

Inspection report

March 2004

# Supporting People Programme

City of Sunderland

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# Summary

## Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide housing related support services that help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the current complex and unco-ordinated arrangements for providing housing related support services for vulnerable people.
- 3 The Supporting People programme brings together a number of funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase, the Housing Corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG) and probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities.
- 4 The City of Sunderland Council is one of the early councils to be inspected. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it moves from implementation to the introduction of the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery and the outcomes of this for vulnerable people.

## Background

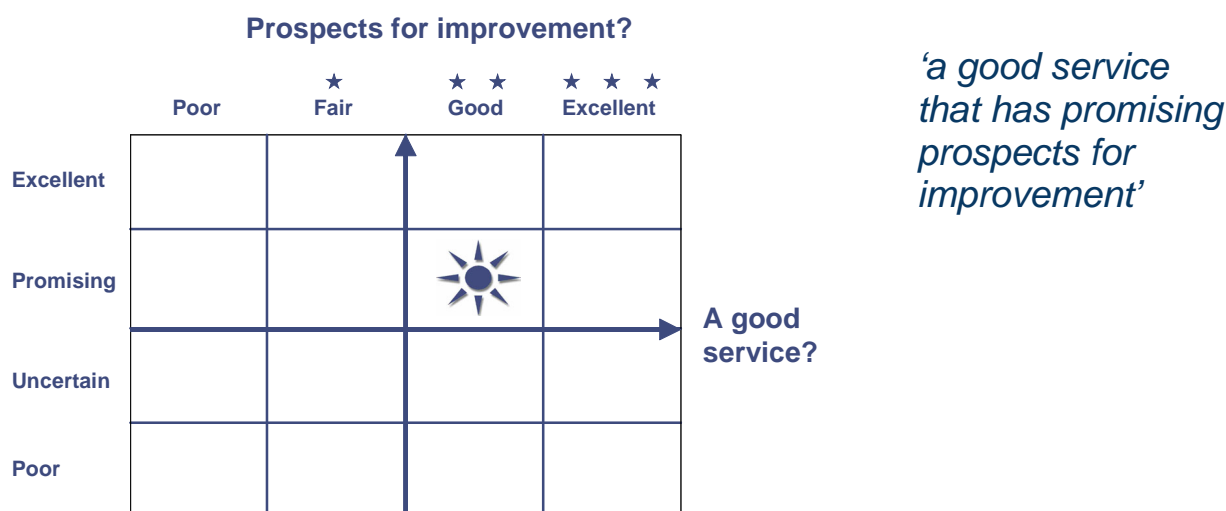
- 5 The City of Sunderland is a metropolitan council in the North East of England situated South of Newcastle and East of Durham in the Tyne and Wear conurbation. The area includes its traditional city centre, Washington New Town and the former coal-mining areas of Houghton and Hetton.
- 6 The highest cost Supporting People service in Sunderland is £370.18 a week for accommodation based support for people with learning disabilities. The lowest cost service is £0.70 a week for sheltered housing for frail elderly residents.
- 7 The population of Sunderland is 281,000 of which 2.8 per cent are from non-white ethnic communities. The borough has relatively high unemployment and low home ownership. Unemployment is 3.7 per cent, which is above the national average of 2.6 per cent. The city is 15th out of 354 authorities in the government's index of multiple deprivation. Eleven out of 25 wards are among the 10 per cent most deprived in the country.
- 8 The council is Labour controlled with 63 of 75 councillors. The council operates under a leader and cabinet style government, with an executive committee of 10 members. The council employs 13,500 staff across all services. The council's revenue budget for 2002/03 was £534 million.
- 9 The council completed the country's largest stock transfer to date in March 2001, transferring 36,000 homes to Sunderland housing group. The transfer will achieve significant investment into the former council stock with £302 million of expenditure planned in the first 5 years following transfer.
- 10 The City of Sunderland Council acts as the administering local authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with Sunderland teaching primary care trust and Northumbria probation service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 11 The total amount of Supporting People grant funding available in 2003/04 is £12,020,323. The council receives £247,157 Supporting People administration

grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.

## Scoring the service

- 12 We have assessed the council as providing a ‘good’, two-star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

### Scoring chart: City of Sunderland Council Supporting People Programme



### What works well

- 13 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date.
- ◆ There is evidence that the supporting people programme is already beginning to produce positive outcomes for the people of Sunderland that link to the priorities in the shadow strategy. These benefits relate to both the range of services available and the quality of existing services.
  - ◆ The council has a history of effective user consultation in relation to social services provision and this approach has been reflected in the development of the supporting people programme in the city. Users have been involved in the crystallisation of ideas for the development of services for their specific client group and providers are also embracing the potential for the systematic use of user views to drive their services.
  - ◆ The council has produced a good shadow strategy for the supporting people programme and has well advanced plans for delivering a five year strategy that embraces the views of users and other stakeholders.
  - ◆ The shadow strategy clearly sits within a hierarchy of other strategies developed by the council and its partners. The long-term and short-term visions for the supporting people programme are clearly expressed in the shadow strategy which also maps the development priorities for the first year of the programme.
  - ◆ Council officers and providers are confident that all schemes eligible for supporting people funding have been captured in the calculation of the supporting people grant for Sunderland. There is no evidence that any services have not been recognised in this process.

- ◆ Providers are positive about the council's supporting people team; their depth of knowledge; and the facilitative style they have adopted in implementing the supporting people programme.
- ◆ All the key milestones for supporting people implementation were met by the council and the negotiation of contracts and the transition of funding occurred without serious complications.
- ◆ The council has sound mechanisms for discussing issues that touch on all aspects of the social care and health agendas with partners and stakeholders through the client specific modernisation and reform groups that report to a multi-agency chief officers group.
- ◆ There are well developed arrangements for the management of risk associated with offenders. Protocols are in place between partner organisations to support these arrangements.
- ◆ The council has successfully met the basic statutory requirements and grant conditions for supporting people.
- ◆ Cross-authority arrangements are still developing between the council and neighbouring administering local authorities. However, the council has been actively engaged in driving the development of cross-authority arrangements for example in the development of a cross-authority statement for inclusion in strategy statements.
- ◆ The assessment of scheme costs for the purposes of defining the correct level of transitional housing benefit were rigorous and has contributed to work to ensure the cost effectiveness of services and value for money.
- ◆ The council has installed systems for the collection of basic performance data from providers to begin to monitor the effectiveness of supporting people funding.
- ◆ The council has a track record of providing good quality social services that have been externally accredited by the social services Inspectorate as excellent.
- ◆ The council has delivered the supporting people programme in the city for a level of administration grant that is below what might have been expected given a comparison with other metropolitan councils and their 'nearest neighbours' in terms of population profile.

### Areas for improvement

- 14 However, we found the following weaknesses with the Supporting People programme that need to be addressed.
- ◆ Supporting people is not fully integrated into the new system of modernisation and reform groups and the multi-agency chief officers group. Individual reports about the progress of Supporting People programme have been tabled at these groups but there would appear to be some duplication of effort in supporting these forums as well as the structures that exist to determine the direction of the programme.
  - ◆ The council has failed to provide clear boundaries for the delegated authority being exercised by officers at the commissioning body. This poses a potential risk to both the council and the officers concerned.
  - ◆ The strategic housing partnership has recently adopted the role of the core strategy group for the delivery of supporting people in the city. The strategic housing partnership has only recently extended invitations to health and probation representatives and the role of representatives from the non-statutory sector is not clear. Given the key role of this group in terms of policy formulation there is a significant risk that the supporting people agenda will fail to adequately represent the collective view of all the local partners.

- ◆ The commissioning body for supporting people in Sunderland has failed to operate in a way that consistently captures the views of the probation service and local primary care trust (PCT). We are satisfied that the council has taken appropriate action to attempt to resolve this lack of representation from the PCT but whilst the current situation remains unresolved the operation of the commissioning body is a weakness and is at odds with other successful partnership working occurring in the city.
- ◆ The outputs from the monitoring of schemes funded by supporting people have not been built into any systematic reporting mechanism within the council. Partner organisations have not been asked to feed in relevant data from their own sources to provide a rounded picture of how the supporting people programme is impacting on the lives of vulnerable people in Sunderland. A reporting mechanism is due to be in operation from April 2004.
- ◆ The outcomes from service reviews have not been reported back to providers and users in a formal manner despite the programme of reviews having been in operation since April 2003. The potential for service improvement has therefore been delayed and negotiations over possible revisions to contract terms have not started with the potential for cost savings to not be realised at the earliest opportunity.

15 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has promising prospects for delivering further improvements. We found the following strengths.

#### What works well

- ◆ The council's well developed systems for users consultation are now supported by the use of the strategic housing partnership as the core strategy group for the supporting people programme as this forum links directly to the wider agenda of the local strategic partnership and the regional housing board. This joined-up approach will ensure that the supporting people programme continues to be focused on the needs of the local community.
- ◆ The council has adopted sound practices for delivering policy priorities through the use of action planning techniques for the delivery of the supporting people programme.
- ◆ The council has a track record of responding positively to internal and external challenge. This commitment is also reflected within the supporting people service.
- ◆ The continued progress of the supporting people programme is ensured by staff receiving regular supervision from their line managers and senior officers make themselves available to staff to discuss day-to-day operational issues.
- ◆ The implementation of supporting people by the council has highlighted the need for performance management at a scheme level resulting in providers being more aware of the need to respond to user input and the monitoring of service outcomes.

#### Areas for improvement

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

- ◆ At present the commissioning body fails to function in the manner that guidance on supporting people suggests is appropriate, this is not helped by the council not offering high level corporate leadership in relation to the seniority of officers tasked with attending the commissioning body. As a result there is a key lack of ownership amongst all the partners in relation to how the programme will be moulded and sustained in the future.

- ◆ Staff within the supporting people team have yet to benefit from annual appraisals that establish a link between their own objectives for the forthcoming year and the directorate and corporate targets.
- ◆ The reporting arrangements for the supporting people programme have not been established at present (although they are due to be established from April 2004). Partners have not been engaged in discussions as to the format and content of these reports to successfully monitor progress on joint objectives for the programme.

## Recommendations

- 17 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, we are making the following recommendations.
- ◆ Progress research, already acknowledged by the council as a requirement, into the needs of black and minority ethnic groups and other user groups that may not be receiving services adequate to fill their needs in line with the strategic direction outlined in the shadow strategy by April 2004.
  - ◆ Build on the use of existing forums such as the strategic housing partnership to avoid duplication of meetings while also ensuring that there is adequate representation for health and probation partners at the resulting forums by November 2004.
  - ◆ Clarify the levels of responsibility and accountability for officers from all partner agencies attending the strategic housing partnership and in particular the commissioning body by November 2004.
  - ◆ Continue requests to partner agencies to supply appropriate officers to attend meetings relating to the development and delivery of the supporting people programme on an ongoing basis.
  - ◆ Mainstream the reporting of data relating to the performance of the supporting people programme through existing council mechanisms and the relevant partnership meetings. This data to adequately reflect the outcomes relevant to all partner agencies and the priorities arrived at through the development of the five year strategy by November 2004.
  - ◆ Consider alternative methods for the publication of service reviews to ensure that the options for service improvement are captured at the earliest opportunity by April 2004.
  - ◆ Clarify the methodology for the review programme in future years notably with reference to the expertise that will be employed to consider the needs and aspirations of particular user groups by April 2004.
  - ◆ Promote the use of staff appraisals within the supporting people team that clarify the links between individual annual targets and wider directorate and corporate objectives by April 2004.
- 18 We would like to thank the staff of the City of Sunderland Council particularly Pauline Blyth, David Smith and the Supporting People team who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

### Inspection Team:

<b>Jim Wilson</b>	<b>Housing Inspector (Sunderland inspection lead)</b>
<b>Doreen Moors</b>	<b>Tenant Inspection Adviser</b>
<b>Eileen O'Sullivan</b>	<b>Inspection Officer – HM Inspectorate of Probation</b>

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**Email:**

**[ji-wilson@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:ji-wilson@audit-commission.gov.uk)**

**For more information please contact  
Audit Commission  
Central Region  
First Floor, Bridge Business Park  
Bridge Park Road  
Thurmaston  
Leicester  
LE4 8BL  
[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 0116 250 4100  
Fax: 0116 250 4101**

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# Report

## Context

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

## The locality

- 20 The City of Sunderland is in the North East of England. Situated between Newcastle to the North and Durham to the West. Sunderland achieved city status in 1992, it is the largest city between Leeds and Edinburgh covering 55 square miles, the area includes its traditional city centre, Washington New Town and the former coal-mining areas of Houghton and Hetton.
- 21 The population of the area is 281,000, living in 119,000 households<sup>2</sup>. 2.8 per cent of the population are from non-white ethnic communities<sup>3</sup>. At approximately 1,500 the Bangladeshi community is the largest ethnic minority group in the city.
- 22 Unemployment stands at 3.7 per cent compared with the national average of 2.6 per cent. The area has experienced a major decline in traditional industries such as mining, shipbuilding and heavy engineering. Car manufacturing and service based call centres have replaced these industries.
- 23 The council has created six area boards to promote community participation and enhance democracy and the quality of decision making.

