

Inspection report

July 2004



Supporting People Programme

West Berkshire Council

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Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the previous complex and unco-ordinated arrangements for providing housing related support services for vulnerable people.
- 3 The Supporting People programme brings together a number of 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 probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities.
- 4 West Berkshire Council was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme and was among the 19 administering local authorities considered by the ODPM to have the highest service costs. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

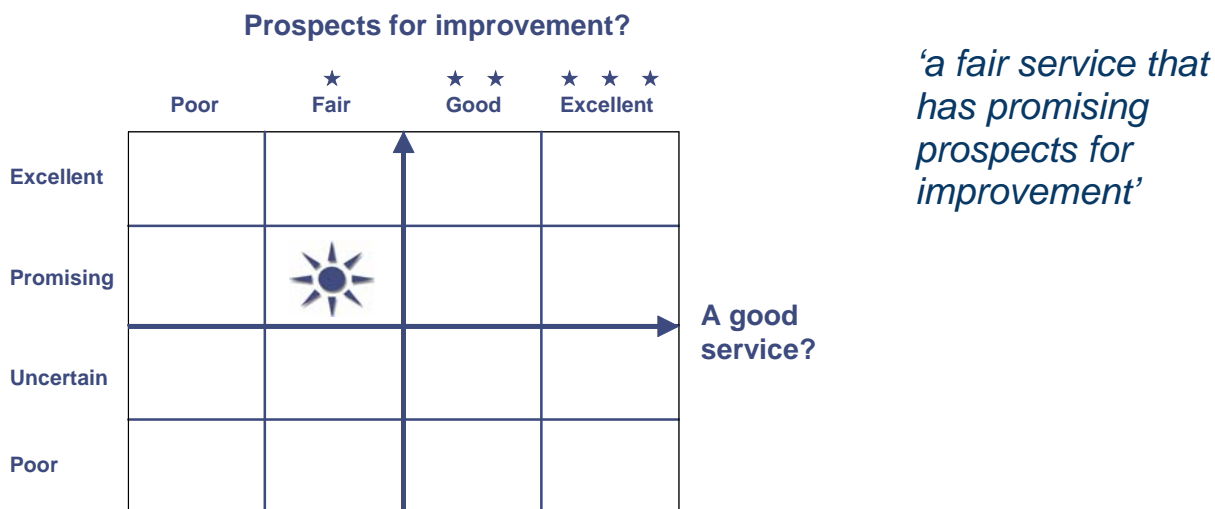
Background

- 5 West Berkshire Council is a unitary authority in the Thames Valley area of England. The population is 144,483 of which 5.9 per cent are from minority ethnic communities (all groups other than white British) including 2.29 per cent from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, which is less than half the national average.
- 6 The council was created in 1998 as a single tier authority on the boundary of the former Newbury District Council, upon the dissolution of Berkshire County Council. It serves a relatively small population for a unitary authority and has 52 elected councillors, 26 Conservative and 26 Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrats have overall control. A leader and cabinet (known as the executive) model was adopted in May 2001.
- 7 West Berkshire Council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with Newbury and community primary care trust (PCT), Reading PCT and the National Probation Service – Thames Valley in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 8 The total amount of Supporting People funding available to the council in 2004/05 is £6.1 million. The council receives £159,000 to fulfil its role as the administering authority. The highest cost Supporting People service is £1018 per person per week for an individual with a learning difficulty; the lowest is less than £4 per week for support for older people in a sheltered housing accommodation scheme.

Scoring the service

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

Scoring chart¹: West Berkshire Council - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 10 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date.
- ◆ New services have been developed to meet the needs of vulnerable people, including floating support services that are helping people to become independent or allow them to maintain independence in their own home.
 - ◆ The service review programme is on track and reviews are being used to help raise the quality of services for the people who use them, as well as assessing the strategic relevance of services and whether they provide value for money.
 - ◆ The council is working to improve the value for money achieved by the programme and is determined to tackle the high cost of some Supporting People services. As a result of service reviews and by monitoring quarterly data returns from providers against contracts, savings of around £350,000 per year have already been realised.
 - ◆ An external consultant and an exchange of expertise with a review officer from a neighbouring council have been used to review in-house services to avoid any conflict of interest. This approach has resulted in a challenging assessment of an in-house service and a comprehensive action plan to improve the service.
 - ◆ Partnership working with local health services is well established with a number of key posts being joint appointments between the council and Newbury and community primary care trust.

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

- ◆ A joint commissioning body and core strategy group is in place, which has already demonstrated it is able to take tough decisions in the face of opposition from service providers.
- ◆ The programme has been implemented successfully, with payments to providers stated to be accurate and made on time.
- ◆ Providers have also praised the Supporting People team for their inclusive approach in planning and developing services, their accessibility, responsiveness and the prompt way in which they disseminate information.

Areas for improvement

- 11 However, we found a number of weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed.
- ◆ Supporting People funding is benefiting a small number of people at a very high cost, which may in the longer term be at the expense of some others. The overall level of both accommodation based services and those described as floating support, compared to the population, is below average. However, unit costs per week are significantly higher than the average for the South East and England.
 - ◆ The dependency and the nature of the support that some individuals receive through Supporting People funding is such that it is not clear that the services are truly helping them to live independently and are appropriate use of the grant.
 - ◆ There are no locally determined transparent criteria for eligibility to Supporting People funding and this could lead to inequities and represent poor value for money in the context of the programme.
 - ◆ There are still gaps in services that were identified as areas for development in the Supporting People shadow strategy. Links between the vision for Supporting People services and the priorities and plans for some other strategic groups such as those of the mental health implementation team (LIT) and the drug and alcohol action team (DAAT) are not sufficiently robust.
 - ◆ There is no overarching housing strategy for older people in the district to guide development in the medium term. Although some developments are taking place, a plan to address the lack of alternatives to sheltered housing has not been formulated yet.
 - ◆ Consultation and action to research views of people who use services from minority or 'hard to reach' groups has not been explored or fully utilised to date. Action to ensure that existing services are sufficiently culturally sensitive to make them attractive to people from BME groups is limited.
 - ◆ Information leaflets on Supporting People services have been updated but are still not suitable for clients with learning difficulties and are not produced in large print as standard.
- 12 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for delivering further improvements. We found the following strengths.

What works well

- ◆ At service delivery level, the Supporting People team have achieved smooth transition from the planning phase to full implementation of the programme in April 2003. The team have delivered on their work programme for 2003/04 and providers of services rate their performance very highly.
- ◆ A reliable IT system is in place and resources within the Supporting People team, although slim, are adequate.
- ◆ A measure of financial flexibility has been secured as a result of the first service reviews that has meant that the council has been able to offer service

providers an uplift for inflation in 2004/05. The substantial savings that have already been secured give the council a 'buffer' against the prospect of further reductions in the grant that may be required by ODPM.

- ◆ At a corporate level, the council has demonstrated that it responds positively to inspection and performance management is being strengthened across the council. Partnerships are seen as essential to increase capacity and secure change.
- ◆ The council are beginning to address equality and social inclusion issues and work at a corporate level to understand the needs of asylum seekers and refugees is underway.

Areas for improvement

13 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve.

- ◆ A large amount of information taken from quarterly monitoring returns that are submitted by service providers is now held. However, the commissioning body/core strategy group had not received any reports at the time of the inspection, as the quality of some of the data submitted had been suspect. This is now being addressed and the first report will go to the commissioning body in August 2004.
- ◆ There is no detailed plan for production of the new five year Supporting People strategy as yet. The commissioning body/core strategy group do not have a rolling action plan in place that they can use to ensure that they guide development and deliver on their responsibilities.
- ◆ Development of outcome measures with and for service users which can be used to assess the performance of providers and strengthen the effectiveness of the programme is at an early stage. We were told by service users that their lives had improved through the programme, but did not see any objective measures of success being used by providers.
- ◆ Performance monitoring of the Supporting People programme by the commissioning body/core strategy group has been relatively informal. A more robust framework has been proposed, but the role that councillors can play through scrutiny committee arrangements has not been defined.

Recommendations

- 14 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations:
- ◆ Take action to improve consultation and understanding of the housing support needs of people from minority ethnic and hard to reach groups. Also consider how views from people who do not currently use services or cannot easily advocate for themselves can be captured. (Medium priority -November 2004).
 - ◆ Raise the profile of involving the people who use them in the continuing development and improvement of the services with all providers through the housing support forum. (Medium priority - March 2005).
 - ◆ Produce information leaflets about Supporting People services in large print as standard and in a pictorial format for people who have learning difficulties. Pilot designs with service users before printing. (March 2005).
 - ◆ Ensure that where a Supporting People service gives the council cause for concern, action is taken to either move the service review forward, or undertake other appropriate action such as a formal validation visit. (High priority - immediate).
 - ◆ Formalise knowledge of providers and services that are not programmed for review until 2005 onwards, by using ODPM quality assessment framework guidance and undertaking random or spot checks, using this to assess the need for further action. (Medium priority - March 2005).
 - ◆ Agree priorities, achievable targets and resources for the development of the new five year strategy and produce a detailed project plan for production of the strategy. (High priority - July 2004).
 - ◆ Develop a rolling action plan that the commissioning body/core strategy group can use to detail their responsibilities in preparing the strategy, ensuring that actions have allocated responsibility for completion within agreed timescales and that this is monitored as a standing agenda item. (High priority - July 2004).
 - ◆ Ensure that the five year strategy makes clear links with other related strategies and plans and shows how actions will help to achieve the council's aims and those of its partners and are linked to quantifiable outcomes. (Medium priority - March 2005).
 - ◆ Agree a timetable for the production of a housing strategy that will address the needs of the growing number of older people in the district and provide sustainable alternatives to sheltered accommodation. (Medium priority December 2004).
 - ◆ Complete the agenda and action plan for the development of support services for people who suffer from drug misuse and dependency, in liaison with the drug and alcohol action team. (Medium priority – December 2004).
 - ◆ Develop a contingency plan to address the risk to the Supporting People programme through staff sickness or the loss of a member of the team which could incorporate cross authority agreement on circumstances where sharing of Supporting People staff could be used as an interim measure. (Medium priority - November 2004).
 - ◆ Strengthen performance management of the Supporting People programme by defining the role that councillors should play through scrutiny committee arrangements and by producing reports for commissioning body that analyse the data submitted by service providers in their quarterly performance returns. (High priority - July 2004).

- 15 We would like to thank the staff of West Berkshire Council, in particular Ian Gilders, Bev Searle and Julia Singleton, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

- 16 This report has been prepared by the Audit Commission (the Commission) following an inspection under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999, and issued in accordance with its duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

The locality

- 17 West Berkshire Council is in the Thames Valley area of England. The 2001 census shows the population of the area is 144,483, living in 57,360 households. 5.9 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities (all groups other than white British), which is under half the national average.
- 18 The council's housing stock of 7,109 council houses was transferred in 1993 to Sovereign Housing Association. The housing strategy, enabling, homelessness, housing register and part of the grants service are still provided in-house.
- 19 The population is growing more rapidly than the national average, with a 4.1 per cent increase since 1991. However, it is the growth in the number of people over the age of 75 years in the last 10 years that poses particular challenges for the council and local health services.
- 20 Unemployment levels are below the national average and the area is one of the least deprived in England ranking 329 out of 354. However, the overall affluence of the area does not reflect the very real difficulties that can occur with access to services and isolation in the rural areas. For example, 70 per cent of the parishes in West Berkshire have no doctor.

