

Supporting People Programme

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high-quality local services for the public. Our remit covers around 11,000 bodies in England, which between them spend more than £180 billion of public money each year. Our work covers local government, health, housing, community safety and fire and rescue services.

As an independent watchdog, we provide important information on the quality of public services. As a driving force for improvement in those services, we provide practical recommendations and spread best practice. As an independent auditor, we ensure that public services are good value for money and that public money is properly spent.

Copies of this report

If you require further copies of this report, or a copy in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call 0845 056 0566.

© Audit Commission 2007

For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 020 7828 1212 Fax: 020 7976 6187 Textphone (minicom): 020 7630 0421

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Contents

Supporting People Inspections	4
Summary	5
Scoring the Supporting People programme	6
Recommendations	9
Report	13
Context	13
How good is the Supporting People programme?	15
What has the programme aimed to achieve?	15
Is the programme meeting the needs of the local community and users?	16
Summary	39
What are the prospects for improvement to the Supporting People programme?	40
What is the Council's track record in delivering improvement?	40
How does the Council manage performance?	42
Does the Council have the capacity to improve?	45
Summary	46
Appendix 1	47
Demographic information	47
Performance information	48
Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken	57

Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

The former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)¹ has published a number of consultation papers on the developing programme and a work plan setting out what local authorities and their partners will need to achieve in order to deliver the programme effectively. All the relevant papers for Supporting People can be found on the Supporting People k-web that can be accessed through the Supporting People website: www.spkweb.org.uk.

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

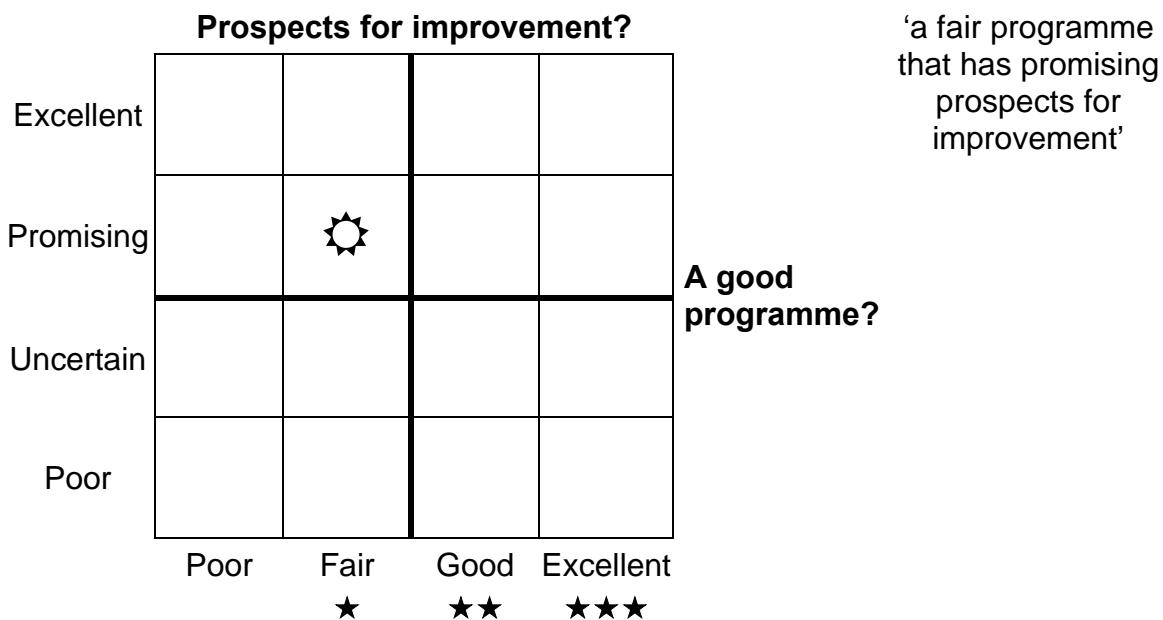
Summary

- 1 Overall Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is providing a 'fair' administration of the Supporting People programme with 'promising' prospects for improvement.
- 2 The delivery of the programme is a mix of strengths and weaknesses throughout the areas we have inspected. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for some service users and driving change for some client groups. Constructive working relationships have been established with service providers and the programme is being effectively managed on a day-to-day basis.
- 3 The Council shows a high level of commitment to the programme through senior officers, councillors and the governance arrangements are well developed with evidence of effective decision-making and wider partnership arrangements are working well. There are some strong links between the Supporting People strategy and other corporate plans and strategies. Service reviews have resulted in improved services and some efficiency gains.
- 4 The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills which have been supplemented by additional training and other corporate services and additional capacity has been provided by the establishment of the Care Trust. Financial capacity within the Supporting People programme is strong and there are appropriate procurement arrangements in place.
- 5 However, the lack of involvement of service users is a serious weakness, access and referral arrangements are inconsistent, the choices available for some service users are limited and there are gaps in service provision for some client groups.
- 6 Whist the Council's has a strong value for money culture, the approach to securing value for money from the Supporting People programme is underdeveloped, as is performance management of the programme and risk management arrangements are weak. The IT system requires further improvement and the approach to learning and cross-authority working is underdeveloped.

Scoring the Supporting People programme

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

Figure 1 Scoring chart²



Source: Audit Commission

8 We found the programme to be fair because:

- the programme is delivering some positive outcomes for service users;
- governance arrangements are well developed with evidence of effective decision-making and wider partnership arrangements are working well;
- there are clear links between the Supporting People strategy and the Council's strategic priorities;
- the Supporting People team are delivering the programme on a day-to-day basis well and relationships with service providers are strong;

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

- service reviews have resulted in poor services being de-commissioned and other services being re-configured and improved to better meet the needs of service users; and
- the Supporting People programme has been used to develop some culturally specific services.

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

- there is a lack of service user involvement in the Supporting People programme, which means they have not been effectively involved in developing services, governance arrangements, contract monitoring or developing information sources;
- access and referral arrangements are inconsistent and information is not always easily accessible;
- the choices available for some service users are limited and there are gaps in provision for some client groups;
- the approach to risk management is weak;
- the Supporting People strategy fails to clearly articulate how priorities will be delivered;
- the overall approach to securing value for money from the Supporting People programme is not robust; and
- there has been a lack of cross-authority working.

10 The programme has promising prospects for improvement. The following positive drivers for improvement are recognised:

- there is strong corporate commitment and effective leadership of the Supporting People programme;
- the programme has delivered new service provision for some client groups and extended provision for other groups;
- key programme milestones have been delivered on time;
- the Council has a strong culture of ensuring value for money;
- financial capacity is strong and efficiencies have been secured;
- the Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills which have been supplemented by other corporate services;
- additional capacity will be provided following the establishment of the Care Trust; and
- there are appropriate procurement arrangements in place.

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

- the Council's track record in involving service users in the programme is poor;
- the Council is unable to demonstrate a sustained track record in its approach to improving equality and diversity;
- the Supporting People programme is unable to demonstrate a track record in improving value for money; and
- the approach to learning and cross-authority working is underdeveloped.

Recommendations

12 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs³ and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with service users, service providers and councillors, and addresses all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Improve access to services by:

- *reviewing all information in conjunction with service users and providers;*
- *ensuring that information about services reach frontline staff including service providers;*
- *ensuring that all information for users of supporting people services includes language straplines and clear guidance on how to obtain it in different languages and formats;*
- *ensuring that information is regularly updated, including information on the council's and care trust's websites;*
- *ensuring there are robust access and referral arrangements in place which are routinely monitored and reviewed to ensure they meet the needs of service users; and*
- *ensuring that frontline staff across all partner organisations have sufficient knowledge and understanding of services to enable them to sign post and refer service users effectively.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

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

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

³ Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R2 Improve the delivery of the Supporting People programme by:

- *undertaking an assessment of the capacity of the Supporting People team to effectively deliver all elements of the Supporting People programme;*
- *reviewing the financial capacity of the programme to commission additional service provision by prudent use of budget surplus';*
- *review the annual programme plan and the strategy implementation plan to ensure they are SMART and that resources, targets and outcomes can be clearly identified and measured;*
- *developing a robust framework for measuring outcomes;*
- *updating the protocols that govern conflicts of interest to ensure that they reflect current arrangements;*
- *ensure that the priorities within the Supporting People strategy are clearly articulated so that progress with achieving them can be clearly measured and reported upon;*
- *ensure that robust data is available to enable services to be tailored to meets the needs of individual service users;*
- *exploring the possibilities of cross-authority working when undertaking service reviews; and*
- *ensure that there are robust risk management and contingency arrangements in place which meet the needs of vulnerable people.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

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

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

Recommendation

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

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

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

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

The implementation of these recommendations will have high impact with low costs. They should be fully implemented by March 2008.

Recommendation

R4 Improve the approach to securing value for money by:

- *obtaining benchmarking data on a regular basis and using this information to inform decision-making;*
- *adopting a definition and methodology for securing value for money and using them when undertaking service reviews and value for money assessments; and*
- *exploring the possibilities of undertaking joint procurement with neighbouring authorities.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

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

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

Recommendation

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

Recommendation

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

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

Dates of inspection: 4 to 8 December 2006

Regional contact details

Audit Commission

1st Floor

Bridge Business Park

Bridge Park Road

Thurmaston

Leicester LE4 8BL

Telephone: 0116 269 3311

Fax: 0116 269 4422

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Report

Context

The locality

- 14 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is one of the seven metropolitan authorities in the West Midlands conurbation. It covers an area of almost 18,000 hectares, two thirds of which is rural and worked farmland.
- 15 Solihull is home to 200,400 people, of these 19.8 per cent are aged over 65, which is slightly higher than the national average of 18.5 per cent. At 5.4 per cent the proportion of residents from black and ethnic minority (BME) communities is much lower than both the national (13 per cent) and regional (11 per cent) average.
- 16 In terms of deprivation, Solihull is ranked 183⁴rd out of 354 English councils. It is a borough of contrasts with some 16 per cent of its wards in the North of the Borough falling within the 10 per cent of most deprived wards in England. Unemployment at 2.3 per cent is just below the national average (2.4 per cent).
- 17 Solihull plays an increasingly important part in the sub-regional and West Midlands economy, with major assets including Birmingham International Airport and the National Exhibition Centre located within the Borough and as a result business tourism is a key part of the economy.

The Council

- 18 The Council has a political structure of a leader with a cabinet with the Conservative party in overall control. The Conservative Party have 26 seats, the Liberal Democrats 15, the Labour Party 7, Independents hold 2 seats and the British National Party has 1 seat.
- 19 Excluding schools staff, the Council employs 2,528 full-time equivalent staff to plan and deliver its services. In 2006/07, the Council has a revenue budget of £125 million, of which £34 million is allocated to adult social services and £1.4 million is allocated to strategic housing services.
- 20 In recent years, the Council has received the following assessments on the performance of its services:
 - under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) 2002, the Council's performance was rated as 'fair';
 - under CPA - the Harder Test in 2005 and 2006, the direction of travel was assessed as 'improving well' and the Council achieved a three-star rating (out of a possible four) for its overall performance;
 - in 2005 and 2006, adult services were assessed as 'serving most adults well with promising prospects of improvement';

⁴ Where 1 is the most deprived and 354 is the least deprived

- in 2005, education and children's social care services were assessed as 'serving most children well with promising prospects of improvement'; and
- during 2005/06 the Council successfully retained its 'Investors in People' status for the whole organisation.

The Supporting People programme

21 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area. The Council works in partnership with Solihull Care Trust and West Midlands Probation Area in commissioning Supporting People services.

22 The Council received a Supporting People grant of £2.585 million in 2006/07 which is reduction of £28,000 or 1.1 per cent on the previous year. The Council has also contributed additional funding to the Supporting People programme; this amounted to £300,000 in 2006/07. Despite reductions in annual grant since 2003/04, the Council has accumulated £590,753 in under-spent grant. The Council also received an administration grant of £132,461 in 2006/07, an amount which was supplemented by an additional £32,000 in 2005/06 to assist with completing service reviews.

23 Solihull Care Trust has been established as a way of providing more joined-up health and social services. All the services previously provided by the Primary Care Trust and the Council's Adult Social Services will be delivered by the Care Trust. The Care Trust is a National Health Service body. There are currently only nine in England and some of these only provide mental health and social care services. In Solihull, the Care Trust provides a wide range of services, including home, day and residential care, healthcare, treatment and advice, support for carers and health promotion advice and guidance.

