

Inspection report

March 2005

Supporting People Programme

London Borough of Barking and
Dagenham

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Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services which help vulnerable people to live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the previous complex and uncoordinated 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 had 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 London Borough of Barking and Dagenham was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People Programme. This report therefore reflects the current context for the council, as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

Background

- 5 The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is a unitary authority to the east of the City on the north bank of the River Thames. The population is 167,300¹ of which 19 per cent are from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. According to Government research, Barking and Dagenham is one of the most deprived authorities in the country, with an overall ranking of 26th out of 354 on the 2004 index of local deprivation².
- 6 The council currently comprises 51 seats and is controlled by a Labour administration with 41 seats. The remaining seats are held by the Conservative Party (3), the Liberal Democrats (3), Independents (3) and the British National Party. A leader and cabinet model of governance is in place.
- 7 The council's net revenue budget for 2004/05 is approximately £220 million. The council employs 7,800 staff across all services.
- 8 The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham acts as the administering local authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with Barking and Dagenham Primary Care Trust and Barking and Dagenham Probation Service in commissioning Supporting People services.

¹ Office of National Statistics, Mid-Year Estimates, 2002.

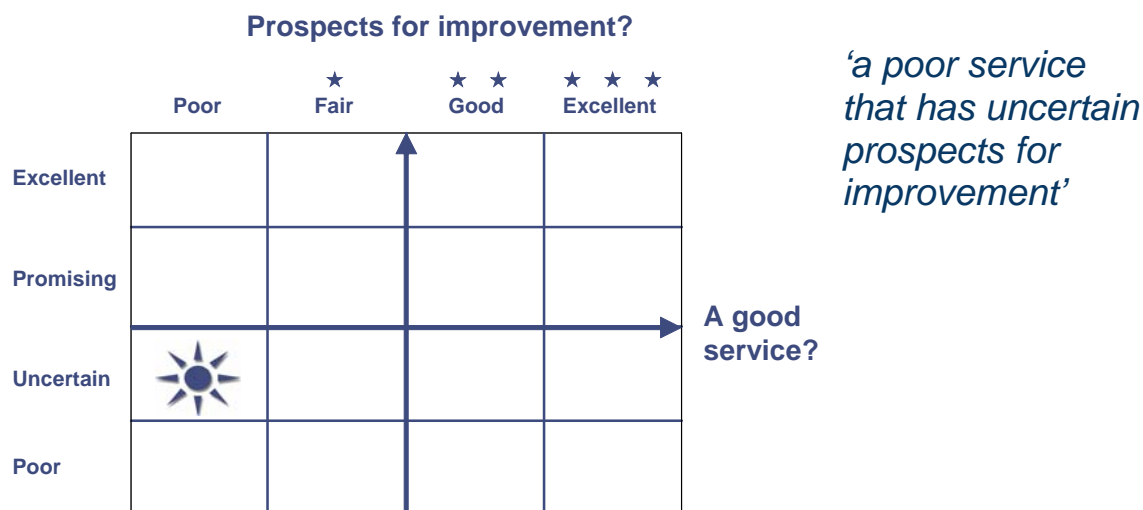
² ODPM Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004.

- 9 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the council in 2004/05 is £4.997 million. In addition, the council receives £178,206 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority. The shadow Supporting People strategy was rated as 'fair' by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in February 2003.
- 10 The highest cost Supporting People service at the time of our inspection was £575 per person per week for a supported housing service for people with sensory and physical disabilities. The lowest cost service is £2 per person per week for a community alarm service.

Scoring the service

- 11 We have assessed the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham as providing a 'poor' no star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Scoring chart³: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 12 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been administered to date. These include:
- ◆ the overall aims of the council reflect a commitment to supporting vulnerable people, with an emphasis on increasing safety, independence and inclusion;
 - ◆ there have been some positive outcomes from the Supporting People programme, such as a new floating support service for older people and a mother and baby unit, which reflect wider council priorities;
 - ◆ mystery shopping exercises to council access points found, all respondents answered the phone quickly and dealt with the enquiry in a courteous way. Most were able to provide basic information about how to progress our service requests;
 - ◆ feedback from service providers indicates that they have been well-supported by the Supporting People team, with high levels of satisfaction with the level of consultation and information;
 - ◆ IT systems to support the delivery of the programme work well and payments to providers have been made on time; and
 - ◆ a fairer charging policy is in place, with information and assessments provided upon request to applicants.

³ The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

Areas for improvement

- 13 However, we found a large number of weaknesses that need to be addressed. These include:
- ◆ there is a lack of published information on Supporting People funded services in the borough, and there is no information about the programme on the council's website;
 - ◆ service users, advocates and carers have had extremely limited involvement in the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme. No user forums have been established as part of the programme, and links with established forums that include Supporting People client groups, are under-developed;
 - ◆ there has been no research to establish the housing related support needs of BME communities, even though this was identified as a priority in the draft Supporting People strategy. This makes it difficult to know whether culturally specific services are required by this group;
 - ◆ there remain some significant gaps in housing related support services, with no current provision for refugees, travellers, people with drugs and alcohol problems or people with HIV/AIDs. There are no culturally specific services for BME groups, and support for young people at risk and offenders is recognised as insufficient;
 - ◆ the administration of the Supporting People programme has not been strategically led by councillors or executive managers. It has yet to be fully integrated into the council's corporate delivery of support to vulnerable people, or reflected in all key strategies;
 - ◆ the commissioning body has not provided effective leadership to guide the delivery and development of the Supporting People programme, with little focus on value for money, re-alignment of services and forward planning;
 - ◆ governance arrangements do not meet ODPM requirements, with existing chairing and voting arrangements, raising concerns about conflicts of interest and bias towards the authority;
 - ◆ due to other pressures, the Primary Care Trust has played a limited role in the development of the programme, and is yet to fully consider how it can help to deliver its key priorities;
 - ◆ there is limited capacity within the Supporting People team to address the full range of challenges and priorities that it currently faces. There is currently no agreed work programme to monitor progress on its key priorities;
 - ◆ there has been limited progress on the development of the five year strategy, and some key stakeholders remain uncertain how it will be developed;
 - ◆ policies and procedures to support the programme are under-developed and do not provide a clear framework for the transparent management of the programme;
 - ◆ performance and financial management information is poor, and is not subject to regular scrutiny by the commissioning body. The performance of internal providers has not been reported to the ODPM since April 2004, even though this is a requirement of the grant;
 - ◆ although a number of service reviews are complete or in progress, those undertaken to date, have not provided sufficient detail to make judgements about strategic relevance and value for money, with limited use of cost, quality and service level benchmarking to inform future funding decisions;