The Council

- 21 The council comprises 52 councillors, split evenly between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrat party has overall control. Currently a leader and cabinet (known as the executive) model was adopted in May 2001 and governs the business of the council.
- 22 The council's overall budget for the year 2004/05 is £149 million; of which around £22.2 million is allocated to community care and housing. The council faces a number of financial pressures and receives less funding from Government than some similar councils due to the affluence of the area. Health services across Berkshire face similar financial pressures.

Supporting People – housing related Support Services in West Berkshire

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Framework for delivery

- 23 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme:
- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
 - ◆ Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
 - ◆ Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
 - ◆ Councillors: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.

- ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.

24 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority, the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. In two tier areas each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the administering local authority has a veto where it can demonstrate it faces a financial risk to the administering local authority.

Management Arrangements

- 25 The Supporting People team is located within the council's community care and housing directorate. The team comprises a manager who is supported by two part-time officers and an administrative assistant. The accountable officer is the corporate director of community care and housing, who also holds the statutory position of director of social services.
- 26 Due to the small size of the council, there is a combined core strategy and commissioning body. Although the two are combined, the constitution of the commissioning body complies with grant conditions. The agenda and minutes differentiate between items that require a decision by the three representatives of the commissioning body and those that are for strategy development information and discussion by the wider group. Representation from the Thames Valley area probation service has until recently been through one of the three housing needs managers. This has now changed and is discussed later in this report.

Strategy

- 27 In 2002 the council produced a Supporting People strategy for 2003/04 which was approved by the commissioning body/core strategy group. The feedback from ODPM was that the strategy was rated as 'fair', with accessibility and inclusiveness rated as 'good'. The shadow strategy starts well and includes clear information on consultation with users and identifies links to other strategies. However, it fails to develop fully and lacks detail of the specific needs of each client group and how these link to other specific strategies.
- 28 The council and its partners are now starting to develop a five year strategy which is due to be submitted to ODPM in March 2005.

Services

- 29 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2004/05 is £6.1million. As a result of changes to the grant allocation by ODPM, this reflects a reduction of almost £71,000 compared to the previous financial year. The council receives £159,000 to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 30 The data appendix at the back of this report shows the overall level of services funded through Supporting People grant and the share of provision between client groups. These figures are based on information submitted to the ODPM in 2003 as part of the reconciliation exercise known as the 'platinum cut'.

How good is the service?

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 31 Inspectors look to see how a council has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.
- 32 Aims need to be challenging, address local needs and support national objectives. This requires the council to consider and demonstrate how a service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans.
- 33 The shadow strategy was developed in 2002 and articulates the aims and objectives for the Supporting People programme, which continue to guide the

service to date. However, links with other strategies and action plans are not sufficiently robust. Clear outcome measures that show how the programme can help to achieve targets of partner agencies and planning groups have not been developed.

- 34 The aims for the Supporting People programme are set out in the shadow strategy and the fundamental aim in West Berkshire is stated to be:

'To ensure high quality, cost effective housing related support services are available and delivered to the people who most need them'. - West Berkshire shadow strategy 2002.

- 35 Key objectives in the shadow strategy for 2003/04 focussed on increasing and improving services for the following groups of people:
- ◆ vulnerable young people;
 - ◆ people who misuse substances;
 - ◆ people with a learning disability; and
 - ◆ older people.
- 36 Gaps in the provision of services for people with HIV/AIDS, physical or sensory disability, and to a lesser extent those with mental health problems and a learning disability are identified in the shadow strategy. This led to the development of some new services during the 12 months prior to April 2003.
- 37 At a corporate level, although there is no specific mention of Supporting People in the council's corporate plan for 2003-2008 or in the community plan, there are links through key strategic objectives which include:
- ◆ tackling all forms of social exclusion across the district;
 - ◆ promoting independence for older people and people with learning disabilities;
 - ◆ improving the quality of life for looked after children and young people at risk; and
 - ◆ working to reduce crime, fear of crime and the misuse of drugs and alcohol (community plan).
- 38 Action to translate these aims and objectives into tangible plans that can be implemented through use of Supporting People funding are not, however, sufficiently robust. Representatives of planning groups such as the mental health local implementation team (LIT), drug and alcohol action team (DAAT) and community safety partnership found it difficult to articulate a vision for how the Supporting People programme would contribute towards meeting their objectives and targets.
- 39 The council's homelessness strategy makes links with the Supporting People programme and includes areas where it sees the programme assisting to meet needs and prevent repeat homelessness. However, the new draft housing strategy lacks sufficient detail on the actions that will be taken to meet the objectives set out for vulnerable people, and the timetable for the production of a domestic violence strategy will, unless brought forward, be too late for key actions to be included in the new Supporting People five year strategy.
- 40 The timetable for the production of a new five year Supporting People strategy has been delayed by ODPM until March 2005 pending future decisions over national funding. This gives the council the opportunity to address these issues and ensure that the new strategy contains clearly articulated priorities that link to identified needs, including those identified by partner agencies and groups. These will then need to be backed by robust action plans with specific measurable targets and dates for action.

Does the service meet these aims?

- 41 Having considered the aims that the council has set for the service, inspectors make an assessment of how well the council is meeting these aims. This includes an assessment of performance against specific service standards and targets and the council's approach to measuring whether it is actually delivering what it set out to do.
- 42 The assessment was based upon the following key issues:
- ◆ commissioning services to meet local needs;
 - ◆ user involvement;
 - ◆ diversity;
 - ◆ partnership working;
 - ◆ value for money;
 - ◆ quality and monitoring; and
 - ◆ outcomes for service users and carers.

Commissioning services to meet local needs

Implementing the programme

- 43 A key priority for the council has been the smooth and effective implementation of the Supporting People programme and this has been achieved.
- 44 The Supporting team is relatively small in comparison to the number of providers and services for which it contracts, but has succeeded in a number of key areas.
- ◆ Effective working between the Supporting People team and housing benefits section has ensured that claims were not missed and were identified and included in the final grant allocation.
 - ◆ Contracts with service providers were signed on time.
 - ◆ Providers are satisfied that payments have been made on time and been accurate from April 2003.
 - ◆ Schedules detailing payments are clear and providers say they are very easy to understand.
 - ◆ Information management systems (IT) are in place and reported to be working effectively.
 - ◆ The programme has remained within budget during 2003/04 and substantial savings have been achieved.
- 45 Evidence from our Audit Commission survey of service providers and from a forum with providers held during the course of the inspection shows that they value the support and clear guidance that they receive from all members of the team. They particularly praised the accessibility of the team manager and the prompt response they received to any queries.

Identifying needs

- 46 Understanding the housing needs of the local population is fundamental to ensuring that sustainable services are developed and commissioned. Action is already underway within the council to research the needs of a variety of different client groups.
- 47 Work has been undertaken to examine the needs of older people who are currently housed in seven different sheltered housing schemes in the district, provided by five different landlords. This has identified a lack of alternatives for older people who do not require sheltered accommodation and could stay in their own home with the help of an alarm service. At the other end of the spectrum the

need for extra care sheltered housing for people with high level needs as a result of physical frailty or mental health memory problems (dementia) has been identified. This has led to the development of a small number of extra care housing units which will be available later in 2004.

- 48 The growth in the population of older people has already been identified by the council as a challenge for the future. This is an area where Supporting People funding could play a part, but this needs to be in the context of a clear strategy to guide the development of older peoples housing in the medium to long term. This could draw on the template and guidance produced by ODPM. An older people's commissioning strategy will be developed by the autumn, but a timetable for the production of an older peoples housing strategy has not been agreed.
- 49 The shadow strategy identifies the research and feasibility study funded by Thames Valley probation service into the needs of offenders for floating support services. This clearly indicated the need for a service and helped to shape the preferred model of service. A generic floating support service commissioned in October 2002 now includes offenders in the service it provides as well as people with multiple problems including those who misuse substances. A 'steering group' comprising members from the Supporting People team, DAAT, registered social landlords, probation service and social services meet quarterly to oversee the development of the service.
- 50 Research to better understand the specific housing and support needs of people who misuse substances is about to be commissioned from external consultants by the DAAT. Work is also underway to identify the needs of adults with mental health problems through a survey of current service users. This will help to shape the mental health commissioning strategy which will be produced by October 2004.
- 51 A similar approach has already been taken to identify the needs of people with learning difficulties and a housing strategy for 2004 – 2007 '*Coming Home*', has been published. This acknowledges that further research to map provision and identify gaps and needs is required, but it does contain a clear action plan for moving forward and some measurable targets.
- 52 The council's 2003 -2007 homelessness strategy identifies the support that is available through Supporting People which helps vulnerable people, including young people, manage permanent tenancies. The strategy acknowledges that analysis suggests there are gaps for young people at risk or leaving care. It also identifies needs in relation to some young people for accommodation with higher levels of support than can be provided for by existing schemes.
- 53 Action is being taken to respond to these areas of unmet need and build on work that was done by the young people housing group in September 2003. A pilot tenancy support service has been agreed and a joint protocol (between children's services, the youth offending team and housing) for assessment of young homeless people has been launched, as well as a mediation service to prevent homelessness.
- 54 Action is needed to ensure that all the various strands of needs information from all available sources are brought together systematically and used to best effect to inform and determine priorities for the five year strategy. A clear, detailed project plan is required. Without this, existing gaps will remain and aspirations will not be met. The recent recruitment of a housing strategy manager will strengthen capacity and agreement of a detailed project plan to undertake this work should be produced and implemented as a priority.

Commissioning services

- 55 Strategic commissioning plans for some client groups have not been developed, including those for older people and people with mental health problems. Action is now underway to address this with commissioning plans expected to be in place and agreed by the council executive in October 2004.

- 56 Although there is an absence of strategies and commissioning plans for some groups, the council made use of transitional housing benefit in 2002 and subsequently Supporting People funding, to commission some new services and increase resources to some other existing services. Examples include:
- ◆ floating support services for elderly people, single homeless people and for adults with mental health problems;
 - ◆ a tenancy support worker to help homeless people;
 - ◆ increased support for people with physical or sensory impairment; and
 - ◆ a small number of extra care sheltered accommodation units specifically for older people with dementia which will come on-line later in 2004.
- 57 National and regional data on the provision of Supporting People services, compared to the population of West Berkshire shows that although some new services were developed, the total number of units of provision for both floating support and accommodation based services are below average as shown in the data appendix to this report. This is particularly noticeable for older people and for adults with mental health problems.
- 58 The council made a bid for national funding in January 2004 to increase capacity within the one home improvement agency that provides a service in the district. The aim was to boost the service to prevent admissions to hospital caused by falls, speed up hospital discharge and improve clients' peace of mind with regards to security and safety measures. Funding totalling around £40,000 had been identified from existing sources, but the bid for an additional £33,000 failed. The shortfall has now been made good and additional resources of £45,000 have been allocated to boost the service through the access and systems capacity grant.
- 59 The amount of grant per head of population is higher than the average in the South East of England and the average for England as a whole. Unit costs (excluding community alarms and sheltered housing) are around 75 per cent higher than average. This is because the council spends significantly higher amounts to support individuals with learning disabilities in their own homes than many other councils. In West Berkshire 46 per cent of Supporting People grant is spent on around 127 units of support for individuals with learning difficulties.
- 60 Following the recommendations of the joint review report in 2000, the council has made a conscious strategic decision to promote independent living for people with a learning disability, which is line with national guidance from the department of health in 'Valuing People'. Comparisons with the services provided across the South East region and national figures suggest that this has not been pursued to the same extent for some other groups, such as older people, adults with mental health problems and people who abuse substances.
- 61 The nature of some of these services, compliance with current grant conditions and value for money is explored later in this report.