24 The Supporting People team is located within the newly established Care Trust with staff transferring from the Council to the Care Trust in October 2006. The Lead Officer for the Supporting People programme is an Assistant Director within the Care Trust, who is currently responsible for commissioning all adult social care services including those funded by the Supporting People programme. The team consists of four staff made up of:

- Supporting People Team Leader (part-time);
- Contract and Review Officer;
- Assistant Contract and Review Officer; and
- Team Administrator (part-time).

25 Twenty-nine service providers deliver a total of 65 services including a Home Improvement Agency. In total, the programme currently funds 2,506 units of housing related support (excluding leaseholders), which is split between 780 units of supported accommodation and 1,726 units of floating support. The highest cost service at £360.14 per unit per week is an accommodation based service for young single homeless people and the lowest cost service is £2.53 per unit per week for a sheltered housing service for older people.

How good is the Supporting People programme?

What has the programme aimed to achieve?

26 The Council reviewed its priorities and objectives during 2005/06 and published a new council plan covering the period 2006 to 2009 which contains five objectives and ten improvement priorities, which are linked to the Community Strategy - 'A Place for People'. These are:

- *A brighter future for our children and young people:*
 - to provide improved facilities and support for our children and young people; and
 - to ensure our children and young people grow up in a safe environment with opportunities to make a positive contribution.
- *Improving your quality of life:*
 - to reduce the fear and incidence of crime and disorder;
 - to provide a cleaner, greener, more sustainable borough;
 - to address housing issues and deliver the Decent Homes Standard by 2010; and
 - to improve transport facilities throughout the borough.
- *Closing the gap of inequality:*
 - To reduce inequalities in respect of health and education and improve access to work and leisure
- *Treating you as an individual:*
 - to improve the customer experience by providing people with the information they require to make informed decisions on services provided; and
 - to provide services to older people in order to promote their independence and sustain their quality of life.
- *Good value services:*
 - to pursue value for money in all council services and effectively communicate this to the public.

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

27 The Council and its partners agreed a five-year Supporting People Strategy in February 2005. The Strategy does not contain an overall vision or a clear set of objectives that clearly supports local and national priorities for helping vulnerable people. However, it does include five priorities for the strategy and six key criteria for the commissioning of new services. The five priorities are:

- fulfil Supporting People programme grant conditions and directions issued by the Government;
- enable the continued commissioning of a range of high quality housing related support services for vulnerable people;
- achieve efficiency savings in 2005/06 or future years as required by Government or as a result of the introduction of a national funding distribution formula;
- continue to meet the requirement to fund individual leaseholders as notified by the Pensions Service as being in receipt of Pension Credit Guarantee; and
- enable the successful commissioning of the refuge for women fleeing domestic violence.

The six key commissioning criteria listed in the strategy are:

- the needs of women are addressed;
- services prevent homelessness;
- services which reduce the need for more intensive forms of care and support, eg residential care;
- services assist with the reduction of crime or the fear of crime;
- the needs of people from BME communities are recognised and addressed; and
- proposals are supported with evidence by a multi-agency 'Planning Team' that it will assist the implementation of national client group guidance and the local strategic response and meet consequent targets.

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

28 The assessment was based on the following key issues:

- governance and partnerships;
- grant compliance, strategy and needs;
- delivery arrangements;
- commissioning and performance;
- value for money;
- service user involvement;

- access to services and information;
- diversity; and
- outcomes for service users.

Governance and partnerships

29 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. There is a strong corporate commitment to the programme and additional funding has been provided. Governance arrangements are well developed and there is evidence of effective decision-making and wider partnership arrangements are working well. However, the effectiveness of the governance arrangements has been adversely affected by a lack of engagement with the voluntary sector and service users.

30 The CLG has set out the following structural arrangements for the governance, development and delivery of the Supporting People programme.

- Accountable Officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
- Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
- Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
- Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
- Councillors: approve key decisions of the Commissioning Body.
- Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.

31 There is strong corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme in terms of both resources and time from officers and councillors. Additional funding of £550,000 has been allocated by the Council to supplement the Supporting People grant during the last three years to ensure that the programme can be delivered effectively.

32 Elected members have been consistently involved in the Supporting People programme with regular reporting to the Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities and Older People. In addition, the Scrutiny Board for Healthier Communities and Older People have looked at the outcomes being achieved by the Supporting People programme. These arrangements ensure that there are good links between the Supporting People programme and both the Council and its political representatives.

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

- 33 The Commissioning Body is providing clear strategic leadership to the Supporting People team and the programme. The Commissioning Body meets on a monthly basis and its membership is drawn from senior managers from the Care Trust and the Council. It is effectively chaired by a senior manager from the West Midlands Probation Area. The members of the Commissioning Body demonstrate a clear understanding of the diverse needs of vulnerable groups and they are ensuring that there are shared priorities in their own organisations to deliver positive outcomes for service users.
- 34 There is evidence of effective decision-making and the Commissioning Body has made difficult decisions in relation to de-commissioning and reconfiguring long-standing services to improve the service to users. Timely decisions have been taken which have led to the meeting of key milestones set by the DCLG (formerly ODPM) such as the production of the five-year strategy.
- 35 There are clear terms of reference in place for all the governance groups, which are regularly reviewed, there are clear voting arrangements and conflict of interest protocols are in place, but these require updating to reflect potential conflicts of interest that may occur, following the creation of the Care Trust and to ensure that the decisions are made appropriately.
- 36 Meetings and agendas are well planned in advance; however information about these meetings is not easily accessible. Copies of Commissioning Body and Provider Forum minutes are available to view and download from the Supporting People website (www.spkweb.org.uk); however, Core Strategy Group minutes are not available. Minutes of meetings are not available to view on either the Council's or the Care Trust's website. This means that service users and other stakeholders cannot easily access information about the Programme in an open and transparent manner.
- 37 The Core Strategy Group is effective. It has a wide membership; it meets on a monthly basis with regular attendance and provides the necessary support for the Commissioning Body. It is chaired by the Accountable Officer. The Group's membership includes representatives from the Care Trust, the Probation Service, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, the Council's Housing Strategy Team and the Supporting People Team. There are also two representatives from the Providers Forum. However, there is no-one representing service users on this Group which is a weakness. Widespread membership ensures that there is a broad base for policy development and that most points of view are represented.
- 38 Service providers are effectively engaged in the Core Strategy Group. There is a clear structure in place for service provider representation. Two service providers attend the meetings to provide the service provider perspective and feedback to the Provider Forum. This arrangement provides an important link with the Provider Forum whose views are vital to the development of practical and sustainable policies.

- 39** The Core Strategy Group is well informed about the Supporting People programme and together with the Commissioning Body is responsible for monitoring progress with achieving the annual programme plan. The Group receives detailed reports on progress with service reviews and regular updates on issues affecting Supporting People locally, regionally and nationally. Recently, the Core Strategy Group has also been responsible for developing and updating the terms of reference, the value for money methodology and commenting on the updated housing strategy.
- 40** The Accountable Officer is an effective champion for the Supporting People programme. The role of Accountable Officer is held by the Council's Director of Adult Social Services, who also holds the position of Director of Health and Social Services at the Care Trust. With this dual role, the Accountable Officer has been able to raise and maintain the profile of the Supporting People programme within the Council, the Care Trust and also in wider partnerships, ensuring that other corporate strategies contain clear linkages to the Supporting People programme.
- 41** The involvement and links between the Supporting People programme and partners delivering services to vulnerable people are good. There are a number of service development groups in place for particular clients groups and these are attended by the Supporting People Lead Officer, who is also responsible for commissioning all adult social care services which ensures synergy in service development. There has been considerable joint working with the Housing Strategy Team on developing and reviewing the Supporting People strategy and the preparation and review of both the Housing and Homeless Strategies. The Supporting People team are also represented on the Strategic and Operational Multi-Agency Homeless Forums which ensures that links are made between agencies to co-ordinate the strategic development and delivery of homelessness services.
- 42** There are strong links between the Supporting People programme and the Crime and Reduction Partnership particularly as the Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities and Older People is currently the Chair of the West Midlands Probation Board and has been very supportive of developing services for 'unpopular' service users such as offenders. Members of the Drug Action Team have participated in service reviews. MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangements) are in place and are effectively dealing with high risk offenders. There is an information sharing protocol in place which includes all appropriate service providers. These arrangements help to contribute to effective strategic planning for service users.

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

43 The Providers Forum provides an effective way for service providers to be involved in the governance arrangements. There is an effective and well attended Providers Forum in place which meets bi-monthly. The Forum is provider led with the Supporting People team providing some administrative support. Service providers value the forum and it has provided an effective channel for communication and information. The Forum has also been used effectively to provide support and mentoring amongst service providers, with larger service providers helping to support small providers through the service review process and offering advice and guidance on developing policies and procedures. This approach is to be commended as it demonstrates a culture of mutual respect and a willingness to share good practice.

44 There has been limited involvement of the voluntary sector within the Supporting People programme and this remains an area for improvement. There is an Inclusive Forum, but this has predominately been attended by Service Providers and the Supporting People team. Its meetings coincide with those of the Providers Forum so that issues discussed at the Forum can be raised immediately with the Supporting People team and this appears to work well. However, its effectiveness is limited because it lacks wider representation from other key stakeholders, service users, their carers and advocates. A meeting has been held recently with voluntary sector agencies, in an effort to raise their awareness of the Supporting People programme and they have been invited to attend future meetings of the Inclusive Forum. In addition, the Voluntary and Community Sector Development Strategy was issued for consultation in December 2006 together with a draft compact. These are important documents in addressing the key issues of concern for the voluntary and sector in the Borough.

45 In addition, there has been no involvement of service users in the governance arrangements for the Supporting People programme. The Council has failed to ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place for service users to fully participate in decisions that affect them. The Council has also failed to use existing service user capacity within other services provided by Adult Social Services to best effect. Without their involvement, the Council cannot ensure that the views of key stakeholders and service users are being effectively represented.

Grant compliance, strategy and needs

46 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. The Supporting People strategy fails to clearly articulate how it will prioritise identified needs and delivery of the strategy is not being robustly monitored. However, the eligibility criteria have been used effectively to ensure that payments are made appropriately. There are clear links between the Supporting People strategy and the council's wider strategic priorities and information on support needs is being updated at appropriate intervals. There are appropriate arrangements in place to access move-on accommodation.

- 47 There are effective eligibility criteria in place which reflects Government guidelines. The Council was late in developing its eligibility criteria, with the criteria not being adopted until October 2005, and as a consequence it was not applied in the first phases of service reviews and the Council relied on guidelines issued by the CLG (formerly ODPM) to ensure grant compliance. Eligibility in these services will be re-examined as part of the new service review programme commencing in January 2007. Positively, the eligibility criteria were developed after full consultation with both the Core Strategy Group and the Provider Forum and as a consequence the criteria are well understood by all partners and service providers.
- 48 The Council has successfully addressed ineligible service provision through the service review process. There were relatively low levels of ineligible service provision being included in the initial 'pot'. Where costs had been inappropriately apportioned to the Supporting People programme, they were identified and services were de-commissioned, with funding being transferred to the appropriate community care budgets. A number of services have been restructured to ensure that their service provision meets the eligibility criteria. For example, a learning disability scheme which previously provided an accommodation based service for four service users has been re-modelled to provide an additional 30 places of floating support and better support facilities for existing service users. These measures help to ensure that the programme provides support in accordance with grant.
- 49 However, the Supporting People team acknowledge that the CLG retraction statement was not completed correctly on submission in September 2006. A nil return was submitted on the basis that all ineligible services have already been de-commissioned. However, it is not clear how elements of ineligibility are being identified within remaining services and how these costs will be removed from the Programme.
- 50 The five-year Supporting People strategy is accessible and easy to read, it contains clear links to other corporate strategies, but it fails to clearly articulate how its priorities will be achieved. The Strategy was delivered on time after full consultation with a wide range of partners and stakeholders. This included working with Birmingham Institute for the Deaf (BID) who produced a video for people with a hearing impairment and a summary version in Braille for a meeting of the Disabled Peoples Network. This ensured that service users could contribute to the development of the strategy.