## The Council

- 24 The council has 75 councillors. The Labour party has overall control. A leader and cabinet govern the business of the council. The council's gross revenue budget for the year 2002/03 was £534 million.
- 25 The Community Strategy identifies nine priorities for action.
- ◆ Economic Prosperity.
  - ◆ City Centre.
  - ◆ Social and Cultural Opportunities.
  - ◆ Healthy City.
  - ◆ Housing.
  - ◆ Community safety.
  - ◆ Environment.
  - ◆ Lifelong Learning.
  - ◆ Young People.
- 26 A comprehensive performance assessment was carried out in 2002 and the council received an overall score of 'excellent'. In the summary of the comprehensive performance assessment the following comment was made 'The council is able to learn from experience and is adept at putting plans and resources in place to ensure that services continue to improve in the future'.

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<sup>2</sup> 2001 Census.

<sup>3</sup> 2001 Census.

## Supporting People – ODPM Framework for Delivery

- 27 The ODPM has set out the following structural arrangements for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- ◆ Accountable officer and the Supporting People team: drive the whole process.
  - ◆ Inclusive forum: consults with service providers and service users.
  - ◆ Core strategy group: proposes strategic direction, service review procedures and timetables and work needed to secure the effective and efficient delivery and development of the programme.
  - ◆ Commissioning body: agrees strategic direction, compliance with grant conditions, outcomes of service reviews and monitors the delivery and development of the programme.
  - ◆ Elected members: approve key decisions of the commissioning body.
  - ◆ Supporting People team: delivers the local programme.
- 28 Supporting People commissioning bodies are a requirement under grant conditions and must have senior representation from the administering local authority (ALA), the local health services (usually one representative from each primary care trust) and the area probation service. In two tier ALAs each district council is entitled to one representative. Each named representative has one vote although the ALA has a veto where it can demonstrate a financial risk to the ALA.

## Supporting People – Housing Related Support Services in Sunderland

### Management Arrangements

- 29 The Supporting People team sits within the social services directorate. The accountable officer is the assistant head of services, services at home.
- 30 The commissioning body comprises the assistant head of service, services at home, City of Sunderland Council; director partnerships and commissioning, Sunderland teaching PCT; divisional director, Northumbria probation service. The commissioning body first met in January 2003. Terms of reference for this body have been agreed which set out its role of overseeing the Supporting People programme in the borough.
- 31 The Supporting People team comprises:
- ◆ a supported housing manager;
  - ◆ a contracts officer;
  - ◆ a review and monitoring officer;
  - ◆ a supporting people project assistant co-ordinator;
  - ◆ a housing benefits co-ordinator; and
  - ◆ two administrative staff.

### Supporting People Strategy and Budget

- 32 The ODPM required all Supporting People administering local authorities to submit a shadow strategy in the autumn of 2002. The shadow strategies were required to demonstrate a clear vision and strategic steer for the programme and to set out the map of existing housing related support provision. The ODPM assessed the council's shadow strategy as good.
- 33 The shadow strategy sets out the context for Supporting People in Sunderland and provides guidance as to the intentions of the programme in the first year of

operation. The shadow strategy explains the identified supply of Supporting People services in the city. These services are mapped against the ODPM's suggested supply profile of Supporting People services in an area such as Sunderland.

- 34 The primary client group analysis of services and unmet need identified in the shadow strategy showed:
- ◆ significant accommodation based services for older people but the absence of any floating support provision for this group allowing them to maintain their independence in their own home;
  - ◆ an underprovision of floating support service for people with learning disabilities;
  - ◆ an underprovision of accommodation based services for people with physical disabilities;
  - ◆ an underprovision of accommodation based services and a lack of floating support provision for people with drug and alcohol dependency;
  - ◆ an underprovision of both accommodation based services and floating support services for offenders;
  - ◆ a complete lack of provision specifically for people with HIV/AIDS; and
  - ◆ a lack of floating support provision for young people, women at risk of domestic violence and homeless families.
- 35 The shadow strategy data mapping of supply and unmet need is different from the supply data as at 31 March 2003. This is due in the main to the number of new schemes coming on-line in six months prior to Supporting People implementation.
- 36 The actual supply of accommodation and support services as funded by Supporting People grant based on 31 March 2003 was:
- ◆ 2514 units of supported accommodation;
  - ◆ 1177 individuals receiving floating support; and
  - ◆ 8155 community alarm units.
- 37 The administration grant awarded to the council by the ODPM to assist in the costs of implementing, delivering and managing the programme is £247,157 for the financial year 2003/04.
- 38 The final Supporting People grant allocation to the council for the financial year 2003/04 is:
- ◆ £12,020,323; and
  - ◆ £64,504 has been awarded to cover the revenue costs of schemes under development (pipeline funding).

## How good is the service?

### Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 39 Inspectors look to see how a council has agreed the key aims for the service being inspected, how clear these aims are to the people that receive the service and whether these reflect the corporate aims of the organisation as a whole.
- 40 Aims need to be challenging, address local needs and support national objectives. This requires the council to consider and demonstrate how a service contributes to its wider corporate aims and community plans.
- 41 The aims of the Supporting People service are clearly explained in the shadow strategy. The shadow strategy sets out how the development of supporting

people sits within the City of Sunderland's housing strategy. The second objective of the housing strategy sets out the aim:

- ◆ 'To promote the development of accommodation and support services to enable vulnerable people to live within their community'.

42 Within the context of this aim the shadow strategy sets the objectives for the Supporting People programme in 2003/04 as being:

- ◆ to support the implementation of Supporting People and services by April 2003 and beyond;
- ◆ to develop accommodation and services for young people with housing and support needs;
- ◆ to develop accommodation and services for adults with housing and support needs;
- ◆ to prevent and tackle homelessness, and the causes of homelessness, including domestic violence; and
- ◆ to identify and address the housing and support needs of black and minority ethnic communities.

43 The agreed strategic priority for the commissioning body in the short-term is stated as being to ensure:

- ◆ 'A successful transition of the funding arrangements and the minimum amount of disruption and dislocation of existing support services for clients within the Supporting People programme'.

44 A longer-term vision is also included in the shadow strategy and is articulated as:

- ◆ 'Supporting People in the city of Sunderland will enable vulnerable people to exercise choice and independence in their own lives by providing the accommodation and support services necessary to achieve this'.

45 The shadow strategy demonstrated a clear understanding of where the gaps were in local provision at the point it was being drafted. Immediate priorities for service development are strategic because they link to the gaps in provision identified by the mapping exercise. Where the council felt unsure as to the nature of the need or the most suitable provision additional research was proposed.

46 The shadow strategy recognises that no provider has identified any cultural specific group within the supply mapping exercise. The shadow strategy suggests that an examination of the needs of the black and minority ethnic population will be an area for specific research.

47 The shadow strategy sets out clearly the priorities for development in each client group area. The rationale for how these priorities were arrived at for each client group is also clearly articulated. At another point in the shadow strategy the main development priorities are stated as:

- ◆ young parents;
- ◆ women fleeing domestic violence;
- ◆ offenders; and
- ◆ black and minority ethnic community.

48 Again the rationale for how these proposed service developments have been ranked and prioritised overall is explained. An action plan for each client group accompanies the shadow strategy providing clarity as to what type of scheme or scale of development is intended for each group.

- 49 The ODPM's initial assessment of the shadow strategy scored the document as good. Two particular comments are of note from the ODPM assessment.
- ◆ 'The role of the Commissioning Body needs to be highlighted further'.
  - ◆ 'Cross authority links appear to be at their development stage in Sunderland'.
- 50 The Supporting People strategy sits within the context of the local strategic partnership. The strategic housing partnership reports into the local strategic partnership while also being central to steering the Supporting People agenda as it has recently taken on the role of the core strategy group for the supporting people programme.
- 51 The housing strategy has clear links and consistent objectives with the Supporting People shadow strategy and the community plan. It is noted that in talking to providers some suggested that there was a mismatch between the development priorities being expressed by the council's officers from social services and those from regeneration and housing. However, regular monthly meetings do occur between council officers from social services and regeneration and housing to consider the strategic links between the supporting people and housing agendas and ensure consistency.
- 52 Senior officers from Northumbria probation service meet regularly with officers from the social services directorate at drug action team meetings and the crime and disorder reduction partnership. Both of these forums are used to discuss issues that relate to the supporting people programme and the strategic aims of these groups are cross referenced in the shadow strategy. The needs of offenders with substance misuse problems are now being addressed through the joint work of the probation service and drug action team. There has also been involvement from the probation service in drafting the council's homelessness strategy.

## **Does the service meet these aims?**

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

### **Commissioning services to meet local needs**

- 55 There is a high level of confidence that the schemes identified for funding by the Supporting People programme are comprehensive. The council has built successful relationships with local providers and has examples of some effective consultation with, and participation from service users.
- 56 Providers have a positive view of the Supporting People team. The following comments were made by service providers during our inspection.

*'The Supporting People team have been helpful and supportive. If they don't know the answer they can always provide signposts to information.'* – **A provider.**

*'The Supporting People team are excellent in terms of the support and assistance offered to providers.'* – **A provider.**

- 57 Providers were very complimentary about the role that the supporting people team had in the city. They had found them very approachable and helpful in understanding the application of Supporting People. The Supporting People team had provided them with literature and presentation aids to assist in explaining Supporting People to users. The council has provided useful levels of guidance and training to providers in the run-up to Supporting People implementation.
- 58 Providers have found that the mechanisms used in Sunderland to disseminate information on the programme have been more effective than in other authorities. A provider representative, who has experience of working with other administering local authorities in the region told us that 90 per cent of the information they had found out about Supporting People they had found out from Sunderland.
- 59 Providers commented that the negotiations over contracts had been uncomplicated and that the introduction of the quality assessment framework had been a useful tool for projects to assess their service to users.
- 60 The key milestones for the implementation of the Supporting People programme were met by the council. There was a smooth transition from implementation to delivery of the programme, contracts were signed with providers and payments were made from the implementation day of 1 April 2003.
- 61 The Supporting People team welcomed challenge and had requested an independent internal audit of their implementation processes prior to the 1 April 2003 deadline for the submission of Supporting People figures to the ODPM.
- 62 The council has deliverable plans for assessing needs in the future. The council is beginning to consider the accurate mapping of local needs based upon the views of the community, users, providers and stakeholders rather than a historical view of what was being provided. The action plan for the service recognises the need to develop the understanding of local needs and produce key targets relevant for each client group. There is an acceptance that 'some things we haven't got right, BME keeps coming up as an issue'. Officers consider that there may be particular issues around meeting the needs of BME elders. However, there has yet to be any research to consider the extent of this problem if any.
- 63 The Supporting People service does link to commissioning for social services provision through monthly meetings with the social services directorate commissioning team. The directorate has recently published a commissioning strategy that covers all relevant client groups and clearly states the linkages with the Supporting People shadow strategy. This document clearly identifies the development requirements and outlines the council's intentions for prospective providers. However, it was recognised by officers that the Supporting People programme needed to keep to its own agenda and ensure that it was not perceived as being too closely aligned with council provision.
- 64 The PCT and social services jointly sponsor modernisation and reform groups. These groups draw together stakeholders, partners, providers and users to consider the delivery of services to specific client groups in the health and social care spectrum. The modernisation and reform groups report to the multi-agency chief officers group which comprises the director of social services and chief executives of the PCT, the acute hospitals and the mental health trust. These groups are one avenue by which the council is assessing levels of need in the city to provide accurate data on gaps in provision.