User involvement and access to services

- 62 Service reviews are being used to obtain views of the people who use services, but more needs to be done to research the views of people from 'hard to reach' groups and from people who cannot communicate easily. The format and media in which information about Supporting People is produced can also be improved.

Consultation

- 63 Consultation in 2002 in preparation for the shadow strategy included service user groups and information was used to develop services such as floating support services, which were identified as a priority by some of the groups that were consulted. Since then there has been further direct consultation focused on Supporting People services for some client groups. For example, 76 service users in 7 different sheltered housing schemes with 5 different landlords were

consulted to establish their views and needs to inform future commissioning decisions. A survey of the views of people with mental health problems is being undertaken and similar work is planned by the DAAT for people who misuse substances.

- 64 The Supporting People team feels that rather than try to set up separate arrangements for consultation, existing groups and structures can be utilised. For example, the mental health implementation team which already includes three service users and a user development worker. Service reviews are also being used to talk to people who are receiving services, in order to understand their needs and how well these are met through current services. The team is also intending to involve service users in undertaking reviews and training is planned for later in 2004.
- 65 User involvement could, however, be further developed:
- ◆ service users do not attend the housing forum, which fills the role of the inclusive forum in West Berkshire;
 - ◆ the views and needs of some harder to reach minority client groups like offenders, people from ethnic minority groups, those with HIV/AIDS and travellers have not been fully explored; and
 - ◆ some service providers could play a far more proactive role in encouraging the people who use their services to help to develop and improve them.
- 66 Thought also needs to be given to how to research the views of people who are not currently using services and those who are not easily able to advocate for themselves, such as older people with a cognitive impairment or those who find it hard to communicate. This will be a challenge, but it is important that their views are sought.

Information

- 67 Information about Supporting People for service users has just been updated and reprinted. New leaflets have been sent out to all council offices, libraries, and to mobile community information centres which visit remote rural communities on a weekly basis. New leaflets now state that information can be made available in other formats such as audiotape or translated into another language. However, they are not produced in large print as standard, do not point people towards further information on the council's web site or mention the 'language line' translation facility. Information leaflets have not been produced in a format suitable for people with learning difficulties, using illustrations as well as text.
- 68 The new Supporting People leaflet has missed an opportunity to elicit feedback from people who use services. It states that *'they (the Supporting People team) will listen to your views as a service user when they review it'*. Although accurate, the majority of service users are unlikely to understand the timetable or nature of service reviews and the statement may actually deter people from sharing their views or concerns. There is no guidance in the leaflet over what to do if the users or advocate wishes to raise concerns before the service is reviewed.
- 69 Involving people who use services in the format and content of leaflets would help. Consulting with existing groups who represent users and carers, or piloting designs would be a way of ensuring that they are user friendly and easily understood by people who need this information.
- 70 Action is underway to implement a new web site for Supporting People in West Berkshire which will provide a searchable database of services in the area. The project has been successful in attracting European Union (EU) funding as an 'e-government trail blazer' and it will be operational in late 2004. The probation service has produced a directory of supported accommodation across West Berkshire which will be available to staff and the public on the new web site once it is operational.

Access

- 71 Access to services can be improved by ensuring that relevant information in suitable media is available and on display in council reception areas. This should also include information on how to complain, which was absent from displays in the main council office in Newbury. Ensuring that accurate information is also available to people making telephone enquires is equally important. One telephone enquiry to find out what might be available to help an elderly person who was getting forgetful was met courteously by council staff, but resulted in being re-directed three times with no offer to transfer the call to the relevant department.
- 72 A further enquiry on behalf of a woman with young children experiencing domestic violence was dealt with helpfully and very sympathetically by a member of staff in the council's homelessness department. Comprehensive, relevant advice on contacting Berkshire women's aid and their refuge accommodation was offered, along with the member of staff's name and direct line to make contact again if required. No attempt was made to deter the woman from leaving home, even though an owner occupier, or place any obstacles in the way, with the first priority being her safety. We commend performance in response to this enquiry.

Diversity

- 73 There has been limited development of services for groups who are not users of mainstream social care services. There is one site for travellers in West Berkshire and there are thought to be very low numbers of people with HIV/AIDS. There are no specific housing support services in place for these people funded through Supporting People grant and their housing support needs have not been researched.
- 74 The shadow strategy makes only very limited reference to the housing support needs of BME groups and there are no Supporting People funded services specialising in provision for any particular ethnic group. Although this may be acceptable due to low demand, action to ensure that existing services are sufficiently culturally sensitive to make them attractive to individuals from BME groups has been limited.
- 75 Some external partners believe that the council lacks a corporate commitment to diversity and the needs of BME people living in West Berkshire. The LSP does not have representation of BME people or groups and there is a perception that consultation with external partners regarding BME issues is inadequate. However, the West Berkshire forum which has now been established is seen as being a positive step forward.
- 76 Although there is further work to be done to engage with BME representatives and better understand their housing support needs, there are some areas where there have been improvements. In particular:
- ◆ the council appears to be making better use of census data and baseline statistical information than at the time of the housing services inspection in May 2002 to address BME issues;
 - ◆ around 11 per cent of new users of Supporting People services are from BME groups, which is substantially higher than might be expected in comparison to the local population profile;
 - ◆ most housing and Supporting People staff have had equalities/diversity training recently, with more planned for delivery in 2004; and
 - ◆ community safety staff have shown a more active and positive approach with regard to BME issues.

Partnership working

- 77 Partnership working is well established at a corporate level and in the planning and implementation of the Supporting People programme. This has been recognised in the council's annual audit and inspection letter.

'The Council is developing a culture whereby partnership becomes the first option when responding to issues'. - 2003 annual audit and inspection letter.

Health partnerships

- 78 Partnership working between the council and Newbury & community PCT is well developed. There are a number of jointly appointed and funded posts both at senior management level and below within the council, which promotes a shared agenda. For example, the head of community care and housing and the head of older people's services within the council are both joint appointments with the PCT. The head of community care and housing is employed at director level within the PCT and represents them on the commissioning body.
- 79 Although not represented on the commissioning body by mutual consent, there are good local links with Reading PCT who provide health services for around 40,000 individuals who are resident in West Berkshire council's area.
- 80 In addition to input to the combined commissioning body/core strategy group, the Supporting People team manager has developed strong links into the local health agenda and has a good understanding of current health service priorities and pressures. This has been achieved by being a member of the mental health local implementation team (LIT) and attending a sub-group of the drug and alcohol action team (DAAT).

Probation partnership

- 81 There are effective arrangements in place for high risk offenders and West Berkshire Council are a signatory to the multi-agency public protection (MAPPA) protocol. The probation service is positive about the council and Supporting People team's understanding and responsiveness to the needs of offenders, although there is an overprovision of accommodation which results in people from outside the area being placed in West Berkshire. This has an effect on the probation service, which has limited case management capacity.
- 82 Partnership with Thames Valley area probation service has undergone recent changes. The probation service had three housing development managers responsible for Supporting People across the Thames Valley probation area. This includes six unitary councils in Berkshire, two county councils and Milton Keynes. However, from mid-2004, one manager is responsible for the entire probation area and will therefore prioritise attendance at the nine commissioning body meetings.
- 83 Thames Valley probation area has initially prioritised the localities of Reading, Slough, Milton Keynes and Oxford for Supporting People work, to complement existing initiatives and criminal justice investment. West Berkshire is not seen as a priority at present and it may not prove possible for the probation service to be represented at all commissioning body meetings. This risks reducing input at senior level by the probation service during the development of the five year Supporting People strategy, and could compromise their ability to play an effective role in the commissioning body.

Stakeholder partnerships

- 84 There are very good working relationships with service providers and other stakeholders. Providers have been involved through four housing support forum meetings each year, visits from the Supporting People team, and other informal contacts. External providers are not represented on the core strategy group, but this was a decision that was taken by providers in response to a consultation

exercise. The youth offending team (YOT) attend the housing support forum and have described it as a positive and effective body.

85 Service providers who completed an Audit Commission questionnaire survey and those who attended a forum with the inspectors praised the Supporting People team. In particular they drew attention to:

- ◆ the inclusive approach that had been demonstrated during the planning and development phase of services;
- ◆ timely and accurate payments from April 2003 to date;
- ◆ challenging but fair service reviews by credible and experienced officers; and
- ◆ relevant information disseminated by the team in a format that is easy to understand.

*'West Berkshire Supporting People team are head and shoulders above other councils where we work – they have kept us informed throughout, it's very difficult to fault them'.
- Service providers.*

86 There are annual conferences organised across the six unitary councils in Berkshire to inform providers about developments in the Supporting People programme. This approach is sensible, as most providers have services across the area.

87 Links with neighbouring councils are well-established. A cross-authority group covering the six Berkshire councils has met regularly since mid-2001. Following new guidance from the ODPM, the group is now being expanded to include Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. A Berkshire cross authority statement has been produced and is included in the shadow strategy. However, work to develop a cross-authority protocol has yet to be completed. This is needed to clarify which council is responsible for funding services and providing move-on accommodation when service users move across council boundaries.

Quality and monitoring

Service Reviews

88 The service review process is central to ensuring that services are effective, provide good value for money and comply with Supporting People grant conditions. Until services are reviewed, contracting decisions which will influence the future shape of services and meet strategic priorities cannot be made. West Berkshire Supporting People team have already made good progress and have negotiated substantial savings as a result of the first reviews.

89 At the time of the inspection in May 2004, the Supporting People team had completed full reviews of all the services that they contract for with six providers and undertaken validation visits to services provided by five others. This leaves 20 service providers for full review between June 2004 and March 2006, which is achievable, provided that resources within the team do not decrease, for example as a result of staff sickness.

90 The service review programme is currently on track and follow up on the first action plans that were produced is being incorporated into the programme. The team is confident that it can complete the timetable as scheduled and has included an element for commissioning external consultancy in their budget.

91 The two officers who undertake the reviews have a high level of expertise, which is demonstrated by the reports produced following reviews and reinforced by the views of the providers of services that have been reviewed. Review reports produced are of a high standard and consider strategic relevance and value for money. All services are validated by visit. Recommendations and options for addressing issues are clear and action plans are agreed with service providers. Providers, who attended a forum with the inspectors, were positive about the way in which reviews had been undertaken. Although perceived as stressful and

challenging, providers said that they were carried out professionally, with clear arrangements and by experienced staff.

- 92 To avoid any conflict of interest when reviewing in-house services, an independent contractor has been engaged to review the council's adult placement service and an exchange was arranged with a neighbouring council (Reading) to bring an external perspective to a review of in-house tenancy support service. This is good practice and demonstrates a commitment to ensure that reviews are impartial and address internal weaknesses as well as those of external providers. Both reports show that there are areas where improvement is necessary and comprehensive action plans have been agreed to address the issues raised.
- 93 Reports and recommendations following each review are submitted to the commissioning body. The results show that the commissioning body is prepared to take tough decisions and it has cut funding to one service provider as a result of a review by £240,000 per year. Further savings of £110,000 have recently been negotiated with two other providers.
- 94 The Supporting People team has good information on the services that have been reviewed or where a formal validation visit has been made but information on the nature of those services that it has not reviewed is very limited. We were unable to undertake desk top reviews of services that had not been visited because the information held on file was minimal. Although the team has had informal meetings with providers and visited some services, insufficient information is held on file to provide assurance that the services for which the council contracts represent good value for money and are being delivered in line with the contracts. This will be addressed as the team begins to implement the most recent guidance from ODPM on contract monitoring and the quality assessment framework.
- 95 The council has a strategic risk management planning system in place which has been applied to Supporting People team and the team has produced a risk register in accordance with the strategic plan of the council. The accreditation process is being used to monitor the financial stability of service providers.