- ◆ some concerns about the eligibility of existing internal services funded by Supporting People have yet to be fully explored. These services have not been prioritised within the review programme; and
- ◆ some service reviews are not supported by action plans; and where plans are produced these are not systematically monitored to identify the rate of progress.

14 We have judged the Supporting People programme has uncertain prospects for improvement. We found the following strengths.

What works well

- ◆ At a corporate level, the council has effective financial and performance management systems in place and has demonstrated an improving track record.
- ◆ There is an improving track record within social services and housing, demonstrated by improved inspection scores across a range of client groups.
- ◆ The council has as strong commitment to partnership working, with existing partnerships providing a base for future integration of the Supporting People programme.
- ◆ The council has made good progress in reconfiguring services to increase the independence of older people, with new intermediate and extra care schemes, promoting independence and choice for service users.
- ◆ A corporate commitment to fund social services to formula funding levels, and make significant capital investment in new services and public offices, will increase the capacity of the service to deliver its objectives.
- ◆ Senior managers within the council recognise the need to improve the performance of the programme. They accept that there is a need to mainstream the work of the Supporting People team and create a stronger framework for its delivery.
- ◆ Some steps have already been taken to improve Supporting People governance arrangements. An agreement to give the Director of Housing responsibility for chairing the commissioning body, aims to create improved inter-departmental ownership and arrangements for member-level oversight of the programme have been agreed.
- ◆ The appointment of two extra staff to the Supporting People team has been agreed, to enhance capacity and additional staff resources within the council, will be seconded to support progress on key initiatives, such as the five year strategy. Management responsibility for the Support People team is being reviewed to ensure that there is effective team leadership in place.
- ◆ A revised delivery and improvement plan for the programme has now been produced to address concerns identified in our inspection.

Areas for improvement

- 15 Although senior managers and councillors have responded positively to the weaknesses identified in our inspection, there are still weaknesses which could prove to be barriers to future progress.
- ◆ Renewed efforts to spell out the programme's relationship with key corporate priorities and build corporate ownership, will take time to become embedded.

- ◆ The volume of outstanding work, lack of robust needs information and extensive consultation required to develop, the five year strategy within proposed timescales, raises doubts about the council's ability to produce a robust document that will guide future programme development.
- ◆ Failure to prioritise service reviews to focus on high risk, high cost services and address value for money within the review process, means that there is currently limited understanding of the scope for re-balancing services.
- ◆ The commissioning body is yet to demonstrate its capacity to make difficult decisions about de-commissioning or re-balancing services.
- ◆ Lack of clear needs information for BME and other hard to reach groups, prevents a proper understanding of how services can be shaped to meet their future housing support requirements.
- ◆ Housing support strategies to inform the commissioning priorities are not at a sufficiently advanced stage to inform the Supporting People programme, with the BME housing needs survey and older people's housing strategy still to be agreed.
- ◆ There are not yet detailed proposals setting out how service user involvement in the programme will be promoted.
- ◆ Developing the skills and competencies of existing and new team members will take time, and this will impact on the ability to drive forward the programme in the short-term.

Recommendations

- 16 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team makes the following recommendations.

With immediate effect:

- ◆ revise the governance arrangements of the programme and terms of reference for the commissioning body, to ensure that they fully meet ODPM requirements and will provide clear strategic direction for the further development of the programme;
- ◆ issue guidance and provide appropriate training to members of the commissioning body, to ensure that they understand their roles and responsibilities within the programme, and have sufficient seniority to take decisions about the re-alignment of key services;
- ◆ clarify the relationship between the commissioning body and the core strategy development group, and ensure that all stakeholders are aware of the revised arrangements;
- ◆ review the financial management of the programme with the assistance of internal audit and ensure that arrangements allow for the proper management and scrutiny of public funds, with a clear separation of financial responsibilities to guarantee probity;
- ◆ develop a clear action plan for the development of the five year strategy, which includes arrangements for full consultation with both service users and other key stakeholders;
- ◆ develop a clear work programme for the Supporting People which includes clear targets, milestones and assigned responsibilities for all staff;
- ◆ assess the training and development needs of all new and existing members of the Supporting People team, and provide training to ensure identified needs are addressed effectively;
- ◆ develop local eligibility criteria for the Supporting People grant and ensure that this is agreed by the commissioning body and circulated to all service providers; and
- ◆ revise the current risk management log to ensure that it outlines the full range of potential risks, including risks to users, and remedial action, and ensure that this is agreed and reviewed by the commissioning body on a regular basis.

Within the next three months:

- ◆ develop all Supporting People procedures, to ensure they are consistent with national guidance, and provide a clear and transparent basis for managing the overall programme and service review process;
- ◆ re-prioritise the service programme review, to ensure a focus on local strategic priorities and high risk, high cost services, and ensure that both previous and future reviews have a clear focus on value for money;
- ◆ assess the range of information available on housing support needs of BME communities and other hard to reach groups, and commission research as appropriate to address gaps;
- ◆ introduce a standardised format for collecting performance information from internal service providers, which meets ODPM reporting requirements;

- ◆ produce information on the financial management of the programme, including both the programme and administrative grant, and ensure that it is presented to, and scrutinised by, the commissioning body on a regular basis;
- ◆ consider how Supporting Service people funded services could be re-developed to meet unmet needs, and ensure that the commissioning body identifies key priorities to guide the further development of the programme; and
- ◆ complete a statement outlining the council's response to the inspection report, and submit this to the Audit Commission so that it can be published alongside our published report.