- 65 The council has met the statutory guidance and financial regulations for grant compliance in that:
- ◆ the local authority, the primary care trust and the probation service are all involved through the commissioning body;
  - ◆ each partner organisation has one vote only on the commissioning body;
  - ◆ joint working arrangements come within the framework of the local strategic partnership;
  - ◆ the commissioning body operates under a terms of reference that recognise the relationship between the commissioning body and the administering local authority;
  - ◆ the existing shadow strategy agreed by the commissioning body covers the range of issues set out in the guidance;
  - ◆ a list of Supporting People services in the commissioning body's area is maintained;
  - ◆ adequate systems in place to monitor Supporting People services;
  - ◆ the council attends regular cross authority groups;
  - ◆ the council has agreed a charging policy for Supporting People services;
  - ◆ the council are ensuring that the grant is spent only in connection with eligible housing related support services;
  - ◆ service reviews are being carried out with a view to managing the budget, ensuring value for money, cost effectiveness and service standards. The outcomes of the reviews are being reported to the commissioning body; and
  - ◆ contracts are in place and payments being made for services.
- 66 In October 2001 the department of transport, local government and the regions (DTLR) published guidance on how they would expect commissioning bodies to operate when supporting people moved beyond implementation. This guidance suggests that the commissioning body should include the chief executive of the council or the director of social services. Provision is made that the council can delegate authority to an appropriate officer but should be mindful of the functions and responsibility held by the commissioning body.
- 67 The City of Sunderland Council has delegated this authority to the assistant head of service, adult services within the social services directorate. The job description for this officer does provide for them accepting delegated authority for a range of duties and responsibilities. However, Supporting People is not mentioned specifically nor were we provided with any documentation to detail the extent of the powers delegated to this officer. Given the scale of the Supporting People programme in Sunderland and the potential for significant decisions involving key partners to be made under the auspices of the commissioning body we would have expected these roles, responsibilities and accountabilities to have been clearly articulated.
- 68 There are some positive examples of collaborative working between accommodation and support providers to meet the needs of vulnerable young people and assisting them in maintaining their independence. A housing strategy for young people has been drafted but the gaps in services highlighted within that are not yet included in the Supporting People strategy and planning, therefore there are likely to be some gaps in knowledge of needs particularly for young people.
- 69 There is still limited choice and services to meet young people needs in Sunderland despite the prioritisation afforded to this group in the shadow strategy. Whilst schemes for young people were identified for early development these proposals were not successful under the pipeline bidding process to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Therefore young people may have to leave

the city in order to access appropriate services. One provider noted that in referring young people to more appropriate services there was a shortage of some services particularly direct access accommodation and accommodation for young offenders which was not presently being met or planned for.

- 70 Extra care provision is now being established in the city because of Supporting People involvement. One scheme has been refurbished providing 24 hour support. There is convalescence bed available for anyone leaving hospital, needing care and confidence building before returning to their home.
- 71 The city lacks a home improvement agency to co-ordinate the improvement and adaptation of homes occupied by vulnerable people across the full range of tenure types. The council have well developed plans to address this gap in provision and a paper has been presented to the director of social services and head of housing and regeneration. This bid has subsequently been submitted at the end of January 2004.

## User involvement and access to services

### Consultation

- 72 Mechanisms have existed for some years to gain feedback from users and carers. The use of these existing relationships will inform developments for Supporting People in the future. For example, residents were consulted in a number of ways to produce the housing strategy. A residents forum was set up but consultation also took place outside of this formal route. The better care, higher standards charter is updated annually following feedback and the charter contains a freepost feedback form for comments.
- 73 The development of the needs analysis for people with learning disabilities within the shadow strategy demonstrates that user consultation occurs and has helped to shape the proposals for the future development of the service.
- 74 A consultation programme for the development of the five year strategy has been agreed by the commissioning body. A consultation task group has been developed to consider the most appropriate mechanisms for engaging users in the development of the five year strategy.
- 75 The Supporting People team has involved users through the inclusive forum and through existing user groups. The consultation programme plans for the Supporting People team to involve service users in identifying gaps in need through consultation days for specific client groups enabling a user focus to the mapping of future need.
- 76 Officers from the Supporting People team have attended tenants groups for individual providers to explain Supporting People and offer users the potential to channel issues back to the Supporting People team. Tenants in sheltered accommodation reported that visits from the supporting people team had been thorough and informative offering them the opportunity to voice their own opinions about the service they were receiving.
- 77 The validation toolkit for providers states that no providers' staff are allowed to be present at the service user meetings during the validation visit. Whilst this will ensure that users are not influenced by the presence of staff in expressing their opinions there is the potential for this approach to be contrary to the users wishes where there is a need for facilitation and advocacy.
- 78 The feedback from users in relation to charging is being captured by the Supporting People team using pro forma to identify the issues. A challenge to the fairer charging policy is being planned in 2004 as a result of user feedback. The use of swipe cards has been a particular issue for users who now have to pay for their rent and support services separately. The requirement to present two separate swipe cards has proved confusing for some users

- 79 There was evidence of user involvement at scheme level within Sunderland in schemes for homeless families, people with learning disabilities, sheltered accommodation, and homeless young people. In some instances this involvement extended to user involvement in shaping job descriptions and person specifications.
- 80 Access to accommodation based services provided for young homeless people with support needs is facilitated by referral from all relevant agencies and is not limited to approaches from the homelessness team. Exclusions from supported accommodation services for young people are considered on a case by case basis dependant on the individual circumstances and if services were inappropriate referrals would be made to alternative schemes.
- 81 According to service providers it has been difficult accessing accommodation for young people to move-on to through the choice based lettings scheme. The council have appointed a support network co-ordinator to overcome some of the difficulties that vulnerable people may experience in accessing the bidding system for the choice based scheme.

### Information

- 82 If members of the public were unaware of the Supporting People programme they would not find any information about it at the main point of access at the civic centre. Although staff were very helpful there was a lack of awareness generally about supporting people. As the first point of contact for potential users these staff were unable to signpost people appropriately to relevant services.
- 83 Our telephone reality check suggested that access to information regarding Supporting People services in Sunderland was not easy. Our call was signposted through but information that was promised through the post was never received.
- 84 The Supporting People summary leaflet that is distributed to users and potential users is easy to read and available in other formats for example large print, braille, audiotape and other languages on request. Contact details are on the front cover with strap line in three other languages.
- 85 There are explanations within the summary leaflet about Supporting People and when it will be implemented; what the programme aims to do; how it will be funded; who will benefit from Supporting People, and what it will achieve. There is an extensive list of vulnerable people who will benefit from Supporting People, and how it will improve their quality of life. There is nothing in the leaflet on how people can access funding or whether they will be entitled to help.
- 86 A newsletter has been produced by the Supporting People team and is aimed at people involved in the Supporting People programme. It introduces the Supporting People project team with their contact numbers on the back page. The newsletter explains the role of the inclusive forum and core strategy group and how often they will meet.
- 87 Providers were able to provide a range of printed information relating to their services. These varied in their quality and their availability in relevant languages. Some schemes catering for people with learning disabilities are developing graphic facilitation techniques to record information in a form that is accessible to users and staff.
- 88 The probation service have produced a tenant awareness programme that is run in conjunction with local prisons and provides offenders who are due for release with information about finding accommodation and maintaining a tenancy.
- 89 The council's own website does offer easy access to information relating to Supporting People. Use of the search engine provides a list of related documents including a summary updated in August 2003 and access to both the users leaflet and newsletters.

## Diversity

- 90 The council has yet to deliver on the expectations within the shadow strategy that the needs of black and ethnic minority provision within the city will be researched. There are plans in place to action this research and a scoping document has been drafted to form the basis of discussions with consultants.
- 91 The council recognises a need to develop ways to consult with hard to reach groups. The council are making considerable efforts to engage with BME communities. However, this work has yet to provide results in terms of gaining a real insight into the needs of BME communities and establishing appropriate services for these groups.

*'We're finding it hard to provide culturally specific services.'* – A council officer.

- 92 This lack of progress by the council is echoed amongst providers. There does not appear to be a clear understanding from providers of the needs of the BME community and how best to meet those needs.
- 93 Gaps in provision remain for BME groups. People with HIV/AIDS and offenders including high risk offenders.

## Partnerships

- 94 Co-ordinated and effective partnership working is key to the success of the Supporting People programme that delivers real improvements to the housing related support available to vulnerable people. The council has a range of mechanisms in place to achieve this as described in the following sections of this report.
- 95 The council has used existing bodies to ensure the involvement of partners. The accountable officer has delivered a briefing to the multi-agency chief officers group on the supporting people programme. Papers have also been prepared for those modernisation and reform groups that consider the needs of users most closely associated with the supporting people programme.

## Inclusive Forum

- 96 The inclusive forum has operated in Sunderland since September 2001. The forum has managed to attract a diverse group of attendees and this has ensured that the forum has been effective in engaging a wide cross section of views to influence the development of the Supporting People programme.
- 97 The inclusive forum has received presentations from the national ODPM Supporting People team and the agendas have provided both information as well as providing the opportunity for debate and discussion. Discussion groups have formed a regular part of the agenda at the forum meetings and these have covered topics such as the shadow strategy and the engagement of hard to reach groups.

## Provider Forum

- 98 The council also operates a provider forum. This has brought housing and support providers together to work in partnership to share joint issues and cross fertilise ideas and experience. The forum has met quarterly over recent years. Providers felt informed and actively involved in the Supporting People programme through their participation at the provider forum.

## Core Strategy Group

- 99 The strategic housing partnership was specifically set up to oversee and deliver the housing strategy for the city of Sunderland. A number of consultation forums feed the strategic housing partnership and exist to debate specific issues. The partnership took on the role of core strategy group in October 2003. The group is still assimilating the knowledge and understanding required to deliver the supporting people programme. However, linking the roles of the core strategy

group and the strategic housing partnership should ensure coherence in the delivery of common objectives.

- 100 The strategic housing partnership in its role as core strategy group contains members who are also support service providers. The role of these providers at the strategic housing partnership does not include a representative from the providers' forum. Providers have expressed an anxiety that they have lost their voice in the management of the Supporting People programme at this level.
- 101 As yet the representation of health and probation at the strategic housing partnership has to be agreed. Given the crucial role of this group the lack of health and probation at the table is a major concern.
- 102 Prior to the shift of responsibility to the strategic housing partnership the core strategy group had been in existence since December 2001 and received comprehensive reports on the progress of Supporting People. Updates on the achievement of implementation milestones; the impact of Supporting People on registered care schemes and cost indicators for different scheme types were all reported to the core strategy group.
- 103 A review of minutes of meetings of the core strategy group shows that attendance by all partners at the group has been sporadic and therefore the strength of the partnership approach to decision making has been weakened. In particular engagement with health has been problematic. The Sunderland teaching PCT has had problems with vacancies at managerial level and has therefore often had to concentrate on day-to-day delivery of health services rather than engaging in discussions over strategies for the city.
- 104 The council should encourage health representatives across the city to look at effective models of partnership working with health in other parts of the country. This will help to ensure that the important preventative work around agreed shared agendas and targets to improve the quality of life and life chances provided by services funded through the Supporting People programme are maximised in Sunderland.

### **Commissioning Body**

- 105 The functioning of the commissioning body is a weakness in the delivery of Supporting People in Sunderland as not all partners are actively involved. Representation from the PCT has been sporadic and there has been no probation representation since May 2003. Council officers have identified that despite any commitment to the programme there is a lack of capacity from health and probation to allow them to engage in all the avenues for partnership working around Supporting People. This lack of regular and consistent engagement prevents the establishment of ownership, shared agendas, and priorities amongst key partners. Given that there are other meetings that do attract the membership of senior officers from partner organisations in the city it is confusing that this level of engagement has not been evident in the management of the £12 million Supporting People programme.
- 106 Reports have been taken to the commissioning body on issues such as the proposal to issue only block gross contracts in the city, the levels of the administration grant and the level of the Supporting People grant allocation. Decisions have been taken by the commissioning body for instance over the mechanism by which the savings required by the ODPM would be made. These decisions have been made without the full engagement of health and probation partners and will impact on the delivery of services to their service user groups.
- 107 A memorandum of understanding with the City of Sunderland Council as the administering local authority has been agreed by the commissioning body. Terms of reference for the commissioning body are in place although they make no reference to dispute resolution or voting mechanisms.