Value for money

- 96 Service reviews that have been undertaken to date address value for money and use the ODPM framework for comparing the costs of services against regional and national benchmarks which is good practice. West Berkshire has also used a system for assessing hourly rates of support provided, to give a more accurate comparison. This system is now in the process of being made more sophisticated and robust, in discussion with other authorities in the South East and in line with emerging government guidance.
- 97 Reviews have already identified some services that were not delivering cost effective services in line with contracts and the commissioning body has acted swiftly to address this and realise substantial savings. But, thresholds and boundaries for commissioning are not sufficiently clear and the council could be vulnerable to challenge as to why one person can receive a combined care package costing £2,000 per week and another will not be afforded a similar opportunity.
- 98 There are issues over the nature of some of the services that are currently being funded with Supporting People grant and whether these can be sustained. There is a prospect of significant reductions to the budget in future years, following the independent review of services across England that was published in January 2004. The council are aware of the impact that this may have on resources and has already modelled the financial impact of a ceiling being placed on the maximum amount that can be funded through Supporting People grant per person per week.

- 99 During the course of the inspection, visits were made to 15 different service providers (almost half of the providers with whom the council contracts for services). Where possible inspectors talked to front-line staff and to the people receiving services or their advocates. This enabled inspectors to form a view on whether services were likely to comply with current grant conditions and appeared to be providing value for money. Key issues arising from the visits are highlighted below.
- ◆ Some high quality services are being provided, with positive outcomes for service users. However, quality does not always appear to be influenced by the cost. Some low cost services are of a very high standard and helping people to live independently.
 - ◆ At least one floating support service is providing a basic housework, cleaning and shopping service for very elderly clients, rather than assisting them to do this for themselves. These services are not eligible for Supporting People funding and cannot be described as housing related support as outlined in ODPM guidance. However, these are legacy services which cannot be changed until a first service review has been completed.
 - ◆ Concerns were raised over the quality of one such service and individual unit costs are high. The Supporting People team is aware of concerns and has already issued a default notice and reduced unit costs as well as offering clients the chance to switch service provider, but a review is not scheduled until 2005. Although the overall cost of this contract is now relatively low, at around £20,000 per year, the council needs to address these issues with greater urgency.
 - ◆ Use of attendance allowance, disability living allowance and possibly mobility allowance to allow individuals to choose their own service supplier and pay for housework and sitting services, rather than provide these through Supporting People funding, has not been explored.
 - ◆ Some highly dependent adults with learning disabilities and in some instances with very challenging behaviour are being helped to live outside of residential care using Supporting People and community care funding. The nature of the 24 hour, one to one support is such that it would be hard to classify this as independent living as outlined in Supporting People guidance.
- 100 Officers told the inspectors that they assess the needs of clients on an individual basis and provide care which responds to these needs. There are no local criteria which limit the cost or the level of services provided through Supporting People grant, community care funding, or a mix of both. However, analysis of Supporting People funding shows that it is services for people with a learning disability that are consuming around 46 per cent of the total budget. 30 of the 51 services provided for this client group cost in excess of £400 per person per week (platinum cut data). The highest cost Supporting People service for one individual is £1,018 per week plus over £1,000 per week from other budgets.
- 101 Although assisting people to live independently is in keeping with 'Valuing People', the department of health initiative to promote independent living for people with a learning disability, and the council's strategy, it is questionable whether some of the schemes are actually providing independent living, due to the very high needs of the individuals. Analysis of services and costs suggests that frail older people and adults with severe and enduring mental illness may not be able to access the same intensive level of support.

Outcomes for service users and carers

- 102 The Supporting People programme in West Berkshire is delivering tangible, positive changes to some of the services it funds and through this, the lives of those people who use services. Visits to services and meetings with the people who use them during the inspection show that people place a high value on the

support that they receive. Some people are being afforded the opportunity to live in their own home for the first time in their lives.

- 103 The following case studies are just two examples of the positive impact some services have had and clearly illustrate how much people value services and the difference that it makes to their lives.

Supporting People Case Study 1

Service User Group: *adults with mental health problems*

Type of service: *floating support*

Key players: *Community mental health team, housing association, floating support service*

Issues to be addressed:

Mrs E has a history of mental health problems that have resulted in her needing frequent admissions to hospital, often for many weeks at a time. She found it hard to undertake day to day household tasks such as cleaning, shopping and cooking which caused difficulties with her partner and a downward spiral, usually resulting in hospital admission.

Action taken:

A floating support service has been agreed. A support worker, who Mrs E has come to trust, visits her each week for a few hours and helps to motivate her to undertake household tasks, accompanying her to the shops and improve her cooking skills.

Outcomes for service user:

The house is now clean and tidy and they have begun to redecorate it. Mrs E has gone for a period of seven months without a hospital admission and when she was admitted recently, she was able to return home after two weeks. She says that having this support has made a huge impact and knowing her support worker is coming motivates her to get going with things that she would otherwise let slip.

Supporting People Case Study 2

Service User Group: *married couple with learning difficulties*

Type of service: *supported accommodation*

Key players: *housing association, social services, Supporting People funded support workers*

Issues to be addressed:

Mr and Mrs X who both have low level learning difficulties, had been married for fourteen years and were living in a registered care home. They were unhappy that they were unable to have the degree of privacy which they wanted and asked for a home of their own.

Action taken:

The couple applied for housing through the council's statutory register and were offered a flat and garden from a local housing association in 2003. Day time support is provided by a local service provider funded through the Supporting People programme and overnight support from a neighbouring local authority's social care programme.

Outcomes for service users:

The couple are happy with the changes and now enjoy the privacy of their own home and receive support with washing, cooking, gardening, shopping and other household activities. Both husband and wife attend college two or three days a week with support for travel. The husband travels to a local class on his own and the wife visits a coffee shop with support. They were in the process of decorating the flat when we visited and preparing to go on holiday.

- 104 Although these and a number of other services demonstrate positive outcomes for people, as discussed earlier in this report, the nature and the high cost of some of the services that are being provided may not comply with grant conditions and alternative funding may be required in the future.

How does the performance compare?

- 105 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.
- 106 Where possible, we have compared the council with other councils in its Audit Commission family group (councils with similar general characteristics). We have also compared the council with the best and worst performing 25 per cent of unitary councils for that indicator. The data appendix at the end of this report provides full details, but significant facts are highlighted below.
- 107 The overall level of service provision funded through Supporting People grant, compared to the population of West Berkshire is lower than the average for England and the south east region, when community alarms and sheltered accommodation, (which can skew comparisons) are excluded.
- 108 Unit costs of Supporting People services per week (excluding community alarms and sheltered housing) are significantly higher than average. Unit costs in West Berkshire are £132 per week, compared to the south east regional average of £71 and England average of £76.

- 109 There have been some significant improvements in meeting social services performance targets that may be partially attributed to the implementation of Supporting People services in 2003/04. In particular, performance for admissions of residents aged 65 or over to permanent residential/nursing care now rates as 'significantly above average' (meaning less people are entering residential care) and delayed transfers of care from hospital have reduced sharply.
- 110 Performance on speed of processing of housing benefit claims was ranked as 'average' in 2002/03. However, performance since then has been variable and delays of 2-3 months can still occur. This was raised as a problem by some providers of Supporting People services during the course of the inspection as it can cause cash flow problems. The council is taking action to address the delays and reports that new claims received post April 2004 are being cleared within 19 days on average.
- 111 New Supporting People services, particularly some of the new floating support services that have been commissioned, should be helping to contribute towards achieving health and probation service targets as well as social services targets. In common with many other councils, as yet there is no hard evidence to show how expenditure on Supporting People services is making a contribution to health and probation service targets and priorities. Representatives from PCTs were unable to point to any specific positive benefits that are attributable to the programme, such as helping to reduce the psychiatric readmission rate and reduce emergency admissions to hospital for older people.

Summary

- 112 We have assessed the Supporting People service provided by West Berkshire to be a fair, one star service. The council and the Supporting People team have successfully implemented the Supporting People programme during 2003/04.
- 113 Improved outcomes can be demonstrated for services users, some of whom are being assisted to live independently for the first time in their lives. Service providers have all praised the team, for their accessibility, responsiveness, prompt way in which they have disseminated information and efficient payment system. The service review programme which is well underway is helping to raise the quality of services and ensure that services provide good value for money and are in line with strategies such as 'Valuing People'.
- 114 However, there are key issues that need to be addressed.
- ◆ Supporting People funding is benefiting a small number of individuals at a very high cost, which may be at the expense of others. The council is vulnerable to challenge over why some people, particularly those with a learning disability, can receive very intensive one to one support 24 hours a day to help them to live at home, when this is not widely available to other individuals.
 - ◆ The council needs to address and resolve the provision of services that are currently being funded through Supporting People that lie outside the guidance provided by the ODPM.
 - ◆ There are still gaps in services that were identified as areas for development in the Supporting People shadow strategy. The vision for Supporting People services is not clearly linked with priorities and plans for other strategic groups such as those of the mental health implementation team (LIT) and the drug and alcohol action team (DAAT).
 - ◆ The growth in the population of older people is recognised as a major pressure for the council in the future, but there is no overarching housing strategy for older people in the district to guide development in the medium term. Although some developments are taking place, a plan to address the lack of alternatives to sheltered housing has not been formulated yet.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 115 Inspectors have judged the service's prospects for improvement as 'promising' based on its capacity to improve, looking at three key areas.
- ◆ What is the evidence of service improvement?
 - ◆ How good are the current improvement plans?
 - ◆ Will improvements be delivered?

What is the evidence of service improvement?

- 116 At service delivery level, the Supporting People team has achieved smooth transition from the planning phase to implementation of the programme in April 2003. The team has a clear service plan which has been used to ensure that they have achieved all the key tasks required of them in 2003/04 and will continue to do so throughout 2004/05.
- 117 A key success factor to date is the progress that has been made with service reviews. Reviews undertaken have already:
- ◆ identified some services which do not deliver good value for money;
 - ◆ addressed the problems and secured significant savings; and
 - ◆ identified improvements and resulted in agreed action plans with providers that will result in higher quality services being delivered to the people who use them.
- 118 Reviews have also secured a measure of financial flexibility which has meant that ODPM budget reductions have had little impact to date and contract prices can be uplifted for inflation in 2004/05. The council has also considered the impact of further reductions in Supporting People grant and modelled the financial implications of a cap on unit costs being imposed.
- 119 Many providers of local services also contract with other neighbouring councils and in some cases, more widely across England. They are therefore well placed to compare performance. Many of the providers, who shared their views with inspectors, expressed high levels of confidence in the West Berkshire Supporting People team and rate their performance very highly compared to their experiences at some other councils. In particular they point to:
- ◆ accurate, timely payments;
 - ◆ an inclusive approach to planning and developing services;
 - ◆ challenging but fair service reviews which help them to raise the quality of their services; and
 - ◆ comprehensive information which is supplied by the Supporting People team.
- 120 At a corporate level, the council has demonstrated that it responds positively to inspection. The significant progress that it has made since the CPA Corporate Assessment in 2002 is noted in the 2003 qualitative assessment report and in the 2003 annual audit and inspection letter.
- 121 Performance management at corporate level is being strengthened. The CPA qualitative assessment report identifies how improvements at a corporate level to improve capacity are being made and how given resource limitations within the council, partnerships are seen as the key to success. In particular, the LSP and partnership with Amey are cited as examples of effective working that have delivered tangible service improvements. Partnership working is seen by councillors as working particularly well. However, the council is not complacent and recognise in the corporate plan that although progress has been made there is more work to be done.

