measurement of service user outcomes needs to be improved to determine longer term outcomes;
- IT systems need upgrading to meet the needs of the service; and
- service provider and users involvement needs development.

## Recommendations

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

### **Recommendation**

*R1 Improve opportunities for further service user involvement in the development and delivery of the programme:*

- *involve service users in the Core Strategy Group;*
- *ensure all service user support groups are formally involved in the programme;*
- *develop a forum for service users to be involved in the programme;*
- *involve service users in the monitoring of the programme;*
- *involve service users in the production of publicity and other material; and*
- *improve the use of carers, specialist and advocacy groups.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services will be developed and improved in line with service users needs and expectations; and
- more accessible publicity material.

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

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<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.

**Recommendation**

*R2 Improve governance arrangements by:*

- *ensuring consistent attendance at all meetings of the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group;*
- *agreeing and publishing a programme of work for the Core Strategy Group;*
- *broadening membership of the Core Strategy Group to incorporate more providers and service users; and*
- *develop the capacity of the Core Strategy Group to act independently of the SP team.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- more representative governing bodies; and
- an independent governance of the programme and its future direction.

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

**Recommendation**

*R3 Improve service planning and performance by:*

- *issuing steady state contracts;*
- *thoroughly examining quality and value for money in services; and*
- *researching outcomes for service users over the longer term.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- greater security for providers and service users;
- outcomes from SP funding are established; and
- improving value from the programme.

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

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

Dates of inspection: 25 to 29 September 2006.

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# Report

## Context

### The locality

- 8 The Borough comprises the town of Warrington and a number of outlying villages and communities.
- 9 The Borough of Warrington covers an area of 18,184 hectares and serves a resident population of approximately 193,200 people living in some 78,000 households. The Claimant Count Unemployment Rate is low at 1.3 per cent (October 2004) compared with a national rate (GB) of 2.2 per cent (Figure 1).
- 10 Warrington was designated a 'New Town' in 1968 that led to a rapid, planned expansion from 1973 onwards in the number of residents, homes, and jobs accommodating migration from Liverpool and Manchester. In the past decade, whilst the population has remained static in the North West region it has increased in Warrington by 4.6 per cent.
- 11 Forecasts from mid year 2002 to 2021 indicate that resident population growth will continue in the short term until 2005 after which the resident population is predicted to decline so that by 2021 the population will be approximately the same size as it is currently (mid year 2003). In line with national trends the size of Warrington's youngest age groups will decline whilst growth is predicted in all age groups over the age of 45 and with significant growth predicted for the 65 and over age group. This trend has implications for Warrington Borough Council's future service delivery to meet the needs of this growing older population.
- 12 Whilst the buoyancy of the local economy means that overall unemployment is relatively low there are extremes of wealth and poverty, co-existing within the Borough. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004<sup>4</sup>, 19 of the Borough's 125 Lower Layer 'Super Output Areas' (SOA)<sup>5</sup> were ranked within the 20 per cent most deprived nationally; of which 10 were ranked within the 10 per cent most deprived. However, 34 of the 125 SOAs were ranked within the 20 per cent most affluent nationally.
- 13 All but one of these deprived SOAs is located within Warrington's six central urban wards. These areas which had already been developed benefited less from the injection of community support and facilities that were made available in the New Town areas. These areas also had a relatively high proportion of skilled workers employed in the traditional heavy industries of Warrington that declined rapidly in the early 1980s.

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<sup>4</sup> Indices of Deprivation 2004, ODPM. Crown copyright reserved. Crown copyright material is reproduced with permission of HMSO.

<sup>5</sup> Super Output Areas are a relatively new statistical geography based upon aggregates of 2001 Census Output Areas. For more information please visit [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

- 14 The inner urban areas have the greatest concentration of people experiencing relatively low income, high unemployment, poor housing, high crime and poor health compared to Borough and national averages. However, not all people in these deprived areas are socially excluded, nor do all socially excluded people live close to each other, with isolated pockets of deprivation identified outside the inner urban area. Particular groups are also more likely to be vulnerable in terms of particular issues within the Borough including for example older people, younger people, disabled people and ethnic minorities.
- 15 The 2001 Census indicated that 7.83 per cent of the population in the North West region were of BME origin. 2001 Census indicated that Warrington has 7,404 (3.87 per cent of population) residents from a BME background.

### **The Council**

- 16 Warrington Borough Council is rated by the Audit Commission as a 'three-star' authority and 'improving well'.
- 17 The Council has six ambitions supported by improvement priorities that it wishes to achieve over the next four years. Four of the ambitions relate to the SP programme:
  - 'improving health and well being and promoting independence;
  - making our communities safer, stronger and sustainable;
  - ensuring all our children and young people have the opportunity to reach their potential; and
  - transforming our organisation to deliver our outcomes.'
- 18 The plan is underpinned by a series of local public service agreement targets, which also refer to the SP programme. This includes such targets as reducing crime and domestic violence.
- 19 The Council modernised its organisational structure at officer and member level in April 2005. This resulted in the Supporting People Programme moving from Environmental Services to a new Community Services Directorate, under the Housing, Protection and Community Section.
- 20 The current political composition of WBC is Labour (25 seats), Liberal Democrats (25 seats), Conservatives (6 seats) and Independent (1). In May 2006 control moved to a shared administration of Liberal Democrats and Conservatives. A new constitution was adopted in May 2002, involving an executive board with a leader and separate overview and scrutiny roles.
- 21 The Council has recently been assessed and re-awarded Investors in People status.

### **The Supporting People programme**

- 22 The Supporting People Programme in Warrington commissions 83 services, with 33 different service providers across all service user groups.

- 23 The Supporting People Grant for 2005/06 was £7,745,015, which represented a decrease of 5.1 per cent from the Grant for 2004/05. The grant for Warrington for 2006/07 is £7,611,086. This represents a decrease of £133,929 (1.75 per cent) from the grant for 2005/06. As with previous years no inflationary uplift has been included by DCLG.

**Table 1 Supporting People Grant 2003 - 2006/07**

Year	SP grant	Comments
31 March 2003	£8,388,618	Total amount eligible for 2003/04 SP allocation
2003/04	£8,274,708	Reduction of £113,910 or 1.4 per cent
2004/05	£8,155,786	Reduction of £118,922 or 1.4 per cent and no inflation
2005/06	£7,745,015	Reduction of £410,771 or 5 per cent and no inflation
2006/07	£7,611,086	Reduction of £133,929 or 1.7 per cent and no inflation
2007/08	£7,611,086	Same grant level as 2006/07 but no inflation

*Source: Warrington Supporting People five year strategy*

**Table 2 SP funding groups 2005/06 and 2006/07**

Main needs groups and change in percentage of SP funds received

Needs group	Percentage of SP funds allocated 2005/06	Percentage of SP funds allocated 2006/07
Learning disability	49%	41.76%
Homeless	14%	15.8%
Older People	11%	12.39%
Generic	10%	11.15%
Mental Health	9%	12.70%
Physical/sensory disability	4%	4.99%
Domestic violence	2%	0.22%
Young people at risk	1%	0.98%

*Source: Warrington Supporting People five year strategy*

- 24 An established Supporting People team structure is in place and takes operational responsibility for delivering the programme. It's location within the Community Services Directorate has increased the opportunities for joint work and enhanced performance management and risk management.

## How good is the Supporting People programme?

### What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 25** The Council has agreed a five year strategy for the period 2006-2010. The plan outlines the Councils key priorities for the period of which four relate directly to the SP programme, these include:
- improving health and well being and promoting independence;
  - ensuring all children and young people have the opportunity to reach their potential;
  - making our communities safer, stronger and sustainable; and
  - transforming our organisation to deliver our outcomes.
- 26** In March 2005 the Commissioning Body produced a Supporting People five year strategy. The main priorities within the strategy can be summarised as follows.
- Achieving the savings target identified by DCLG.
  - Securing the existing range of services currently funded.
  - Priorities for additional or new investment for the following:
    - Older People and Frail Elderly;
    - People with Drugs or Alcohol Problems; and
    - Black & Ethnic Minorities.
  - Refocus existing services, funding or resources for the following need groups:
    - People with a Learning Disability;
    - People with a Physical or Sensory Disability;
    - Young People at Risk; and
    - Generic Services by reducing the existing level of generic floating support and remodel specific elements of existing generic support services to provide floating support.
- 27** The strategy is supplemented by an annual plan which was agreed with all stakeholders. The plan lists a series of priorities for the year which dovetail with the priorities in the five year strategy. A series of key tasks are set for the year which include the following.
- Achieve the identified savings identified by DCLG.
  - Develop and implementing a robust commissioning and contractual framework.
  - Deliver enhanced service user outcomes, service quality and value for money.

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

- Undertake of a range of Strategic Reviews to assess unmet need, service gaps and service development opportunities.
- Undertake additional research, needs analysis and options appraisal relating to the provision of Housing Related Support relating to:
  - Assistive Technology; and
  - Black & Minority Ethnic Communities.

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

28 The assessment was based on the following key issues:

- governance and partnerships;
- grant compliance, strategy and needs;
- delivery arrangements;
- commissioning and performance;
- value for money;
- service user involvement;
- access to services and information;
- diversity; and
- outcomes for service users.

### Governance and partnerships

- 29 There is a balance of strength and weaknesses in governance arrangements. The Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group are well established and generally work effectively together. Key stakeholders such as Probation and the Primary Care Trust are engaged in the planning process and service delivery. Terms of Reference and memorandum of understanding have been agreed between all parties and are regularly reviewed. Conflicts of interest and potential conflicts between partners are appropriately managed. Councillors are involved in the development of the programme and have an understanding of the issues. The SP team are involved in regional and sub-regional SP initiatives. However not all parties consistently attend Commissioning Body meetings and membership of the Core Strategy Group does not incorporate many independent agencies and no service users.
- 30 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: drives 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.

### **Delivery arrangements**

- 31** The Commissioning Body in Warrington was established in 2002 and is a partnership between Warrington Borough Council, Warrington Primary Care Trust and the National Probation Service (Cheshire).
- 32** Membership of the Core Strategy Group is made up as follows:
- Head of Housing, Protection & Community, Warrington Borough Council;
  - Supporting People & Commissioning Manager, Warrington Borough Council;
  - Probation Accommodation Unit Manager, National Probation Service (Cheshire);
  - Learning Disability Joint Commissioning Manager, Warrington Primary Care;
  - Principal Officer Corporate Social Services, Community Services Directorate, Warrington Borough Council;
  - Head of Housing Services, Warrington Borough Council;
  - Centre Manager, Salvation Army (Provider representative); and
  - Chief Executive, Warrington Community Care (Provider representative).

### **Corporate commitment**

- 33** Corporate commitment to the delivery of the programme is strength. Additional finances have been provided to support the administration of the programme and the SP team has access to a range of corporate expertise, such as legal and financial services. The SP programme and its objectives dovetail with wider corporate objectives and generally SP is well embedded in the council's planning process.
- 34** Cross authority work has enabled both savings to be made and the opportunity to share good practice. Service costs/benchmarking information between Administering Authorities in the NW has facilitated savings. Opportunities for joint commissioning, review and monitoring particularly in relation to cross authority floating support have been identified and review outcomes shared. The service is provided both effectively and efficiently.