Within the next six months:

- ◆ strengthen front-line staff's understanding of the programme and consider producing a service directory of Supporting People to clarify the range of housing support options available;
- ◆ develop proposals to include information about Supporting People on the council's website;
- ◆ raise the profile of Supporting People through existing partnerships, user and carer forums and regular reports to councillors;
- ◆ develop action plans following reviews and ensure that progress on action plans is consistently reported to the commissioning body; and
- ◆ address any other weaknesses identified in this report.

- 17 We would like to thank the staff of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, particularly Roy Figes and Penny Pike, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

The locality

- 18 The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is a unitary authority to the east of the City on the north bank of the River Thames. The population of the area is 167,300⁴, living in 67,723 households. The population is projected to increase to 190,722 by 2016⁵, with significant implications for future housing needs.
- 19 The borough has an increasingly diverse community, with black and minority ethnic (BME) communities projected to form one quarter of the population by 2016. In 2001, 19 per cent of the population were from BME groups. The largest individual groups are the black African (4.4 per cent), Indian (2.3 per cent) and Black Caribbean communities (2.1 per cent)⁶. Compared to the rest of England, there are a lower proportion of people aged over 65 years (14.2 per cent), though the number of those aged 85 and over is rising.
- 20 Barking and Dagenham is one of the most deprived authorities in the country, with an overall ranking of 26th out of 354 on the Government's 2004 index of local deprivation⁷. While levels of unemployment are equivalent to the London average (3.3 per cent)⁸, average incomes are the lowest in the capital. Almost one in five people in the borough (19.9 per cent) reported a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability in 2001⁹.
- 21 The majority of homes in the borough are owner-occupied – 64 per cent. The council owns 34 per cent of homes and housing associations own just 3 per cent. The need for affordable housing in the area remains high, with demand outstripping supply. Levels of homelessness have increased steadily in recent years, with the number of households accepted as homeless and in priority need increasing from 346 in 2001/02 to 667 in 2003/04¹⁰.
- 22 There are major areas of land available for re-development in the borough and the council is involved in several major regeneration programmes that will include new housing provision. For example, London Riverside in the Thames Gateway will provide 20,000 new homes by 2016. Barking Town Centre and South Dagenham will also be the subject of significant growth.

The council

- 23 The council comprises 51 councillors and is controlled by a Labour administration with 41 seats. The remaining seats are held by the Conservative Party (3), the Liberal Democrats (3), Independents (3) and the British National Party (1). A leader and cabinet model governs the business of the council.
- 24 The council's net revenue budget for the year 2004/05 is £220 million. The budget for social services increased from £59.3 million in 2003/04 to £66.4 million in 2004/05, with spending levels now reflecting the level of the Formula Funding Share (FFS)¹¹. The council employs 7,800 staff across all services.

⁴ Office of National Statistics, Mid-Year Estimates, 2002.

⁵ GLA Population Projections, 2003.

⁶ Office of National Statistics, Census 2001.

⁷ ODPM Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2004.

⁸ NOMIS, September 2004.

⁹ Office of National Statistics, Census 2001.

¹⁰ ODMP P1E data, quarter 1, 2004/05.

¹¹ The Formula Funding Share (FFS) is a notional spending level prescribed by central government.

- 25 The council's priorities as identified in the community strategy are:
- ◆ promoting equal opportunities and celebrating diversity;
 - ◆ raising general pride in the borough;
 - ◆ developing rights and responsibilities;
 - ◆ better education and learning for all;
 - ◆ improving health, housing and social care;
 - ◆ making Barking and Dagenham cleaner, greener and safer; and
 - ◆ regenerating the local economy.
- 26 The council was rated as 'fair' following the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) undertaken by the Audit Commission between 2002 and 2004. The Social Services Annual Performance Review 2004 rated the council as a one star service, with both adults' and children's services assessed as 'serving some people well, with promising prospects for improvement'. In 2003, the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) similarly judged older people's services to be 'serving some people well, with promising prospects for improvement'.

The Supporting People Programme

- 27 The council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in their area.
- 28 The Supporting People programme subject to inspection is designed to meet the housing related support needs of vulnerable people including the homeless, older people with support needs, people with a learning difficulty, people with mental health problems, those with substance abuse problems, refugees, travellers and offenders.
- 29 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the council in 2004/05 is £4.997 million. In addition, the council receives £178,206 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority. In 2005/06, the Supporting People grant available to the council will be £4.830 million and the Supporting People administration grant will be £142,565.
- 30 The highest cost Supporting People service at the time of our inspection is £575 per person per week, for a supported housing service for people with sensory and physical disabilities. The lowest cost service is £2 per person per week for a community alarm service.
- 31 The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham was inspected in the second year of the Supporting People programme. The report therefore reflects the current context for the council as it continues to deliver the programme and focuses on determining the effectiveness of current service delivery, the value for money presented by the contracted services and the outcomes for vulnerable people.

How good is the Supporting People Programme?

- 32 The assessment in this report was based upon the following key issues:
- ◆ governance of the programme;
 - ◆ delivery arrangements, including strategy and needs assessment;
 - ◆ financial monitoring and management of the grant;
 - ◆ service reviews carried out by the administering authority;
 - ◆ value for money;

- ◆ user involvement;
- ◆ partnerships with providers and others;
- ◆ customer care, access to services and information;
- ◆ diversity; and
- ◆ outcomes for service users.

Governance arrangements

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

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

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

35 Our inspection identified a number of weaknesses in the governance arrangements in Barking and Dagenham. Although a commissioning body is in place, it has not provided effective leadership to guide the delivery of the programme. The ODPM governance arrangements have not been followed. Corporate ownership and political oversight and understanding of the programme are limited. Although there are good working relationships with providers, the role of service users in the programme is under-developed.