'Greater effort is required over the next five years to develop a stronger performance culture across the council. Improvements in services will not be realised unless this area of activity is given a higher priority'. - West Berkshire corporate plan.

- 122 Staff and councillor awareness of equality issues has been raised and a corporate group has developed an action plan to ensure an effective response to equalities and social inclusion issues. The council has now adopted the commission for racial equalities standards and submitted a race equality scheme. It has set an immediate target of reaching Level 3 in the equality standard for all forms of potential discrimination. Although these are positive developments, the council still has a relatively weak understanding of the needs of BME people with limited research information. Recent work on the needs of asylum seekers and refugees has taken place with a working group having been set up to begin to address this.
- 123 There are, however, areas where the council's track record for improvement is not strong. For example; a private sector housing renewal strategy is not in place and a number of planned actions in the care management and commissioning service plan for older people 2003/04 were not delivered due to a reported lack of capacity.

How good are the current improvement plans?

- 124 The Supporting People team are working with planning groups within the council and with partners, such as the mental health LIT and the DAAT to better understand the needs of the local population and inform the new five year strategy. This will, (dependent on the funding that is available in future years), improve services and fill some existing gaps in provision.
- 125 The new five year strategy, which all administering local authorities must produce, will be submitted to ODPM by March 2005. This timescale has been extended from the original deadline of 2004 because decisions over the level of funding available nationally have to be finalised, in order for councils to be able to plan effectively for the future.
- 126 Some preparatory work and consultation to assist with strategy development has already been undertaken, as described earlier in this report. The recent recruitment of a new housing strategy manager will increase capacity and help to develop the new Supporting People strategy as well as linked strategies such as a housing strategy for older people.
- 127 Utilising existing information on needs and current performance is essential to the development of the strategy. To assist with this, the council has invested in a tailored made IT system for the Supporting People programme (SPOCC system). All performance information that service providers submit on quarterly returns, service review information and payment information is held within the system. Further developments are being made to the system to allow it to link with housing benefit and fairer charging information systems.
- 128 Although a large amount of information is now held within the system and reporting systems are being further developed, output from the system has been limited to date. The commissioning body/core strategy group has not received reports showing the results from the quarterly monitoring returns that providers submit. The reason for this is stated to be that work was needed to ensure that submitted by providers was accurate.
- 129 To ensure that the returns submitted by providers are accurate, each has been checked back to the contract with each individual service provider. Errors and omissions have been discussed with providers and in some instances savings to the Supporting People budget have been identified. A new reporting suite has been developed for the IT system and the first detailed report on provider performance, based on quarterly returns, will go to the commissioning body in August 2004.

Will improvements be delivered?

- 130 The council and the Supporting People team are well placed to deliver improved services to the people of West Berkshire.
- 131 The financial flexibility that has already been secured through the first service reviews provides a buffer against future budget reductions, which may be required by ODPM. However, the council is not complacent and the impact of further significant budget reductions and the effect on community care budgets has already been modelled.
- 132 Evidence from inspectors visits to a number of services, suggests that there is further scope for savings to be made, for example by encouraging alternative funding of housework and shopping services through benefits such as attendance allowance. This will allow expenditure to be re-configured to help to meet some of the gaps in current service provision.
- 133 The Supporting People team is committed and well organised and team members have the necessary skills and expertise to continue to deliver the programme. However, the team is small and action in the last year has, by necessity focussed on implementation and ensuring that the basics were being delivered such as payments being made on time.
- 134 Although the team has a good track record to date, their size makes them highly vulnerable. Sickness or the loss of a team member would have a damaging impact on the council's ability to continue to deliver the programme. A contingency plan to deal with this risk needs to be formulated. Given the relatively small size of the Berkshire unitary councils, agreement on circumstances where cross authority pooling of Supporting People staff could be used could provide a solution.
- 135 In the short term, the Supporting People team need the flexibility to divert resources from the service review programme, which is currently forming a large part of their workload, to strategy development. The team will require substantial input from members of the commissioning body/core strategy group during the coming months to pull together all the related strands of information and determine priorities.
- 136 The scale of the task cannot be underestimated. A detailed project plan for production of the strategy, plus a rolling action plan specifically for the commissioning body/core strategy group, which details the actions that they must take and which they can review at each meeting would assist.
- 137 In order to ensure that improvements will be delivered, strong performance management systems need to be in place. In particular, the commissioning body/core strategy group and councillors need firm indicators which can demonstrate that:
- ◆ the Supporting People team are able to deliver on their work programme;
 - ◆ key priorities are being achieved; and
 - ◆ providers of services are consistently delivering high quality services that represent good value services across all groups of vulnerable people who need housing related support services.
- 138 A number of layers of performance management are already in place which will assist; for example, there is a corporate appraisal system in place, with monthly supervisory meetings between line managers and staff within the Supporting People team. In order to strengthen existing reporting mechanisms, the Supporting People team have recently proposed a framework for performance monitoring of relevant indicators to the commissioning body. This is good practice and will commence in August 2004.

- 139 Performance monitoring can, however, be further strengthened. In particular, the role of councillors through their role in scrutiny committee arrangements needs to be developed to ensure that the Supporting People programme is monitored by the community care and housing overview and scrutiny committee.

Summary

- 140 We consider that the council's delivery of the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for improvement. This is based on a number of factors including:
- ◆ the council's track record of responding positively to inspection and corporate commitment towards performance improvement;
 - ◆ the strength of the partnerships that are in place, in particular the relationship with the local PCT and with service providers;
 - ◆ the skills and expertise of the Supporting People team and their success in delivering against their work programme to date;
 - ◆ commitment to ensuring that services are providing value for money and are high quality;
 - ◆ evidence of swift action taken to tackle services that are not providing good value for money or where quality needs to be raised;
 - ◆ the ability to manage financial pressures and re-configure services to respond to local needs; and
 - ◆ action to ensure that regular monitoring reports detailing provider performance and the work of the Supporting People team will be submitted to the commissioning body from August 2004.
- 141 However, in order to ensure that the programme can continue to deliver benefits for vulnerable people who need housing support, the council needs to make sure that it has the capacity and a detailed plan for development of the five year strategy. Performance management reporting for Supporting People programme needs to be strengthened and a clear remit for the scrutiny committee agreed.

Appendices

The purpose of a best value inspection is to make two judgements. The first is how good is the service being inspected? The second is what are the prospects for improvement? We carried out a range of activities to enable us to reach our judgements. We have also included key demographic and performance information.

Documents reviewed

Before going on site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that the council provided for us. This list is not exhaustive, but key documents included:

- ◆ Service Review Timetable and the full reports from completed reviews.
- ◆ Supporting People Delivery Plan 2003-2005.
- ◆ Supporting People Interim Strategy.
- ◆ Older Peoples reports.
- ◆ Learning Disability Housing Strategy.
- ◆ Mental Health and DAAT services plans and reports.
- ◆ Teenage Parents Plan.
- ◆ Corporate Plan.
- ◆ Community Plan.
- ◆ Procurement Strategy.
- ◆ User leaflets relating to Supporting People and newsletters issued to users.
- ◆ Better Care Higher Standards.
- ◆ Contracts.
- ◆ Minutes of the core strategy group and commissioning body meetings.
- ◆ Terms of Reference for the core strategy group and commissioning body.
- ◆ Charging and Contracting Policy.
- ◆ Annual Audit Letter 2002/03.
- ◆ Draft Housing and published homelessness strategies.
- ◆ Minutes from housing forum meetings.
- ◆ Social Services performance monitoring reports.
- ◆ PCT Local Delivery Plan.

Reality checks undertaken

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. We also followed up on issues relating to the management of the review and the improvements flowing from it. Our reality checks included visits to the following service providers and users of some of their services:

- ◆ Greenslade.
- ◆ Cherwell.
- ◆ Home Farm Trust (2 services).
- ◆ Paramount (2 services).
- ◆ Mencap.

- ◆ Sovereign Housing Association.
- ◆ Call Us (2 services).
- ◆ Richmond Fellowship.
- ◆ West Berkshire Council adult placement service.
- ◆ West Berkshire Council temporary accommodation tenancy support service.
- ◆ Stonham.
- ◆ Millercare (2 services).
- ◆ New Support Options (2 services).
- ◆ Support Partners.
- ◆ Purley Park Trust.
- ◆ Berkshire Women's Aid.
- ◆ Hanover Housing Trust.

List of people interviewed

| | |
|--|---|
| Janet Ashfield | DAAT Manager |
| Phil Barnett | Councillor |
| Lindsey Bass | Operational Manager Youth Offending Team |
| Mary Bennett | Mental Health LIT Chair |
| Joe Devanney | Reading PCT |
| Rachel Crags | Community Safety lead |
| Jan Evans, Social Services Contract & Finance Officers | Head of Older Peoples Services and Social Services Officers |
| Ian Gilders and the Supporting People Team | Manager and Team |
| Margaret Goldie | Director of Community Care & Housing |
| Jim Graham | Chief Executive |
| Graham McCartney, & Paul Williams | Assistant Chief Probation Officer and Housing Needs & Partnership Manager |
| Beverley Searle | Head of Community Care & Housing |
| Peter Slater, Helen Jermy & Learning Disability Officers | Project Manager Supported Living, Learning Disability lead and officers |

Demographic information

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

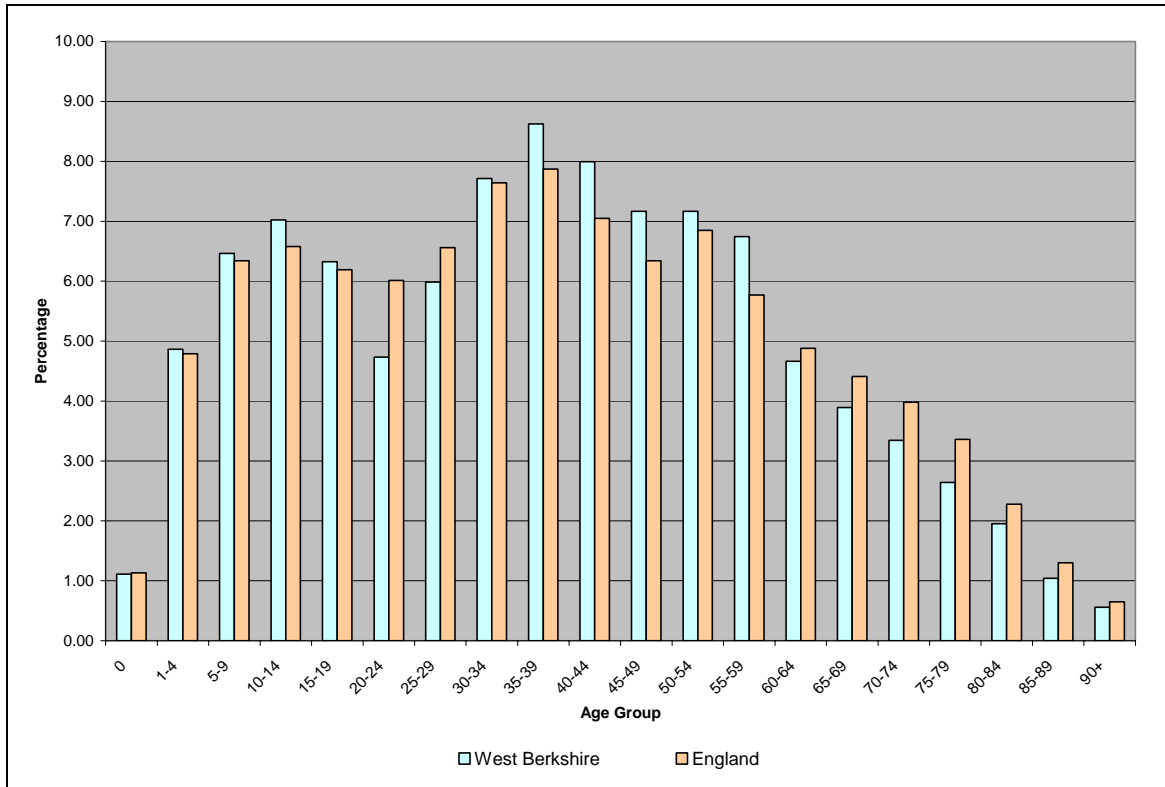
| Measure | West Berkshire | England |
|---|----------------|---------|
| Population (mid-2001) | 143,900 | - |
| Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001) | 13.43 | 15.9 |
| Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001) | 5.93 | 12.5 |
| Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003) | 1.1 | 2.6 |
| Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ² | 329 | - |
| Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ³ | 0 of 31 | - |
| Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent ⁴ | 1 of 31 | - |