### **Commissioning Body**

- 35 The Commissioning Body involves key stakeholders and provides clear leadership for the programme. Agreed strategies link with the Council, PCT and Probation priorities and generally there is a 'joined up' feeling to their work. However, attendance is inconsistent and the PCT has failed to attend a number of meetings; although 'substitutes' are in place, they have not always fulfilled their role. Poor attendance diminishes the capacity of the Commissioning Body.
- 36 Clear leadership and decision making is demonstrated. Difficult decisions have been made which includes the decommissioning of services and the return of service reviews to the Core Strategy Group for further examination. The group are aware of the contracted services strengths and weaknesses and are adequately serviced by the Accountable Officer.
- 37 Terms of reference and a memorandum of understanding have been agreed. Both documents are effective and have served to avoid any conflicts or misunderstandings.
- 38 Appropriate secretarial support is given to the Commissioning Body. For example meetings and agendas are planned in advance and minutes of meetings are easily available. Minutes show that meetings are efficient and business dealt with and decisions made.
- 39 Performance across a range of services is closely monitored. Reports detailing financial performance and progress against improvement plans are regularly submitted as well as reports detailing qualitative issues such as outcomes for services users. Reports on outcomes for service users would benefit from research over a longer period; nevertheless this is an effective means of keeping the Commissioning Body in touch with events 'on the ground'.

### **Core Strategy Group**

- 40 The Core Strategy Group has worked effectively to deliver a series of initiatives including the service review programme and effectively supports the Commissioning Body. However attendance is drawn from a small number of service providers and there are few from the independent sector. Attendance at meetings is variable, with on one occasion as few as six people attending, two of which were from the SP team. Service users are not involved at all.
- 41 The group has terms of reference and conflict of interest protocol. Both are presently under review but do not presently incorporate service users.
- 42 The Youth Offending Team does not attend Core Strategy Group meetings. Although there are other routes for service users to make representation such as through related service providers, there is, nevertheless, a gap in provider representation.

- 43 Structures for service provider and service user representation are not well developed. Feedback on meetings is not completed on a formal basis and is often dependant on individuals reporting back at a series of forums. Service users have expressed interest in becoming part of the group and are shortly to enter a training programme to build the capacity of interested individuals. Presently the group is drawing on a narrow base of providers which diminishes its capacity to improve services.
- 44 The group is largely administered by the SP team and does not demonstrate independence. Some groups elsewhere are chaired by independent providers, providing a counter point to local authority run services. The position is compounded by the fact that the provider forum is presently not active and cannot therefore feed into the Core Strategy Group. A strong and independent Core Strategy Group gives confidence to service providers and users a voice in the programme.
- 45 The group are well informed of the priorities of the programme and committed to improving services. The group approves service reviews before passing them to the Commissioning Body and are well informed about SP services in the region. The group do not have a specific work programme but work to the action plan within the annual plan. With delegated authority from the Commissioning Body the group have produced a series of significant documents including the eligibility criteria, assessment of the viability of services and inflationary uplifts. The group are effective in progressing the SP programme but representation is incomplete.

#### **Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements**

- 46 Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements works satisfactorily with the SP team. Issues around move on accommodation and high risk offenders are dealt with in a satisfactory manner. The Chair of the Commissioning Body and PCT both attend quarterly meetings on DAT and YOT issues and feed these issues into Principal Officer meetings and Commissioning Body meetings.

#### **Supporting People team**

- 47 The Supporting People team is located within the Community Services Directorate. The team of six is drawn from a variety of disciplines which includes a qualified social worker and people with housing expertise. The team work closely with colleagues in other sections of the council who provide specialist support and advice. The team are well equipped and in a position to effectively deliver the SP programme.

- 48 The team has established effective links with a series of providers and service user organisations. The team has recently moved into accommodation shared with a number of agencies supplying SP services. The SP team meet with provider and user advocacy agencies and support groups to update them on the programme. For example, the SP team attended the Learning Disability Partnership Board but other groups were less involved. Support groups, open days and contacts for agencies are promoted in the SP newsletter. The newsletter provides information to all providers and is considered useful. Close working and co-operation between agencies, where it is actively pursued, improves and helps people access services.
- 49 Providers are satisfied with the service provided by the SP team. The team are helpful and responsive, dealing with queries and offering support when required. In a recent survey around 90 per cent felt they were helpful or very helpful and were satisfied with the overall service. Providers receive the support they require.
- 50 The team is effectively managed and trained. Staff have regular team meetings, one- to-one meetings with line managers and individual performance development reviews which focus on training/development needs and key performance targets. This system has helped staff to identify development needs and promoted a strong focus on key tasks.
- 51 The SP team enjoys close links with other council departments. For example, with the permission of the claimant the SP team has read only access to HB accounts. Good links providing prompt information when housing benefit has been awarded or has ended help housing-related support to be quickly and accurately established and to prevent overpayments. The receipt of housing benefit entitles the recipient to full SP subsidy and is therefore crucial to service provider and user.
- 52 The administrative cost of the team has been benchmarked with other Merseyside authorities. The team was found to be the second least expensive when compared with Merseyside authorities.

### **Grant conditions and eligibility**

- 53 Eligibility criteria were agreed by the Commissioning Body in November 2004. The eligibility criteria were developed through the North West eligibility working group chaired by the Lead Officer from Warrington. Information on the eligibility criteria and its application has been outlined through policy briefings, presentations to forums and boards. The Council is fully complying with grant conditions laid down by the DCLG. These are necessary to provide clarity to officers, service users and service providers about activities that can be properly funded by the grant.
- 54 The application of the eligibility criteria has led to significant savings. Retraction plans are in place and were submitted to the DCLG within the deadline. For services for people with a learning disability this led to a saving of £1.6m. The transfer of these costs to other budgets was handled in an appropriate manner. At no time were services to vulnerable people put at risk.

- 55 Contracts are effectively managed. Service providers confirm that workbook returns from providers are chased up promptly and the SP team confirm that they all workbooks are returned. Annual Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) returns also act as a further check on service standards. Effective monitoring of contracts ensures that high standards are maintained.

### **Work planning**

- 56 Corporately Warrington shows a commitment to improving services and detailed improvement planning. The SP team are equipped with an annual plan which serves this purpose and also serves to implement the five year strategy.
- 57 The annual plan was agreed with stakeholders, excepting service users. The plan lists a series of priorities for the year which dovetail with the priorities in the five year strategy. A series of key tasks are set for the year which include:
- promoting sustainability of re-commissioned services; and
  - development and implementation of the contractual framework.
- 58 The annual plan is accompanied by a SMART action plan detailing objectives for the year. The plan details provision for unmet need and the remodelling of services to meet need. Implementation of the plan is regularly monitored by the Commissioning Body. Areas of weakness are addressed in the plan with details of how the weaknesses will be addressed. The plan is an effective means of improving services.
- 59 Improvement planning follows logically from one year to the next. For example needs surveys are completed one year and provision to meet that need established in the following year. This is an effective use of resources.

### **Needs mapping and analysis review**

- 60 The needs of vulnerable people have been effectively mapped. Using a variety of sources from the census, central government estimates to the local knowledge of service providers, the levels of need of vulnerable people have been estimated. The information has been used in a strategic manner both informing the five year strategy and annually guiding resource allocation. This will help meet need in the most efficient manner.
- 61 Service providers were involved in establishing the needs map. Providers were invited to a focus day when they had the opportunity to comment on levels of demand for their service and areas of unmet need. Involving providers in such an exercise enhances the accuracy of mapping and anticipation of future needs. The comprehensive involvement of service users would have further helped.

- 62 Information on the level of need is kept up to date by a variety of means. Every six months service providers in the borough are canvassed to see if they have sufficient resources to meet need. From this a need for additional extra care units has been identified and measures have been put in place to meet this need. Other statistical sources are also used to keep the needs map up to date by specialist research on the needs of minority groups such as travellers and the BME community. An up to date needs map will reflect unmet need in the borough.

### **Performance monitoring and management**

- 63 Performance is reported across a series of management indicators. This includes relevant BVPI<sup>6</sup>, PAF<sup>7</sup>, and SP specific indicators, as well as progress on the service improvement action plan. The Commissioning Body is regularly updated on a series of performance indicators in qualitative and quantitative formats such as service reviews and budget position.
- 64 Financial reporting is regular and effective. Financial expertise is provided by a corporate accounts team who meet regularly with the SP team to monitor programmed grant and administration grant spend against profiled budgets. Presently a £600,000 surplus is built into the budget to accommodate new service streams due to come on line later in the year and future grant reductions by the DCLG. A further one per cent of the budget is earmarked for contingencies and unforeseen events. Sound budget management gives the Commissioning Body the opportunity to commission new services.
- 65 Proxy indicators are used to determine the effectiveness of services. Move on outcomes for service users are monitored across a range of services. Positive move on outcomes are seen as an indicator of an effective service. It is unclear how information gathered on move on outcomes is presently used but information such as this gathered over an extended period can be useful in identifying effective services. Warrington is presently part funding research into move on outcomes in the North West.
- 66 Service standards have not been agreed or publicised for all need groups. The setting and publicising of service standards gives service users an indication of the sort of level of service they can expect.

### **Fairer charging**

- 67 A policy and procedure for fairer charging is in place which follows DCLG best practice. The policy is publicised to service users through leaflets and the web site. Specialist staff such as Welfare Rights officers and advice agencies have been updated on fairer charging and series of promotional 'road shows' have taken place in sheltered housing.

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<sup>6</sup> Best value performance indicators measuring local council performance.

<sup>7</sup> Performance Assessment Framework Indicators measuring performance in delivering social services.

- 68 There are a number of weaknesses around fairer charging:
- its availability has only recently been widely advertised;
  - leaflets are not detailed and from them it would be difficult to determine if someone is entitled to fairer charging; and
  - there has been no analysis of likely take up rates, such as comparison with neighbouring authorities take up rates.
- 69 Warrington has adopted 'a more generous than elsewhere' policy for passporting applicants onto full SP benefits. Benefits which passport applicants onto full SP benefits include Pension Credit Guarantee and Disability Living Allowance. A 'generous' approach such as this may explain the limited take up of fairer charging as most vulnerable people are exempted from charging.
- 70 Leaseholders are given access to SP services. A draft leaseholder policy is in place which is due to be reviewed in January 2007. The adoption of a 'generous' policy to access SP services has allowed leaseholders to take up SP services without facing potentially prohibitive charges. Before the policy was agreed it was estimated this would cost around £40, 000 to the SP budget. This has improved access to services and shows prudent management of budgets.