36 The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham established a commissioning body for the Supporting People programme in January 2002 to oversee the development to the draft strategy and implementation arrangements. However, the lack of a Supporting People manager between April to September 2003, alongside changes in accountable officer arrangements and patchy attendance from key commissioning areas, meant that the group was not well-placed to drive the programme forward for a significant period of time.

37 Terms of reference (ToR) for the commissioning body were agreed in November 2003 and reviewed in September 2004. However, while the ToR help to clarify some of its responsibilities, there are a number of shortcomings which limit the effectiveness of governance arrangements. For example, the ToR:

- ◆ do not clearly spell out the veto rights of the authority with respect to financial risk to the council;

- ◆ set out voting arrangements that are strongly biased towards the local authority, with the council holding two out of four votes, plus the casting vote in the case of disputed decisions;
 - ◆ do not make it clear how the PCT's interests would be reflected if it took a different position to the council; although probation and the PCT have a vote each, there is no named PCT representative on the commissioning body; and
 - ◆ do not spell out the extent of the commissioning body's responsibilities for on-going monitoring of the financial aspects of the programme, the performance of providers and approving service reviews.
- 38 The accountable officer for the programme, the council's head of adult services, also chairs the commissioning body. This creates a potential conflict of interests, with this officer responsible for both directing and approving the work of the Supporting People team and making commissioning decisions based on its work. Although there is no evidence that this has led to any inappropriate decisions, one external stakeholder felt it reinforced their view that the commissioning body was a local authority meeting rather than a genuine partnership.
- 39 External stakeholders are not fully engaged in the work of the commissioning body. The PCT does not have a representative on the group in its own right, though three members are jointly employed by the council and PCT. Senior managers within the PCT acknowledged that Supporting People has received little priority, with the PCT focussing primarily on its own recovery plan to improve its zero star status. Awareness of the programme among senior managers within the PCT was weak, with little understanding of the opportunities provided by the programme in meeting health priorities or improved health outcomes for vulnerable people from the programme.
- 40 Probation Service representatives have routinely attended commissioning body meetings, but there is some frustration about the rate of progress. Representatives acknowledged that involvement in the group had provided an opportunity to highlight the housing support needs of offenders, but lack of follow-up on decisions and progress on key initiatives were cited as problems. For example, a recent decision to circulate a pro-forma to collect information for the five year strategy has not been progressed and, despite some discussion, the process for developing the strategy was considered unclear.
- 41 Attendance at meetings by some council representatives on the commissioning body has been inconsistent and lacked continuity. This has contributed to weak understanding of the programme, with some current representatives unable to explain linkages between the programme and their own commissioning area or their role and responsibilities within the group. The tiers of management represented within the commissioning body, with most at third tier or below, also raise concerns about their authority to make significant changes to the pattern of spend and service provision. To date, there has been limited training for commissioning body representatives.
- 42 There has not been systematic consideration of key areas of work against an agreed action plan and reports often lack clear recommendations, preventing robust management of the programme. For example, several papers to the commissioning body have considered the development of the five year strategy, but these have not had clear recommendations and there are no milestones to monitor progress. Similarly, while options for expansion and contraction of the programme have been considered by the group, it is unclear how and when future priorities will be determined to inform future commissioning plans. The group has yet to make any difficult decisions about re-balancing services to meet unmet needs.

- 43 Some basic responsibilities of the commissioning body are not being met. For example, the group has not received regular reports on the financial performance of the programme or the administration grant, or formally considered the risks associated with the programme. Equally, the development of some key procedures has not been driven forward by the group. For example, an appeals procedure for service reviews was identified as a gap in June 2003, but a procedure was not drafted and approved until October 2004. Problems obtaining performance information from internal providers reported to the commissioning body in October 2003 are yet to be fully resolved.
- 44 There has been no core strategy development group (CSDG) to support the work of the commissioning body since April 2002, when the two groups merged due to role duplication and overlaps in attendance. While this is allowed within ODPM guidance, the commissioning body recently decided to reinstate the CSDG in order to engage a wider range of stakeholders. However, there is not yet an agreed timetable for future meetings of the CSDG or details of the proposed membership. During our inspection, some stakeholders were uncertain how and if the CSDG would be taken forward, while the Supporting People team were unclear about the benefits of re-establishing the group.
- 45 A bi-monthly providers' forum, held jointly with the London Borough of Havering, provides an opportunity to engage providers in the programme and is well-attended. Feedback from providers suggested that this worked well, with all expressing satisfaction with the level of consultation and involvement in developing Supporting People services. However, there are currently no formal ways to engage service users in the programme, with feedback limited to their involvement in the service review process. There is no evidence that feedback from existing user forums in the borough has directly shaped the programme.
- 46 Councillor involvement in the Supporting People programme has not been well-defined and there is little evidence of effective scrutiny of the performance of the programme at this level. The draft Supporting People strategy was agreed by the council's executive and new contracts are presented to this forum, but there has been no report on the performance and delivery of the programme to the executive for the past 12 months, indicating a lack of robust monitoring arrangements.
- 47 The commissioning body recognise that there is still a need to improve ownership and understanding of the programme among councillors, with minutes of a strategy meeting held in September 2004 reporting that councillors had 'shown little interest in the programme unless it affected a scheme in their area'. A councillor was appointed as the champion for the programme in July 2004, but this individual's responsibilities in relation to the programme have not been clarified.
- 48 Senior managers in the council, recognise that there has been insufficient focus on mainstreaming the work of the Supporting People team within the authority, and expressed a strong commitment to strengthening governance arrangements. Some action has now been taken. For example, following our inspection chairing of the commissioning group has transferred to the Director of Housing in order to create greater inter-departmental ownership. Other proposals for improvements are at an early stage.

Delivery arrangements

- 49 Initial work to establish the Supporting People programme within the authority was well-managed, with both the development of the shadow strategy and approval of transitional housing benefit claims progressed on time. However, limited capacity within the Supporting People team has reduced the council's ability to move towards 'steady-state' arrangements for the programme, with an over-reliance on the Supporting People manager to drive forward both operational and strategic issues. Progress on the development of the five year strategy has been slow. A number of new services funded by Supporting People clearly support wider strategies, but linkages between Supporting People services and other commissioning plans have yet to be fully established.