² Indices of Deprivation 2000, average ward score for the authority.

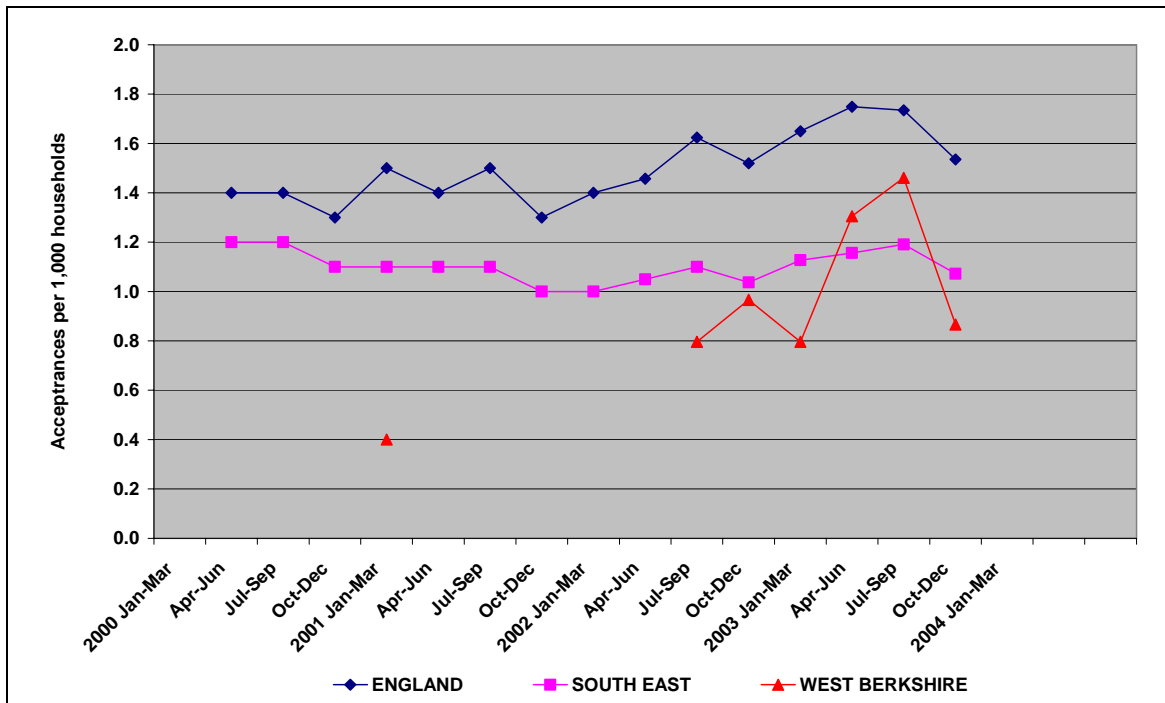
³ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

⁴ Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of access domain (out of 8414 wards).

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



Households accepted as homeless between 1999 and 2003 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



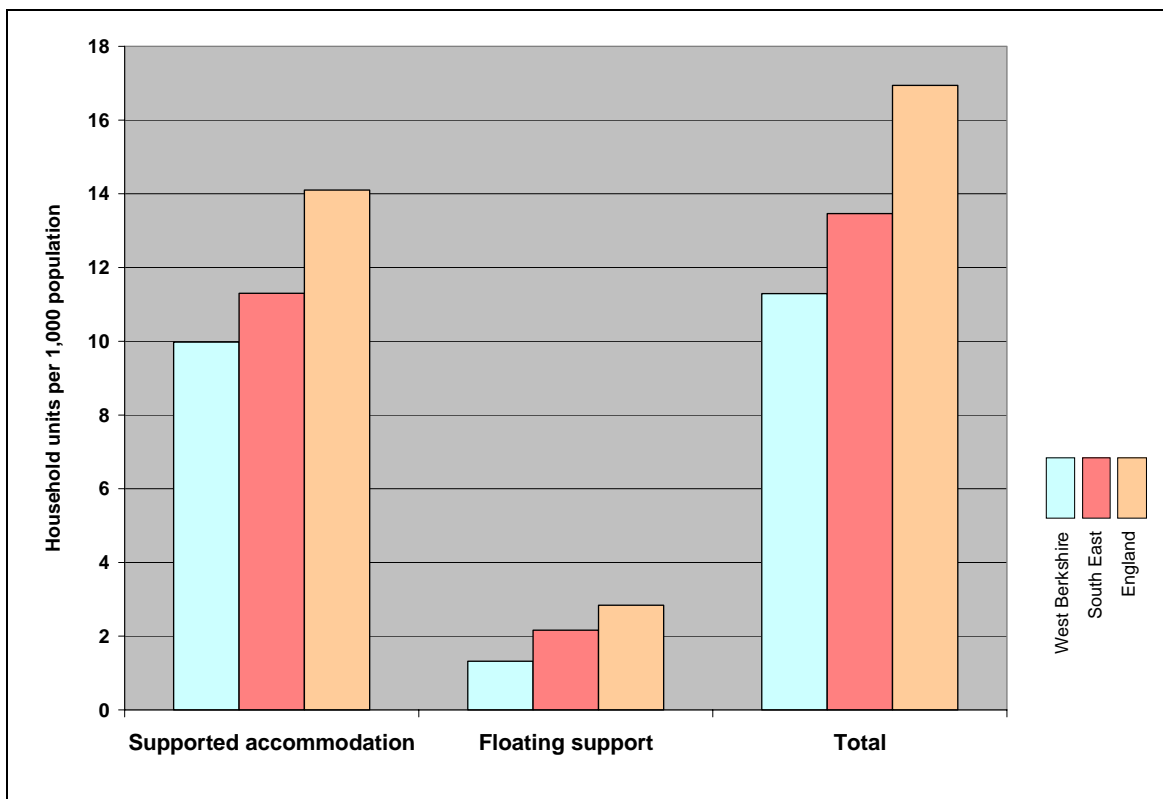
Performance information

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.

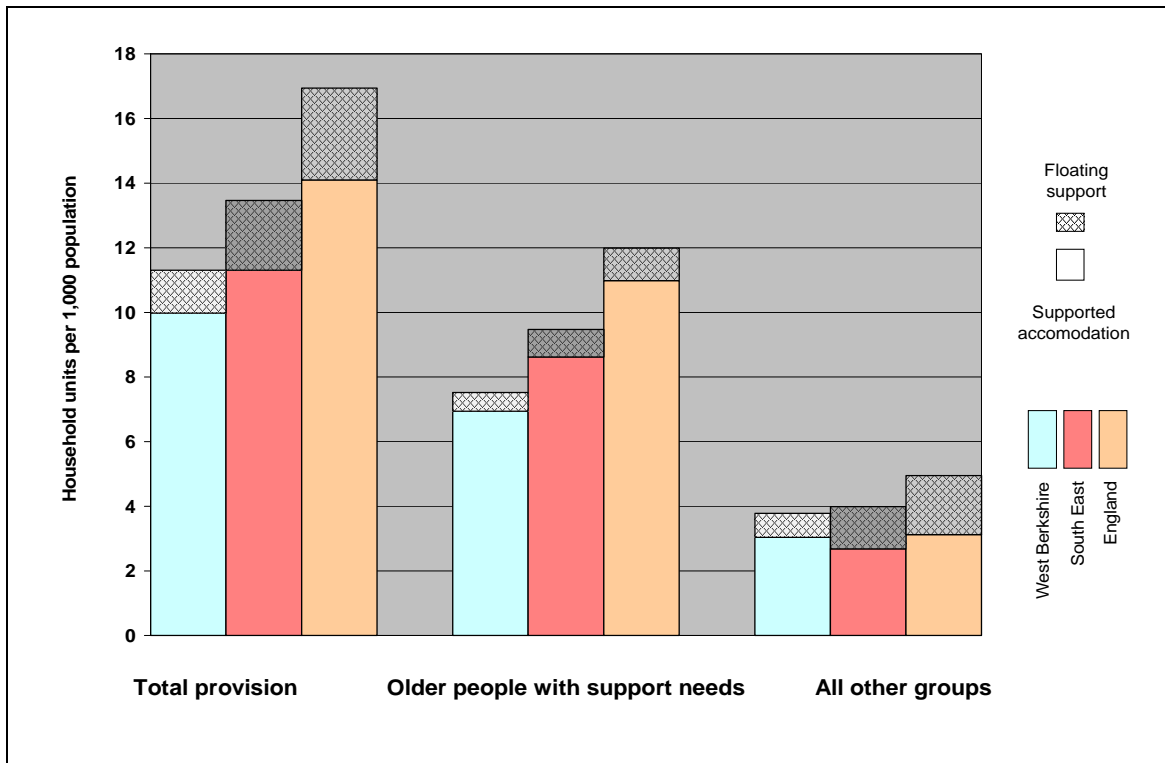
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People⁵