- 108 The accountable officer has no written delegated authority from the council to make decisions on their behalf at the commissioning body. Decisions could therefore be delayed by the need to refer back. Decisions actually made at this level have potentially far reaching political and/or financial consequences, representing a risk to the council and to the individual officer concerned. Council officers acknowledged that there may not be the appropriate level of senior staff on the commissioning body to facilitate partnership working.
- 109 There is a multi-agency chief officers group for health and social services operating in the city where Supporting People has been discussed. This may result in a better understanding of the linkages identified.
- 110 Elected members were informed about Supporting People at three meetings starting in April 2002. The council also operates a series of seminars during the year at which staff and members can be updated on emerging issues. The accountable officer and supported housing manager have also attended the social services and health review committee to provide an overview of the programme and there is an agreement that the review committee will now be receiving regular updates on progress of the programme.

### **Cross Authority Issues**

- 111 Sunderland is aligned to Tyne and Wear and Northumberland cross authority group in the development of Supporting People. The six administering local authorities in the cross authority group have worked together to achieve consistencies in working practices across borders on several issues. There has been evidence of some useful cross authority working to develop a statement for the shadow strategy and subsequently a draft for the five year strategy.
- 112 The cross authority group is also working to adopt joint approaches to the review of providers. This will make the review and validations process easier and less burdensome for providers and ensure that their experience of each administering local authority will be similar.
- 113 The cross authority working groups are working towards a joint understanding of the cross authority issues and have agreed to data sharing for this purpose. This will enable each of them to produce meaningful reports for their five year strategies and to make informed joint commissioning and decommissioning decisions in the future. However, the lack of reliable data regarding cross authority migration and needs is delaying progress on joint commissioning or decommissioning.
- 114 MAPPA arrangements work well in Sunderland, and are supported by a specific office set up in Northumbria, with the involvement of the Police and other partners. The divisional director for Northumbria probation area chairs the high risk meetings and MAPPA reviews, where there is also representation from partner agencies such as public health, PCTs and the trust.

### **Quality and Monitoring**

#### **Contracts and Payments**

- 115 The council has successfully negotiated the signing of contracts with service providers and has implemented the payment of Supporting People grant in a timely and efficient manner.
- 116 The transition of funding streams from 1 April 2003 has been seamless. No difficulties with Supporting People payments are reported by the Supporting People team or the providers we contacted.
- 117 Workshops and presentations were carried out with providers as and when new information was received from the ODPM. One to one visits could be arranged to assist providers with the forms. The supporting people team scrutinised providers' forms to make sure they were claiming correctly to receive the right amount of funding. These processes were welcomed by providers.

- 118 Providers were positive about the contracts being drawn up early to allow them time to fully understand the implications and negotiate any changes.

### **Performance Management**

- 119 There has been a positive partnering approach to key performance indicators with providers, who have negotiated return dates with the Supporting People team. The information flow between providers and the council is becoming well established.
- 120 There is a general lack of overall monitoring of performance information gathered from the providers. Data is considered by individual officers within the social services directorate and there are some examples where the performance of individual providers has been questioned on the basis of their performance returns. However, there is no review of indicators specific to Supporting People and there is no systematic production of reports for senior managers or members.
- 121 As yet there has been no use of health or probation performance indicators in the development of monitoring arrangements for Supporting People. As a result the potential impact of the Supporting People programme on wider agendas for vulnerable people in Sunderland cannot be accurately monitored. Council officers acknowledged that the development of local performance indicators had not been arrived at in conjunction with health, housing and probation.
- 122 There are plans to report the performance of the Supporting People programme to cabinet on a six monthly basis. Where Supporting People developments do impact upon local communities these would be discussed at the local area forums at which local members would be involved in the debate.
- 123 Performance management is beginning to be applied more rigorously at scheme level through the impact of Supporting People. A provider of accommodation based support for young homeless people with support needs is developing a point's based method of showing progress over time towards independence. This will provide a qualitative measurement of outcomes for this client group.

### **Value for Money and Cost Effectiveness**

- 124 All transitional housing benefit claims had been cleared by the time the final grant reconciliation, the Platinum Cut, was completed in July 2003. The level of funding determined for submission to the ODPM was less at the Platinum Cut than it had been at the interim grant reconciliation, the Golden Cut, in March 2003 suggesting a rigorous approach to the scrutiny of submissions from providers.
- 125 The council adopted robust mechanisms for ensuring that claims for transitional housing benefit were evidenced by background data that verified the housing related support costs. An individual member of staff within the Supporting People team and drawn from a background in housing benefit administration checked all claims and requested additional documentation from providers to ascertain the correct level of benefit.
- 126 The Sunderland housing group, the stock transfer company, has a system of pooled rents whereby the cost of providing supported housing services, in particular to sheltered accommodation, were absorbed by the rental income from all tenants regardless of whether they received such services. The arrival of Supporting People has meant that the Sunderland housing group has had to identify the cost of providing such services separately.
- 127 The total Supporting People grant paid to Sunderland housing group is approximately £5.3 million per annum. There has been no alteration to the rent being charged to tenants by Sunderland housing group as the result of this additional income. This has resulted in a windfall cash benefit to Sunderland housing group. The council are in discussions with the group to identify the needs

that can be met through the creative use of this additional revenue that meets the aspirations of the Supporting People programme.

### **Risk and Contingency Planning**

- 128 There is currently no comprehensive risk management strategy in place relating to the full extent of the Supporting People programme. Work has been undertaken to consider the potential for service failure in emergencies through the service continuity document. These arrangements were tested in October 2002 when a World War II bomb was discovered in the city and two large sheltered schemes had to be evacuated requiring the relocation of residents for two days.
- 129 Risk management arrangements are in place to consider the management of offenders accommodated in Sunderland. Protocols have been established between partner organisations and information sharing protocols are being drafted.
- 130 In considering the appropriate form of contract to be adopted by the council the risks involved in each possible choice was outlined in a paper to the council's cabinet meeting of 6 November 2002.
- 131 Risks to the information technology system for Supporting People have been assessed and contingency plans are in place including daily backups and disaster recovery procedures.

### **Service Reviews**

- 132 ODPM guidance requires administering local authorities (ALAs) to review all services funded through Supporting People within the three years from 1 April 2003. ALAs are required to produce a service review timetable and to produce a rationale to explain the ordering of reviews. Progress with the service review timetable is provided to ODPM through their regular performance monitoring returns.
- 133 A number of factors were considered by the council in determining the rationale for selecting older persons' schemes for review in the first year of Supporting People funding being in place. The reasoning was that this was the largest area of provision and officers had an understanding that some accommodation might be redundant and could be potentially harnessed for use by other client groups. However the review of high unit cost schemes, in order to test the robustness of assessments for eligibility and the potential for significant cost savings, has been discounted.
- 134 The review timescale was agreed by the commissioning body with older persons' provision being in year one starting with Anchor Housing's accommodation in April 2003. As a result of opting to consider older persons in the first year the Supporting People team have embarked upon an ambitious review programme with 75 reviews planned within this year, 2003/04.
- 135 Despite the Supporting People team carrying out some service reviews as early as April 2003 the outcomes of those service reviews have not been relayed to providers and service users, this has limited the effectiveness of the learning opportunities from reviews. Verbal feedback is given to providers following the completion of the review and they are encouraged to tackle issues that have arisen as part of the review. However, there has been no formal written reporting of outcomes of the reviews to the commissioning body despite 47 reviews already having been completed. Given the timescale for implementing changes to contracts the benefits that could be realised may be considerably delayed.
- 136 The delay in the production of reports and feedback to service users and providers following review is inconsistent with other contract management arrangements within the social services directorate which offer providers speedy feedback and an opportunity for challenge. The rationale for the delay is that

reviews were also intended to compare the cost of the services with comparative data from across the region and nationally. This comparative information has only been made available recently.

- 137 Supporting people team members have attended training provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and women's aid in November 2003 to provide officers with a better understanding of the issues relevant to the review of schemes for women leaving domestic violence.
- 138 Exact details of the methodology for future reviews are still to be determined. There is an acceptance amongst council officers that the skills of the supporting people team will need to be supplemented to provide expertise in the client groups that will be reviewed in years two and three of the programme. Current thinking within the council is that independent voluntary sector advocacy groups may be contracted to provide input into the reviews with particular regard to eliciting the views of users. Some providers expressed concerns that their reviews, scheduled for years two and three, needed to be conducted by staff that understood their client group and would allow an open and honest contribution from staff and users.
- 139 The support received from the Supporting People team by provider's perspective has been very helpful and the validation toolkit was a useful tool for ensuring that providers were prepared for the scope of the reviews. The toolkit gives providers a detailed guide as to the approach the council will take in carrying out service reviews. The toolkit states that all stages of the review process will be used for all providers regardless of risk. Desktop reviews alone will not be relied upon.
- 140 The council has drafted an appeals and disputes procedure to coincide with the service reviews. This procedure has been presented to the provider's forum and is due to be ratified by the commissioning body in early January 2004.

### **Needs mapping**

- 141 Council officers and providers were confident that the process of developing the Supporting People programme in Sunderland had effectively captured all the provision that would be eligible to the funding. The shadow strategy demonstrated that there were some gaps in provision when compared with the ODPM's suggested profile. There was no significant discrepancy in the results of the analysis in the shadow strategy and the comments received from providers.
- 142 The Supporting People team have highlighted the need to utilise any surplus funding as a result of windfall benefits with providers to meet identified gaps in need.
- 143 The probation service contributed to the shadow strategy and are preparing their needs priorities for the five year strategy, including the probation's housing support plan. Northumbria probation service has reviewed its offender accommodation in three other boroughs, by sending out stakeholder questionnaires. It is anticipated that this will also happen in Sunderland.

### **Outcomes for service users and carers**

- 144 The services visited generally provided good standard accommodation and furnishings. Levels of support provided to the tenants were regarded as appropriate by the tenants themselves and could be adapted by negotiation as needs varied. The Supporting People programme is increasing the quality and consistency of services for vulnerable people across a range of client groups including people with learning disabilities, street homeless, young people and older people in sheltered accommodation.
- 145 Resident feedback from the supported accommodation services that were visited was that they were satisfied with the support they had received. In particular feedback from residents of a sheltered accommodation scheme has identified that they are more than satisfied with the service they receive and welcome the

welfare checks that the wardens carry out as well as the social activities that are arranged as it contributes to their ability to maintain their independence and improves their quality of life.

- 146 The implementation of Supporting People has triggered the council to consider the use of the most appropriate types of occupancy agreement that will provide the greatest security of tenure for users. A working group, with input from legal staff, is now considering the applicability of alternative tenure types across mental health and learning disability accommodation.
- 147 The decision to only utilise block gross contracts means that under the council's own procedures all service users who might be charged for services will automatically benefit from a welfare benefits assessment. This procedure has not realised significant additional benefits income for users, however, it does ensure that charges are being levied in a fair and equitable manner.
- 148 It has proved difficult to demonstrate the added value that floating support services are offering to the range of client groups assisted through the Supporting People programme. The establishment of more effective performance monitoring systems is key to recognising the benefits that the programme is delivering.
- 149 There are still a number of priorities that need to be addressed from the perspective of the probation service to meet the needs of offenders. These include the provision of direct access services open to users with an offending history.
- 150 The following case studies illustrate positive outcomes for service users and demonstrate the effectiveness of the council's work in this area.

## Supporting People Case Study 1

Service User Group: Young Single Homeless  
Type of Service : Accommodation based  
Key Players : Housing Advice  
Accommodation Provider  
Support Provider

Issues to be addressed :

- ◆ P is an eighteen year old male who became homeless. His parents are divorced and he originally lived with his mother who asked him to leave, whereupon he spent several months staying with various friends or with his father whose home was already overcrowded.

Actions taken :

- ◆ P approached the housing advice centre and was referred to the project for young homeless people in which he now lives. He shares a two bedroom flat with another male.
- ◆ When he first moved in he had to be shown how to use a washing machine as he had never done this. He was assisted in obtaining benefits and has agreed a support plan with his key worker which assists him with budgeting and to access training which he hopes will enable him to obtain employment.

Outcome for Service User :

- ◆ As a result of the support given to him P is undertaking a course in food hygiene. He would like ultimately to obtain his own independent tenancy but recognises that it will take him several more months before he reaches this level of independence. P is very happy living at the project and feels able to influence such matters as house rules by discussion with the support workers and via house meetings. His relationship with his mother is improving as a result of him taking responsibility for himself and he says that he is slowly building bridges with her.