The Supporting People team

- 50 The Supporting People team is located in the Social Services Department, reporting to the Head of Adult Services, who is also the accountable officer for the Supporting People programme. The team comprises a Supporting People team manager, a Supporting People officer and a part-time administrative assistant. The post of Supporting People officer has been vacant since mid-October 2004. Some consultancy support and input from other services areas within the authority has been used to assist the team in key areas, such as the development of IT systems, interim contracts with service providers and user consultation.
- 51 Key vacancies within the Supporting People team have led to difficulties driving the programme forward at critical periods. The post of team leader was vacant between April to September 2003, leading to ineffective leadership and delays in developing key policies and procedures for the programme. For example, little emphasis was given to developing review procedures and local grant eligibility criteria until the latter half of 2004 and more work is still required to ensure that these are comprehensive and robust.
- 52 Lack of capacity has resulted on an over-reliance on the Supporting People manager. The Supporting People manager is currently responsible for all aspects of the programme, with the exception of processing payments. This creates serious doubts about the team's ability to manage day-to-day tasks and keep the service review programme and five year strategy on track. Feedback from the team, for example, indicated that other pressures may impact upon the service review programme. It is unclear why under-spends in the administrative grant, which totalled £28,000 in 2003/04, were not used earlier to enhance capacity.
- 53 The absence of a clear work programme for the Supporting People team limits its ability to monitor progress on its key priorities. The current service plan is not 'fit for purpose': it is not written in a SMART¹² format, lacks clear milestones and has no assigned responsibilities.
- 54 Additionally, while there is strong corporate emphasis on performance management, the small size of the team has led to an informal approach to day-to-day staff management, characterised by the absence of regular team meetings, with no routine recording of discussions and action points. Although some members of the team have targets in place, some reported that they had no personal targets and had received insufficient training to develop a full understanding of the programme.

¹² SMART targets are specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-bound.

- 55 Despite the pressures facing the Supporting People team, there are effective working relationships with providers. Responses to a questionnaire from eleven external providers showed universal satisfaction with the support offered and the level of consultation. This view was reiterated at a provider forum during our inspection where the level of helpfulness and support was highly commended. However, a number of providers who managed services outside the borough said that aspects of their service which had been challenged by other Supporting People teams had not been criticised in Barking and Dagenham's service reviews, which indicates a less robust approach.
- 56 Risk management of the programme is rudimentary. Although a risk log has identified seventeen potential risks for the programme, there are no detailed actions setting out how these would be managed. For example, in relation to reductions in the programme grant, the required action is 'forward planning and decision-making protocol' while lack of partner commitment will be dealt with by 'action at senior level'. There is no evidence that risks identified have been systematically assessed by partners, presented to the commissioning body or discussed with providers. Even though some vulnerable users may be at risk due to physical or financial abuse, risks to users are not covered in the log.
- 57 The council has now recognised that there is a need to increase the capacity of the team to take the programme forward. Job descriptions for two additional Supporting People officer posts, focusing on IT and contracts and service reviews, have recently been approved. However, advertisements for these posts had not been placed at the time of our inspection.

Development of the five year strategy

- 58 Progress on the five year strategy has been slow and there have been delays in taking forward supporting work. For example, a decision by the commissioning body to recruit extra resources to undertake a needs mapping exercise in October 2003 was not progressed, when the ODPM extended the timescale for submission of the strategy from November 2004 to March 2005.
- 59 Although a number of reports to the commissioning body have set out the framework for the strategy, at the time of our inspection there was no project plan for the development of the strategy. Discussions with Probation Service representatives and senior managers in the PCT also raised concerns about the inclusiveness of the strategy development process: all were unclear how the strategy and related needs assessments were to be progressed.
- 60 User consultation to inform the strategy development process is under-developed. Some consultancy work to develop a user consultation framework for the strategy was completed in November 2004. This provides a comprehensive overview of the user and carer consultation mechanisms in the borough and proposals to improve dissemination of information about the programme. However, an action plan to carry out specific user consultation and information giving initiatives based on this exercise has tight deadlines which the Supporting People team understandably feel cannot be met within current resources.
- 61 There is a reliance on needs information collected by the council and partner agencies to inform the strategy rather than separate commissioning of work or a focus on opportunities for cross-boundary working. This approach will generate some information to inform the strategy: for example, the housing support needs of older people have been addressed in a 2004 housing needs survey and a mental health needs assessment is underway.

Probation have also undertaken work to map the needs of offenders and a drugs audit has looked at the accommodation needs of drug misusers. However, there is also some evidence of gaps in information.

- ◆ A draft housing strategy for people with learning difficulties indicates that further research is required to accurately estimate the level of housing and support for this client group.
- ◆ A draft BME housing strategy notes that a needs mapping profile for this group is still to be completed.
- ◆ While a report to the commissioning body in November 2003 indicated that there were gaps in needs information for people with HIV/AIDs, refugees and alcohol misusers, there is no evidence of work to address these gaps.

62 Priorities for future funding and the scope to address gaps are yet to be agreed. The programme currently provides no support for a number of groups: people with substance misuse problems, mentally disordered offenders, people with HIV/AIDs, travellers, refugees or specialist services for BME groups. High demand for the existing services funded by the programme and a perception that there are limited opportunities for savings, has led to a common view among commissioning body representatives that there is little scope for re-alignment. However, this assumption has not been yet been fully supported by detailed analyses of value for money (VFM) and eligibility. For example:

- ◆ the VFM of certain high cost services has yet to be reviewed, including two services for people with physical and sensory difficulties with unit costs of £575 and £305 compared to a London average of £51. The council has since advised that the review of the highest cost service was postponed due to a fire at the service which resulted in tenants being moved temporarily;
- ◆ where reviews have taken place, high costs are yet to be fully scrutinised. For example, reviews of a scheme for people learning difficulties with a unit cost of £349 compared to a London average of £219 and a scheme for people with mental health problems with unit costs of £368 compared to a London average of £187 have not included detailed analyses of the level of support provided and a breakdown of associated costs; and
- ◆ concerns about the full grant eligibility of an in-house community accommodation team, and the housing welfare scheme reported to the commissioning body have yet to be addressed. These contracts total just over 10 per cent of the total budget (£525,916).