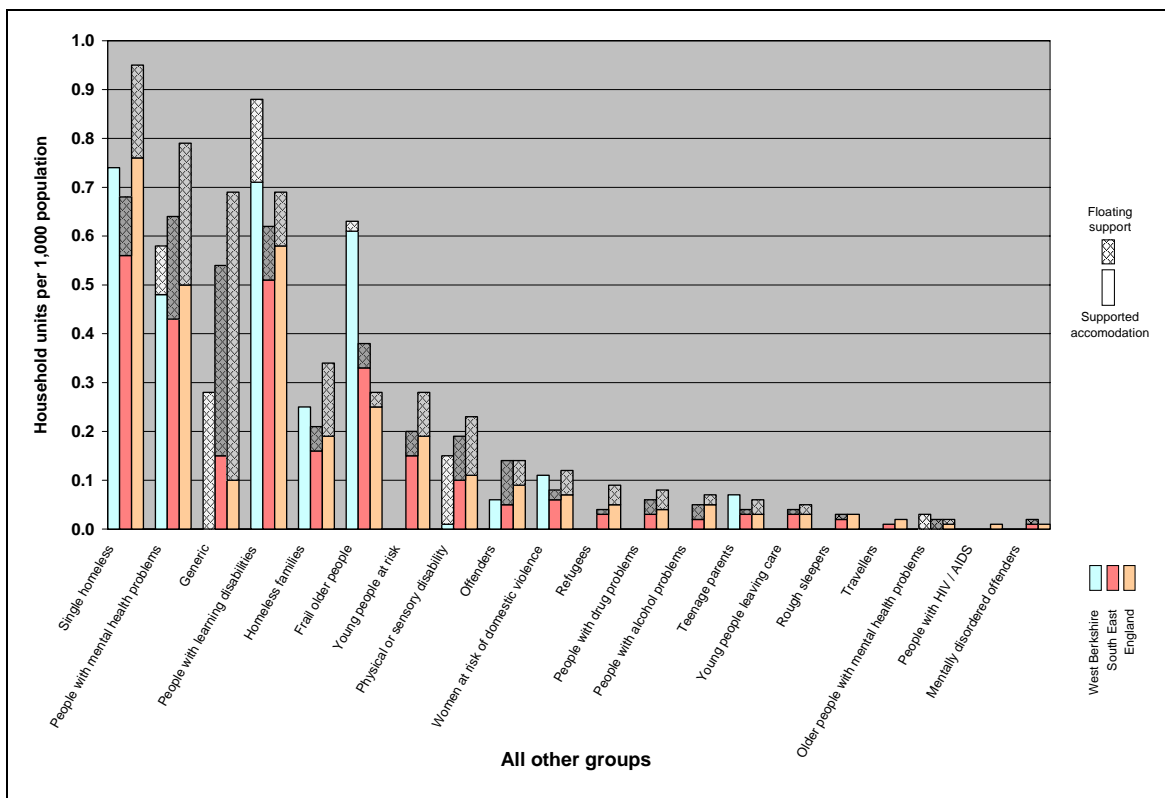


⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England⁶



Services for other groups compared with the region and England⁷



⁶ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

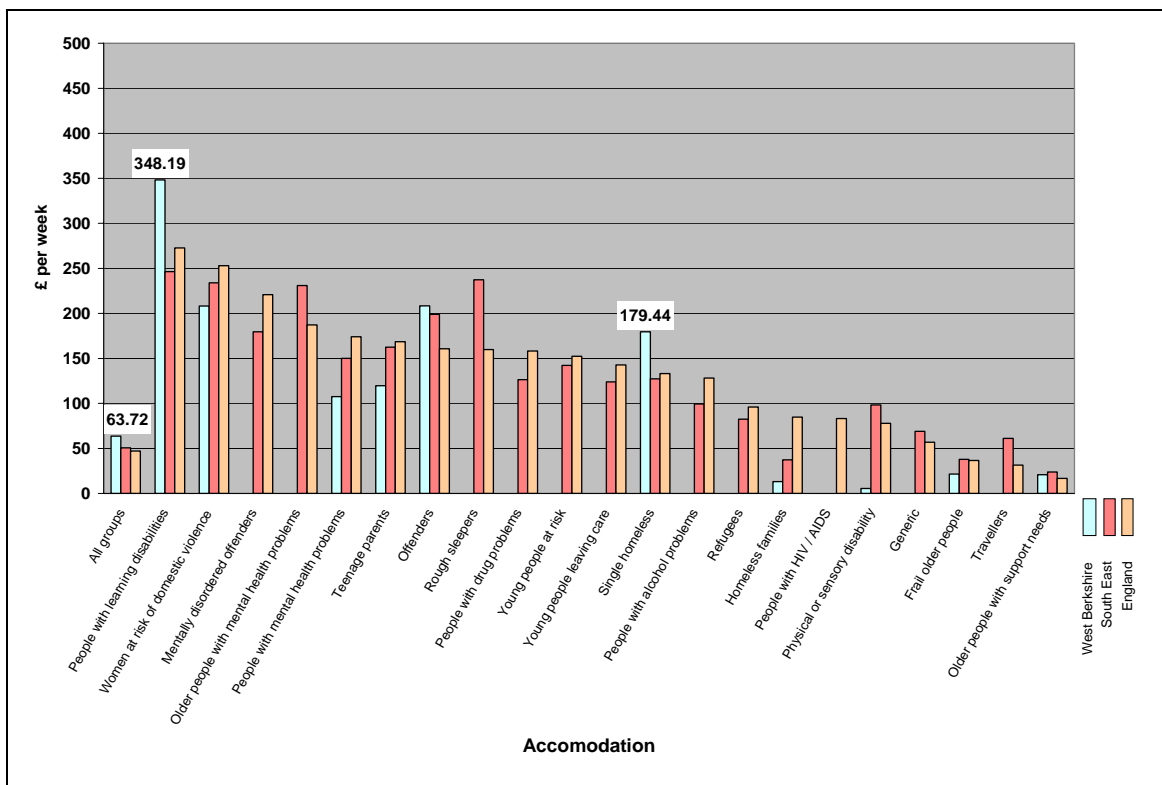
Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

| | Final Supporting People grant 2003/04 | Pipeline allocation June 2003 | Administration grant 2003/04 |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| West Berkshire | £ 6,190,546 | £ 65,349 | £ 187,453.12 |

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

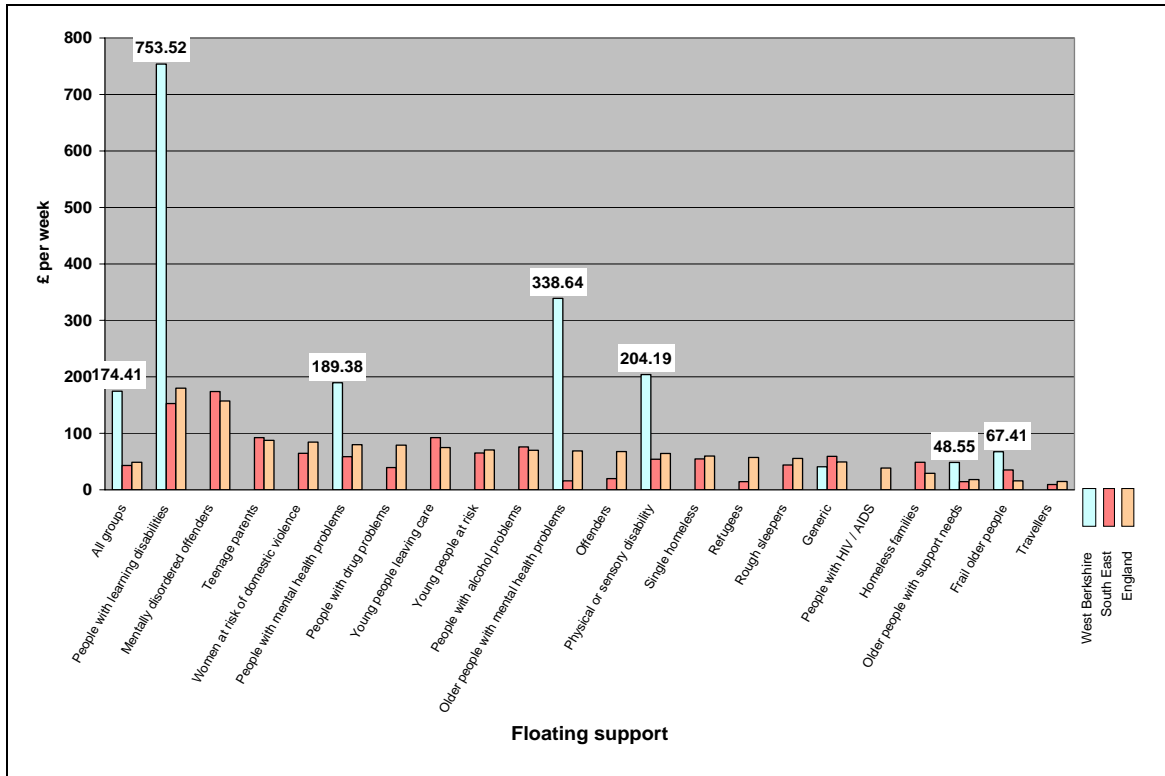
| | Per head of population | Per unit | Per unit excluding community alarms | Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing |
|----------------|------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|---|
| West Berkshire | £ 0.83 | £ 51.87 | £ 61.75 | £ 132.10 |
| South East | £ 0.52 | £ 24.94 | £ 32.26 | £ 71.78 |
| 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) ⁸