### **Five year strategy**

- 71 The five year strategy gives a clear direction for the programme and outlines its priorities. It complies with DCLG guidance and was submitted within prescribed timescales. The strategy was widely circulated to providers, but not stakeholders, for consultation and their views acted upon. It is made clear to service providers what services will be developed and what are not considered priorities. The strategy dovetails with other council strategies and provides a 'joined up' approach to meeting needs. It is an effective strategy which will guide the programme.
- 72 The strategy has been widely distributed in a variety of formats. As well as the full strategy being made available a summary strategy concisely outlining the programme's main priorities has also been produced. Both versions are available for download on the Councils web site. Service providers were aware of the strategy and how to access it.
- 73 Strong links are made with other Council strategies. The five year strategy makes clear links with other strategies, such as the housing strategy and the homelessness strategy to show how the two are interrelated. Co-ordination is vital to services maximising their impact.
- 74 The strategy will be regularly reviewed, but there are no proposals for including all services users. Consultation on reviewing the strategy will begin in April 2007 and be formally reviewed as part of the 2007/08 Annual Planning Process. A series of strategically important studies in 2007 will all feed into a review of the strategy. The studies include a needs analysis, the strategic review of services for rough sleepers and older people and the generic floating support services. The inclusion of service users would help keep the strategy up to date with developing issues.

## **Risk management**

- 75 Risk is managed in an effective manner. A risk register has been compiled detailing different risks, what risk they pose to the programme and best means of mitigating that risk. Effective management of risks reduces the risk of disruption to vulnerable service users.

## **DCLG SPLS data upload**

- 76 Warrington contributes to nationally gathered statistics on the SP programme. Accurate uploads are submitted to DCLG each quarter, on time with few queries.

## **Service reviews**

- 77 Service reviews have been used effectively to improve services and ensure that SP funds only strategically relevant and eligible services. All services were assessed within deadline. A rigorous inspection programme and protocol was publicised along with an appeals process involving an external moderator. Service providers and users were generally well-engaged and spoke positively about the experience. Quality assurance arrangements are in place ensuring consistent and equal treatment of internal and external service providers. More strategic needs group based reviews are planned for next year.
- 78 The arrangements in place to meet government deadlines were robust. Service reviews were all carried out by the deadline of 31 March 2006, and reported to the Commissioning Body for approval. The Commissioning Body provided effective quality assurance and on a number of occasions referred reviews back to the Core Strategy Group for further attention. The reviews were effective and led to the decommissioning of one service, one service being remodelled and four were withdrawn from the SP programme.
- 79 A clear policy and procedure was agreed for service reviews. A detailed service review policy with an appeals process has been circulated to all service providers and users. The position of different services in the review timetable was informed by quarterly Service Risk Assessments. Some reviews were delayed if, for example, the service was being reviewed by another regulatory body. A clear and transparent process gave confidence to service providers and users that reviews would be fair.
- 80 Moderation arrangements for reviews involved lacked inclusiveness. Moderation of the reviews was completed by the Core Strategy Group and signed off by the Commissioning Body. The inclusion of peers and service users would have enhanced the moderation process.
- 81 A comprehensive and well publicised appeals process is in place. There is a comprehensive appeals process that at its final stage involves an external review from a neighbouring local authority. Providers are made aware at all stages of the review process of the availability of this. To date WBC have received no appeals. Providers have the opportunity to challenge decisions and receive an impartial hearing.

- 82** Service reviews were robust and carried out in a collaborative manner. Providers were given clear notice of the scope of the review, documentation required and details of the process. Where required specific training was offered to providers. Providers report review staff as being competent and knowledgeable and aware of the issues. Over 70 per cent of providers were very satisfied with the manner in which their review was carried out. An effective and collaborative review process can drive service improvement.
- 83** Reviews were completed by competent staff. Staff completing the reviews had appropriate skills and experience in dealing with vulnerable people. They showed an awareness of issues affecting service providers and users. Where such skills were not available in house an external consultant was employed. A DCLG grant of £32,000 was obtained to carry out reviews of sheltered housing schemes. This is a good use of resources ensuring reviews were completed on time and to an appropriate standard.
- 84** There have been positive outcomes from the review process. Outcomes from the review process for service users have included:
- improvement in support planning for service users moving on;
  - improved support planning;
  - improved needs and risk assessments; and
  - improvements in service user consultation.
- The reviews secured service users a better quality of life.
- 85** The review programme also secured a series of improvements for the SP programme as a whole, these included:
- savings of £1.67 million through the application of revised eligibility criteria;
  - savings of £243,796 through reduced service costs;
  - one service decommissioned (services moved to another provider), one remodelled and four withdrawn;
  - challenged inappropriate exclusion policies;
  - improvements in service quality with a minimum level C QAF with plans in place to improve quality further particularly around support planning, needs and risk assessment; and
  - identified new service opportunities for young people, women experiencing domestic violence and floating support.
- 86** Robust action plans are in place to help providers improve their services. Following the initial review, action plans were agreed to bring all services up to level C in on the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF), and providers who already met that level were given an action plan to reach the next level. Plans are monitored on an ongoing basis, with the frequency and support provided tailored to the needs of the provider. This means that the services offered to users will continually improve.

- 87 Effective use is made of joint accreditation without allowing standards to fall. Warrington BC has a policy that allows passporting of any provider who is accredited by another authority and Warrington BC are satisfied as to the robustness of the other authorities review processes. External passports, such as Investors In People are also used for some sections of the assessment. The SP team is small and are aware of the potential of joint accreditation to reduce the workload for them and service providers. Again this is an effective use of resources which reduces the workload for all parties.
- 88 There are arrangements in place for cross authority working. Warrington BC has participated in the development of SP cross authority work through the NW Review Officers group and NW Contracts Officer group. There is shared accreditation for some schemes. Opportunities for joint commissioning, review and monitoring, particularly in relation to cross authority floating support, have been taken. This relieves some pressure on providers and brings efficiencies into the volume of work required.
- 89 Effective use is made of joint commissioning within the council. Twelve social care provider contractors, who also provide SP services, have their contracts jointly commissioned by social services and the SP team. The CPA status of the Council awards them flexibility in the use of the SP grant. The Council has pooled some of the grant to provide welfare services that include housing related support and one nominated contracts manager oversees the contract. Providers with jointly commissioned contracts spoke well of the arrangement. This is an efficient means of contracting services.
- 90 Strategically important services have been sustained in an effective manner. Inflationary increases are available to services which would require them to remain operational. Service reviews were used to identify services which would require uplift and an appeals process established which went to the accountable officer and then the Commissioning Body. This approach helps maintain strategically important services.

### **Commissioning and performance**

- 91 Contracting arrangements are not robust. There are no steady state contracts in place, although 18 are in draft and have been given to providers for comment. The contract, based on the north west model, was discussed with providers and suggestions made for amendments which were adopted. Until the reviews of services that include rough sleepers, generic floating support and older people have been completed, these services will continue on interim contracts. The lack of longer term commitments makes future planning for providers difficult and in some cases staff can only be offered short term contracts.
- 92 Payment mechanisms are comprehensive. Payments to providers are made via BACS. Where providers cannot accommodate this alternative payment methods are adopted.

- 93 Adjustments on subsidy payments are not carried out in timely manner, leading to additional work to reconcile payments. In a recent (July 2006) provider satisfaction survey only 50 per cent felt they received payments in accordance with the contract. This involves additional work for providers.
- 94 Effective use is made of block gross and block subsidy payment. Providers in receipt of either form of payment confirmed that the system works well for them.

### Value for money

- 95 The council has adopted a robust approach to securing value for money, scoring 3 out of 4 for value for money in the last CPA judgement. The SP five year strategy has securing value for money as one of its key objectives. Through the appropriate application of the eligibility criteria significant savings have been made. Administration costs have been benchmarked with neighbouring authorities and found to be second lowest. Service reviews have also been used to drive cost and quality improvements. However, efficiency targets have not been set for this year and there are no guidelines for staff when letting contracts outside of normal procurement procedures. In addition, the VALUE FOR MONEY approach adopted for SP is very cost centred. The absence of comparable service quality considerations means the approach has limitations. How do costs compare?
- 96 Based on figures supplied to the ODPM (now DCLG) for the Platinum Cut in 2003, the average unit cost in Warrington was below average in all services excepting those services excluding community alarms and sheltered housing. These figures precede work carried out by the Council through their service review programme and the application of eligibility criteria.

**Table 3 Unit cost of Supporting People 2003/04**

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Warrington	£0.70	£ 25.17	£ 27.53	£ 112.62
North West	£0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

Source: *Platinum cut 2003/04*

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

- 97 The council procurement, plan published April 2006, outlines how the council can strategically improve its purchasing and through this save money and improve services. Targets for savings are set across a range of goods but SP services are not specifically mentioned.
- 98 The SP team has worked well with other SP teams and agencies to secure value for money, promote consistency, reduce administration costs and promote cross authority working. A steady state contract/service specification based on the North West contract model has been developed with service providers. This is an effective use of resources and will help avoid contract disputes.
- 99 A comprehensive value for money policy has been agreed with all stakeholders and follows DCLG guidance. The guidance is used when assessing value for money for services receiving SP funding with an emphasis placed on cost effectiveness. A services value for money is assessed over a range of indicators which includes comparative study of costs and other issues such as staff/client ratios and staff costs. All services are asked to submit a value for money workbook which looks at expenditure broken down into two categories - direct staff costs and non direct staff costs. A further analysis of none direct costs is made and compared with the SP grant, if over service specific thresholds further investigation is made. However the approach adopted is not robust. While service costs are closely evaluated and controlled, this needs closer alignment to an assessment of service quality or the value of service outcomes.
- 100 Effective use is made of the quarterly performance information (PI) returns to establish the need for and efficient operation of services. Occupation rates and positive move on outcomes are recorded to broadly assess services efficiency. The information is also used to investigate further benefits of services. For example the 955 units devoted to older people show a 94.9 per cent utilisation rate with 97 per cent maintaining independent living and 11 people moved into nursing care. Anecdotal evidence suggest sheltered accommodation residents remain independent longer than those living on their own and therefore minimising the impact on residential care provision. Warrington intends to monitor this further and it is a good example of positive outcomes from SP funding.
- 101 Work priorities and services reviews are timetabled in an effective manner. A quarterly contract monitoring risk assessment is used to prioritise the focus of the work of the SP team into areas where contract compliance and service quality maybe at risk. This is an effective means of managing risk.
- 102 Service costs were robustly assessed during service reviews. There are clear criteria for assessment which include cost analysis, ratio of direct staff costs to overheads and local regional and national benchmarking information. Information is available to enable SP to compare services and for the provider to identify potential savings. Working with providers in this manner will save money and improve services.

- 103** Benchmarking has been used in an appropriate manner. Platinum cut and locally gathered data has been analysed to identify costs in upper quartiles. This has been used in the risk matrix and as a means to focus further examination. Only after more detailed examination are judgements made about the value for money of services. Such an approach accommodates the extra costs inevitably incurred by some services dealing with high risk groups within different client groups.
- 104** Benchmarking information is being further developed. The North West Supporting People Regional Implementation Group is to produce benchmarking data with a greater level of detail, particularly about staffing levels. This will give greater accuracy to benchmarking comparisons.
- 105** Administration costs are monitored closely. Comparisons are made with neighbours and family group councils to ensure that the size of the team is comparable and salary levels are competitive. A review of expenditure is carried out each year when all aspects of expenditure involved are used to broadly set the budget from a zero base each year. This is an effective means of controlling administration costs.
- 106** Procurement policies do not show how value for money is to be achieved when services are let outside the usual tendering process. The Council has a clear procurement policy but on occasion it is appropriate to let services outside of procurement procedures. However, no guidance is given to staff on how to secure best value in such circumstances. This leaves staff in a potentially difficult situation and does not guarantee value for money in procurement.
- 107** Additional supported accommodation is being provided with partners in innovative ways. With a local social housing provider a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funded scheme providing supported housing for young people is under construction. The council has also stopped using expensive B&B accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers and now leases accommodation on a long term basis from a local Housing Association. Innovative use of different funding sources has increased the stock of available housing with support to those in need.