63 Due to staff changes within both the commissioning body and Supporting People team, learning gained from the development of the draft strategy has not fed through to inform future work. There was also no evidence that the existing strategy is being used to provide direction to the programme. Although the draft strategy sets out action plans for each client group, members of the commissioning body were unable to identify what progress had been made on these and some— such as proposed analyses of housing needs for BME groups and people with learning difficulties – have not progressed.

Links to other service strategies

- 64 A number of links have been made with other service strategies developed by the council and new services funded by the programme are clearly supporting their wider aims and objectives. For example:
- ◆ the Supporting People team has contributed to the development of a comprehensive strategy for tackling teenage pregnancy produced by the council and the PCT and has committed funding for six beds at a new mother and baby unit which opened in April 2004. From January 2005, the programme will also fund a floating support worker to assist vulnerable young mothers in the community;
 - ◆ there are clear links between the Supporting People strategy and housing, with the programme reflected in both the council's housing and homeless strategies. Supporting People funding has been earmarked for two new registered social landlord (RSL) managed hostels to providing 71 units of accommodation for homeless people, both of which will be on stream by July 2005.
 - ◆ the programme has supported wider plans to reconfigure older people's accommodation to meet emerging needs. For example, the council has recently converted a part three residential home to an extra care management scheme for people with dementia, with staffing costs partly met by Supporting People; and
 - ◆ a new borough-wide floating support service for older people funded by Supporting People aims to increase the security of older people through close working with the police and is understood to be contributing to improved hospital discharge rates.
- 65 A number of housing support strategies – such as a BME housing strategy, older person's housing strategy and housing strategy for people with learning disabilities – are in the process of development and do not yet provide a clear commissioning framework for Supporting People funding. Equally, both new mental health and learning disabilities strategies recognise that further work is required to quantify the extent of local needs.
- 66 Although an older persons' strategy is in place, this does not yet take account of Supporting People and its role in providing services for vulnerable older people. However, we were advised that this would be addressed in a forthcoming strategy.

Financial monitoring and management

- 67 Arrangements in place for financial monitoring and management of the grant are weak. There have been some concerted efforts to put contracts in place, ensure that payments to providers are made on time, and to promote fairer charging. However, there has been a lack of emphasis on monitoring and scrutinising financial and performance information. Failure to ensure robust, standardised performance information from internal service does not suggest a level playing field with external providers and has led to difficulties completing ODPM returns. The council is yet to negotiate savings based upon the service review process.

Contracts and payments

- 68 The council currently has 74 interim contracts in place, covering services with 17 external providers and four council departments. In terms of monetary value, around a third of the expenditure is invested in council services, with the remainder funding a range of RSL, private, voluntary and charitable provision.

- 69 Not all contracts were signed by 1 April 2003, but all were signed and returned to the council by July 2003. There are currently no steady state contracts in place. This is due to the financial uncertainties surrounding the programme until central government announced future funding levels in December 2004. Additionally, while a number of service reviews have been approved by the commissioning body, no subsequent negotiations with providers have been concluded.
- 70 The housing benefit section worked closely with the Supporting People team in the lead up to April 2003. Robust reviews were completed prior to transfer to the program and the transition was considered seamless. The reviews included an assessment of costs and compliance with eligibility criteria set by the Department of Works and Pensions at the time, though these criteria no longer applies. Payments to all providers are made monthly in advance, and have been timely. All providers expressed satisfaction with the payment process.
- 71 Six registered care homes providing services to people with learning difficulties and mental health problems, which were formerly in receipt of supported housing management grant, were transferred to the Supporting People programme. The owners of these homes chose not to re-register on the basis that they provide independent living and tenancies for their residents. Although this is within the terms of the grant, it is recognised that there is little housing related support to justify the total annual cost of £105,000. However, while funding from the scheme will cease in April 2006, there are no clear contingency plans showing how the future funding gap will be met. It is also unclear why actions to address this were not taken sooner.

Financial management and monitoring

- 72 There is a specialised IT system (SWIFT) that monitors the Supporting People programme and enables officers, to access information for monitoring grant expenditure and payments. The system interfaces with the housing benefit information system, allowing staff to check cases in receipt of a support charge and the status of claims. Although the system works well, only one team member is fully trained in its use, which creates risks in the case of absence.
- 73 The system can produce a range of financial and performance monitoring information, but this has not been subject to proper scrutiny. Although monthly printouts of payments are passed to social services finance officers, performance is measured only by looking at spend against budget. Assumptions made about the robustness of the underlying data, such as the quality of information provided by internal providers, are not verified, and there is no evidence that financial information is cross-referenced against performance. Neither the commissioning body nor councillors receive regular reports on the financial management of the programme or performance of providers.
- 74 The ability to get an overall picture of Supporting People grant expenditure is constrained by the split responsibility for different parts of the budget. While social services are responsible for the programme grant, the administrative grant sits within housing. There is no evidence that expenditure on the administration grant has been routinely monitored either by the Supporting People team or the commissioning body. No officer interviewed during the inspection could provide a rationale for these arrangements.
- 75 There are on-going difficulties obtaining performance information from internal providers. While external providers are completing the ODPM workbook, internal providers are returning information in a range of different formats, which often provide insufficient information to inform key ODPM performance indicators, which focus on availability, usage and throughput.

As a consequence, it has not been possible to include the performance of internal providers on returns to ODPM since April 2004. ODPM confirmed that this was a requirement in correspondence with the Supporting People manager in October 2004.