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

- 51 There are clear links between the Supporting People programme and the Council's wider strategic priorities and these links are clearly identified in the Supporting People strategy. For example, the Council has identified providing services to older people in order to promote their independence and sustain their quality of life as a key improvement priority. The Council in conjunction with the Primary Care Trust have produced an extra care housing and care home accommodation strategy for older people - 'All Our Tomorrows'. The Supporting People team were involved in the development of this strategy. The strategy highlights the need for an additional 200 units of extra care accommodation during the next five years and the Supporting People team is working closely with the Housing Strategy team to ensure that there is sufficient Supporting People grant invested in older people's services to facilitate the development of new schemes.
- 52 However, while the Supporting People strategy does highlight unmet needs, for example there is currently no specific service provision for refugees or people with HIV/Aids, the strategy fails to clearly articulate if these needs will be met and what priority, if any, is being given to the different client groups within the strategy. Without clearer prioritisation it is difficult to see how competing needs will be met during the life of the strategy.
- 53 The delivery of the Supporting People strategy is not being robustly monitored. There is a strategy implementation plan, but this plan is not SMART⁵, it lacks clear targets and outcomes, it only updated on annual basis, when it is reported to the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group and it does not clearly link with the annual Programme Plan, which is used to monitor the day-to-day delivery of the programme. The Council fails to use the annual review of the strategy implementation plan as an opportunity to inform stakeholders and service users of progress and achievements made during the year, this is a missed opportunity to engage with service users and other stakeholders and canvass their views on whether the programme is delivering positive outcomes. In its current form the implementation plan is not an effect tool to monitor progress with delivering the strategy.
- 54 There are systems in place to ensure that information on the support needs of vulnerable groups is being updated. A needs analysis was undertaken as part of the development of the five-year Supporting People strategy. Additional work to update the needs information of individual client groups has been developed as part of individual sector work, which is usually undertaken jointly with the relevant commissioning manager. For example, during the development of the Joint Learning Disability Strategy, a detailed health needs assessment was undertaken, together with an assessment of accommodation needs. This has resulted in the development of an extra care scheme for people with learning disabilities, which should be completed during 2007. In this way the Council is ensuring that services are being planned and delivered based on the needs of vulnerable people.

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

- 55** There are appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that vulnerable people can access suitable move-on accommodation. Currently, there is not a shortage of suitable move-on accommodation in Solihull and relationships between service providers are generally positive. There are some formal arrangements in place for move on from short-term supported accommodation to permanent housing. A move on agreement has recently been put in place between Bromford Housing Group and Solihull Community Housing⁶ who will consider offers of permanent accommodation when service users have finished a programme of support within Bromford's services. This includes the provision of floating support as appropriate. This will help to ensure service users do not remain in services unnecessarily and will help to prevent 'sitting up' of supported accommodation.
- 56** The Council is currently developing a choice based lettings scheme (CBL), which is due to 'go live' in June 2007 and active consideration is currently being given to ensuring that the needs of vulnerable people are addressed as part of the scheme development. Service providers are actively involved in developing the CBL scheme. Two service providers are on the project team for the CBL scheme and it is a standing item on the agenda of Provider Forum meetings. In this way service providers will be able to influence the development of this scheme to ensure positive outcomes for service users.

Delivery arrangements

- 57** This is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. The Supporting People team is delivering the programme on a day-to-day basis well. Relationships with service providers are strong as is the financial management of the programme. However, performance management arrangements are underdeveloped, the budget surplus is not being used effectively, information about fairer charging assessments is limited and risk management arrangements are weak.
- 58** There is an effective Supporting People team in place. The Lead Officer for the Supporting People programme is an Assistant Director within the Care Trust, who is currently responsible for commissioning all adult social care services including those funded by the Supporting People programme, he is supported by a small team of four (two of which are part-time). This limited capacity has affected the team's ability to deliver all elements of the programme as effectively as possible, as referred to in later sections of this report.

⁶ Solihull Community Housing is the council's Arms Length Management Organisation and manages the council's housing stock

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

59 The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills and knowledge which have been further developed through training such as adult and child protection awareness, budgeting and management training. Additional resources have been used successfully to supplement the team, for example, consultants were used to undertake a value for money assessment of the costings for the new women's refuge. Resources have also been provided from within the Council to help with support on financial, legal and IT issues. The team have performed well in the submission of data extracts, milestones and additional requests for information to the DCLG. Submissions have been in the required format and on time. Payments to Service Providers are made accurately and on time. The Supporting People strategy was also delivered to the target date of March 2005.

60 Relationships with service providers are strong. Service providers were very positive about their relationship with the Supporting People team, which they described as 'mutually supportive'. The team is effective at ensuring service providers are kept up-to-date with the latest information about the Supporting People programme and this includes distributing external publications and SITRA newsletters to providers. There was also positive feedback from providers regarding the Service Provider day and the Supporting People awareness day, which were both organised in conjunction with service providers and helped to raise awareness about the Supporting People programme in general and helped providers share good practice and learn from each other.

61 Performance management is underdeveloped. The annual programme plan provides a work plan for the Supporting People team, the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group. It is monitored and updated on a monthly basis by both the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Group. But the plan is not fully SMART⁷, as there are a lack of measurable outcomes, the resources needed to complete tasks are not identified, there are no milestones and it is unclear which tasks have the greatest priority. In addition, the tasks included in the programme plan do not clearly link with the priorities set in the Strategy Implementation Plan, or with the key deliverable in the annual Adult Social Services Performance Plan. This makes it more difficult to monitor outcomes effectively, to ensure they are meeting the needs of service users.

62 As previously mentioned, there is little reporting on progress against the programme's overarching aims, with progress on delivering the strategy only reported annually. There are no local performance indicators or outcome measures for the programme as the Council is awaiting the publication of the national framework by the CLG. Without suitable measures in place and regular reporting it is difficult to determine what outcomes the programme is achieving for vulnerable people and to systematically address areas of under-performance.

⁷ SMART - specific, measurable, approved, realistic and timebound

- 63 Financial management of the Supporting People programme is strong. There are robust systems in place for the financial management of grant payments and these are monitored through the Commissioning Body on a monthly basis. The Council has forecasted the spending profile for the Supporting People programme up to 2010/2011 which shows that if spending and grants levels remain as estimated then the programme remains in a viable position. Currently the programme has a surplus of £590,753 in under-spent grant which amounts to 23 per cent of the total annual grant. This will be used to fund increased spending in future years. Despite wider uncertainties about the future funding of the national programme and the financial pressures facing the Council it has supported the commissioning of new services.
- 64 The links between the Supporting People programme and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) are underdeveloped. Solihull is preparing a Local Area Agreement (LAA) for commencement in 2007/08 and the Commissioning Body is currently considering how to make effective links between the Supporting People programme, the LSP and the themes contained within the interim LAA. Without clear links, the Council cannot ensure that the Supporting People programme will make an appropriate contribution towards meeting the agreed targets within the LAA.
- 65 Information about fairer charging assessments is not easy to access for service users and their carers, and monitoring arrangements are currently underdeveloped. There are appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that fairer charging assessments are undertaken for Supporting People service users. There is a fairer charging policy in place, which was introduced in 2002 and is currently being reviewed. But there is limited information about fairer charging assessments in the Council's Supporting People leaflets and these are not readily available and a corporate leaflet about fairer charging was out of print at the time our inspection. Information on the Council's website was extremely limited and difficult to access. This makes it difficult for service users and their carers to access appropriate information.
- 66 Assessments are undertaken by the Housing Benefit team and service users who make an unsuccessful claim for housing benefit are sent information about their entitlement to apply for a fairer charging assessment. However, information about the number of assessments requested and the outcomes of these is not routinely reported to the Supporting People team, which limits their ability to ensure that service users are receiving the financial help they are entitled to. Following our inspection, procedures were put in place to ensure that team are notified about the number of applications received and assessments made. Since 2004, the Council has received 107 applications, of which 59 were successful.
- 67 Risk management arrangements are weak. There is no separate risk register for the Supporting People programme. Some risks are identified within the Adult Social Services risk register; however, these have not been discussed or reviewed by the Commissioning Body. In addition, a comprehensive risk assessment of the Supporting People programme has not been undertaken and there are no specific contingency plans in place to deal with a potential service withdrawal or failure. This leaves vulnerable service users at potential risk.

Commissioning and performance

68 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. Service reviews were undertaken in a consistent and robust manner and have led to positive outcomes for the programme and for service users. There are arrangements in place to ensure that services continue to improve and there has been good progress in agreeing steady state contracts. However, there was a lack of external scrutiny of service reviews, cross-authority working is underdeveloped and there is an absence of performance targets in steady state contracts.

69 Service reviews were undertaken in a consistent and robust manner. Reviews were undertaken to a clear timetable and service providers were kept well informed about the progress of their reviews. All reviews were completed by the March 2006 deadline and the Council successfully bid for additional resources from the former ODPM, to enable an officer with relevant experience to be seconded from a Service Provider to add additional capacity to the team whilst reviews were being undertaken. A joint approach between the Supporting People team and the relevant Commissioning Manager meant that there was specialist input into reviews where required, thereby ensuring outcomes from reviews were widely shared.

70 Most providers are positive about the approach the Council has taken to the service reviews, which they found to be thorough and robust. Providers received support and guidance from the Supporting People team and reviews were completed within agreed timescales and final reports were issued promptly. Service Providers were asked for their feedback at the end of the service review process via a questionnaire. Providers believe that the quality assessment framework (QAF) has been used effectively to drive up standards in the local area.

71 The Commissioning Body was effective in challenging the outcomes from service reviews. The outcomes of all service reviews were reported to the Commissioning Body and there is evidence to show that the Commissioning Body effectively challenged a number of review outcomes. However, there was a lack of external challenge and validation to service reviews, with no reviews being examined by neighbouring authorities or moderation panels drawn from partner agencies. This meant there was a lack of independent scrutiny of the service review process.

72 Service reviews have resulted in the de-commissioning of a number of services; these were either ineligible services that were being inappropriately funded by the Supporting People grant or poorly performing services that did not improve following the review of improvement plans. Service reviews have also led to the improved configuration of some services; examples include services for women at risk of domestic violence and people with learning disabilities, which have led to improved outcomes for service users.

- 73** Service providers were able to challenge the outcomes of reviews and there is a documented service review procedure in place which includes an appeals process. However, no appeals have been made to date in Solihull as service providers were able to successfully challenge the outcome of their service review without needing to use the formal appeals procedure. There is no specific complaints procedure in place for Supporting People, complainants can use the council's corporate complaints procedure, which is robustly monitored and the outcomes from which are reported to ensure that the organisation learns from complaints. There has been one complaint relating to the Supporting People programme since 2004 and this was resolved appropriately.
- 74** There are improvement planning and monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that services continue to improve following service reviews, however, these could be used more effectively to drive service improvement. Out of 65 services reviewed, 22 services received a score of D using the QAF. Currently all services are now assessed at C or above, of these only 9 are rated as A or B. There is evidence that improvement plans are regularly monitored to ensure compliance with the QAF. However, plans primarily focus on the QAF and do not always capture progress against other review outcomes, such as value for money and service re-configuration, using indicators such as these would give a more rounded view of service improvement.
- 75** Following the completion of the first round of service reviews, the Commissioning Body has agreed a methodology and timetable for a new programme of service reviews which will commence in January 2007. Priority for reviews has been given to new schemes that have not yet been reviewed, services where there are particular concerns following previous reviews and subsequent monitoring and services where other major changes have taken place such as a new service provider or major remodelling. The review programme will build on existing information about services and will incorporate the QAF. It will include the encouragement of continual improvement where services have achieved level A, by use of supplementary objectives. The timetable for the review programme, which appears to be achievable, has been agreed by the Core Strategy Group and the Provider Forum.
- 76** Service Providers are well informed and have a clear understanding of the present contractual arrangements. The Council has made good progress with agreeing steady state contracts with only three contracts still waiting to be signed at the time of our inspection. However, contracts do not contain any performance targets, which is a missed opportunity and limits the Council's ability to effectively monitor outcomes from the contracts it has agreed with service providers.

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

77 The approach to cross-authority working is underdeveloped. The Council has been unable to develop approaches with neighbouring authorities to reduce burdens or to improve efficiency in the areas of quality assurance and monitoring shared providers. The neighbouring authorities have routinely met as a regional group but have failed to make headway in this area. The Commissioning Body did consider joint accreditation arrangements but rejected the proposal because they were not convinced that other ALA's would take an equally robust approach as being adopted in Solihull. Although clearly difficult to resolve, the impact upon service providers and also on costs because of some duplication of effort is a negative feature.