## How does the performance compare?

- 151 In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.
- 152 The details of the data used to inform comparisons are included in the data appendix to this report. Where possible, we have compared the council with other councils in its Audit Commission family group (councils with similar general characteristics). We have also compared the council with average indicator for all England and all metropolitan councils.
- 153 The council has delivered the Supporting People programme utilising an administration grant from the ODPM that is significantly below the average per head of population for metropolitan councils across England.
- 154 The council compares well in the resources it has secured for the grant available to fund the whole programme. While the figure is below the average per head of population for metropolitan councils it is above the average for all administering

local authorities in England and above the average for administering local authorities in the North east region.

- 155 Accommodation based services have been developed for:
- ◆ eight beds of accommodation for single people aged 18 to 65 recovering from drug and alcohol addictions.
- 156 Floating support schemes have been developed for:
- ◆ a scheme for twenty tenants in general needs accommodation but requiring additional support over a limited period to sustain their tenancy; and
  - ◆ a scheme for eight young homeless people rehoused in private sector accommodation.
- 157 In the performance assessment framework indicators for 2001/02:
- ◆ the council performed significantly above the average for employment, education & training for care leavers; adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home; older people helped to live at home; users who said they got help quickly;
  - ◆ the council performed above the average for intensive home care; admissions of supported residents aged 18-64 to residential/nursing care; users who said that matters relating to race, culture, or religion were noted; waiting time for care packages; adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home;
  - ◆ the council performed averagely in relation to intensive home care as a percentage of intensive home and residential care; adults with mental health problems helped to live at home; delayed discharge (all ages); emergency psychiatric re-admissions; percentage of items of equipment and adaptations costing less than £1000 delivered within 3 weeks; and
  - ◆ the council performed below the average for admissions of supported residents aged 65 or over to residential/nursing care; and avoidable harm for older people (falls and hypothermia).
- 158 In the best value performance indicators for 2001/02 compared with other metropolitan councils:
- ◆ the council was in the top quartile for performance in the level of the commission for racial equality's standard to which the authority conforms; the number of unfit private sector dwellings made fit or demolished; the number of homelessness decisions within 33 days; and
  - ◆ the council performed averagely in the number of buildings accessible to disabled people; the average time for processing new claims for benefits; the average time for processing changes of circumstance for benefits; the number of renewal claims processed on time; and the number of domestic violence refuge places.

## Summary

- 159 Overall, we judge that the City of Sunderland is delivering a good, two-star service in its planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme. We have highlighted the following areas in making our judgement.
- ◆ The council has produced a sound shadow strategy for the Supporting People programme and has well advanced plans for delivering a five year strategy that embraces the views of users and other stakeholders. The shadow strategy clearly sits within a hierarchy of other strategies developed by the council and its partners. Providers are positive about the council's Supporting People team; their depth of knowledge; and the facilitative style they have adopted in implementing the Supporting People programme. The Supporting People programme is already beginning to produce positive

outcomes for the people of Sunderland that link to the priorities in the shadow strategy. These benefits relate to both the range of services available and the quality of existing services.

- ◆ The council has delivered the Supporting People programme in the city for a level of administration grant that is below what might have been expected given a comparison with other metropolitan councils and their 'nearest neighbours' in terms of population profile. However, Supporting People is not fully integrated into the new system of modernisation and reform groups and the multi-agency chief officers group. The council has failed to provide clear boundaries for the delegated authority being exercised by officers at the commissioning body. The outputs from the monitoring of schemes funded by Supporting People have not been built into any systematic reporting mechanism within the council. Partner organisations have not been asked to feed in relevant data from their own sources to provide a rounded picture of how the Supporting People programme is impacting on the lives of vulnerable people in Sunderland. The results from service reviews have not been formally reported back to providers and users despite the programme of reviews having been in operation since April 2003. The potential for service improvement has therefore been delayed.

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

160 Inspectors have judged the service's prospects for improvement based on its capacity to improve using the four building blocks for effective improvement identified in '*Changing Gear*'.

- ◆ Ownership of problems and willingness to change.
- ◆ A sustained focus on what matters.
- ◆ The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement.
- ◆ Integration of continuous improvement into day to day management.

## Ownership of problems & willingness to change

161 There was a commitment to the Supporting People programme from senior officers and elected members it was seen as important by councillors who are portfolio holders with an interest in the agenda.

162 Sunderland teaching primary care trust (PCT) is satisfied with the level of general engagement with the council on joint health and social services agendas across the spectrum on need. This engagement is facilitated by the numerous modernisation and reform groups that are in operation drawing together officers from the statutory sector with voluntary sector representatives, users and carers. The existence of such groups and the successful engagement of the council and the PCT at these meetings makes it even more surprising that there has been an absence of PCT attendees at Supporting People related meetings.

163 There are also regular meetings of senior officers from the council and health sector at the multi-agency chief officers group at which the progress of the modernisation and reform groups is discussed. It is acknowledged that the relative underdevelopment of the PCT has hindered a full engagement with the Supporting People programme both through the core strategy group and the commissioning body. The council have requested regular attendance of sufficiently senior officers from the PCT at Supporting People meetings. These requests have included direct contact with the PCT's chief executive. However, the requests could have been made from a more senior level within the council.

164 A change in the structure of the local probation service has meant that representation at the commissioning body and the core strategy group is now split. The officer tasked with attending the commissioning body had not yet been

able to attend although this situation has been rectified from the beginning of 2004.

- 165 There is a recognition by senior officers in the council that following outcomes of reviews there will be difficult decisions to be made but that the mechanisms are not in place to do this until other partners are successfully engaged to provide a rounded basis for the decisions to be taken.
- 166 At present the commissioning body fails to function in the manner that guidance on Supporting People suggests is appropriate, this is not helped by the council not offering high level corporate leadership in relation to the seniority of officers tasked with attending the commissioning body. As a result there is a lack of ownership amongst all the key partners in relation to how the programme will be moulded and sustained in the future.
- 167 Those officers attending the commissioning body have showed a preparedness to take difficult decisions in relation to the revenue funding of pipeline schemes, some of which were in the construction phase, that did not attract the Supporting People grant that had been expected. The commissioning body after exploring alternative revenue income streams agreed that these schemes would be front funded until savings could be realised from the service review process.

## **A sustained focus on what matters**

- 168 The council adopts a rigorous project planning approach and this is evident in the consideration given to the work plans for the Supporting People team. Specifically the development of the five year strategy for the programme has been integrated into a comprehensive plan for the future work of the team.
- 169 The council is developing its consultation in relation to the five year strategy with a clear commitment to users through the service specific consultation strategy. The inclusion of the results of this consultation will allow a continued focus on the aspirations and opinions of users as the Supporting People programme develops.
- 170 The dialogue between the local strategic partnership (LSP) and the Supporting People programme is channelled through the strategic housing partnership. This group is chaired by the council's portfolio holder for housing and a representative attends the LSP. As the strategic housing partnership takes on the role of the core strategy group there are well developed mechanisms for information to flow between Supporting People and wider community priorities.
- 171 However, for this interchange to be truly effective the involvement of health, probation and voluntary sector representatives at the strategic housing partnership needs to be addressed and modified. Attendance of these representatives needs to be secured.
- 172 Links to the regional housing board are evident as the minutes of strategic housing partnership record the Tyne and Wear bid for regional single housing investment programme resources. The regional housing board are invited to attend meetings of the strategic housing partnership.

## **The capacity and systems to deliver performance and improvement**

- 173 The council has a sizeable Supporting People team drawn from a variety of backgrounds. The team has remained stable over a relatively long period with little turnover of staff. The experience and knowledge embodied in this team suggests that the Supporting People programme has sufficient staff capacity available to deliver performance improvements.
- 174 The council has a robust approach to project planning. A flowchart based action plan has been implemented to guide the council in achieving the production of the five year strategy and develop the Supporting People service more generally.

Other strategy documents are also backed up by action plans for instance the housing strategy has an action plan attached which is prioritised, the tasks have been identified and a lead person named, timescales attached, outcomes set out and resources allocated.

- 175 By commissioning an internal audit of Supporting People implementation the council utilised its corporate capacity to support the successful implementation of the programme. The Supporting People team also committed resources and time to the production of business process diagrams and functional specifications to enable their IT section to produce a robust Supporting People local system. By focussing on the functional requirements (the what) rather than the technical specifications (the how) the Supporting People team have ensured that the product met their needs exactly.
- 176 The Supporting People local system has been fully implemented and is fit for purpose at this time. Ongoing development capacity and flexibility in the department will ensure it will continue to support the delivery of the programme into the future. Again this is evidence of corporate capacity being used to bolster the development of the Supporting People programme.
- 177 At a senior level the corporate performance management system is used to set and monitor personal staff targets. This ensures that staff understand how their role contributes to the corporate goals. The supported housing manager also receives regular supervision from the accountable officer in addition to annual appraisal. The performance of individual Supporting People staff is managed through the supervision staff receive in formal sessions with the supported housing manager every six weeks. However, staff from the Supporting People team do not have individual targets for them to meet so it is difficult to identify their individual contributions to wider strategies.
- 178 There is an open door approach for staff to talk to managers which staff find useful, monthly supervisory meetings and each member of staff have a personal development file for training purposes.
- 179 There is an intention on the part of the Supporting People team to introduce local performance indicators by April 2004 based on specific user client groups, which will enable more detailed information on performance amongst specific service areas to be gathered and monitored. None of the partners have been involved in the development of the local performance indicators and there is a need to ensure that the outcomes required by the partner organisations are built into the eventual monitoring profile. At present the administration requirements for providers do not appear to have been too onerous from the provider's perspective The Supporting People team have been successfully involving providers and building capacity as a key area of work.
- 180 Senior officers in the council recognise that the reporting arrangements for Supporting People are not robust and mainstreamed into the council's performance management framework. This is despite the existence of regular and comprehensive reporting arrangements for other aspects of work managed within the social services directorate.

## **Integration of continuous improvement into day to day management**

- 181 Council officers are confident that as an excellent authority there is the ability to challenge internal services rigorously. The council has a track record of responding to internal and external examination as a contribution to continuous improvement.
- 182 The council is proactive in challenging existing methods of service provision and offering constructive criticism to improve delivery. The council has already conducted two internal reviews of the Supporting People service. There has been an internal audit report on the financial and administrative arrangements around

Supporting People. There has also been an internal review of the service based upon the social services inspectorate and joint review matrix. This review reported that in the council's opinion the Supporting People programme was good with excellent prospects for improvement. In both cases actions and recommendations were made to improve the service and these have been incorporated into objectives for the Supporting People team.

- 183 The input of the Supporting People programme has focussed providers on the need for performance management information and using this to promote continuous improvement. There are examples of this in relation to the restructuring of staff teams, target setting and the installation of monitoring systems to check the development of users over time.
- 184 The modernisation and reform groups provide a grounding for the decisions being taken in relation to the provision of accommodation related support across all user groups in Sunderland. The findings of these groups feed into the strategic level multi-agency chief officer group and the results are reflected within the draft commissioning strategy produced by the social services directorate. The link to Supporting People funding is recognised within this document.
- 185 The inclusive forum provides a regular opportunity for the Supporting People team to consider the views of users and their representatives. These views are welcomed and there is evidence of a user perspective being used to adapt and mould the strategy for the supporting people programme.

## Summary

- 186 Overall, we judge that the City of Sunderland Council has promising prospects for delivering further improvements in the delivery of its Supporting People programme.
- ◆ The council's well developed systems for users consultation are now supported by the use of the strategic housing partnership as the core strategy group for the Supporting People programme as this forum links directly to the wider agenda of the local strategic partnership and the regional housing board. The council has adopted sound practices for delivering policy priorities through the use of action planning techniques for the delivery of the Supporting People programme. The council has a track record of responding positively to internal and external challenge. This commitment is also reflected within the Supporting People service.
  - ◆ The council is not offering high level corporate leadership in relation to the seniority of officers tasked with attending the commissioning body. There is a lack of ownership amongst all the key partners in relation to how the programme will be moulded and sustained in the future. Staff within the Supporting People team have yet to benefit from annual appraisals that establish a link between their own objectives for the forthcoming year and the directorate and corporate targets. The reporting arrangements for the Supporting People programme have not been established at present. Partners have not been engaged in discussions as to the format and content of these reports to successfully monitor progress on joint objectives for the programme.