- 76 At present there is no long-term financial strategy for the programme, which estimates likely resources to be available and possible savings to be made from re-configuring services, or contingency plans to deal with windfalls. For example, latest budget out-turn figures at November 2004 show that there is likely to be an overall under-spend of £500,000 on the Supporting People programme in 2004/05. While recent announcements indicate that the required savings for Barking and Dagenham in 2005/06 will be much smaller (£167,864), plans to provide short-term support, which were agreed by commissioning body in October 2004, have focussed on expanding current projects due to the absence of new project proposals for other groups with unmet needs.
- 77 Although some financial risks have been recognised in the risk assessment for the programme, these are not supported by detailed contingency plans. For example, while eligibility has been identified as a risk in relation to some in-house services, there is no evidence that this has been taken into account in departmental financial plans.

Charging

- 78 A fairer charging policy is in place, with details set clearly within a Supporting People leaflet. Information and assessments on fairer charging are provided to applicants on request, though only one Supporting People application has been made to date. Feedback from providers during the inspection indicated that there was a good level of awareness about the implications of the policy.
- 79 There are no arrangements for recouping charges from the council's sheltered housing tenants, who are not eligible for benefits. Although this issue was reported to the commissioning body in June 2003, it is yet to be fully addressed, resulting in some, albeit limited, loss of income. However, there are plans to begin collection of charges in April 2005 and a public leaflet outlining new arrangements has been drafted.

Savings

- 80 There is no evidence that the commissioning body is using a robust process to secure savings in the programme based on agreed strategic priorities. In 2003/04 required savings were mainly achieved through under-spends. An anticipated cut of seven per cent in 2004/05 has been managed through the establishment of a contingency fund within the grant.
- 81 A decision was taken to award no inflationary uplift to providers in 2004/05, following the ODPM's decision not to provide an inflationary uplift to administering local authorities, though this is not clearly documented in the minutes of the commissioning body. The Supporting People manager indicated that all providers had been given the opportunity to raise hardship issues with the team, but no approaches were made.
- 82 To date, there has been limited savings through the service review process, as no contract negotiations following reviews have been agreed. However, a provider of a women's refuge service withdrew during the course of a review and the subsequent re-tendering released a sum of £56,000 per annum. Small savings of £12,500 per annum have been achieved through the termination and reduction of two contracts outside of the review process.

Service reviews

- 83 ODPM guidance requires administering local authorities (ALAs) to review all services funded through Supporting People within three years starting from 1 April 2003. ALAs are required to produce a service review timetable together with a rationale to explain how the reviews have been prioritised. Progress with the service review timetable is submitted to ODPM through their regular performance reviews.
- 84 Although the council has made progress in carrying out service reviews, there are significant weaknesses in the approach. Reviews have not been prioritised to target services which are high cost and high risk and have to date focussed exclusively on external provision. With the exception of the appeals policy, the quality of procedures to support the review process is poor. Although providers express satisfaction with the review process, there is evidence that key issues, such as value for money and eligibility, are not sufficiently explored.

Programme prioritisation and procedures

- 85 A review schedule for the programme has set out a total of 30 reviews covering all funded services. There are no clear target dates for completion of reviews within the schedule, though the last is programmed to commence in August 2005. To date, six reviews have been completed, but no contract negotiations have been concluded and the timetable for sign off is unclear.
- 86 As noted earlier, feedback from the team pointed to potential difficulties in keeping progress on track, with the self-assessment reporting that resources for reviews would only be sufficient 'if other demands do not intervene too much'. Agreement to appoint a dedicated review officer will offer additional support. However, opportunities to bid to ODPM for additional resources to support the review process have not been reported to the commissioning body or followed up.
- 87 The approach to prioritising services for review does not promote a level playing field, between internal and external providers, or maximise opportunities to address risks and promote VFM. Although ODPM guidance indicates that reviews should be prioritised on the basis of risk, cost and local strategic priorities, the commissioning body took a decision to look at the most expensive schemes first. However, this has not been acted upon, with some schemes with the highest unit costs not scheduled for review until December 2004. Partly due to internal re-structuring, internal services have been put at the end of the programme, despite concerns that some may be undertaking work which is partly ineligible for the grant.
- 88 There have been delays in developing procedures to support the review process. For example, a review procedure was only drafted in June 2004 and an appeals procedure was not agreed by the commissioning body until October 2004. As the first review began in July 2003, this has meant that early reviews were not supported by a clear and transparent methodology. This has led to lack of clarity for some providers about how the process works. For example, one provider was informed by the Supporting People manager that their full response to the review report could not be presented to the commissioning body and required to produce an abridged version, but there was no clear policy to support this decision. A subsequent written request for a copy of the appeals policy was not followed up by the team.

- 89 Some procedures now in place still provide insufficient information about the overall management of the process and key issues, such as eligibility. For example, the review procedure does not explain the relationship between the review process, outcomes and subsequent contract negotiations and places the onus on providers to get more detailed information from the ODPM website. The eligibility criteria does not spell out the local position on 'grey areas', such as how treatment of overlaps with social care and housing management will be managed, or how costs in part multi-funded and eligible services will be apportioned. A statement that schemes will 'be dealt with on their merits' affords no clarity. Neither procedure has yet been approved by the commissioning body.
- 90 In contrast, the recently agreed appeals policy is comprehensive and outlines the action that will be taken, if a provider contests a commissioning body decision as a result of a service review. This includes provision for adjudication by the council's executive if a resolution cannot be found. However, this has not yet been circulated to all providers.
- 91 Despite weaknesses in the procedural framework, the majority of providers express satisfaction with the way reviews are managed. However, in our view, the over-reliance on verbally clarifying the process through meetings may pose difficulties in the long-run, particularly if contract negotiations become contentious.