Value for money

78 This is an area where weaknesses outweigh strengths. The approach to securing value for money in the Supporting People programme is not robust. There is no agreed definition or methodology in place, cost comparisons are not routinely undertaken, there have been limited outcomes from benchmarking and cross-authority working is underdeveloped. However, there is a strong corporate approach to securing value for money in other areas of council responsibility and the service review process and other negotiated savings have helped to secure efficiencies in service delivery. There are procurement arrangements in place although these could be strengthened.

How do costs compare?

79 Cost comparisons are not undertaken in a robust manner. The Council has not undertaken any cost comparisons with other ALA's so it has little awareness about how its costs compare both regionally and across England. National cost comparisons show that Solihull is the 10th lowest funded authority out of 150 ALA's and regionally it is the lowest funded both per head of population and in cash terms. This results, overall, in less people receiving housing related support than in other ALA's.

80 The costs per unit, set out in the table below (excluding community alarms) shows a generally lower level of unit cost by comparison both regionally and across England, indicating lower cost services and a much lower level of funding per head of population. However, these figures should be treated with some caution as there has been a number of changes since the platinum cut data⁸ was produced and ALA's should be undertaking their own cost comparison exercises.

⁸ Source: DCLG (formerly ODPM) 'Platinum cut' figures, November 2003

Table 1 Unit costs comparison of SP grant per head of population - 2003/04 (£ per cent week)

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Solihull MBC	£0.26	£13.69	£13.69	£53.33
West Midlands	£0.43	£29.71	£32.34	£42.15
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£76.37

How is value for money managed?

- 81 The Council has a strong culture of ensuring value for money (VFM) and councillors and managers actively seek to challenge their approach to VFM. Senior managers are accountable for delivering value for money and the Council has scored three out of four for its approach to VFM for two years running as part of its annual Use of Resources assessment.
- 82 Despite this, the approach to assessing and scrutinising the VFM of the Supporting People programme is weak. There is no overall definition of VFM and there is no VFM methodology in place, although extensive work is currently being undertaken to introduce and pilot a methodology which will assess three elements; cost, quality and performance. However, it appears that the methodology will not be in place prior to the commencement of the new service review programme, which means that some services will be reviewed without a robust VFM assessment being undertaken. This is a serious weakness which needs to be addressed.
- 83 Value for money has not been fully addressed as part of the service review process to date. Although there is some evidence of assessment of cost, quality and performance this was not part of a fully agreed approach or framework. This has limited the opportunities to enable high cost services to be effectively challenged or explored. There has been no involvement of service users, their carers or advocates in scrutinising the impact of decisions or determining the overall approach to VFM, which means their views on the cost and quality of services have not been considered.

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

- 84 There has been no effective benchmarking undertaken to compare the costs and quality of service provision. Solihull has only very recently joined a benchmarking group that will look at performance indicator data; however, there have been no outcomes from this group to date. Without robust comparative data, it will be more difficult for the Council to determine whether its services are delivering VFM.
- 85 Despite this, the service review process and other negotiated savings have helped to secure efficiencies in service delivery. A number of contracts have been renegotiated with resulting increases in the numbers of service users being supported at no extra cost. For example, the re-modelling and amalgamation of one high cost learning disability service with another service has enabled up to 53 service users to receive floating support, an increase on the previous figure of 24 with an overall efficiency gain valued at £230,000 in 2006/07. Since 2004/05 the Supporting People programme has achieved a total of £1,146 million in efficiency gains (both cashable and non-cashable), which have been included in the council's Annual Efficiency Statement. These savings have been used to maintain service provision and also to commission seven new services.
- 86 Savings have also been used to pay inflationary increases. The Commissioning Body has agreed to fund a two per cent increase in both 2006/07 and 2007/08 for all services that fall below a maximum unit cost agreed in January 2005. A different unit cost is applied for different client groups based on the standard residential care cost. Service providers whose costs are above these rates do not receive an inflationary uplift, so in real terms their contract values will reduce over time.
- 87 There has been consideration of VFM when procuring new services. For example, the Council engaged an external consultant to undertake a VFM assessment of the cost of the new women's refuge, which included an assessment of quality, but not planned outcomes. This resulted in an estimated annual saving of £98,000 based on the original costings for the project which was agreed with the service provider following detailed negotiations.
- 88 There are appropriate procurement arrangements in place. There is an operational commissioning statement for Adult Social Services which was agreed in February 2005 and covers the period 2005/06 to 2008/09. This is a comprehensive document and has been used effectively to commission new services, including services for both BME service users and travellers using specialist service providers. The Council's approach to procurement has enabled the establishment of a level playing field which ensures equity in procurement.
- 89 The approach to cross-authority work with regard to securing VFM and pursuing joint procurement opportunities is underdeveloped. There have been no efficiency gains through cross-authority working and there are no plans for Solihull to consider joint procurement opportunities with either members of the West Midlands Regional Implementation Group (WMRIG) or other neighbouring ALA's. This is a wasted opportunity to secure greater efficiency gains and add greater value to the Supporting People programme, bearing in mind that Solihull has identified unmet needs for groups such as refugees and people with HIV/Aids that could be met in conjunction with a neighbouring authority.

Service user involvement

- 90 This is an area of weakness for the Council. There are limited opportunities for service users, their carers and advocates to be involved in developing services and establishing priorities, so there have been limited outcomes to date. There is no involvement of service users in either governance or performance management arrangements.
- 91 Service user involvement in the Supporting People programme has been recognised by the Council as an area for improvement. There is a service user and carer engagement strategy in place for Adult Social Services. However, the strategy contains no clear targets or planned outcomes and it has not been used by the Supporting People team to develop a clear, well resourced plan to engage with service users and their carers and advocates.
- 92 Service users had limited input into the development of the Supporting People strategy. As part of the consultation on the draft strategy, the Council worked with the Birmingham Institute for the Deaf (BID) who produced a video for people with a hearing impairment and a summary version in Braille for a meeting of the Disabled Peoples Network, this helped to ensure that service users could be effectively involved in the consultation. However, the overall approach to the development of the strategy lacked robustness. There was no clear plan for involving service users from all client groups in the development of the strategy. Without the input of service users, the Council cannot demonstrate that the current strategy adequately reflects users' priorities.
- 93 The Council has failed to use its existing consultation frameworks effectively to ensure service user involvement in the Supporting People programme. The Council has a number of joint commissioning boards which include both service user and carer representation. The Council also has a successful AgeSafe forum whose core responsibility is promoting and facilitating debate and dialogue with older people and agencies with an interest in working with older people. However, the Supporting People team has not used these frameworks to develop an effective way of involving service users in policy development.
- 94 Service users have been involved in service reviews and where appropriate advocates were used to ensure that very vulnerable service users had the opportunity to fully participate in reviews. Their views have been reflected in action plans for improvements to services. There is also evidence that some service providers are effective at involving service users in making decisions that affect their individual services.
- 95 Service users are not consistently involved in monitoring the performance of service providers. There are no robust systems in place to allow service users to give regular feedback on the service they receive from their service providers. Individual service providers collect customer satisfaction information, for example the Safe and Sound service undertakes a survey every two years and the most recent survey shows that satisfaction with the service has increased. However, feedback is not currently collected and used in a systematic way.

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

96 The Council is currently analysing the results of its first service user survey, which was being undertaken during our inspection. The questionnaire asks service users about existing services and improvements they would like to see. The Council did involve service providers in the design of the survey forms and this included commissioning one provider to produce an 'easy read' version of the questionnaire for service users with learning difficulties. However, not all service providers were satisfied that their comments about the design and content of the questionnaire were taken into account. The Council failed to involve any service users or their advocates in the design of the questionnaire; this is a missed opportunity to involve service users in a service development and ensure an outcome that meets user's needs and aspirations.

97 Service users are not effectively represented in Supporting People governance structures. There are no representatives from service users or their carers or advocates taking part in any of the governance arrangements for the Supporting People programme. This means that service users are currently excluded from contributing to and making decisions that affect them and other vulnerable people.

Access to services and information

98 There is an area of weaknesses for the Council. There is a comprehensive service directory and information leaflets for Supporting People services. However, access and referral arrangements are not consistently robust, information is not always easily accessible and service users have not been involved in developing information sources.

99 There are no effective arrangements in place to ensure that access and referral arrangements are fair and transparent and are applied to all services. Access to services is currently determined by individual service providers on a service by service basis and there are no additional checks or mechanisms in place to check that services are easily accessible to those who need them. The Council is not working effectively with service providers in assessing the level of demand for services in terms of referral rates, waiting times and numbers to inform future commissioning in terms of services where there is most pressure and/or demand from service users. Additionally, only limited work is currently being undertaken to look at the reasons why some services are being consistently under-utilised. Without comprehensive information the Council cannot demonstrate that services are easily accessible to all service users.

100 The arrangements to enable potential service users to access support services are not consistent. Staff can access information about the Supporting People programme from the council's intranet and a copy of the service directory is held in the council's customer contact centres - Solihull Connect. However, the mystery shopping enquires we made about accessing homelessness, domestic violence, learning and physical disability services were handled inconsistently. We received good advice about how to access services for a family fleeing domestic violence and for a young person who had learning difficulties. However, the advice we received about a young person with physical difficulties varied depending upon the office visited and the advice given to a young man aged 17 who had been made homeless was poor. He was given incorrect information and told to return to a neighbouring authority without being offered the opportunity of a formal homeless interview. This demonstrates a need for further training for frontline staff. Potential service users can be discouraged from seeking assistance if they do not have confidence that frontline staff are well informed about the services they may need.

101 The Council provides two leaflets about Supporting People services, but these are not easily accessible in all council offices. The leaflets give basic information about long and short-term services. The Council also produces a leaflet about fairer charging, but as mentioned earlier in this report, this was out of print at the time of inspection and was therefore unavailable for customers. The Long Term Care Charter is informative and up-to-date and contains information about Supporting People services, however, unlike other services; it contains no service standards for supporting people services which is a missed opportunity for the Council. None of the leaflets contain language straplines, so service users who first language is not English, would find it more difficult to obtain translated copies of this information. Leaflets are available in other formats on request; however, this option is not clearly advertised on the leaflets. Mystery shopping also revealed that these leaflets were not readily available at Solihull Connect. This is a barrier to accessing services.

102 A comprehensive directory of Supporting People services is available and was updated in September 2006. The directory includes useful information about support services in Solihull including the number of units available for each client group and referral arrangements for each service. It also provides contact details for other useful services and agencies and gives key information about eligibility criteria. Feedback about the directory has been positive.

103 Information about the Supporting People programme and services is difficult to access on the council's website. There is little information about the Supporting People programme on the council's website and it is difficult to locate. When searching for information about housing related support services you are directed to the pages that relate to Solihull Community Housing, which gives some information about services, but does not provide comprehensive information about all service providers. This means that service users and other stakeholders cannot easily access information about the Programme. Information about Supporting People is easier to access on the Care Trust website which includes a direct link to the Supporting People service directory and copies of relevant plans and strategies including the Supporting People strategy.

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

104 There has been no input from service users, their carers or advocates into the design and content of Supporting People leaflets, service directory or the web site. Service providers were involved in the updating of the service directory. This means that the current range of information may not fully meet the needs of recipients.

Diversity

105 This is an area where there is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Corporate progress has been slow and as a consequence progress with achieving diversity targets is mixed and there is limited information about the needs of service users. However, the Supporting People programme has supported the development of culturally sensitive services and service reviews have successfully challenged potentially discriminatory behaviour.

106 Corporate progress in addressing the diversity agenda has been slow. The Council has remained at level one of the Equalities Standard since 2003/04, despite having a target to reach level two for the last three years. The target has been rolled forward and the Council is aiming to reach level two by the end of 2006/7. Performance in other areas of diversity is mixed, for example the percentage of staff from BME groups and women in senior positions is rising, but the percentage of staff that have a disability is falling. In 2005/06, 94 per cent of council buildings had facilities for people with disabilities, missing the Government target, which was to achieve 100 per cent compliance by October 2005, but current performance is amongst the best 25 per cent when compared to all councils nationally. The Council has yet to publish its Disability Equality Statement which should have been published at the beginning of December. Without sustained corporate leadership in this area, the Council is unlikely to achieve its corporate objective of 'treating customers as individuals'.