### **Service user involvement**

- 108** Service user involvement is presently a developing area in the programme. There are a number of bodies from which service users can contribute to the programme such as through inclusive forum and some of the already well established support groups. Service reviews also involved service users and their opinions were taken into account when remodelling services. However there is no provision for service users to sit on the Core Strategy Group or the Commissioning Body.

- 109 User representation is underdeveloped. WBC has identified relevant established groups, such as the older person's engagement forum and partnership board, to assist in representing users views. However it is not clear how these groups link into the SP process outside of formal consultation exercises or how they are updated with developments in, for example, the Core Strategy Groups work programme. Arrangements to comprehensively include service users in formal consultation exercises need further development.
- 110 Service users were effectively involved in the review process. Service users were involved in reviews in a variety of ways, tailored to the requirements of the users. The review team liaised with providers as to the most appropriate communication mechanism for their service user/client group. The methods used included questionnaires, including a semi pictorial one, individual interviews, focus groups and group meetings. The results of the review were fed back to users in a variety of ways, either in writing, or in one case at a tenants meeting in a presentation format.
- 111 Warrington is aware of its weaknesses around service user involvement and is developing the capacity of service users to take part in meaningful involvement. An independent consultant has been commissioned to develop service users' capacity and to set up a Service User Group. The group is presently in its infancy and there have been no outputs from it. Nevertheless this is an interesting development and should improve service user involvement. Effective service user involvement can lead to significant improvements in services.
- 112 Appropriate resources have been put into service user involvement. A service user development programme is presently building service user's capacity for meaningful involvement. External contractors specialising in specific needs groups were brought in to complete service reviews and involve service users. Forums for specific needs groups and held and the bi annual inclusive forum offers inducements for service users to attend such as a buffet lunch.

### **Access to services and information**

- 113 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in the ease by which services can be accessed. The website is strength, it is easy to access information about SP services and the on line directory of SP services is good. Telephones are promptly answered and corporately the council is enhancing its telephone service. Services can be accessed in person at several information points which are welcoming and equipped with a lot of information. The hard copy directory of services is due to be replaced with an enhanced directory. SP literature has only recently been produced and would have benefited from service provider and user involvement. Literature indicates in English that it is available in other formats and languages.

- 114** Information about SP services and related issues are available in easy to read leaflets. The leaflets have only recently been produced and are available with other related information at council offices and a number of partner agencies. The leaflets are available in a range of formats and languages but do not carry translation strap lines. They are generally well laid out and easy to understand but would benefit from more detailed information on, for example, fairer charging. The leaflets help people access services.
- 115** Stakeholders are not involved in producing publicity for the SP programme. Service providers and users were not involved in producing the new suite of leaflets and some were unaware of them. Although the material is available in a number of formats some formats such as Braille and pictograms are not mentioned, although there are plans to introduce them. Involving stakeholders can improve the relevance and easy of use of publicity material.
- 116** Better Care Higher Standards is an effective document to convey information about Supporting People to the public. The better care higher standards document has been updated and is accompanied by an attractive and clear information pack for the public comprising of a number of fact sheets. There are references to Supporting People in the appropriate sections and information is offered in a variety of formats. Service users will be able to access information about the programme via this route.
- 117** It is easy to refer to and locate services through the web site. It is easy to navigate the Council's website and access information. The site has a lot of useful information about SP for service providers, partners and service users. The web site has a good directory of services detailing useful information about the service and access arrangements.
- 118** The site is clear and offers different means of accessing information for people with disabilities. Making information easily accessible contributes to the effective administration and the operation of the programme.
- 119** The site supports those without an understanding of SP with an effective search facility. Searches for services for people suffering domestic violence produced useful information such as contact numbers for refuges and means of accessing advice. This improves access to services and supports advice and other agencies.
- 120** The present hard copy service directory is for reference only and not as comprehensive as the web site version. For example, it lacks maps. A new hard copy directory is currently in draft form, which was delayed to include the SP team's new address, and is an improvement on the present version with more detailed information. Although again available in a variety of formats it does not carry language strap-lines and is not available in Braille.

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

- 121 Access to services for disabled people have been improved through a Disability Awareness Day. The day has been held for the last 15 years with over 280 exhibitors (since 2003 including SP) from voluntary, statutory, private and business organisations with ideas for independent living. The day is actively supported by the Council and draws people from as far as Europe. The Council has clearly indicated its support for people with disabilities and seeks to improve their living conditions in a practical manner.
- 122 Mystery shopping exercises found phones to be answered quickly by friendly and enthusiastic staff. Staff are knowledgeable, well trained and pleased to help.
- 123 A mystery shopping exercise around an enquiry about domestic violence was dealt with appropriately. Although it was difficult to locate the emergency number once found it was answered and a specialist officer called back shortly to offer more detailed advice.
- 124 An attractive and informative newsletter has recently been produced. The newsletter entertainingly mixes hard and soft news and is distributed around service providers and other stakeholders. It is too early to predict if the newsletter will be an effective means of disseminating information about the programme to concerned bodies. The newsletter would benefit from service users involvement.
- 125 The council has a clear intent to make access to services as easy as possible. A recent survey showed that the most popular means to contact the council is by telephone. Consequently increased resources have been put into the telephone service. The easier the access the more likely vulnerable people are to connect with the services they need.
- 126 A comprehensive complaints procedure is available to providers and users. This gives response time targets and includes an appeals process, of which the final appeal is to the Commissioning Body level. Access to the complaints procedure is publicised in a clear written format and assistance is offered to those with special needs. In the first instance users are expected to use the providers' own complaints procedure, which is assessed as part of the service review. An effective complaints procedure helps maintain service standards and protects the vulnerable.
- 127 Complaints procedures require closer management. It has not been made clear to complainants that complaints can be made direct to the SP team and few complaints are received. Although the complaints procedure is a required document in a service review, only recently have complaints registers been requested. The SP complaints procedure is on a different timescale to that of providers and complaint resolution is not monitored against that. Service users may not be aware of alternative ways in which they can express dissatisfaction with a service. This lack of rigour makes it more difficult for service users to complain about their service provider.

## Diversity

- 128** The Council's approach to diversity is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. There are a range of mechanisms in place to engage with the small but growing BME community and baseline data is good. Service reviews have addressed diversity issues but some issues are still outstanding with providers. The directory of services identifies access issues and as with other material is available in other formats. Only the first level of the five levels of the Local Government Equality Standard has been reached. Involvement of service users needs development and not all council buildings are DDA compliant.
- 129** There is a corporate commitment to diversity and equal opportunities issues. There is a corporate policy and plan in place with leadership from both members and senior staff. This is linked with a corporate review of how customers access services and the ensuing action plan. The council is only at level 1 of the equality standard with a target to meet level 2 by March 2007. The Accountable Officer is the council diversity champion, which brings expertise into the service.
- 130** Solid baseline data based on census information, labour market review and partner research has been established. There is an awareness of emerging eastern European groups and how all LA services need to be made more accessible. Good baseline data has provided a solid platform for determining strategic priorities within the SP programme.
- 131** The ethnicity of Supporting People service users broadly reflects the demographic profile of the borough. Although numbers are small, Warrington also has a greater incidence of Travellers receiving SP services than regional averages. Using the 2001 census data the figures show a fair representation of BME groups accessing Warrington's SP services. However closer examination of the figures shows Asian groups to be under represented and black groups to be over represented.
- 132** The council maintains contact with a variety of BME groups. Warrington has a small BME population which are made up of a number of ethnic groups, without a high representation from any one group. The groups cover all significant BME populations in the borough and has a single representative group, Warrington Ethnic Communities Association. The council meets regularly with BME groups to update them on council services and to establish if their needs are being met. The Council consider that liaison arrangements with the BME community could be stronger and have commissioned independent research into the needs of the community. This is likely to produce a statistically more rigorous estimation of need in the BME community than the Council presently have.
- 133** Access to services for BME groups is generally good. Figures show that service users from a BME background, excepting those from an Asian background are well represented in SP services. Staff have been trained in and have access to language line and publicity material is available in different languages and formats. Access would be easier for BME groups if leaflets and other material carried translated language strap lines, rather than in English as they presently are.

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

- 134 It is easy to access to information from the web site. The site is Bobby approved, provides audio versions of documents and gives hyper links to a translation facility. The on line service directory gives good information for people with a disability on accessing buildings detailing such things as steps and the availability of disabled parking. This will help people with disabilities independently access services.
- 135 Staff are expected to adopt a positive approach to diversity. Staff have received mandatory training on a variety of diversity issues and are able to use such services as language line. All new members of staff have an induction programme which includes diversity training. Staff show a commitment to a diverse approach and this is monitored by managers.
- 136 Providers are encouraged to be culturally sensitive. Cultural sensitivity was included as part of service reviews. Particular care was taken in ensuring appropriate methods of communication were available to users where their views were included in the review. Some isolated examples of poor practice were uncovered during the inspection and these are being tackled by the SP team. Culturally sensitive services will attract minorities and improve outcomes for service users.

### **Outcomes for service users**

- 137 The SP programme has led to a series of improvements in outcomes for service users. Service reviews have been used to drive improvements in support plans and participation in service delivery. Services have been remodelled and there is a long term strategy to develop floating support services. There is some recording of longer term outcomes for service users but this needs further development.
- 138 Service reviews have been used to drive improvements. Service users had the opportunity to take part in reviews and a series of improvements such as good quality support plans have been put in place. Users commented to inspectors that services have improved and there are few complaints about services.
- 139 Good progress has been made in delivering additional service outlined in the five year strategy and annual plan. For example, an additional seven units of supported accommodation for people with a physical disability have been funded as a result of the eligibility exercise and a preventative technology grant of £100,000 has also been secured. There is a long term strategy to move service provision onto a floating support basis for several need groups. The development of technology and community based models of service provision are consistent with the ethos of SP.
- 140 Workbooks completed by providers and standard SP indicators are used to monitor outcomes for service users. For example move on outcomes are recorded in detail. Warrington is also part of the North West outcomes framework pilot. Recording of such outcomes shows the effectiveness of the SP programme.
- 141 A housing improvement agency has been established. The agency provides a repairs and adaptations service for owner occupiers in the borough. The agency accounts for 2.5 per cent of the SP budget. It provides an important service in an area with high rates of owner occupation and growing elderly population.