# Appendices

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

## Documents reviewed

Before going on site and during our visit, we reviewed various documents that the council provided for us. These included:

- ◆ Housing Strategy.
- ◆ City of Sunderland Strategic Housing Partnership - Terms of Reference and minutes.
- ◆ City of Sunderland Supporting People Service Continuity Plan.
- ◆ Internal Audit Report – Supporting People.
- ◆ Minutes of Cabinet meetings where Supporting People discussed.
- ◆ Better Care Higher Standards Charter Summary.
- ◆ Minutes of Core Strategy Development Group and terms of reference.
- ◆ Commissioning body minutes and terms of reference.
- ◆ Validation Toolkit.
- ◆ Supporting People Leaflet.
- ◆ Supporting People Newsletter issue one.
- ◆ Focus on the Future Action Plan Flowchart.
- ◆ Internal Audit – Supporting People Application.
- ◆ Supporting People Five Year Strategy and Business Planning – Consultation Process Document.
- ◆ Service Review timetable document.

## Reality checks undertaken

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

- ◆ North East Council on Addiction – User group and visit to accommodation.
- ◆ Hillcrest Hostel – User interviews and visit to accommodation.
- ◆ Ashkirk Homeless Families Unit – visit to accommodation.
- ◆ Chillingham House Sheltered Accommodation – User interviews and visit to accommodation.
- ◆ Salvation Army Direct Access Hostel – visit to accommodation.
- ◆ Housing 21 Sheltered Accommodation – visit to accommodation.
- ◆ Wearside Women in Need – visit to accommodation.
- ◆ YMCA Foyer – visit to accommodation.
- ◆ Hepburn Grove Learning Disability Group Home – User interviews and visit to accommodation.

- ◆ Albany House Sheltered Accommodation – visit to accommodation.
- ◆ Holmewood Project for young homeless – User interviews and visit to accommodation.

## List of people interviewed

Steve Atkinson	Housing Benefits Manager
Pauline Blyth	Accountable Officer, Assistant Head of Service, Adult Services
Louise Butler	Benefits Co-ordinator SP Team
Alan Catherall	Financial Manager, Social Services
Cllr Charlton	Deputy Leader
David Elliott	Customer and Quality Services Manager
John Fisher	Head of Service, Adult Services
Councillor Forbes	Leader of the Opposition
Jean Hedley	Social Services
Eileen Innes	North East Council on Addiction
Glenys Jones	Director of Social Services
Julie Kelly	Sunderland Housing Group
Graham King	Principal Performance Management Officer
Hana Knotek	Divisional Director, Northumbria Probation Area
William Leong	Housing Services Manager Housing 21
Sheila Lister	Assistant Director of Primary Care Partnerships
Pamela Maxwell Court	Manager Housing 21
Ian Morris	Housing Service Manager
Clare Phillipson	Wearside Women in Need
Lorraine Regan	ODPM
Doug Smith	Strategic Policy Manager
David Smith	Supported Housing Manager
Richard Taylor	Partnership and Accommodation Manager, Northumbria Probation Area

Cllr Timmins Portfolio Holder Social Services and Health

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Cllr Trueman Portfolio Holder Housing

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Marilyn Wilkie Mental Health Direct

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# Appendices

## Demographic information

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

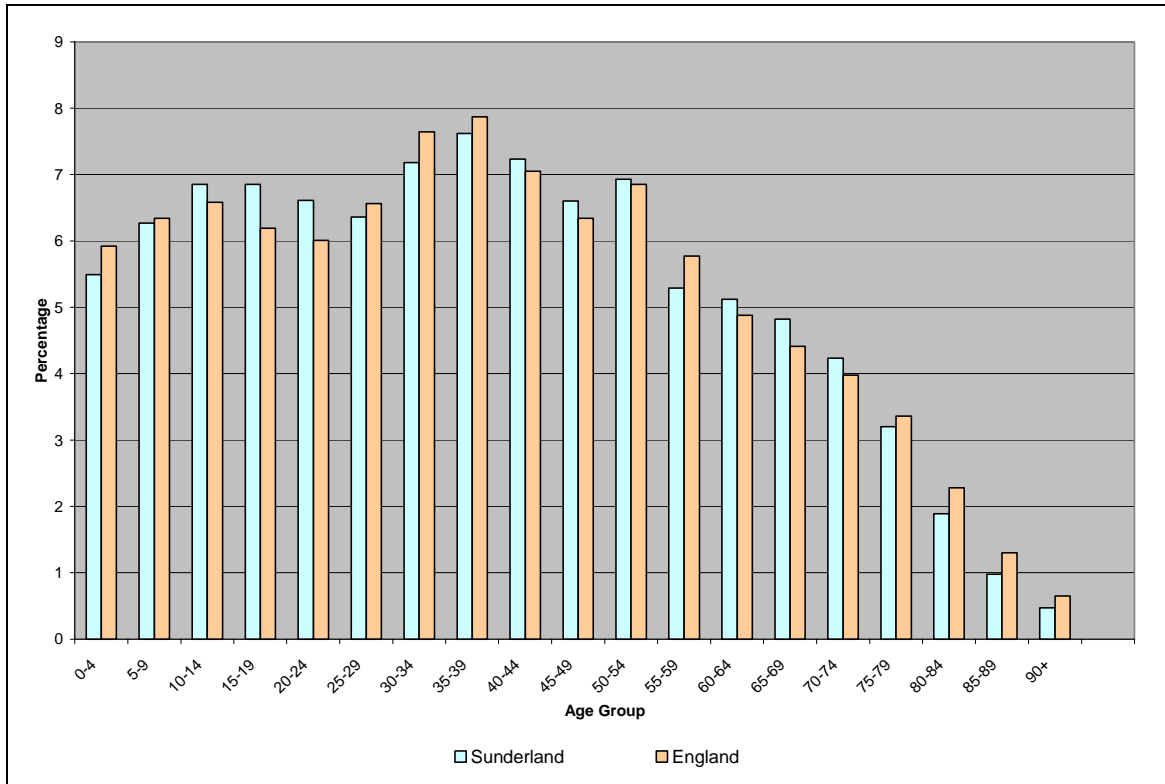
Measure	Sunderland	England
Population (mid-2001)	280,807	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2001)	15.59	15.9
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2001)	2.88	12.5
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	3.7	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) <sup>4</sup>	15	-
Multiple deprivation – wards in the most deprived 10 per cent <sup>5</sup>	11 of 25	-
Access to services - wards in the most deprived 10 per cent <sup>6</sup>	0 of 25	-

<sup>4</sup> Indices of Deprivation 2000, average ward score for the authority.

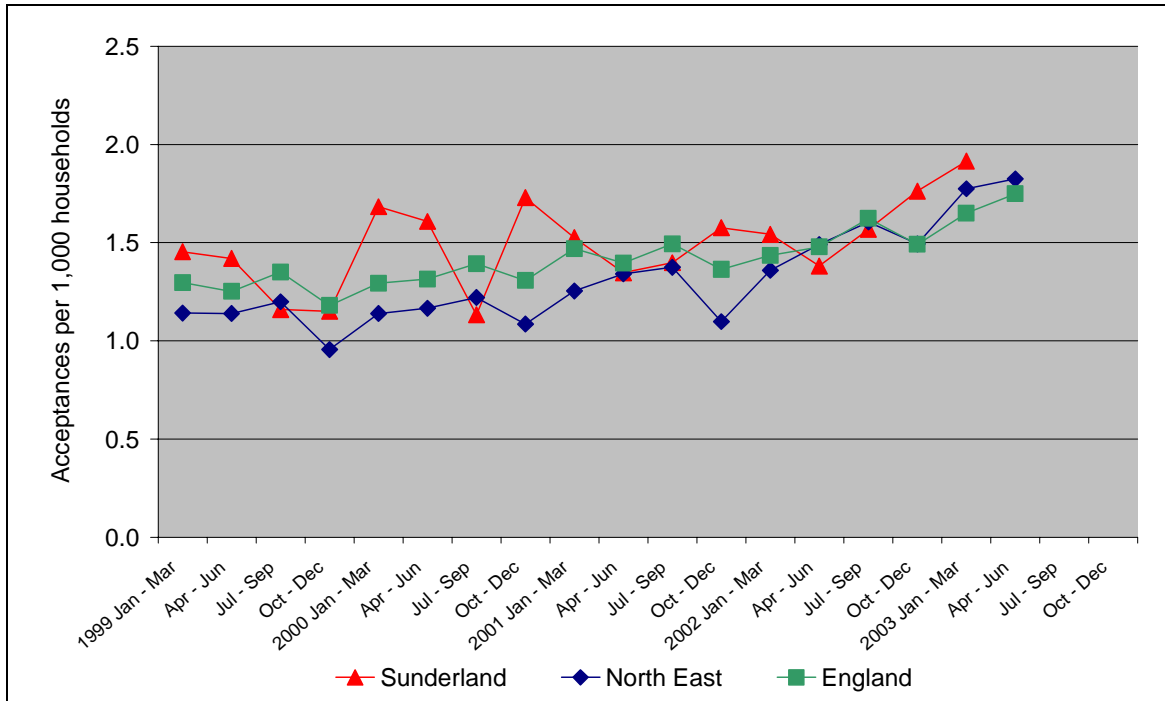
<sup>5</sup> Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of index of multiple deprivation rank (out of 8414 wards).

<sup>6</sup> Indices of Deprivation 2000, rank of access domain (out of 8414 wards).

Percentage of the population in each age group compared with England



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



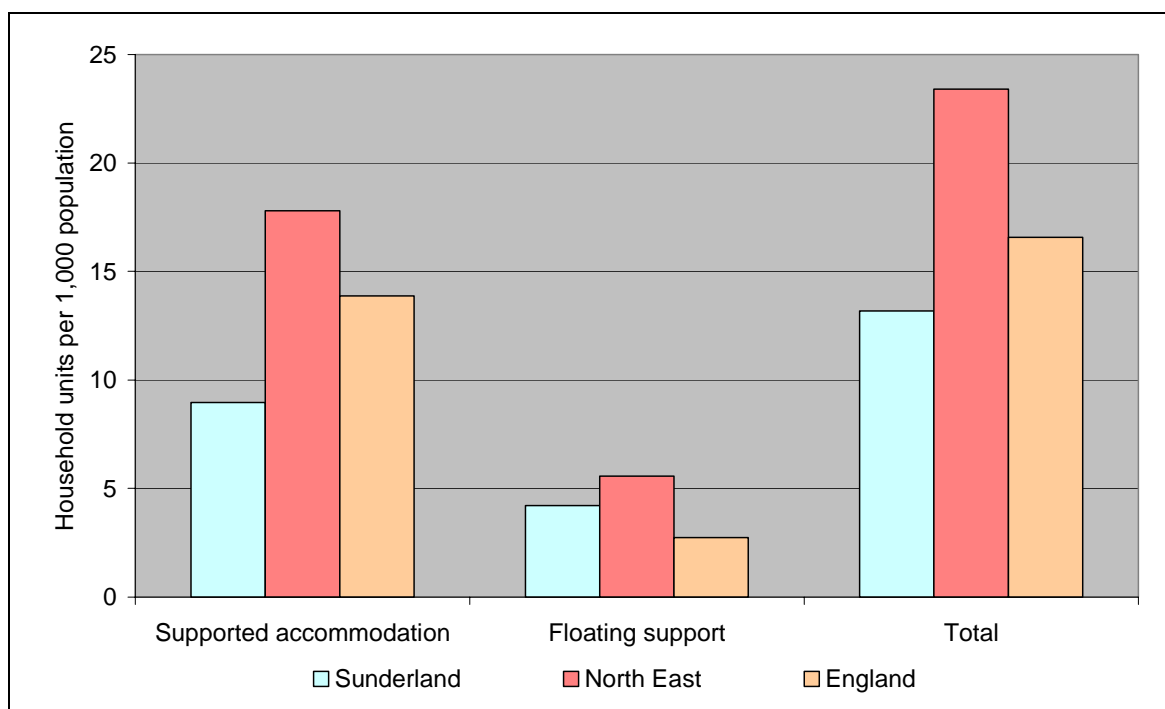
## Performance information

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

- ◆ data for services funded through the Supporting People programme;
- ◆ comprehensive performance assessment scores;
- ◆ star ratings for social services;
- ◆ performance assessment framework indicators for social services; and
- ◆ relevant best value performance indicators.