107 Equality impact assessments have been undertaken of the Supporting People and Homelessness strategies and an assessment of the allocations scheme is nearing completion. In undertaking these assessments the Council has been able to consider how these plans and strategies impact on the diverse needs of the local community.

108 There is very limited information collected about the diverse needs of service users. Solihull Connect does not currently monitor the diversity profile of service users and the Supporting People team has only recently introduced ethnicity monitoring for long-term service users via the Supporting People service user notification form, but this is at an early stage and no other information is collected or analysed. This means it is difficult for the Council to assess the extent to which Supporting People services are meeting the needs of diverse groups.

- 109** The Supporting People programme has supported the development of culturally sensitive services. The Supporting People strategy identified a need for the development of services specifically to meet the needs of travellers and service users from BME communities. Two floating support services have been commissioned during 2006 to meet these needs and both schemes can support up to 15 service users at one time, early indications show a demand for both schemes with referrals increasing month by month and monitoring information provided by one of the service providers shows that service users come from a range of BME groups. There are also examples where cultural diversity has been considered within new service developments, for example, the new women's refuge includes a prayer room and proposals for to develop extra care housing schemes will include consideration of the cultural needs of Asian elders.
- 110** Service reviews have been used effectively to challenge potentially discriminatory behaviour by service providers. For example, the admission criteria for one service was challenged and discussions held with the provider when it appeared to potentially exclude non-christians from accessing this service. This will help to ensure that services are accessible to all service users.
- 111** Equality and diversity training has been variable. Members of the Supporting People team have all received some training as part of their induction course. However, despite repeated requests they have been unable to access additional training. This may lead to variable knowledge of equality and diversity issues amongst staff which may affect their ability to deliver services equitably.

Outcomes for service users

- 112** This is an area where there is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for service users and driving change for some client groups so that services better reflect the priorities for the area. However, the choices available for some service users remain limited, the outcomes for service users are not being measured effectively and the effectiveness of support planning is mixed. In addition the lack of cross-authority working is hindering the identification of sub-regional commissioning opportunities for small, marginalised groups for whom there is currently no provision.

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

113 The range of Supporting People services is beginning to better meet local needs as a result of some service reconfiguration through service reviews and additional service provision. Gaps in service provision have been identified in the Supporting People strategy. Additional support services has been commissioned by the Council in line with priorities over the last three years, these include:

- floating support service for BME service users provided by a specialist service provider;
- floating support service for travellers provided by a specialist service provider;
- floating support service for people at risk of offending;
- floating support service for mentally disordered offenders;
- supported accommodation for people with mental health problems; and
- a women's refuge for families fleeing domestic violence.

114 Service improvements have been driven by the QAF and service reviews and have resulted in benefits for service users. A number of contracts have been renegotiated with resulting increases in the numbers of service users being supported at no extra cost. Services have also been reconfigured and new services commissioned to provide additional floating support services, leading to a nine per cent increase in the number of floating support units and providing more choice of service provision for some service users.

115 However, the choices available for some service users are still limited, despite the commissioning of new services for some client groups, there are still no services available for refugees, people with alcohol problems and people with HIV/Aids, despite these being identified as priorities within the Supporting People strategy. Without appropriate service provision vulnerable people will be unable to receive the support services they need. The outcomes from cross-authority working have been limited in terms of the outcomes for service users. The Council have not pursued opportunities for sub-regional or regional commissioning of services that could help to address gaps in service provision.

116 Service reviews have been used effectively to drive up the standards within existing services but there are some missed opportunities to drive further improvements. A number of poorly performing services were de-commissioned and all remaining services are now assessed at level C or above, of these nine are rated as A or B. There are effective improvement plans in place to ensure that services continue to improve. However, the programme is not maximising opportunities to drive forward improvements to services. For example, service specifications do not outline expectations for providers to move through levels of the QAF or consider the use of supplementary QAF objectives. This reduces the scope of the programme to deliver effective outcomes for service users.

- 117** There have been gaps in service provision for some service users. Whilst it is positive that poorly performing services have been de-commissioned, there have been considerable delays in commissioning a replacement service for one of these services. The Commissioning Body made a decision to terminate a contract for a poorly performing floating support service for people with drug problems in July 2006 and the service provider was given three months notice. However, little progress has been made on re-commissioning this service, with a report being submitted to the Commissioning Body in November 2006, outlining a timetable for the procurement of a new contract. This shows that a new service will not be operational until May 2007; this means there will be no specialist service provision for this vulnerable client group for a considerable period of time.
- 118** The Council has not yet progressed work towards an outcomes framework for its Supporting People programme and existing performance indicators are not used effectively to monitor outcomes for service users. It is recognised that ALAs are awaiting further guidance from CLG but some initial work should be taking place at a regional level in order to inform the local response. Without a transparent framework in place the Council is unable to effectively measure improvements in outcomes for service users.
- 119** The effectiveness of support planning is mixed. In a number of schemes we visited, support planning was being used effectively to ensure that service users were receiving the appropriate level and types of support. However, in some schemes, service users were not given copies of their support plans or involved in the review of these plans. This will limit the effectiveness of support planning as a means of promoting independence.
- 120** Examples of individual testimonies and case studies provided show that some service users have achieved positive outcomes from Supporting People funded services. This is achieved through the support offered by the provider and links into employment, training, counselling and therapeutic services. In some cases, service users have moved into independent accommodation provided by housing associations with ongoing support helping them to maintain their tenancy. Two case studies illustrating the benefits of the Supporting People programme in Solihull are set out overleaf.

Case Study 1

Service user is a 27 year old female who was referred to a floating support scheme for people at risk of offending when she was released after spending five years in custody and was homeless.

She has two children aged six and two. She had arrears from a previous tenancy and although her father paid the debt, she was likely to be considered intentionally homeless as she was previously evicted for rent arrears.

The service provider supported her with her homeless application and liaised with the housing department to secure a three bedrooomed maisonette.

She wanted to work so she was assisted with budget plans for benefits and working, calculating family tax credit and housing benefit entitlements.

She was helped with finding employment and she is now living happily with her children, working and has passed her driving test.

Case Study 2

Service user is 21 year old female with learning difficulties. She has two children aged under 5 and she was referred to a floating support scheme for BME service users by her family.

Service user is on a youth offending programme and has problems with anger management. Her partner is also an ex-offender who was not taking part in his probation programme and was harassing her.

Support was offered to help the service user to keep her appointments at her local probation office and ensure that she successfully completed her probation programme and did not re-offend.

Service user was supported to stop smoking by signposting her to a local smoking cessation programme. She was also supported to access child care services and her children are now in local playgroups, allowing her to enrol on a part-time beauty therapy course at a local college.

The service user was also referred to local mental health services and Women's Aid for floating support whilst her partner continued to harass her.

The service user was helped to apply for council accommodation, which she decided to refuse because she felt she would be at risk of racial abuse and she is currently waiting to be made a further offer.

The floating support given has enabled the service user to build her level of confidence and become less fearful of approaching agencies for help and support.

Summary

- 121** We have assessed the administration of the Supporting People programme by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to be a 'fair', one-star service.
- 122** The delivery of the programme is a mix of strengths and weaknesses throughout the areas we have inspected. The programme is delivering positive outcomes for some service users and driving change for some client groups. Good working relationships have been established with service providers and the programme is being effectively managed on a day-to-day basis. The Council shows a high level of commitment to the programme through senior officers, councillors and the governance arrangements are well developed with evidence of effective decision-making and wider partnership arrangements are working. There are some strong links between the Supporting People strategy and other corporate plans and strategies. Service reviews have resulted in improved services and some efficiency gains.
- 123** However, the lack of involvement of service users is a serious weakness, access and referral arrangements are inconsistent, the choices available for some service users are limited, and there are gaps in service provision for some client groups. Corporate progress on addressing the diversity agenda has been slow, performance management of the Supporting People programme is underdeveloped and risk management arrangements are weak. The overall approach to value for money is not robust, the Council were slow to agree an eligibility criteria, there is no agreed definition of VFM or methodology in place, cost comparisons are not routinely undertaken, there have been limited outcomes from benchmarking and the lack of cross-authority working has meant that possible efficiency gains and joint procurement opportunities have not been explored.

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

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

- 124** Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The Supporting People programme has delivered new service provision for some client groups and expanded provision for other groups. Key programme milestones have been delivered on time and financial efficiencies have been secured and the Council has responded quickly to feedback received during our inspections by implementing a number of 'quick wins' However, the Council's track record in involving service users in the programme has been poor, access and referral arrangements lack robustness and the approach to securing value for money from the Supporting People programme is underdeveloped.
- 125** The Supporting People programme in Solihull has delivered additional services for a number of client groups who are identified as a priority in the five year strategy, for example, additional services for women suffering from domestic violence have been developed as well as floating support schemes for travellers and BME service users. Some services have also been re-configured through service reviews, to better meet the needs of their service users, including changing provision from accommodation based support to more flexible floating support schemes. As a result the number of floating support units has increased by nine per cent. However, gaps in provision remain with some client groups unable to access specialist service provision, despite their needs being identified as a priority in the strategy. Without appropriate service provision vulnerable people will be unable to receive the support services they need.
- 126** The Supporting People partnership has achieved its key milestones on time, which have led to service improvements. The Supporting People strategy was delivered on time as was the service review programme, which was undertaken in a consistent and robust manner. This has led to some poorly performing services being de-commissioned whilst other services have been subject to improvement plans to ensure that they continue to improve.
- 127** The Supporting People team have delivered most elements of the programme effectively. They have established and maintained positive working relationships with service providers have ensured that payments to providers have always been made in a timely and accurate manner and the majority of steady state contracts are in place.

128 The Supporting People team responded quickly to the feedback they received during our inspection and made a number of immediate service improvements which included:

- leaflets for service users now include language straplines;
- improvements made to the Care Trust, Solihull Community Trust and spkweb websites to make it easier to access information about the Supporting People programme in Solihull;
- minutes of the Core Strategy Group are now available on the spkweb;
- software purchased to enable 'SMARTer' programme planning;
- the service user survey has analysed and service users identified who would like to be involved in service developments. All service users will receive a copy of the survey results;
- a system is now in place for six monthly reporting of fairer charging data to the Core Strategy Group; and
- the Supporting People team have attended meetings with a number of key stakeholders with the aim of ensuring that they are kept well informed about the Supporting People programme, for example AgeSafe officers and the new Area Social Care Managers.

129 Performance indicators (PI's) show that service providers are delivering a consistent level of performance. Comparisons of the four Supporting People PI's between 2004/05 and 2005/06 show that service providers performance has been maintained in the four areas of service availability, utilisation levels, staffing levels and throughput. The figures show there is little difference between accommodation based and floating support services. The overall picture is one of a high level of staffing (98 per cent), service availability (98 per cent) utilisation (94 per cent) and throughput (108 per cent).

130 The Council's track record in involving service users and the voluntary sector in the Supporting People programme has been poor with very limited outcomes achieved to date. This has been identified as an area for improvement, but there are no clear plans in place to address this within a suitable timeframe. Without the involvement of service users in the programme, the Council cannot demonstrate that it is effectively meeting their needs.

131 The Council has not succeeded in ensuring that access and referral arrangements are consistently robust. Referral arrangements are not being monitored effectively to ensure that they are fair and transparent and information about referrals is not being routinely gathered in order to inform future commissioning decisions. There are also difficulties in accessing information about Supporting People services which were highlighted during our mystery shopping exercises and there are no service standards in place for the Supporting People programme. Consequently, the Council cannot demonstrate that services are easily accessible to all service users.

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

- 132 The Council cannot demonstrate a sustained track record in its approach to improving equality and diversity and its performance on meeting its diversity targets are mixed. However, the Council has accepted that its corporate approach to diversity needs to be improved and it now included as one of the Council's four 'adaptive challenges' with overall responsibility given to the Assistant Chief Executive. Recent developments have included the establishment of a successful inter-faith forum.
- 133 However, within the Supporting People programme significant progress has been made with new services provided which meet the specific needs of travellers and service users from BME groups. But there is still limited information about the needs of service users which means that the Council cannot demonstrate that services are currently meeting all service users' needs.
- 134 The Council is unable to demonstrate a track record in improving value for money (VFM) in its Supporting People programme; however, plans are in place to address this. The approach to assessing VFM is not robust. There was no agreed definition or methodology in place to ensure that VFM is being assessed in a consistent and transparent way. VFM was not fully addressed as part of the service review process and this limited the opportunities for high cost services to be effectively challenged or explored. There has been no effective benchmarking undertaken to compare the costs and quality of service provision. The Council's approach to cross-authority working with regard to securing VFM is underdeveloped. However, recent developments have included the piloting of a VFM methodology with a number of service providers, prior to it being agreed by the Commissioning Body in April 2007. This means there will be an agreed VFM methodology in place when undertaken the new programme of service reviews.
- 135 Despite the lack of a clear methodology, the Council has been able to achieve efficiencies within its Supporting People programme. The service review process and other negotiated savings have resulted in £1.146 million in efficiency gains since 2004/05. These savings have been used to maintain current service provision, commission new services and to pay an inflationary increase to service providers.