- 142** Needs analysis has been used to highlight gaps in the service. Where there are gaps in provision these are either being met through other services or research is ongoing to determine the extent of the gap and how need may best be met. Presently there is no specific provision for people living with HIV/AIDS but as there is insufficient need to warrant specific services, it is estimated there are only five people living with HIV/AIDS in the borough, this is being met through other service streams. There is also ongoing research into the needs of gypsies and travellers, following which appropriate provision will be put in place.
- 143** The SP team have contributed to a number of initiatives which will directly improve standards for service users. For example, community matrons link into SP accommodation for people with learning disabilities to improve take up of health care services. The PCT recently launched a Healthy Living initiative to which the SP team were invited and they are now looking to build these issues into the SP service contracts. For example there is a higher prevalence of bowel cancer amongst homeless people, so the SP team are promoting healthy living amongst service providers and looking at this being linking to the QAF.
- 144** Working closely with the primary social housing provider in the area, Golden Gate Housing, the SP team has developed new services for care leavers, the 'new start initiative'. Warrington as corporate parents have set up furnished accommodation schemes which care leavers can go into on six month basis. If the placement is successful they remain in the accommodation, and another 'unit' is identified for the scheme. Thus 16 year olds who are too young to hold permanent tenancies get permanent accommodation and support in the early days of their leaving care. Should the placement fail then there are a range of additional measures to support the young person.

## Summary

- 145** The SP programme administered by Warrington Borough Council is fair.
- 146** Warrington Council is committed to SP and has agreed a series of corporate priorities which has helped guide the programme. All central government deadlines have been met, however, there are weaknesses in aspects of governance. The five year strategy is comprehensive and gives a clear direction for the future development of the service. Cost savings have been made and the eligibility criteria effectively applied. Service reviews were completed effectively and have led to improvements in some services. It is generally easy to access services and the web site provides a lot of useful information in an accessible format.
- 147** The SP team have good relationships with service providers who consider them helpful and supportive. Effective partnership working has secured a series of improvements including a purpose built single homeless person's facility. Outcomes for service users have improved and information on move on outcomes for service users is being gathered. Diversity issues are addressed and the council is seeking to improve its performance in this area.

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

- 148 Service user involvement is developing but presently there are few formal means for service users to access services. The Core Strategy Group is not representative with few independent providers attending meetings and no provision for service users. The Group does not have its own work plan and is administered by the SP team. Fairer charging has only recently been widely advertised and take up is limited. No steady state contracts have been issued causing uncertainty for providers.

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

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

- 149 The Supporting People programme in Warrington has delivered improvements which have improved outcomes for service users. Service reviews have been completed ahead of schedule and significant cost reductions have been achieved. Gaps in some services are being filled and the nature of housing related support is changing to reflect changing need and aspirations. Service providers and users report improved services and there are plans to build on these.
- 150 Warrington SP has a track record of delivery. DCLG milestones for the delivery of the programme have been met, for example all reviews of legacy services were completed by the deadline, and a comprehensive five year strategy has been published with the support of other agencies and stakeholders.
- 151 The Council has capitalised on opportunities for additional funding for the programme, securing additional funds from a variety of sources. This will result in, amongst other improvements, increased provision of 24 units for young people at risk/care leavers and seven units of supported accommodation for people with a physical disability.
- 152 Service costs are tightly controlled and around a quarter of a million pounds in efficiency savings have been identified. As a result, money is being released that could be used for investment in additional services.
- 153 Service reviews have driven improvements in services for users and the administration of services. Improvements in service quality have been secured with a minimum level C QAF, with plans in place to improve quality further particularly around support planning, needs and risk assessment. Action plans have been agreed with providers and are monitored by the SP team. All service users now have personal support plans in place identifying personal objectives. This means that service delivery is now more focused on maintaining and/or improving people's capacity to live independently.

### 38 Supporting People | What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?

- 154 Service user involvement is less well developed than other aspects of the SP programme. Warrington has informally used existing community groups supporting people with, for example, learning disabilities, as a means to consult with service users. Additionally a series of events with specific groups have been held, with for example, rough sleepers. This approach however has left some gaps with groups without effective support groups under represented. Some aspects of consultation are also underdeveloped around, for example, the effectiveness of publications. Plans are in place to address this weakness with the development of a training programme to build service user's capacity for meaningful involvement. Presently aspects of the SP programme have been developed without effective service user involvement.
- 155 The SP team has developed good relationships with service providers. Providers are regularly canvassed on their satisfaction with the team and the 2006 survey shows that nearly eighty per cent of providers consider consultation arrangements are good. Providers commented that they find the team easy to contact, helpful and knowledgeable.
- 156 The nature of housing-related support provision is changing to reflect needs and rising aspirations and is available across all tenures. Floating support provision has changed from 15.4 per cent of total SP budget in 2003/04 to 16.5 per cent in 2006/07. Gaps in provision are beginning to be filled. For example, intensive accommodation-based support for families at risk of homelessness through anti-social behaviour, and additional floating support to provide move on services and continuing support for single homeless people. Performance indicators show that an increased number of people move on from services in a planned way. Service re-modelling and commissioning has increased support, improved access to support and promoted move-on opportunities for service users.
- 157 Other objectives such as researching the housing related support needs of hard to reach groups such as gypsies and travellers are also being pursued. Warrington are part funding regional research into the needs of gypsies and travellers. This will inform the commissioning of new services.
- 158 The Council has played a role in working with other SP bodies in the region. They have helped develop standard approaches to key areas of work such as contract specifications and more effective use of resources. There are well developed plans to appoint a regional SP co-ordinator to increase strategic capacity which will add to the capacity of the regional group to capture and spread good practice. The Council are anxious to develop regional and sub regional working and their contribution has improved services in the Merseyside region.
- 159 Cross boundary and regional working needs further development. Pass-porting of services through reviews has only been used to a limited extent and there is no cross boundary commissioning of services. Development of sub regional service provision will save money and improve services for users.

- 160 Corporately there is a generally strong record of delivering improvements. Under the Direction of Travel statement the Council was assessed as improving well, however Social Services rating fell to one star in 2005 due to declining performance in Children's Services. Nevertheless Council expectations are high and the SP programme operates in an environment where improvement is expected.

## How does the Council manage performance?

- 161 Through the five year strategy the SP programme has clear aims and priorities. The annual plan and five year strategy dovetail to deliver strategic and operational improvements. The plans address identified gaps in services and improvements in existing services to meet need and changing styles of care. There is evidence of learning from others and of spreading good practice. Performance management arrangements capture outcomes for service users but this could be further developed with research over an extended time period. Involvement of service providers and users is not comprehensive and would benefit from further development.
- 162 A clear direction and aims for the service are set out in the five year strategy, ratified by the commissioning body in December 2004. Service providers were consulted on the strategy and it is based on informed judgements about present and future needs. Service users were not comprehensively consulted on the strategy. The strategy is readily available and has an accessible separate summary document. All SP stakeholders can see the priorities and direction of the programme from the strategy.
- 163 The strategy is effectively implemented through the annual plan. The annual plan was agreed with all stakeholders and lists a series of priorities for the year which dovetail with the priorities in the five year strategy. The annual plan is accompanied by a SMART action plan detailing objectives for the year. The plan details provision for unmet need and the remodelling of services to meet need. Clear, integrated plans will help to deliver improvement in key areas.
- 164 Improvement planning follows logically from one year to the next. For example needs surveys are completed one year and provision to meet that need established in the following year. This is an effective use of resources.
- 165 The aims and objectives of the strategy and action plan have been explained to SP staff. SP staff had opportunities to contribute to the development strategy and are aware of how their work supports wider community and Council priorities. The annual nature of the implementation plan will ensure that the strategy continues to reflect emerging priorities.
- 166 There is effective leadership of the Supporting People programme. Elected Members are involved, with cabinet members regularly briefed on the programme and budget profile. The Accountable Officer is of an appropriate senior level to raise the profile of the programme within the Council and through partnerships. The Chair of the Commissioning Body is the Strategic Director for the Community Services Directorate and line manager of the accountable officer.

## 40 Supporting People | What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?

- 167 Governing bodies can evidence their ability to make and stick to difficult decisions. Examples include lobbying the Council for additional funding for administrative support and the decommissioning of services. The Council has effectively introduced new services for unpopular groups whilst allaying local concerns. Clear leadership of the programme will bring benefits for service users and the wider community.
- 168 Through the Commissioning Body, key partners such as the PCT and Probation, are involved in the programme. The Commissioning Body works effectively to make decisions about the programme, particularly in terms of the budget position and recommendations resulting from service reviews. Meeting quarterly the body considers reports from the Accountable Officer and responds quickly and decisively. The clear lead given by the Commissioning Body has given stakeholders a degree of confidence and certainty about the direction of the programme. The effectiveness of the body is however undermined by inconsistent attendance by some partners.
- 169 The SP team is effectively managed. Staff have regular team meetings; one-to-one meetings with line managers and individual performance development reviews which focus on training/development needs. This has helped staff to identify development needs and promoted a strong focus on key tasks.
- 170 The outcomes for services users are recorded. Move on outcomes are recorded for all groups. The North West Outcome Monitoring Framework is being piloted in two Warrington SP services. Outcomes for service users would be enhanced by research over a longer period and other quality outcomes such as employment or training. The research has helped to show the worth of services and the wider benefits for the general community.
- 171 Ineligible costs have been identified and transferred to other budgets in an appropriate manner. Around £1.6m of ineligible charges were identified in services for people with learning disabilities. The retraction of funding was managed effectively and with the co-operation of the budget holder receiving the charges. This is a good example of co-operation and ensured that service users did not experience any diminution of services.
- 172 Risk is managed in an effective manner. Risk matrices have been drawn up identifying key risks to the programme and actions required to mitigate their likelihood or impact. Contingency plans are in place for major risks and other specialist sections with the authority have contributed to this. As part of a wider programme of support to small strategic services a risk template has been provided by the council. Effective risk management reduces the chances of major disruption to the programme and its vulnerable service users.

- 173 The SP team are aware of the programmes weaknesses and gaps in services. The five year strategy and annual plan detail the means by which they will be addressed. Strategic reviews are to replace individual service reviews in 2006/07 and will include the following services: rough sleepers, floating support and older people. The strategic reviews will differ from the individual reviews of SP service providers and will focus on the future direction of the SP programme in a comprehensive manner including service models and procurement options. Such reviews will lead to more cost effective services tailored to the needs of the service user. However this work will not be effective unless the Council address the weaknesses in service user involvement.
- 174 Warrington has learnt from other SP teams, used best practice and shared information. SP officers have contributed to regional and sub-regional groups established to develop Supporting People arrangements. Examples of this include standardised contracts and the benchmarking of administration costs across Merseyside. Good practice identified in service reviews has been shared and generally a culture of mutual co-operation has been engendered. Warrington has benefited from the experience of others and improved services for all.
- 175 The SP team has contact with minority communities in Warrington. It is aware that some services are delivered in a manner which does not reflect the diversity of service users and is addressing this. Through census information it has a good understanding of the make up of its small BME population and has links with community groups. With the exception of the Asian population minority groups are well represented in services indicating there are no difficulties for minorities accessing services. Asian under representation in services causes the SP team concern. Following unsuccessful attempts to establish the reasons for this, formal research has now been commissioned. The BME community in Warrington is growing rapidly and the SP team are positioning itself to meet their needs.