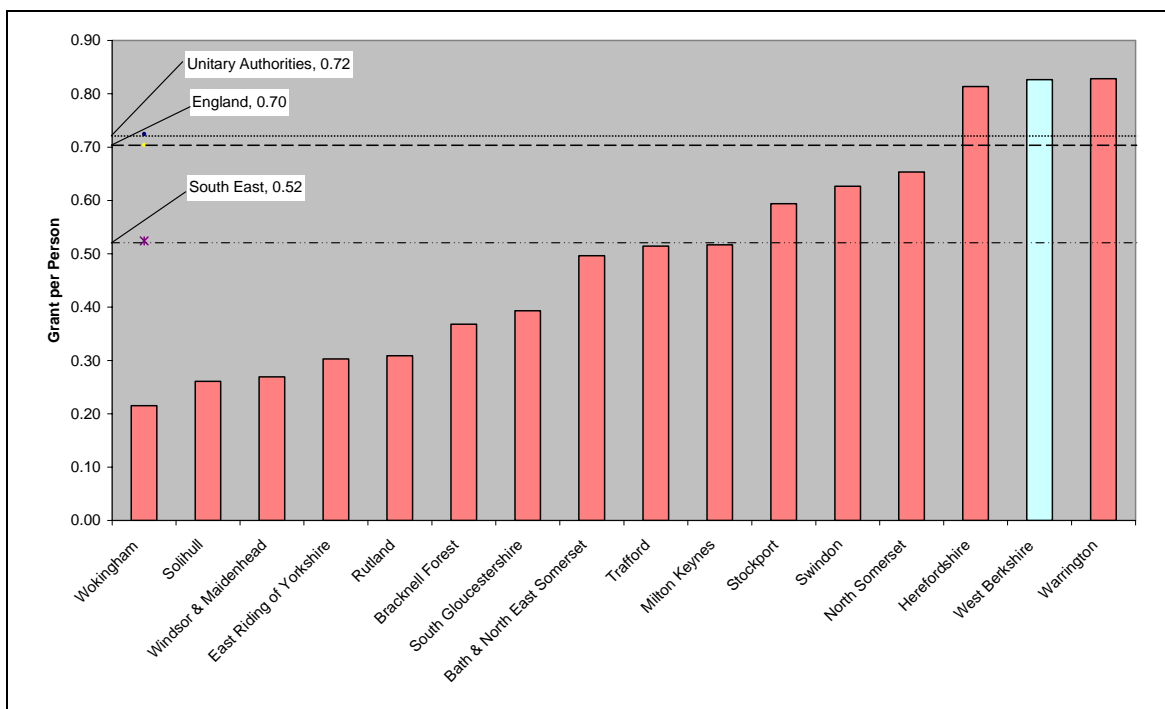


⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

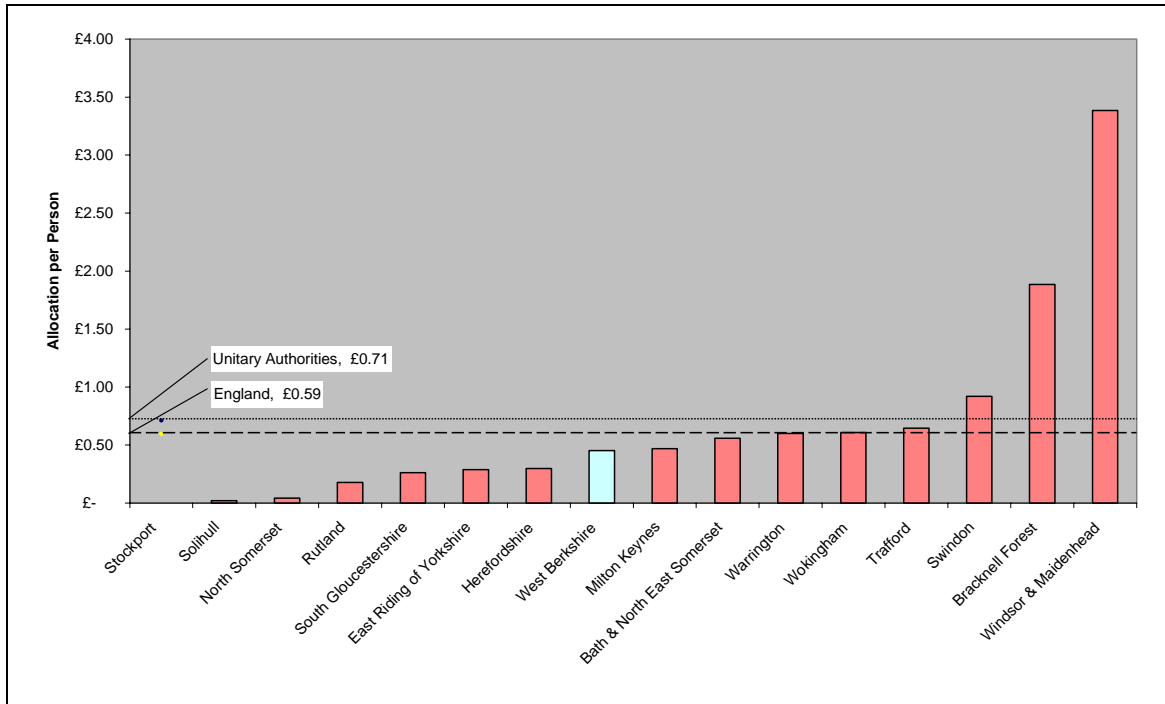


Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours⁹, all unitary councils and all English councils (2003/04)

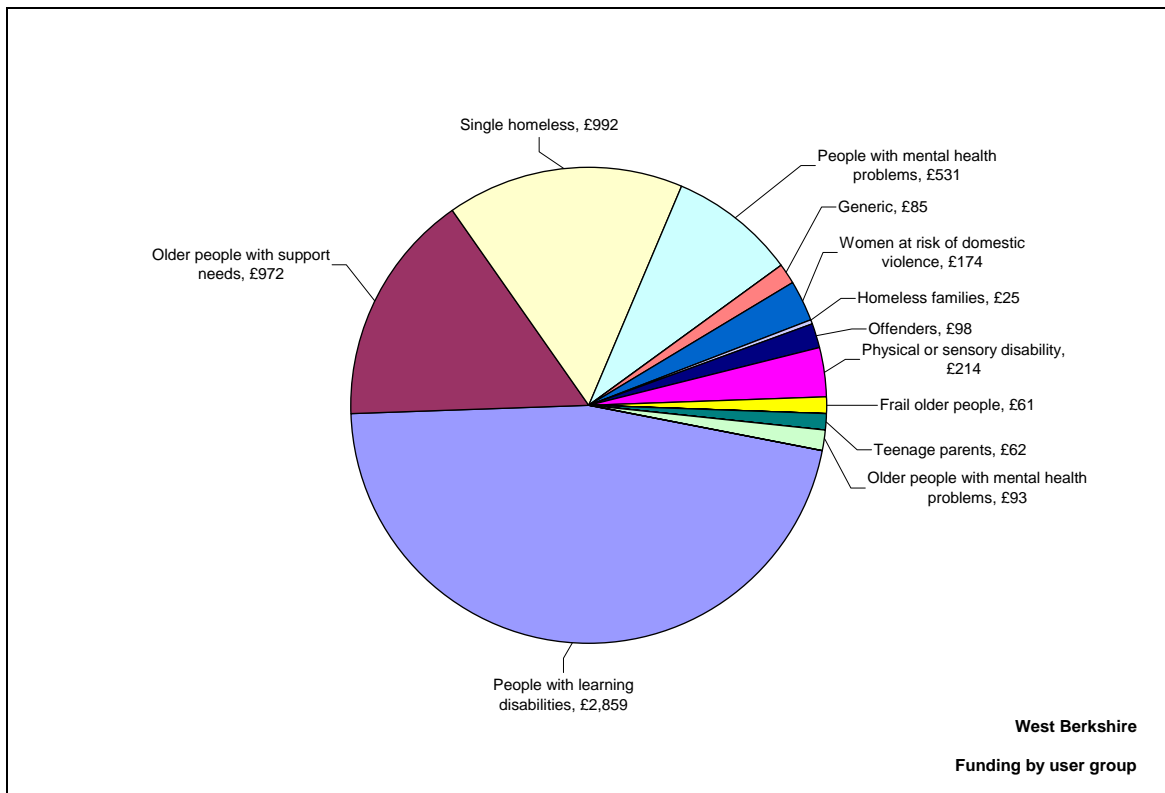


⁹ A comparator group of similar councils.

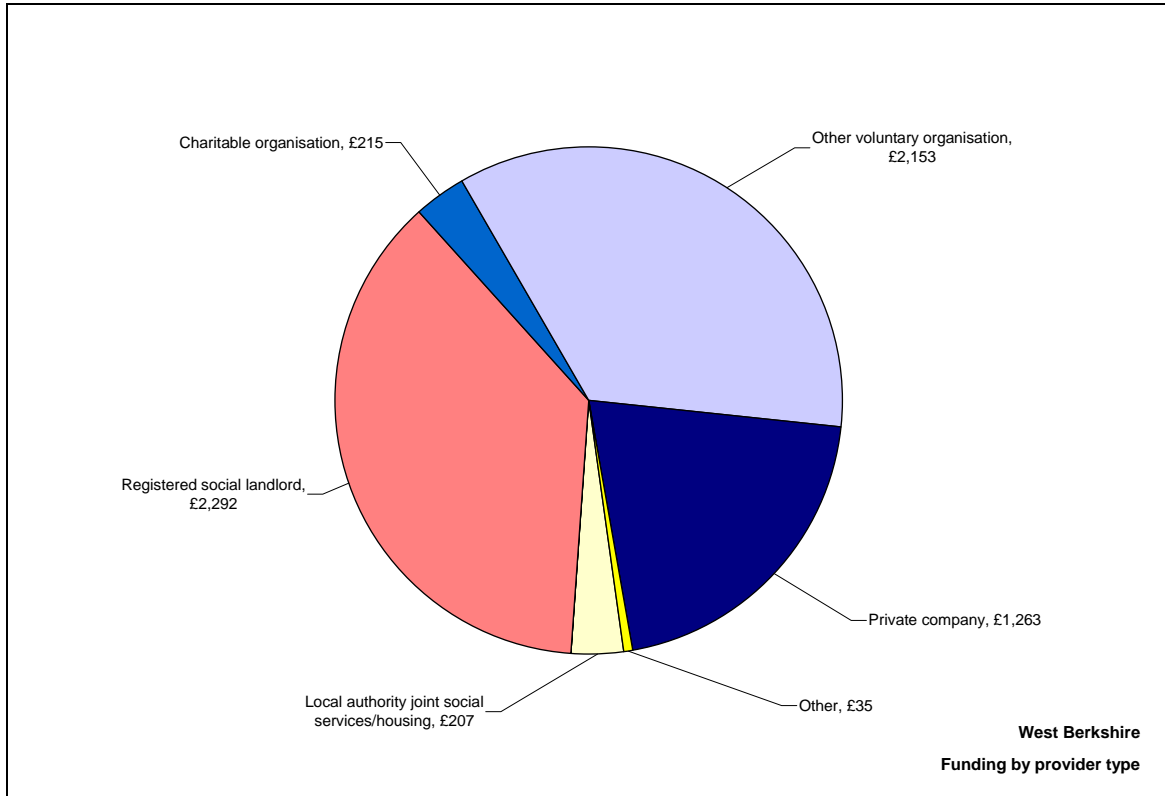
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all unitary councils and all English councils.



Share of spending between user groups (£000s)



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



Social Services star ratings November 2003

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

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

Social services performance indicators

Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03

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

| West Berkshire | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Significantly above average (★★★★) | Admissions of adults aged 18-64 to residential or nursing care (C27) Admissions to hospital of people aged 75 or over due to hypothermia or a fall (C33) Items of equipment costing less than £1,000 delivered within 3 weeks (D38) |
| Above average (★★★) | Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care (C26) |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| | Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) |
| Average (●●●) | Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) |
| Below average (●●) | Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Delayed discharges for older people (D41) New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks (D43) |
| Significantly below average (●) | |

Best value performance indicators

Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/3 compared with unitary councils

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

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| West Berkshire | |
| Within the best 25 per cent | The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2) Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a) Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b) |
| Average | Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a) Racial incidents recorded by the authority (BV174) Domestic violence refuge places (BV176) |
| Within the worst 25 per cent | Racial incidents that resulted in further action (BV175) |

Supporting People – Housing related support services

‘Supporting People’ is the Government’s long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide 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 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 support services with housing, social services, health and the probation service. Negotiation and consultation is also required with 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 programme allows for greater diversity of provision tailored to individual needs and delivered in a local strategic context. For example:

- ◆ support services for people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities whose needs have previously not been met in an appropriate or timely manner;
- ◆ support services for vulnerable older people who wish to live independently, including those in sheltered housing;
- ◆ temporary hostel accommodation – including probation hostels and those providing support for women fleeing domestic violence;
- ◆ support services for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties;
- ◆ floating support to a range of vulnerable people including young people leaving care; and
- ◆ home improvement agency services whose work includes providing practical support to older owner occupiers to enable them to live independently.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has published a number of consultation papers on the developing programme and a work plan setting out what local Authorities would 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

Positive Practice

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

Positive practice is something which makes a service more effective and, ultimately, more able to deliver what the customer wants. This appendix summarises areas of positive practice found during the inspection of the Supporting People Programme at West Berkshire council in 2003/04.

Item 1

- ◆ To avoid any conflict of interest when reviewing in-house services, an independent contractor has been engaged to review the council's adult placement service and an exchange was arranged with a neighbouring council (Reading) to bring an external perspective to a review of in-house tenancy support service. This demonstrates commitment to ensuring that reviews are impartial and address internal weaknesses as well as those of external providers. Both reports show that there are areas where improvement is necessary and comprehensive action plans have been agreed to address the issues raised.

Item 2

- ◆ A telephone enquiry on behalf of a woman with young children experiencing domestic violence was dealt with helpfully and very sympathetically by a member of staff in the council's homelessness department. Comprehensive, relevant advice on contacting Berkshire Women's Aid and their refuge accommodation was offered, along with the member of staff's name and direct line to make contact again if required. No attempt was made to deter the woman from leaving home, even though an owner occupier, or place any obstacles in the way, with the first priority being her safety.