How does the Council manage performance?

- 136 This is an area where there is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. There is strong corporate commitment and effective leadership of the Supporting People programme, there are clear links between the programme and other strategic priorities and there is a clear corporate performance management framework in place. However, the Supporting People strategy fails to clearly articulate how priorities will be delivered, performance management of the programme is underdeveloped, risk management arrangements are weak and the approach to learning is underdeveloped.

137 There are clear links between the Supporting People programme and the Council's wider strategic priorities and these links are clearly identified in the Supporting People strategy. However, the strategy does not contain an overall vision or a clear set of objectives that clearly supports local and national priorities for helping vulnerable people. The strategy also fails to clearly articulate how its priorities will be achieved. Without a clear set of objectives and priorities it will be more difficult to judge whether the strategy has been delivered successfully and what outcomes have been achieved.

138 The Council has a clear performance management framework in place. There is a corporate template and timeline for production of annual performance plans and the Council is now moving towards a balance score-card approach from the new financial year. There are named performance leads in each directorate who act as the link between individual directorates and the corporate performance team. All performance plans are on the council's intranet and are monitored formally every six months with a position statement and report submitted to the relevant Cabinet Members. The top 40 corporate PI's are kept under review and are reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny Board on a quarterly basis. The Supporting People programme features strongly in the Adult Social Services Performance Plan, there are six key deliverables identified for the programme in the current plan which is significant given the small size of the Supporting People grant compared to the overall budget for Adult Social Services and demonstrates the Council's commitment to the programme.

139 Performance management of the Supporting People programme is underdeveloped. The Supporting People programme plan which acts as a work plan for both the Team and the various governance bodies is comprehensive, but not fully SMART as there is a lack of measurable outcomes, the resources needed to complete tasks are not identified, there are no milestones and it is unclear which tasks have the greatest priority. In addition, the tasks included in the programme plan do not clearly link with the priorities set in the Strategy Implementation Plan, or with the key deliverables in the annual Adult Social Services Performance Plan. This means that the plan is not an effective as it could be in driving improvement.

140 Reporting arrangements are mixed and lack clear measurement of outcomes for service users. There is regular reporting on progress against the programme plan, finance and Government performance indicators, but there is little reporting on outcomes for service users or progress against the programme's overarching aims and progress on delivering the strategy is only reported annually. In addition, there are no local performance indicators or outcome measures for the programme. Without suitable measures in place and regular reporting, it is difficult to determine what outcomes the programme is achieving for vulnerable people and to systematically address areas of under-performance.

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

- 141 There are improvement planning and monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that services continue to improve following service reviews, however, these could be used more effectively to drive service improvement. Improvement plans are regularly monitored and services are improving as a result. But these plans primarily focus on the QAF and do not always capture progress against other review outcomes, such as value for money and service re-configuration, using indicators such as these would give a more rounded view of service improvement.
- 142 Risk management arrangements are weak. There is no separate risk register for the Supporting People programme and a comprehensive risk assessment of the Supporting People programme has not been undertaken. There are no specific contingency plans in place to deal with a potential service withdrawal or failure. This leaves vulnerable service users at potential risk.
- 143 Leadership of the Supporting People programme is effective and there is strong corporate commitment to the programme. The Commissioning Body is providing clear strategic leadership to both the Supporting People team and the programme. The members of the Commissioning Body demonstrate a clear understanding of the diverse needs of vulnerable groups and they are ensuring that there are shared priorities in their own organisations to deliver positive outcomes for service users. Elected members have been consistently involved in the programme and support the overall aims of the programme. The Accountable Officer has raised the profile of Supporting People both corporately and in wider partnerships thereby ensuring that the programme receives appropriate recognition.
- 144 The overall approach to learning is underdeveloped. The Council can demonstrate some examples of learning from others. The Supporting People team have used the Supporting People website (www.spkweb.org.uk) to look for examples of positive practice. They have also contacted other ALA's and sought agreement to amend and use their documents and procedures for use in Solihull. Examples include a memorandum of agreement, leaseholder's policy, and accreditation procedures. However, there are areas where the Council could have benefited from taking opportunities to learn from neighbouring authorities through the work of the West Midlands Regional Implementation Group (WMRIG) and shared the opportunity to undertake sub-regional work such as joint accreditation, benchmarking, developing a joint approach to value for money and explored the opportunities for joint procurement.

Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

145 Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills which have been supplemented by additional training and other corporate services and their capacity will be improved by the establishment of the Care Trust. Financial capacity is strong and there are appropriate procurement arrangements in place. However, a lack of capacity has affected the team's ability to deliver all elements of the programme, the IT system requires improvement and the approach to cross-authority working is underdeveloped.

146 The members of the Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills, but their ability to deliver all elements of the programme successfully has been hampered by the capacity of the team. This has meant that the team has had to prioritise its resources in order to meet the key milestones within the programme. This has resulted in slower progress being achieved in some key areas such as service user involvement, developing links with the voluntary and community sector, undertaking a full risk assessment of the programme and introducing a value for money methodology. Additional resources have been used to supplement the team where appropriate, for example consultants have been used to undertake a VFM assessment of the new Women's Refuge.

147 The programme has a reasonable level of support from corporate services. For example, finance officers routinely attend the Core Strategy Group to provide guidance, while legal services have provided assistance on contractual matters and the development of the steady state contract. Other specialists have assisted in the service reviews. This has provided additional capacity to support the Supporting People team.

148 Additional capacity has been provided by the establishment of the Care Trust. The Supporting People programme is a key part of the Care Trust and this will enable the benefits of housing related support services to be fully exploited within the health economy and maximise the existing commissioning arrangements between the former Primary Care Trust and Adult Social Services Directorate. The Council and the Care Trust do have the scope and capabilities to further improve (within the limited resources available) the quality of the Supporting People programme, enhance its integration within the wider health, social care and housing economies and secure better value from a wide range of housing related support services for vulnerable people across the borough.

149 Financial capacity within the Supporting People programme is strong. The Supporting People budget currently has a surplus equivalent to 23 per cent of the total annual grant. Spending has been profiled for the next four years and the current surplus will be used to fund the seven new services that have been commissioned. The Council has secured £4.8 million in capital funding from the Housing Corporation and has committed £1 million of its own to develop supported housing schemes for a range of service users, including extra care housing for older people, which has been highlighted as a corporate priority.

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

- 150 There are some weaknesses in the current Supporting People IT system. The CareFirst system has some inflexibility and limited reporting functionality. This will limit the ability of the team to respond effectively to DCLG monitoring requirements and to use effectively use other data within the system.
- 151 The Supporting People team have received training to develop their skills. The staff development and appraisal system is used effectively to identify training needs and the Council has Investors in People status. Training has included adult protection awareness and risk management. However, diversity training is still awaited for some team members. All staff receive annual appraisals and regular supervision sessions with their manager and individual targets are linked to the annual programme plan.
- 152 There are appropriate procurement arrangements in place which have been used effectively to commission new services and to establish a level playing field for all service providers which ensures that smaller providers are not excluded from tendering for services.
- 153 However, the approach to cross-authority work with regard to joint procurement is underdeveloped. There are no plans for Solihull to consider joint procurement opportunities with either members of the West Midlands Regional Implementation Group (WMRIG) or other neighbouring ALA's. This is a wasted opportunity given that Solihull has identified unmet needs for groups such as refugees and people with HIV/Aids that could be met in conjunction with a neighbouring authority.

Summary

- 154 Our judgement is that the Council's Supporting People programme has 'promising' prospects for improvement.
- 155 There is strong corporate commitment and effective leadership of the Supporting People programme and there are clear links between the programme and other strategic priorities. The Supporting People programme has delivered new service provision for some client groups and expanded provision for other groups. Key programme milestones have been delivered on time and value for money efficiencies have been secured. The Supporting People team have a range of appropriate skills which have been supplemented by additional training and other corporate services and additional capacity has been provided by the establishment of the Care Trust.
- 156 However, the Council's track record in involving service users in the programme has been poor, access and referral arrangements lack robustness and the approach to securing value for money from the Supporting People programme is underdeveloped. Performance management of the programme is underdeveloped and risk management arrangements are weak. The IT system requires further improvement and the approach to learning and cross-authority working is underdeveloped.

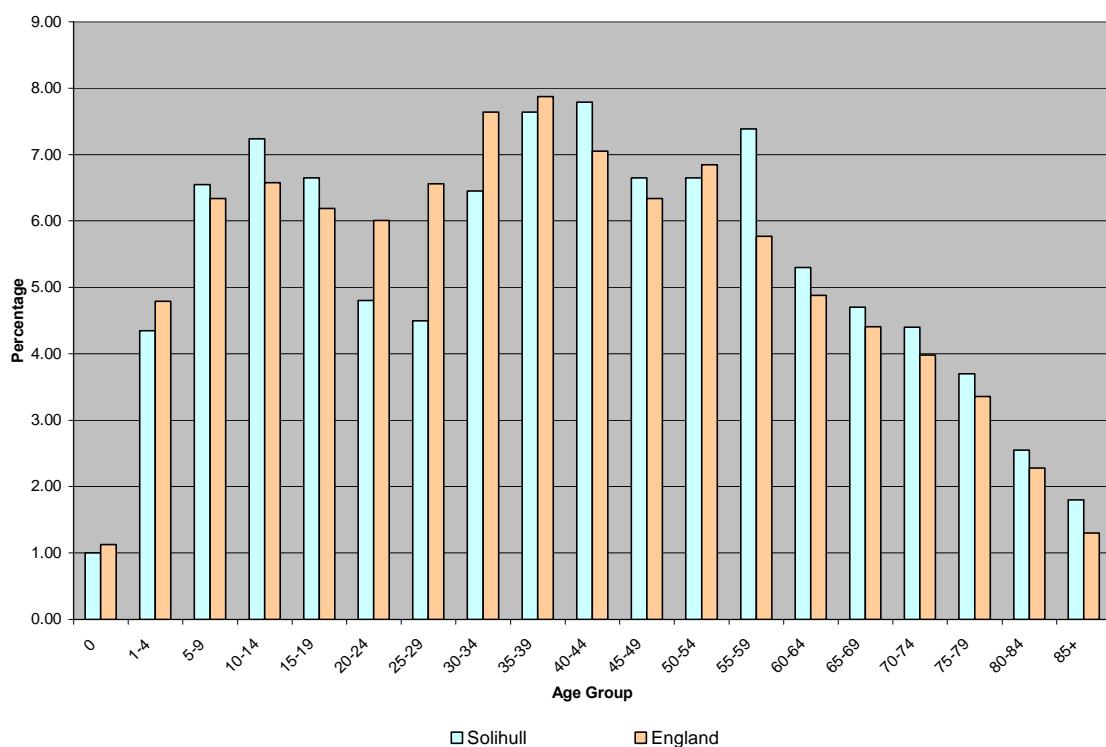
Appendix 1

Demographic information

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

Measure	Solihull	England
Population (mid-2004) ⁹	200,900	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	19.8	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	5.4	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ¹⁰	2.3	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ¹¹	182	-