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

- 176 The SP programme and Council has sufficient capacity to improve. The Council has shown clear commitment to the programme and other council departments, such as legal and IT, contribute their expertise. Corporately financial and human resource planning are strengths. The SP team is appropriately skilled and supported with training and other resources. In conjunction with other sections additional resources have been secured for new buildings, staff and IT. Steady state contracts have yet to be issued which causes uncertainty with suppliers.
- 177 The SP team is appropriately resourced. Staff have experience across a range of skills and services from contract management to front line work with service providers and users. Skills gaps are met by either referring to other council departments or using consultants for limited periods. A skilled SP team will help the successful delivery of the programme.

## 42 Supporting People | What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?

- 178 The Commissioning Body has operated in an effective manner and given the programme clear direction but would be strengthened by more consistent attendance by all the key partners. The Commissioning Body has clear terms of references and is adequately resourced and serviced by the accountable officer. Although the Commissioning Body has given a clear direction for the programme its links with the Core Strategy Group need further development. An effective Commissioning body is necessary to give a clear direction to the SP programme.
- 179 Financial management is prudent with budgets delivered on target. A hardship fund is available for small providers lacking the capacity to manage without inflationary increases; although this has never been called on. A contingency of £600, 000 has been built into this years programme to fund new schemes due to come on stream later in the year and prepare for any shortfall in DCLG funding. Financially qualified staff based elsewhere in the council regularly report to officers and members on the state of the SP budget. Services to vulnerable people are secured by effective financial management.
- 180 The council has signalled its intention to research and meet the needs of minorities. It has commenced research for a BME housing strategy and has contributed to a research programme into the needs of gypsies and travellers. Asian under representation in SP services has been raised with Asian community groups, following which further formal study into the issue is proposed. This is an effective means of uncovering unmet needs and signals the council's intent to involve minority groups.
- 181 Partnerships working is well developed and has delivered a series of improvements to the programme. The Council has a record of good partnership working having already developed joint commissioning of health and social care services for a range of client groups. Shortages in move on accommodation have been eased by effective liaison between housing providers and support agencies looking to move clients on to more independent living. Partnership working builds the programme's capacity to meet people's needs.
- 182 Joint commissioning is to be further developed. From April 2007 one combined jointly commissioned contract will be developed for both social care and SP purchasing. Warrington have liaised with other LA's who have already developed this and see it as an effective means of securing value for money.
- 183 The SP programme is dovetailed with other Council services to deliver a joined up approach to meeting need. For example social services and housing staff (from the Council's ALMO, Golden Gates Housing) are on the core strategy group. The SP lead officer is closely involved in developing strategies such as for homelessness and the housing needs of the BME community. Co-ordination of resources and strategy in this manner maximises their effectiveness and reaches the most needy.
- 184 The SP team have expanded and improved provision using funding from mainstream sources. For example an assistive technology grant of £100,000 has been secured for older persons. Any additional resources will help to meet need and improve provision in existing services.

- 185 IT systems are a recognised weakness. Present IT systems lack capacity and cannot produce the necessary information in an efficient manner. The SP team are aware of this and are working with colleagues in other departments to procure a bespoke IT system. Fit for purpose IT systems will free staff time to work on projects directly related to improving services.
- 186 Corporate procurement policies are effective. The main principles are set out in the corporate procurement strategy, which is supplemented by a value for money strategy. However, for good reasons services are occasionally procured outside of normal arrangements. Although staff can seek advice, no guidelines for doing this exist which may leave staff unsure if they are acting in an appropriate manner. This can lead to staff procuring services which are not value for money.
- 187 The SP team have good relationships with Housing Benefit. However the constraints of the current system necessitate a time delay before subsidy payments can be implemented and cancelled, leading to additional work for providers in identifying payments and adjusting accounts. SP staff have access to Housing Benefit IT systems and with permission from the client can access individual applications for benefit. This has proved useful when dealing with enquiries from service providers and users.

## Summary

- 188 Warrington Borough Council's SP programme has promising prospects for improvement.
- 189 There is an established track record in delivering improvements. The profile of housing-related support has been shaped to reflect changing aspirations and previously unmet need. There are well established plans to fill gaps in service provision and innovative means of meeting need are to be tested. Effective service reviews were completed within schedule and have led to improvements in services. Efficiency savings have been secured through a clear focus on cost control. Value for money and its relationship with the quality of services are developing. A series of other improvements have been achieved which will be noticed by service users.
- 190 The Commissioning Body and the five year strategy have given the programme a clear direction. Performance management arrangements are effective and will benefit from proposed longer term research into outcomes for service users. The Core Strategy Group effectiveness would be enhanced by incorporating more service providers and service users. Generally service providers are not as effectively involved as elsewhere.
- 191 Financial management and human resource planning is a strength. Partnerships are mature and delivering improvements in service. Benefits from cross authority working have been limited and joint commissioning needs further development. Procurement arrangements are sound but would be enhanced by provision for lettings outside the established mechanisms. IT is a soon to be addressed weakness and there has been some success in leveraging in additional resources from other funding sources.

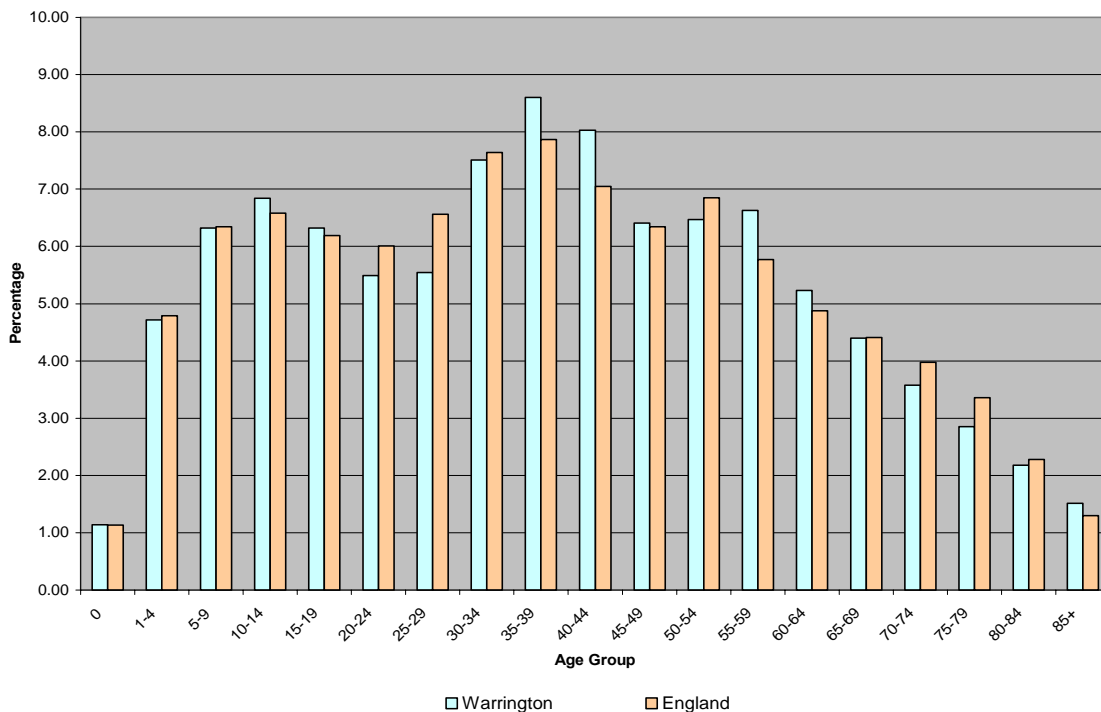
# Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

## Demographic information

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

Measure	Warrington	England
Population (mid-2004) <sup>8</sup>	193, 700	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	17.2	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	2.1	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) <sup>9</sup>	2.0	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) <sup>10</sup>	111	-

### Percentage of the population<sup>11</sup> in each age group compared with England



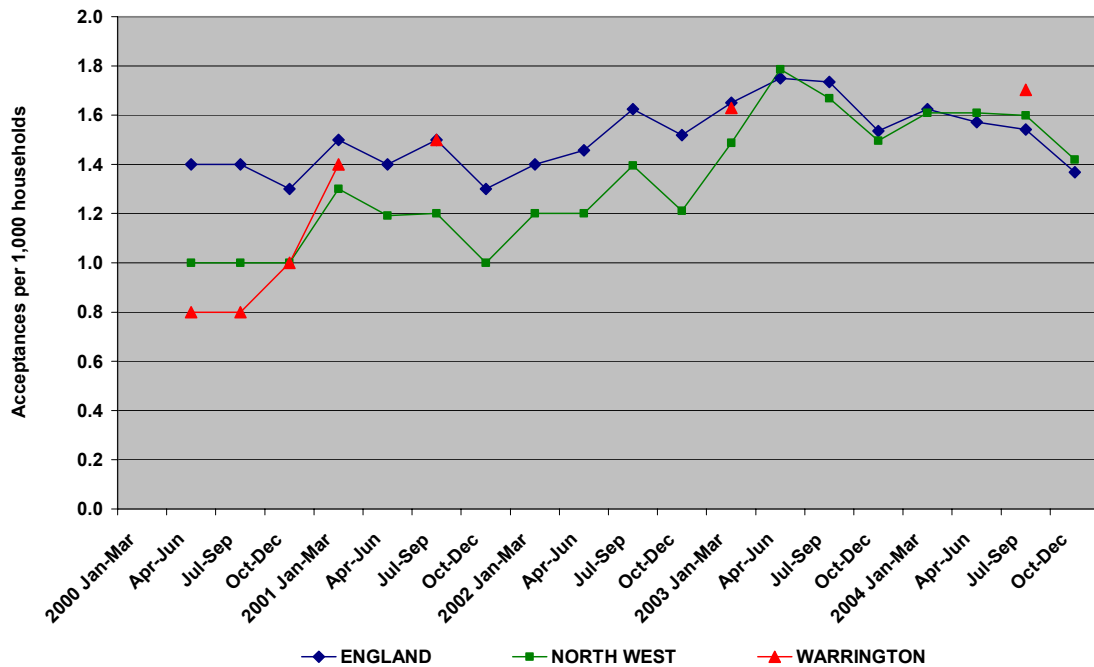
<sup>8</sup> Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

<sup>9</sup> Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (September 2006)