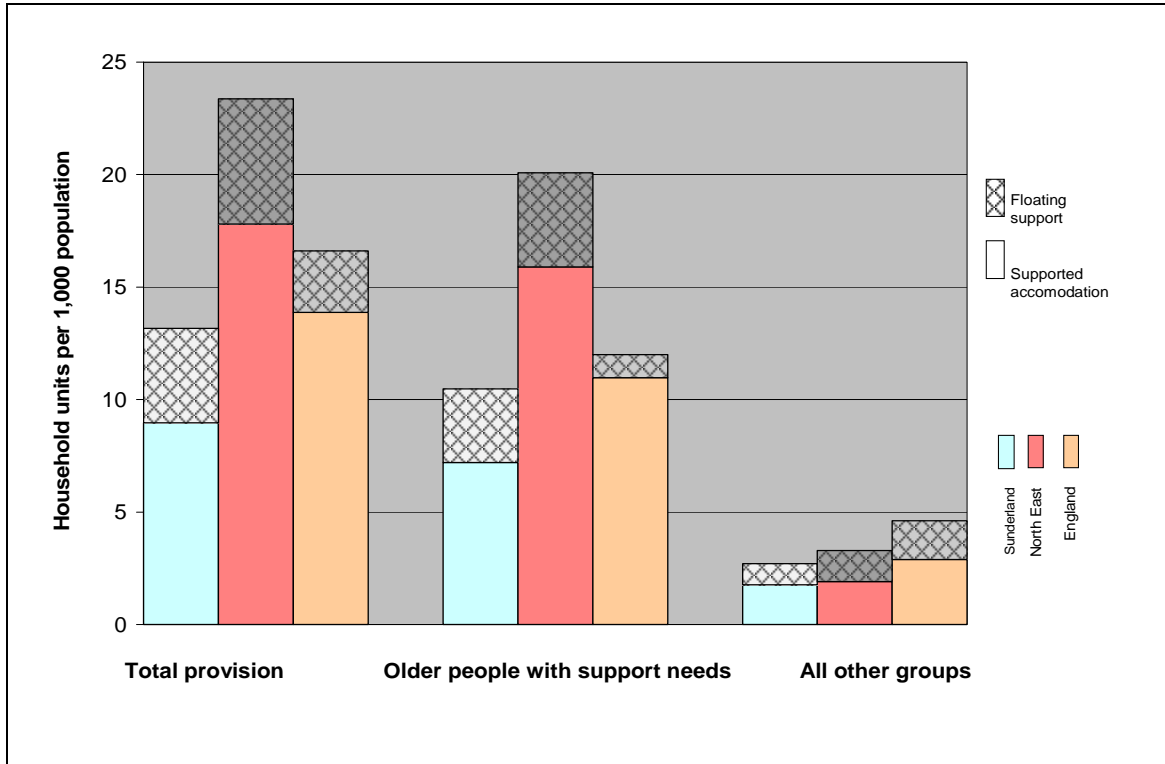
### Supporting People data

#### Total service provision funded through Supporting People<sup>7</sup>

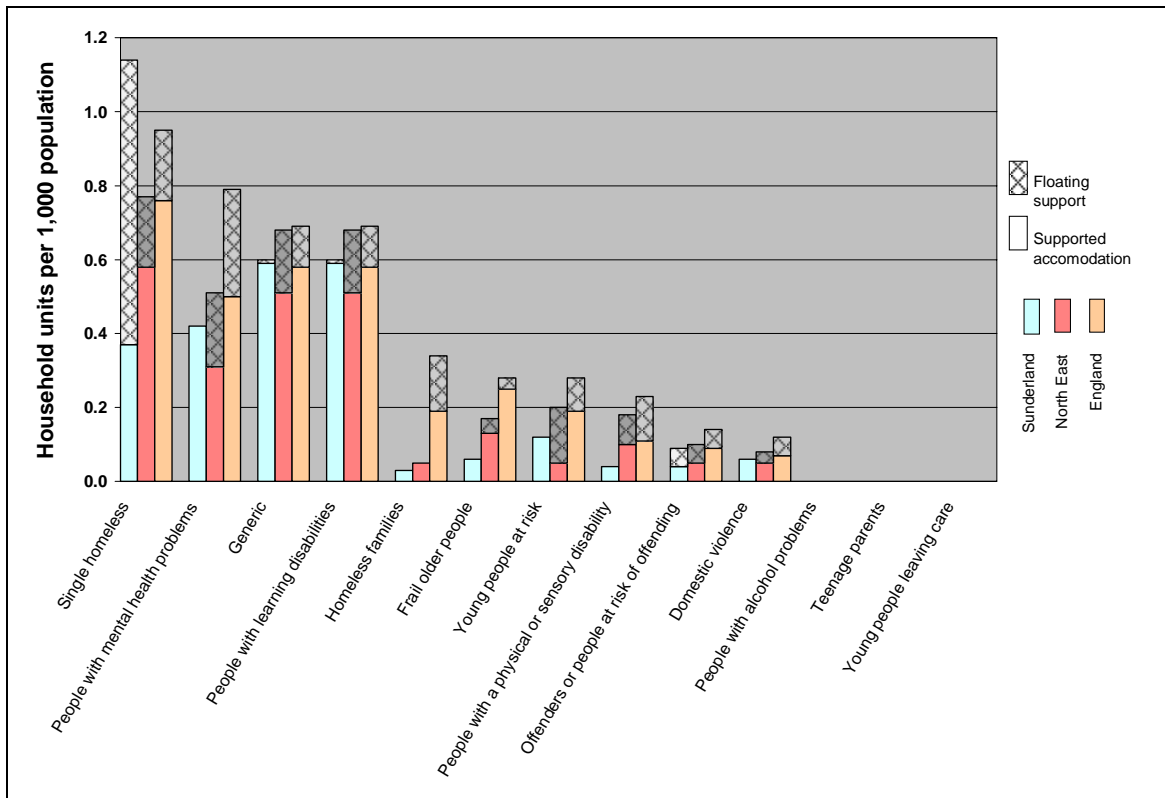


<sup>7</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England<sup>8</sup>



Services for other groups compared with the region and England<sup>9</sup>



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

<sup>9</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

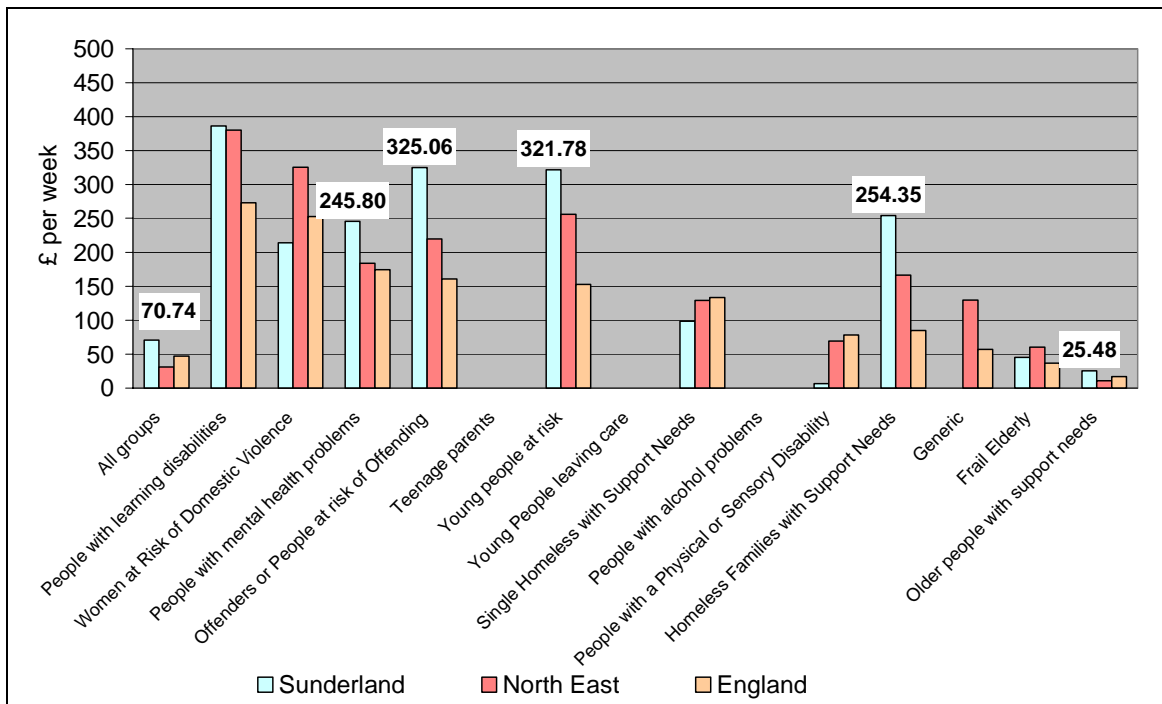
**Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04**

	Final Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Sunderland	£ 12,020,323	£ 64,504	£ 247,157.57

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

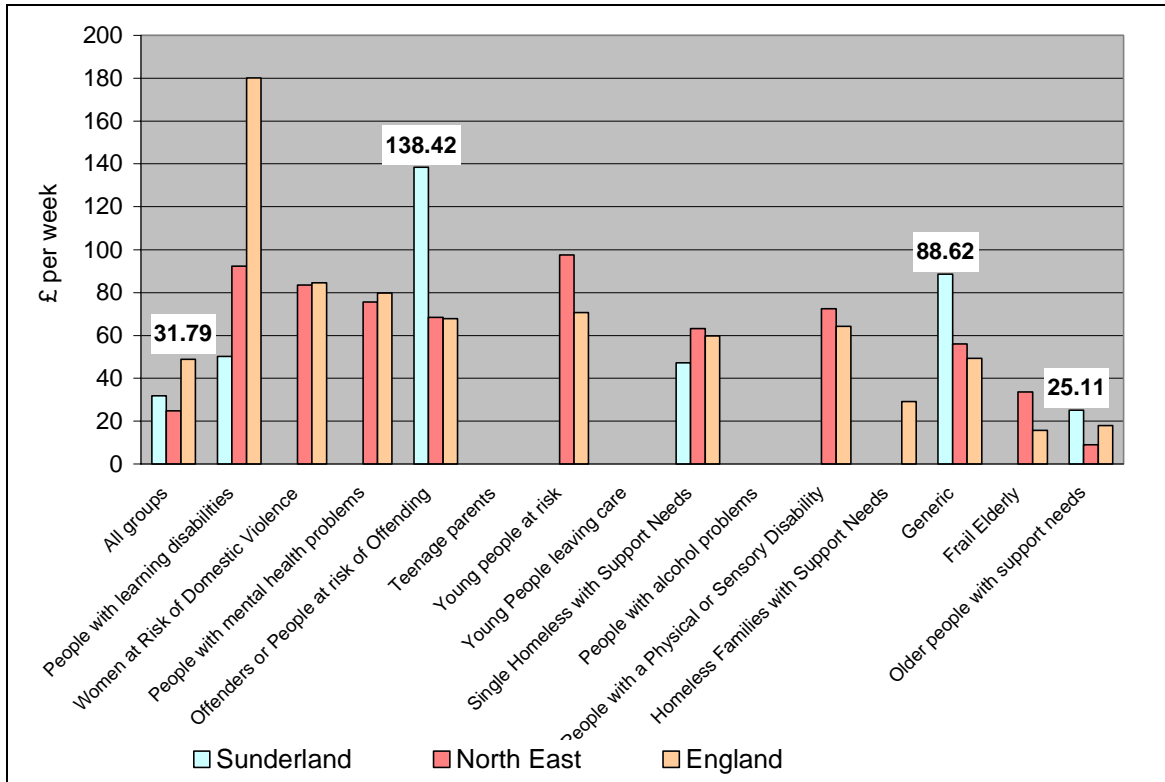
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing
Sunderland	£ 0.83	£ 19.51	£ 62.30	£ 175.86
North East	£ 0.72	£ 17.86	£ 24.71	£ 62.45
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

**Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) <sup>10</sup>**

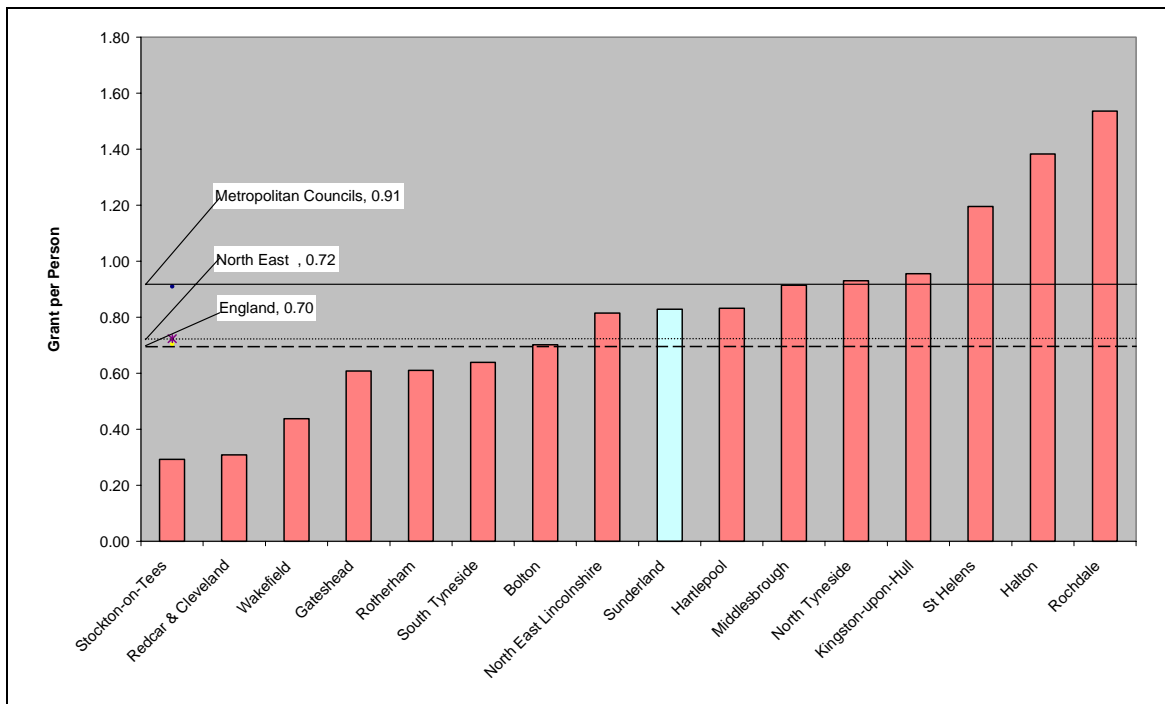


<sup>10</sup> Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

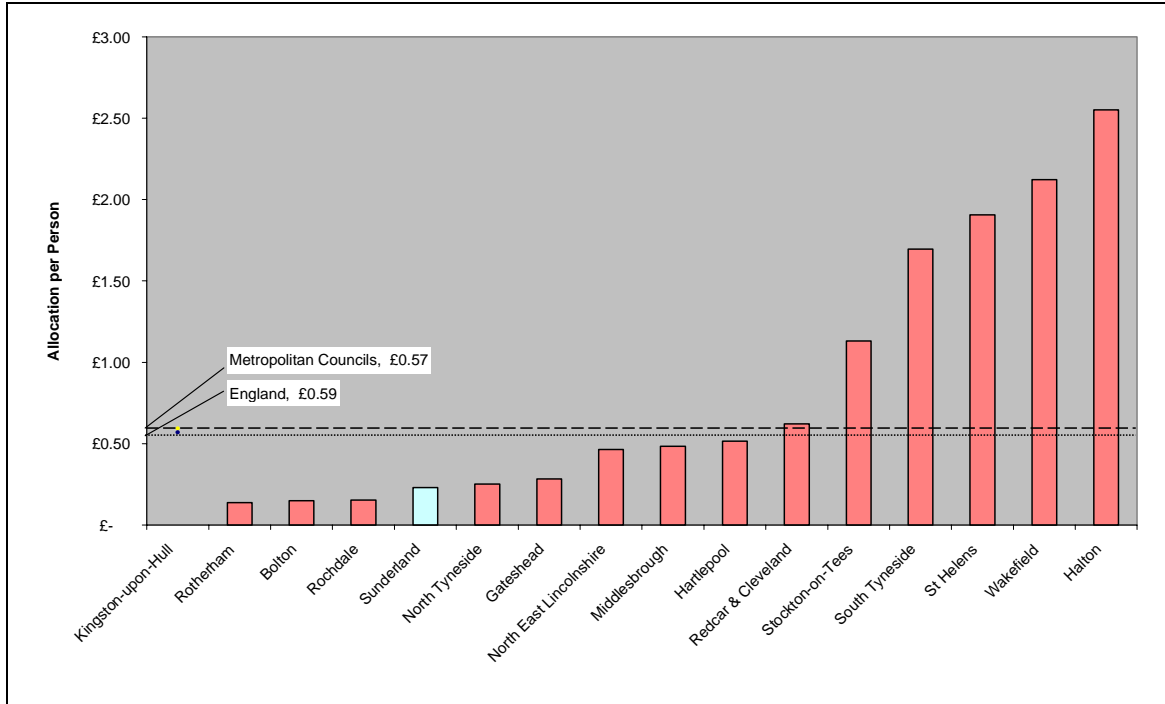


**Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours<sup>11</sup>, all metropolitan councils and all English councils (2003/04)**

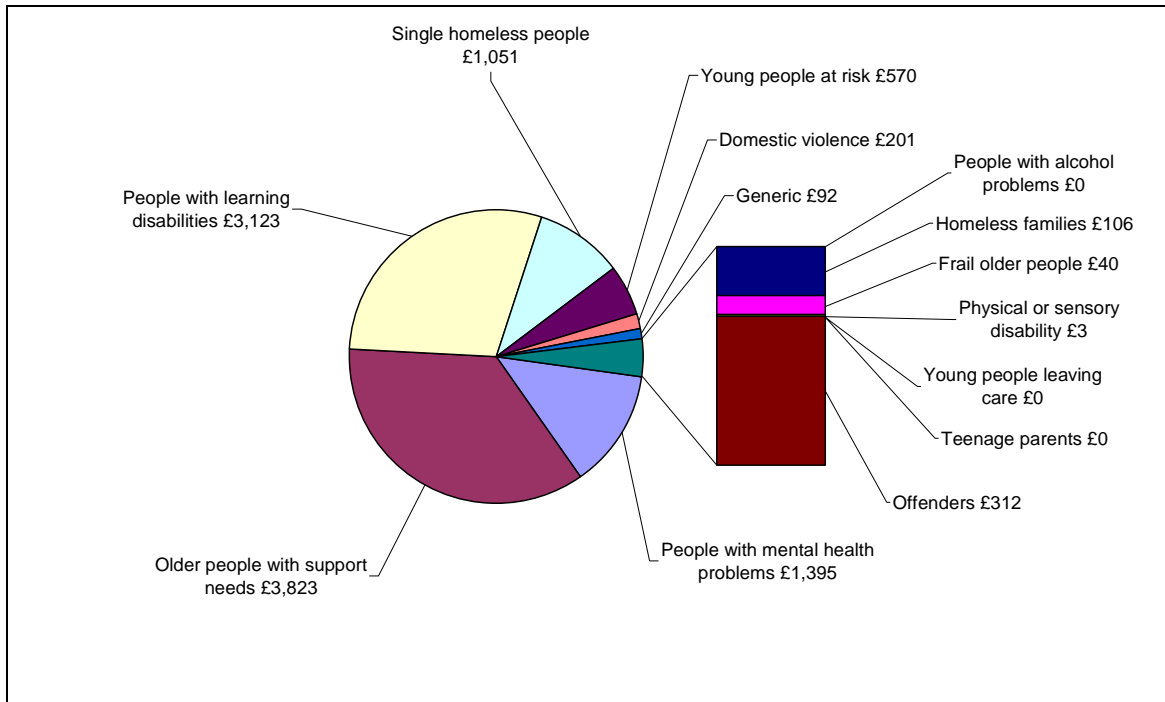


<sup>11</sup> A comparator group of similar councils.

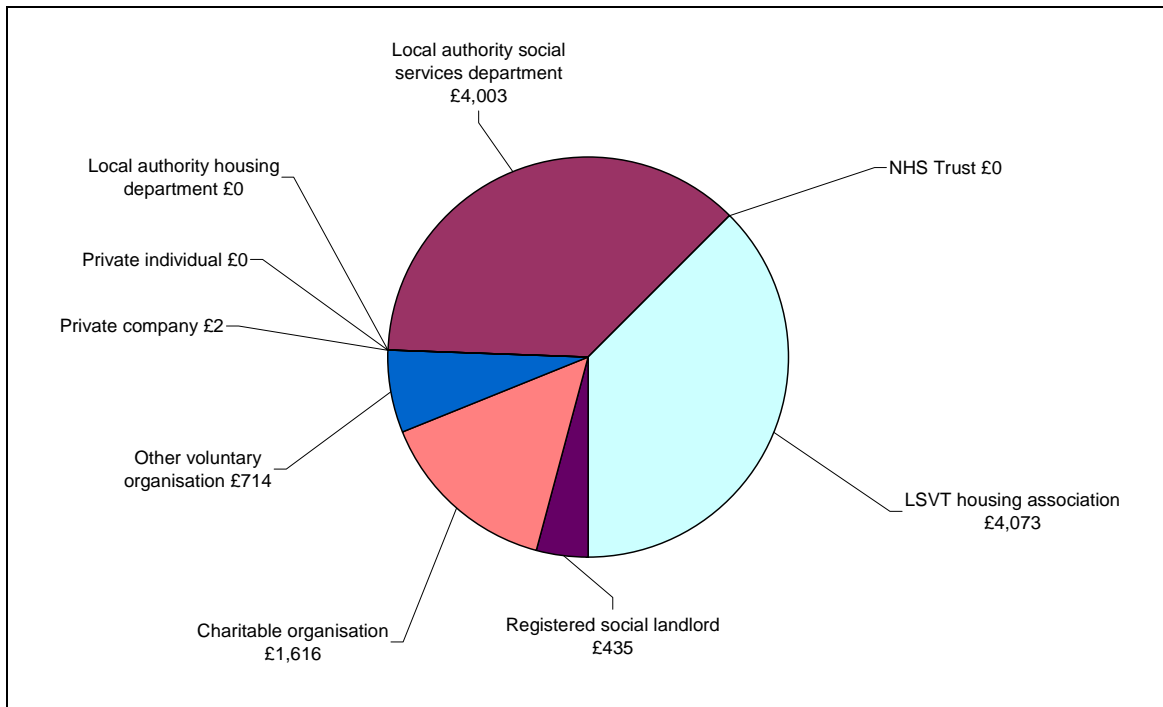
**Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all metropolitan councils and all English councils.**



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



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



**Social Services star ratings November 2003**

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

	Serving people well?	Prospects for improvement?	Performance rating (CPA equivalent)
Adults' Services	Most	Excellent	☆☆☆
Children's Services	Most	Excellent	(4)

**Social services performance indicators**

**Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2002/03**

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

Sunderland	
Significantly above average (●●●●)	Older people helped to live at home (C32) Delayed discharges for older people (D41) New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks (D43)
Above average (●●●)	Admissions of adults aged 18-64 to residential or nursing care (C27) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29) Items of equipment costing less than £1,000 delivered within 3 weeks (D38)

Average (***)	<p>Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6)</p> <p>Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care (C26)</p> <p>Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30)</p> <p>Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31)</p>
Below average (**)	<p>Employment, education &amp; training for care leavers (A4)</p> <p>Admissions to hospital of people aged 75 or over due to hypothermia or a fall (C33)</p>
Significantly below average (*)	

## Best value performance indicators

### Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/3 compared with metropolitan councils

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

Sunderland	
Within the best 25 per cent	
Average	<p>The level of the equality standard for local government to which the authority conforms (BV2)</p> <p>Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a)</p> <p>Domestic violence refuge places (BV176)</p>
Within the worst 25 per cent	

## Supporting People – Housing related support services

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

The Supporting People programme brings together significant funding streams including transitional housing benefit (THB), which has paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase; the Housing Corporation's supported housing management grant (SHMG) and probation accommodation grant scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 administering local authorities.

Unitary and metropolitan authorities and counties are designated as an administering authority with the county taking the lead in most cases for the districts in their area.

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

The programme allows for greater diversity of provision tailored to individual needs and delivered in a local strategic context. For example:

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

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

# Positive Practice

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

Positive practice is something which makes a service more effective and, ultimately, more able to deliver what the customer wants. This appendix summarises areas of positive practice found during the inspection of the Supporting People programme at City of Sunderland Council in December 2003.

## Item 1

- ◆ The City of Sunderland Council was active in seeking the views of users to help shape the initial shadow strategy for the Supporting People programme. The evidence of user input is evident at various points in the final document. This commitment to user consultation is being explored further in the development of the five year strategy for the programme. Both existing consultative bodies and specific events for particular user groups are being resourced to gain a proper understanding of the user perspective in developing the programme into the future.