Percentage of the population¹² in each age group compared with England



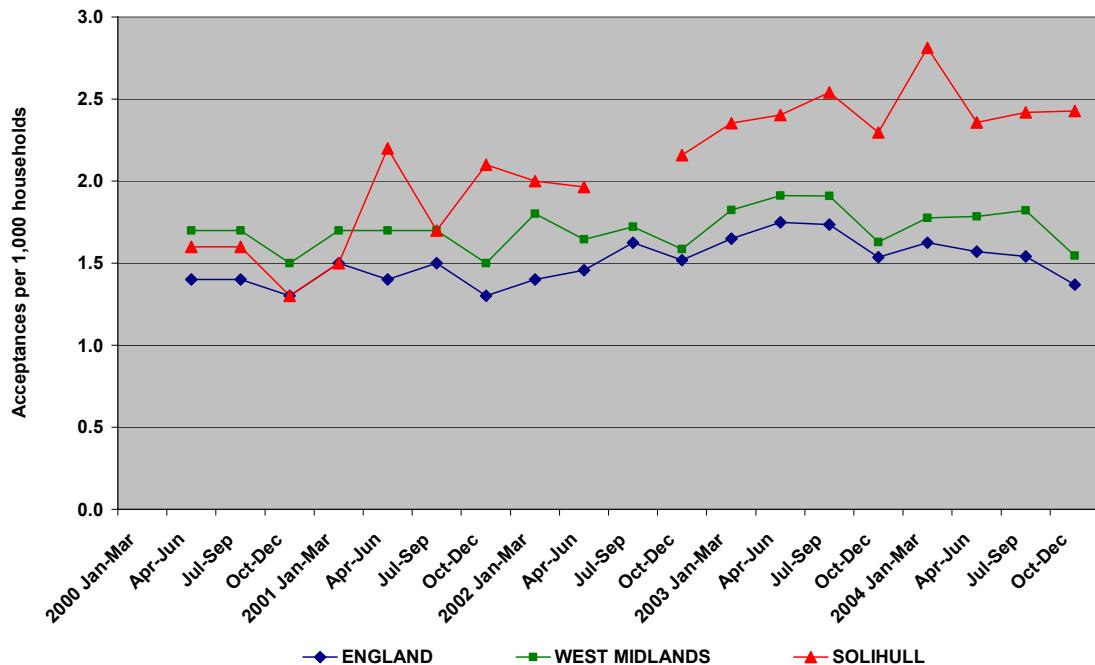
⁹ Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

¹⁰ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (December 2006)

¹¹ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

¹² Source: midyear population estimates (2004)

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



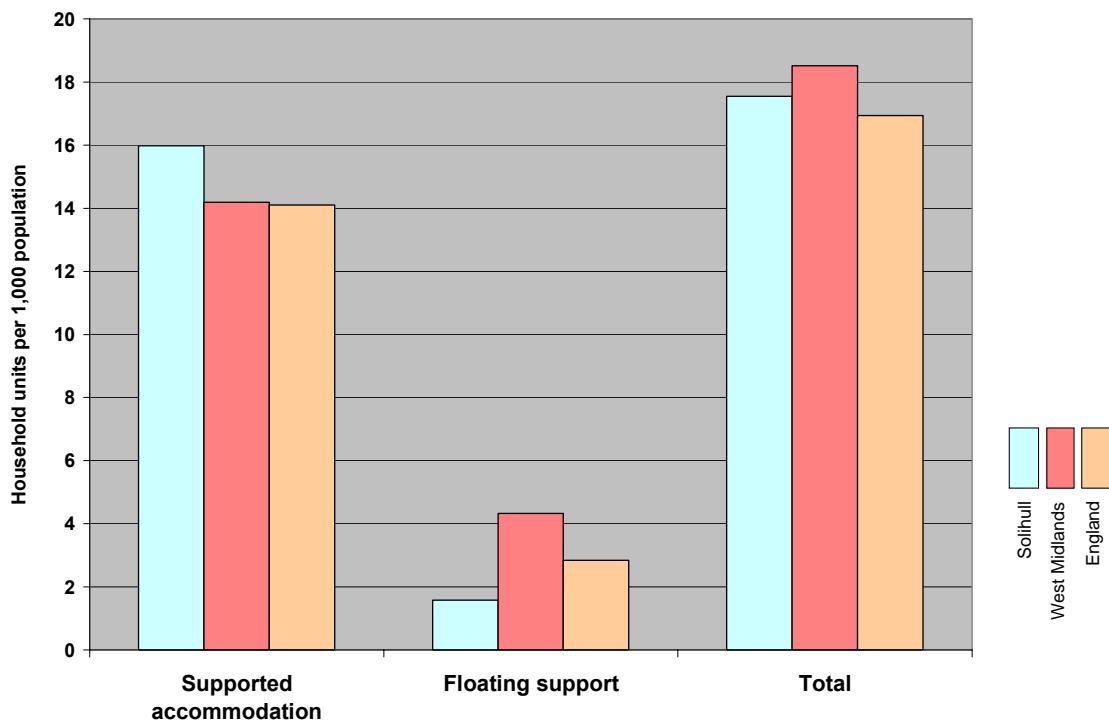
Performance information

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

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

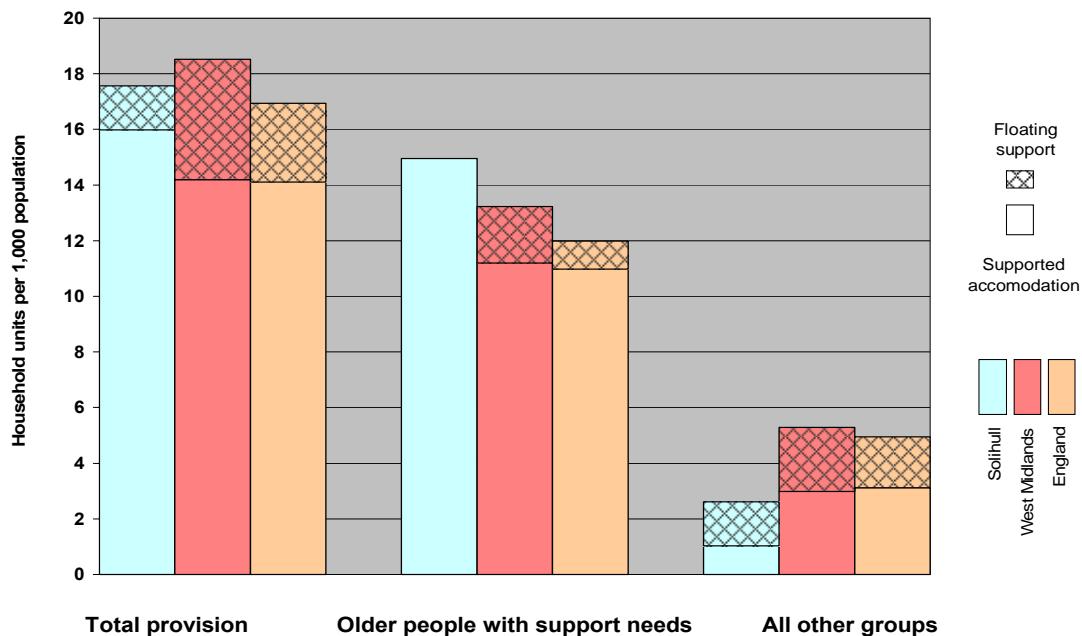
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People¹³

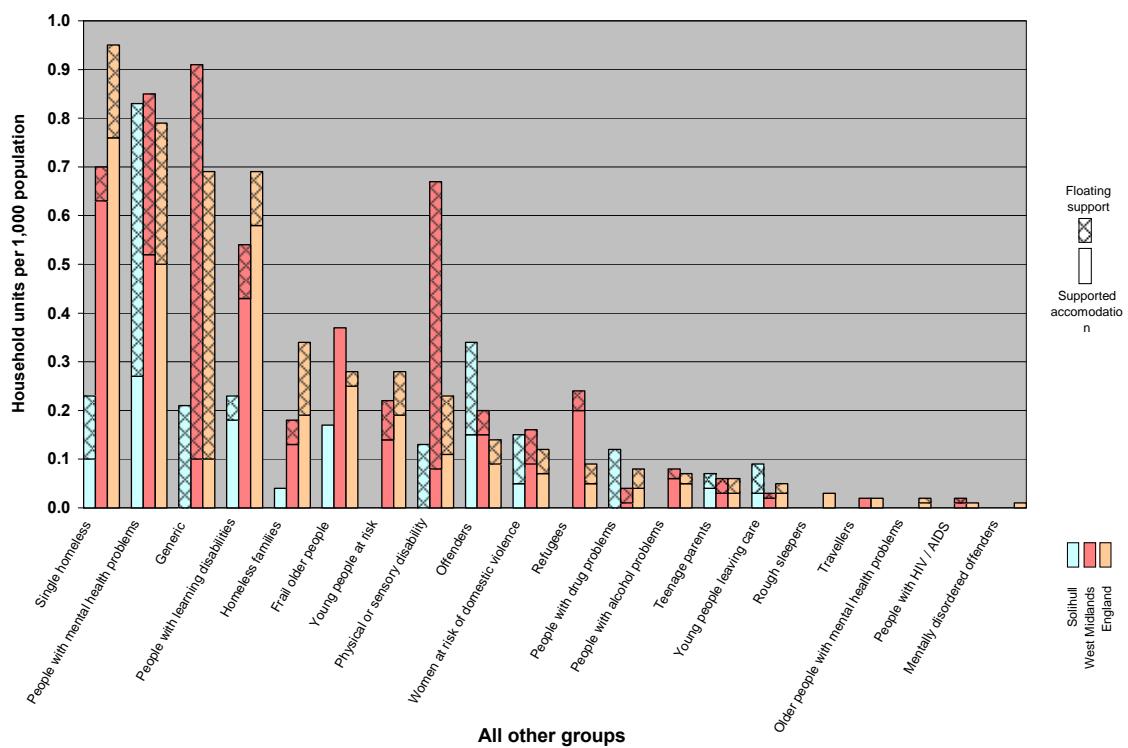


¹³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹⁴



Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹⁵



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

¹⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Funding for Supporting People¹⁶

Solihull	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£2,708,650	£2,670,265	£2,613,473
Pipeline allocation	£7,973	£29,293	£-
Administration grant	£194,183	£165,576	£132,461

Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹⁷

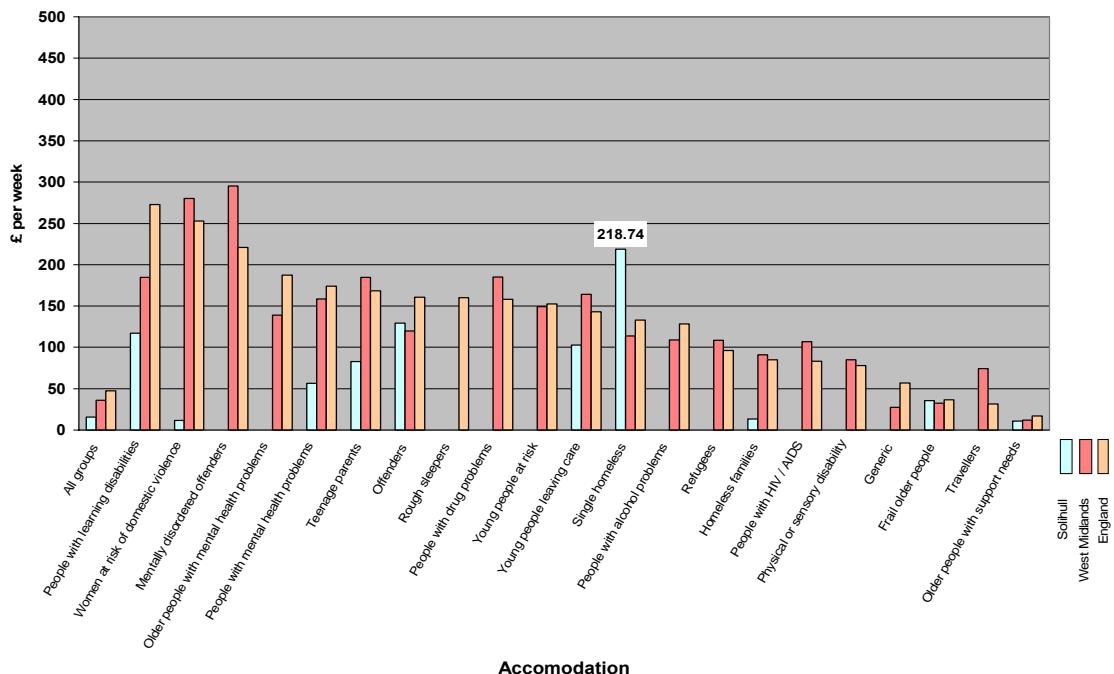
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Solihull	£0.26	£13.69	£13.69	£ 53.33
West Midlands	£0.43	£29.71	£32.34	£ 42.15
England	£0.70	£28.30	£34.71	£ 76.37