<sup>10</sup> Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

<sup>11</sup> Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

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



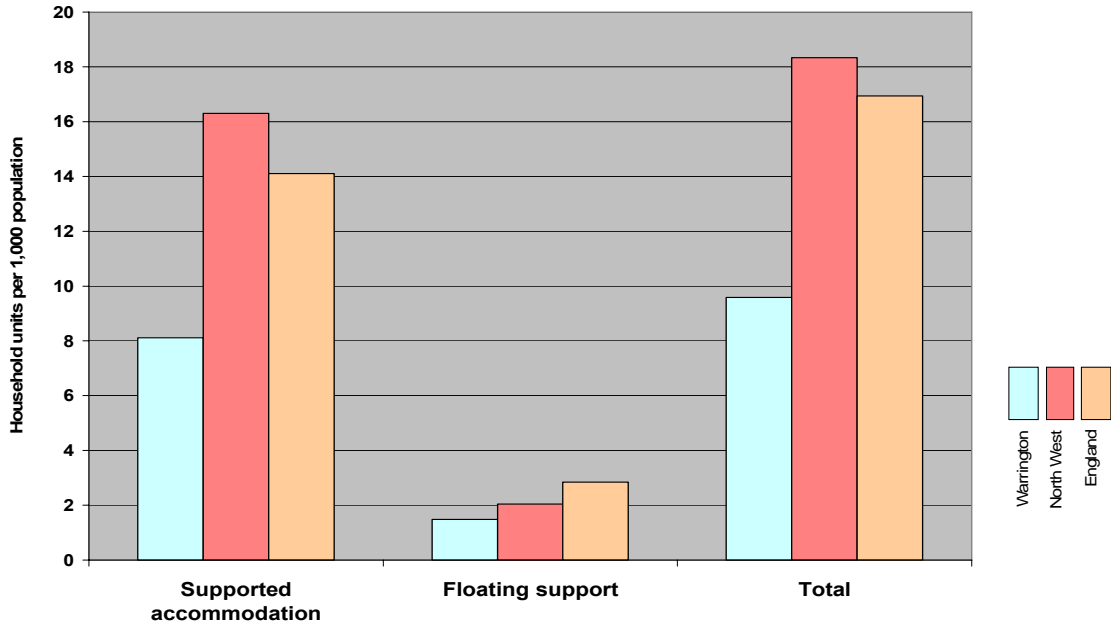
## Performance information

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

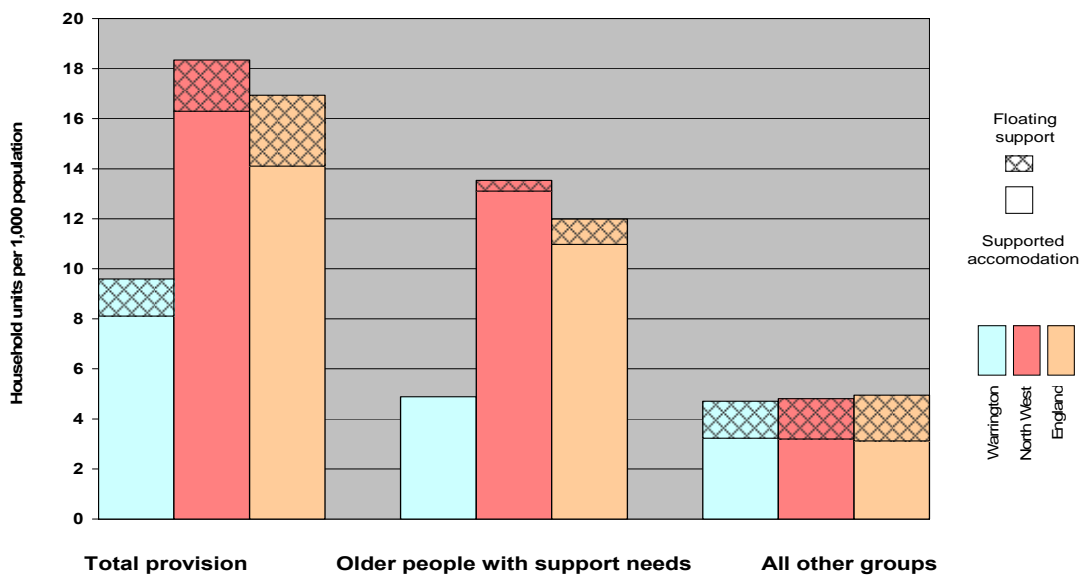
- data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment scores;
- star ratings for social services;
- Performance Assessment Framework indicators for social services; and
- Relevant best value performance indicators.

## Supporting People data

### Total service provision funded through Supporting People<sup>12</sup>



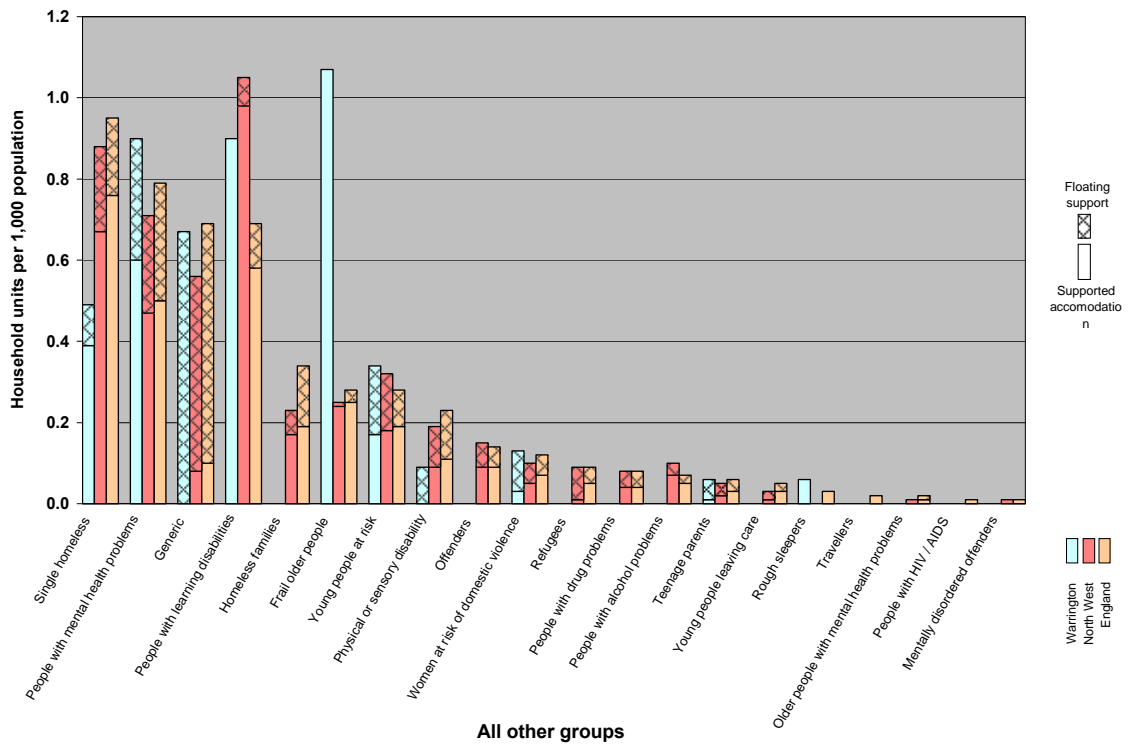
### Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England<sup>13</sup>



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

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

### Services for other groups compared with the region and England<sup>14</sup>



### Funding for Supporting People<sup>15</sup>

Warrington	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 8,274,709	£ 8,155,786	£ 7,745,015
Pipeline allocation	£ 114,480	£ 204,680	£ -
Administration grant	£ 234,148	£ 172,358	£ 137,886

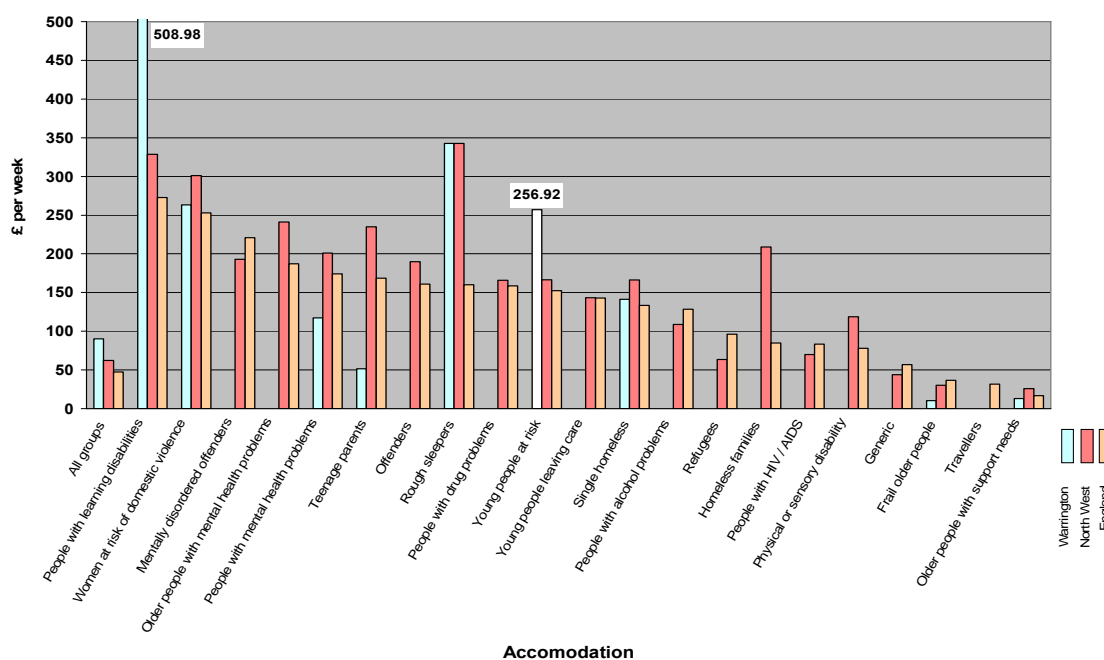
<sup>14</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

**Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)<sup>16</sup>**

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Warrington	£ 0.83	£ 37.40	£ 65.06	£ 108.51
North West	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

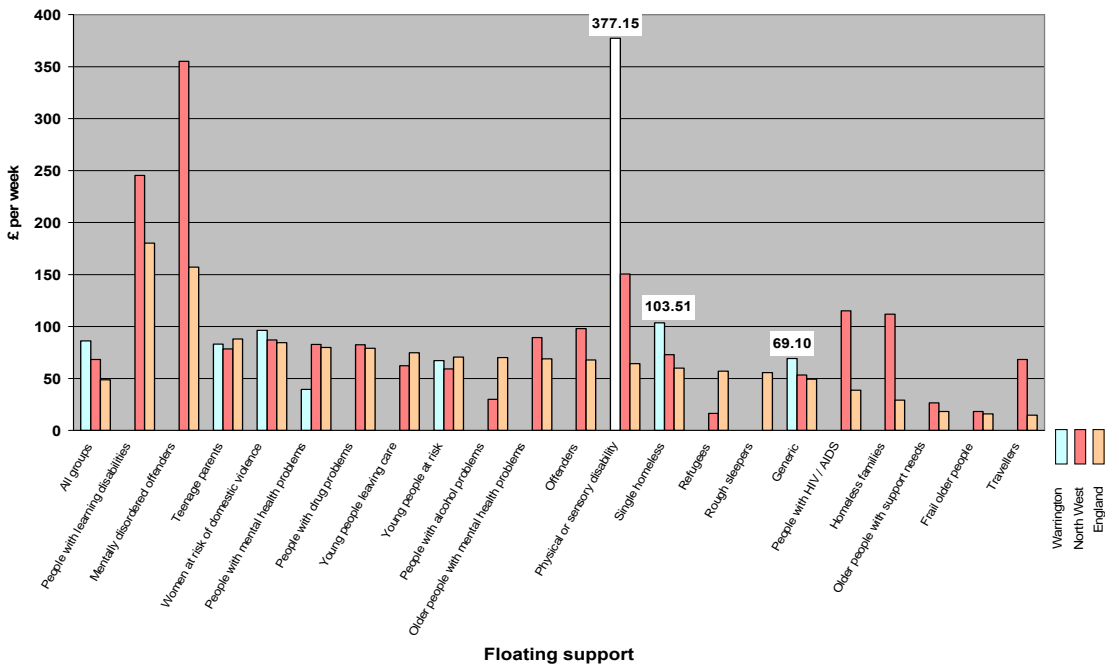
**Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)<sup>17</sup>**



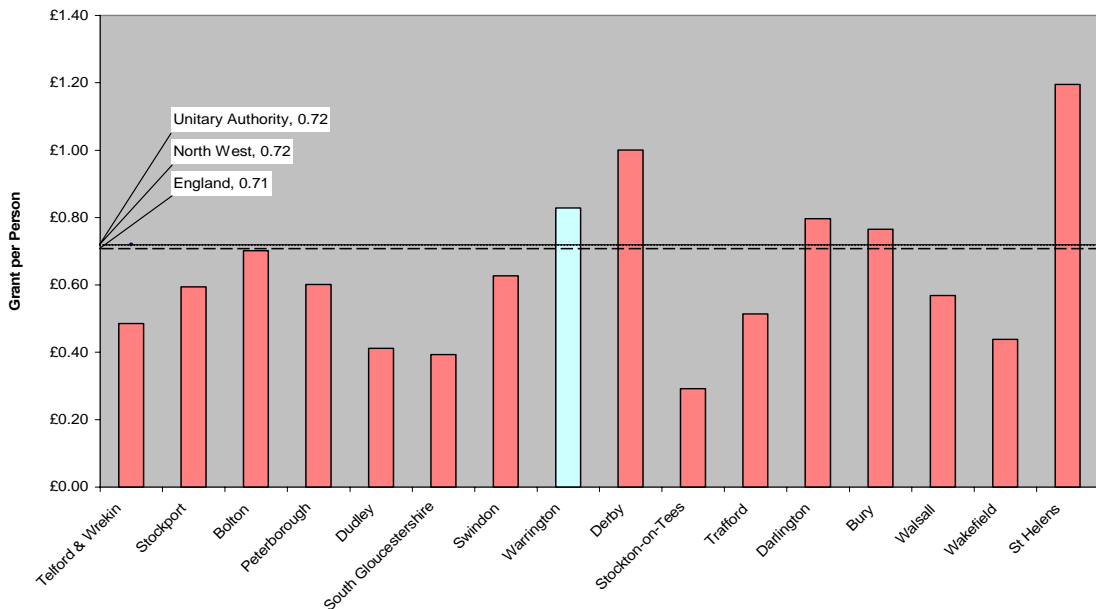
<sup>16</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

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

**Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) <sup>18</sup>**



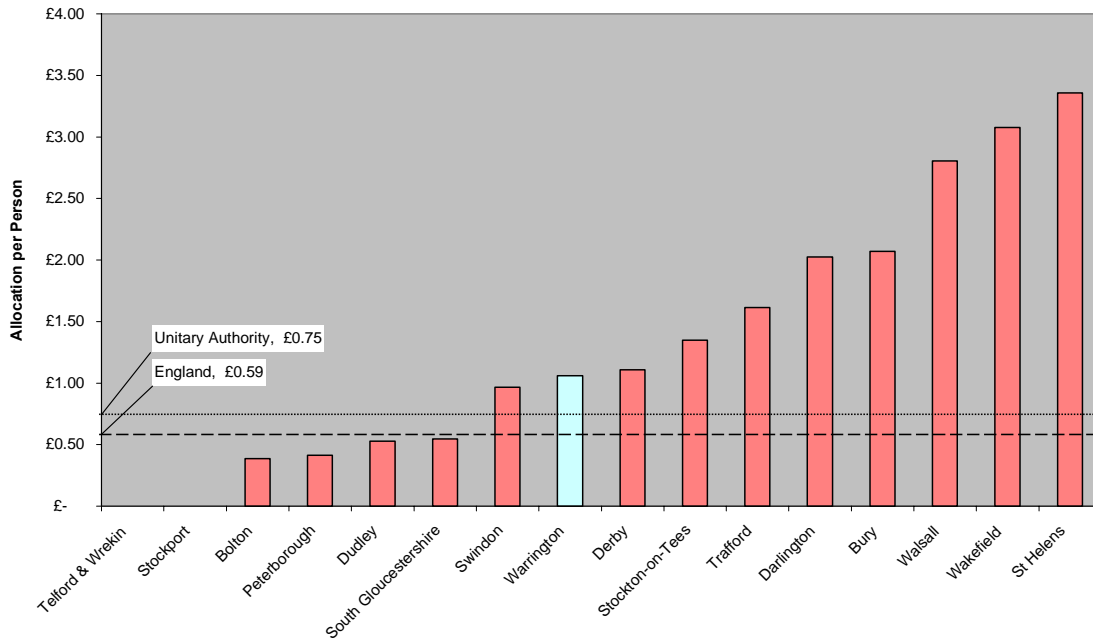
**Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours <sup>19</sup>, all unitary councils and all English councils (2004/05)**



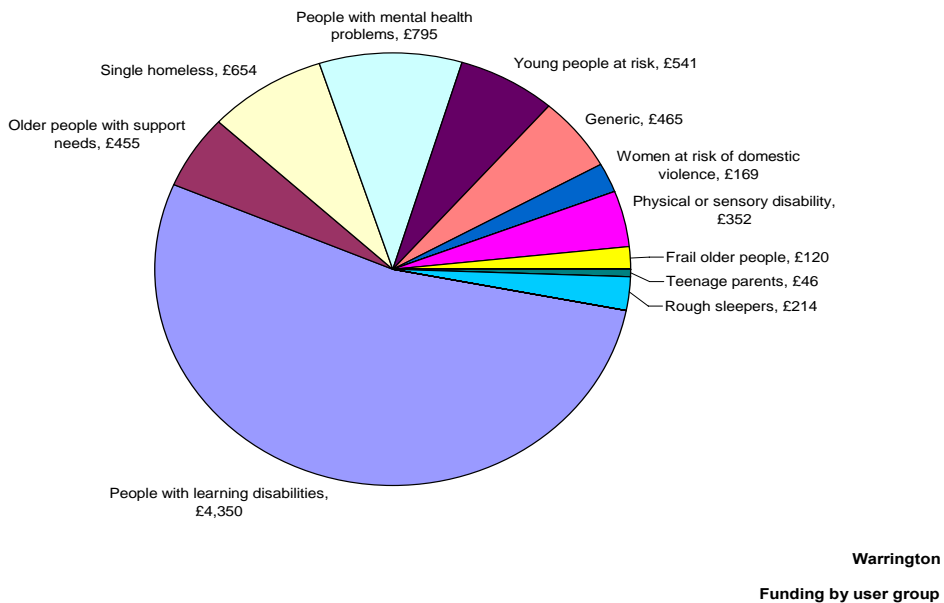
<sup>18</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

<sup>19</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

**Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours<sup>20</sup>, all unitary councils and all English councils**



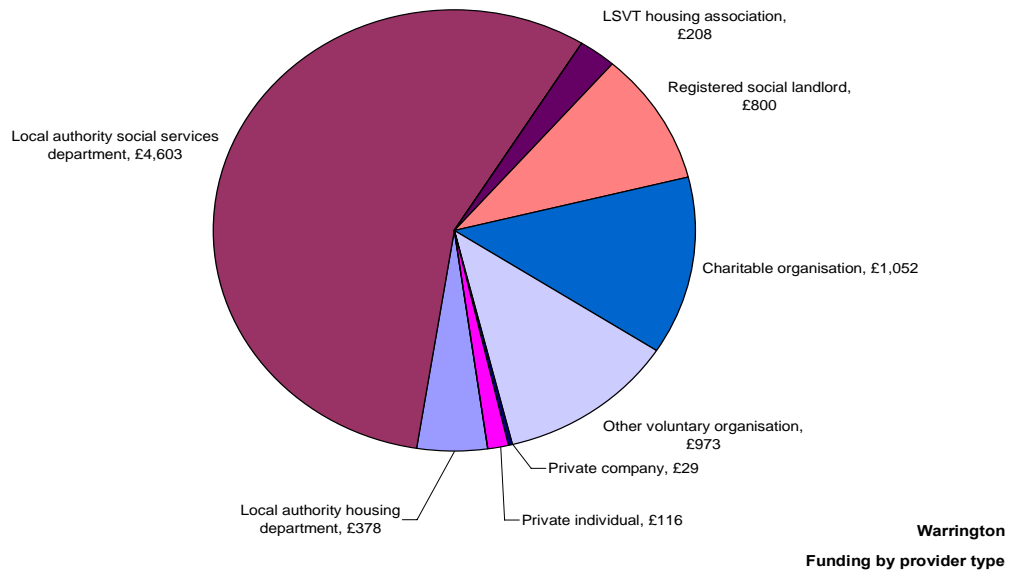
**Share of spending between user groups (£000s)<sup>21</sup>**



<sup>20</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

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

**Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)<sup>22</sup>**



**Social Services star ratings November 2004**

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

	<b>Serving people well?</b>	<b>Prospects for improvement?</b>	<b>Performance rating (CPA equivalent)</b>
Adults' Services	Some	Promising	★ (1)
Children's Services	Some	Uncertain	

<sup>22</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

## Social services performance indicators

### Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

<b>Warrington</b>	
Significantly above average (•••••)	<p>Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31)</p> <p>Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57)</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58)</p>
Above average (••••)	<p>Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26)</p> <p>Admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care (C27)</p> <p>Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30)</p> <p>Delayed transfers of care (D41)</p> <p>Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)</p>
Average (•••)	<p>Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6)</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39)</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51)</p>

<b>Warrington</b>	
Below average (**)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Older people helped to live at home (C32)
Significantly below average (•)	

## Best value performance indicators

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

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

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

## Appendix 2 – Documents reviewed

- 1 Before going on site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that were provided for us. These included:
  - the Council's corporate strategies that impact upon Supporting People, including the strategic plan;
  - plans and strategies from partner agencies such as the Probation Service that may impact on Supporting People;
  - needs research information, the five year Supporting People strategy, the 2005/06 Annual Plan, the section's service improvement action plan and the service review programme;
  - minutes of the Commissioning Body and core strategy group meetings; and
  - Supporting People advice leaflets.

## Appendix 3 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
  - a questionnaire survey which was sent to all providers of housing-related support services;
  - focus groups for service providers, frontline staff and neighbouring councils' Supporting People lead officers;
  - visits to supported housing schemes, to talk to service users, managers and frontline staff;
  - visits to a number of service user access points to test the level and extent of information available for service users;
  - observing meetings of the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group;
  - telephone calls to test how easy it is to access services; and
  - interviews with a wide-range of stakeholders, including the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, the acting Director of Community Services, the Accountable Officer, the Supporting People lead officer, managers and members of the Supporting People team, councillors, social services commissioning managers, representatives of the probation service and the primary care trusts, advocacy groups and community safety.

## Appendix 4 – Positive practice

### **Disability awareness day**

- 1 The day drew 25,000 people from around Europe to visit the numerous stalls and exhibitions on living with disability.

### **Service user involvement**

- 2 The capacity of service user to be involved in the SP programme in a meaningful manner is being built through a structured training programme.