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

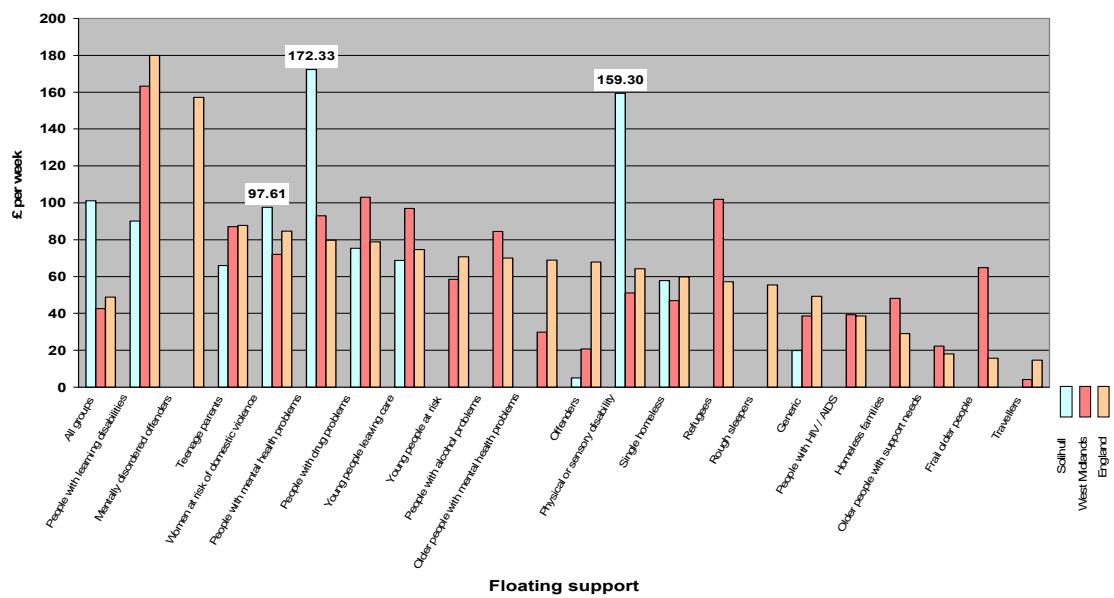
¹⁶ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

¹⁷ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁸



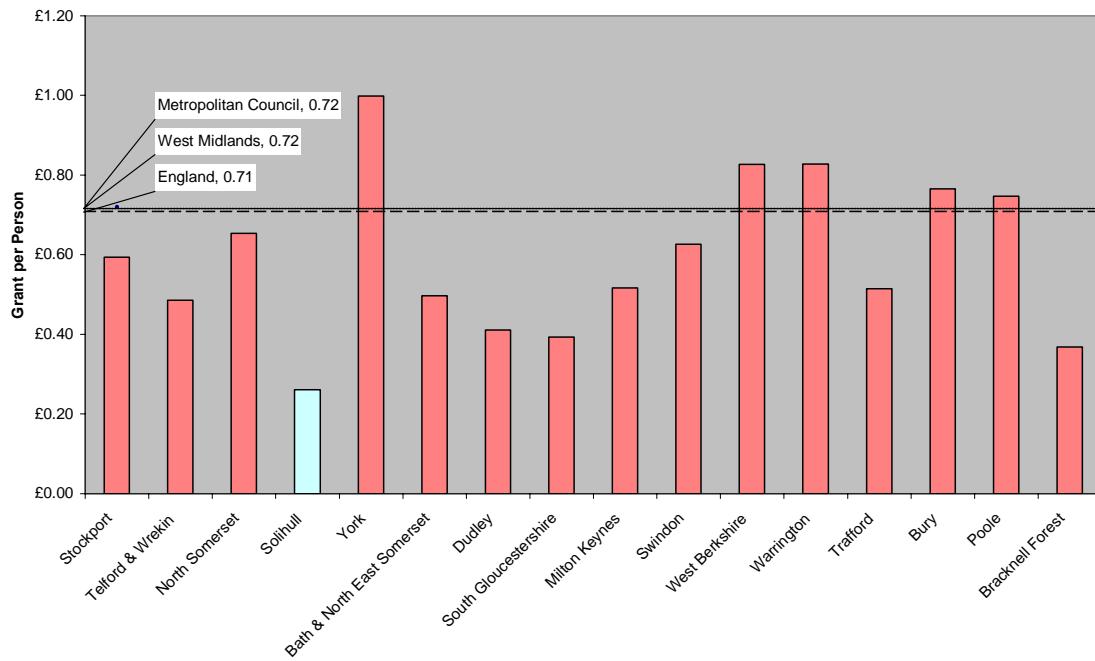
Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁹



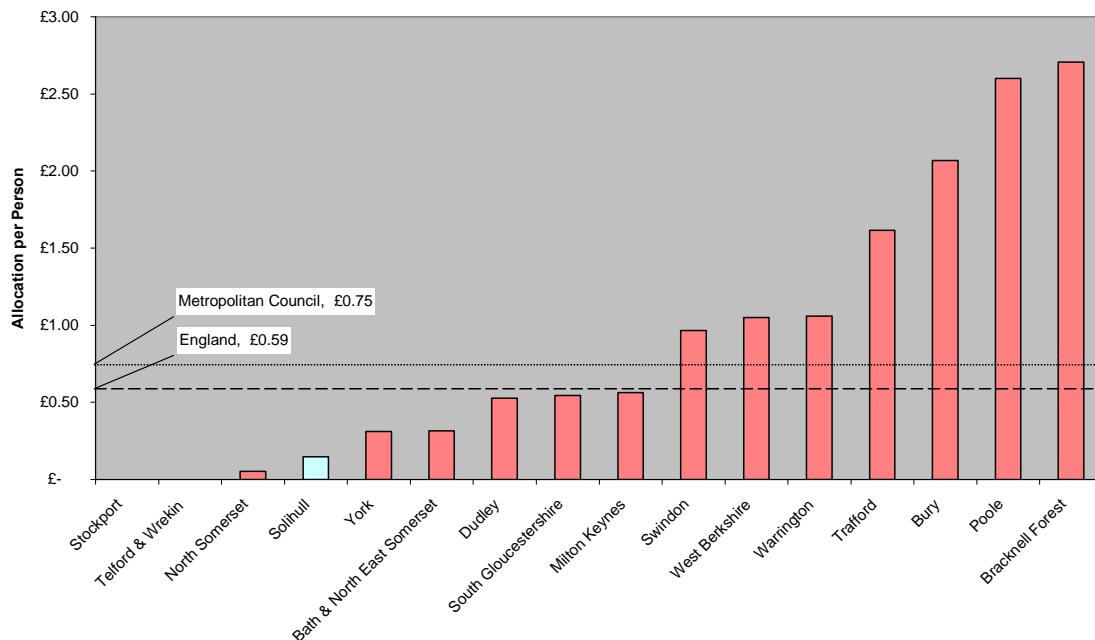
¹⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹⁹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours²⁰, all metropolitan boroughs and all English councils (2004/05)



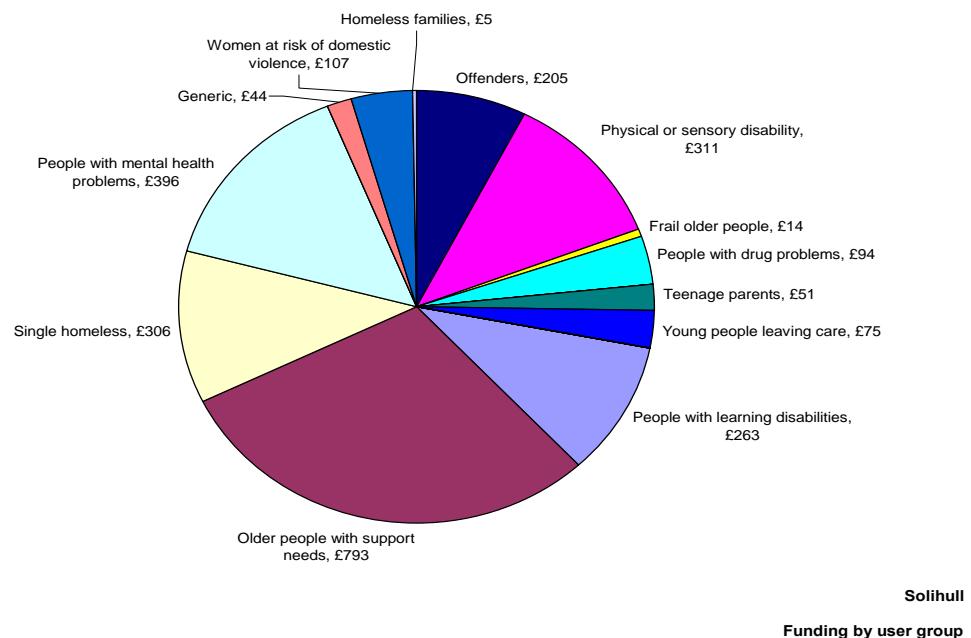
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours²¹, all metropolitan boroughs and all English councils.



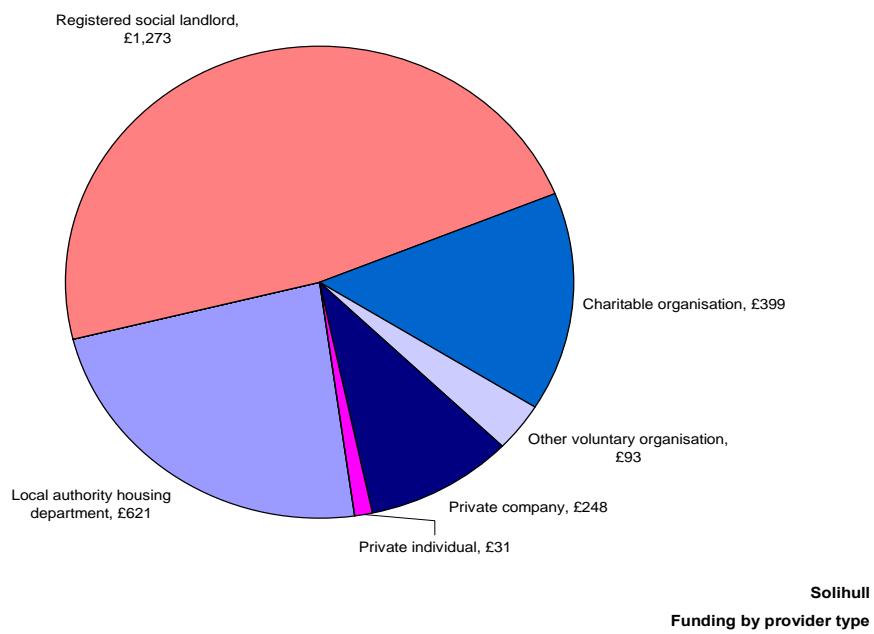
²⁰ A comparator group of similar councils.

²¹ A comparator group of similar councils.

Share of spending between user groups (£000s)²²



Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)²³



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

²³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

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

Social services performance indicators**Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04**

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

Solihull	
Significantly above average (*****)	<p>Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6)</p> <p>Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26).</p> <p>Admissions of supported residents aged 18 to 64 to residential/nursing care (C27).</p> <p>Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4).</p>
Above average (****)	<p>Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39).</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57).</p> <p>Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58).</p> <p>Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54).</p>

Solihull	
Average (***)	<p>Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40).</p> <p>Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31).</p> <p>Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29).</p> <p>Older people helped to live at home (C32).</p> <p>Delayed transfers of care (D41).</p>
Below average (••)	<p>Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30).</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51).</p>
Significantly below average (•)	% change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5).

Best value performance indicators

Performance on relevant indicators in 2003/04 compared with metropolitan boroughs

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

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

Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

3 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:

- a questionnaire survey which was sent to all providers of housing related support services;
- focus groups with members of the Providers Forum;
- visits to supported housing schemes, to talk to service users, scheme managers and frontline staff;
- file checks of service reviews;
- mystery shopping exercises to test how easy it is to access services;
- review of leaflets and the council's and care trust websites;
- interviews with members of the Supporting People Team;
- interviews with members of the Commissioning Body and the Accountable Officer;
- observation of Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group meetings; and
- interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Chief Executives of the Council and the Care Trust, the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder and other councillors. Managers from Adult Social Services, the Care Trust and the Probation Service.