Progress of reviews

- 92 The Supporting People manager has been responsible for most of the service review work undertaken to date. There was some input from a neighbouring borough on one review of a jointly commissioned service, while a community safety officer took part in a review of the women's refuge. In our view, current arrangements place an over-reliance on the skills and experience of one officer.
- 93 Inability to delegate work has meant that the team has been unable to follow its own service review procedure: while the procedure states that two people will undertake reviews, sickness and lack of capacity in the team has meant that much review work has been undertaken largely by the Supporting People manager. In one case, a conflict of interest which arose, due to the Supporting People manager's prior employment by a service under review, did not prompt the appointment of an alternative reviewer, on the grounds that there was nobody else with sufficient expertise to carry out the work. Although there is no evidence that this influenced the outcome of the review, failure to follow set procedures exposes the council to unnecessary risk and challenge.
- 94 Examination of the review reports completed to date shows that the approach has broadly sought to address the range of issues set out in the ODPM Quality Assessment Framework (QAF), and makes some assessment of strategic relevance. However, the reports indicate a number of weaknesses.
- ◆ Most reviews to date do not fully explain how the service supports local and national strategic objectives and fits in with broader commissioning strategies and plans.
 - ◆ Eligibility for funding is not always fully clarified within review reports. In a review of a floating support service, for example, the service was judged to improve the morale and to help clients practically, but there was no detailed examination of whether the nature of the support provided met the grant criteria. In a review of a homeless hostel, concerns about the non-eligibility of non-housing and night staff were not fully explored.

We also noted one case where potentially non-eligible costs in a service we visited had not been identified in the review process: the whole time cost of one service manager is fully charged to Supporting People when a significant proportion of their time is actually spent on issues relating to the fabric of the building.

- ◆ The appropriateness of the final assessment score is sometimes unclear. For example, a floating support service was judged to meet the minimum requirements for support plans, even though users were often unaware of their individual plans and there was no clear review procedure.
 - ◆ Value for money has not been thoroughly assessed in the service review process. Although comparative data is included in the report, its value is often questioned and there is often no attempt to analyse performance information or disaggregate direct and overhead costs when unit costs are higher than average. Although we were advised that further analyses would be done through contract negotiation, these issues should be fundamental to the service review process.
 - ◆ Weaknesses identified in the review process are not consistently reflected in the action plans. For example, issues about the lack of a review process for support plans and allocation of key workers, and low awareness of Supporting People among front-line staff, raised in one review were not reflected in the recommendations. Additionally, some targets within actions plans are not time-bound.
- 95 User consultation is a standard part of the review process, usually involving meetings with users and questionnaires. However, there is no evidence that feedback is given to those involved in the process.
- 96 Review reports are presented for approval to the commissioning body. To June 2004, five reviews had been presented and approved, despite most containing some of the weaknesses described above. This does not suggest that there has been a robust internal challenge to reviews to date, and raises some concerns about the commissioning body's understanding of the review process.
- 97 Action plans are not consistently produced following reviews. Where they are produced, there are no clear mechanisms in place to report progress. Although the Supporting People manager indicated that progress is covered at subsequent visits, outcomes are not recorded. This makes it difficult to assess what improvements have been made following reviews. Failure to document any lack of progress may have a negative impact on subsequent contract negotiations, for example, if the council cites lack of progress as a reason to terminate contracts.

Value for money

- 98 Although the council's corporate performance management framework places a strong emphasis on effective financial management, this has yet to be reflected in its approach to the Supporting People programme. Although comparative cost data identifies a number of high cost service areas in Barking and Dagenham, there is limited evidence of steps taken to address these.
- 99 Comparisons of unit costs with London and England are shown in the data appendix. These are based on the platinum cut data submitted to the ODPM in July 2003, which is the most up-to-date comparison available. These figures contain some errors, and will not reflect the work done by the council since April 2003 to reduce unit costs. However, we have taken this into account in forming our judgements.

- 100 Overall, Supporting People services have lower unit costs in comparison with other similar councils, with unit costs totalling £24.49 compared to £42.10 for London as a whole. There is lower overall provision of services per head of population as a whole, compared to London and England and significant gaps in services for different client groups, but levels of floating support are above average. However, overall figures mask some high unit costs. For example:
- ◆ supported accommodation costs for people with mental health problems, women at risk of domestic violence, homeless families and people with physical or sensory disabilities were above both the national and London average and within the highest 25 per cent of all councils; and
 - ◆ floating support services for people with mental health problems, homeless families and older people with support needs were above both the national and London average and within the highest 25 per cent of all councils.
- 101 Our inspection identified limited work to reduce overall costs since the introduction of the Supporting People programme. Although the re-tendering of the contract for the women's refuge has seen unit costs fall from £467 per week to £211 for the same level of service, which is around the London median, progress has not been made in other areas.
- 102 As noted earlier, opportunities to achieve savings through the review process are not being maximised. While high unit costs have been identified in some reviews, these have not been systematically challenged to explore possible underlying reasons, such as high proportions of management overheads, ancillary costs, or demand-led inflationary pressures. The extent of cross-funding is not detailed in review reports, making it difficult to assess whether there has been a full assessment of possible double charging issues.
- 103 Benchmarking of services is under-developed. Although the team uses comparative data within service review reports, there has been no work to systematically compare staffing costs, hours of support or overhead costs with other areas and clarify the reasons for any variations. Lack of comparative data is often cited as barrier to effective benchmarking, though it is unlikely that similar schemes do not exist outside the borough. Although differing levels of need will account for some cost variation between different schemes, costs comparisons within the groups of services funded by the programme have not been explored. For example:
- ◆ floating support services for people with learning difficulties range from £393 to £56, compared to an average regional cost of £98.21;
 - ◆ unit costs in mental health supported accommodation schemes provided by the voluntary sector range from £497 to £56, compared to a regional average of £187; and
 - ◆ the cost of support in RSL sheltered housing schemes, excluding those for the frail elderly, range from £7.70 to £47.38, compared to a regional average of £24.33.
- 104 There has been no work to address cost issues within the council's own sheltered housing services. At present a standard unit cost of £12.77 is charged to the Supporting People programme irrespective of whether the service involves extra care units, units with wardens or a scheme with a peripatetic service. No detailed analysis of current charging arrangements are planned until a service review is undertaken, this is scheduled for January 2005.

- 105 Information from the Supporting People team and interviews during our inspection, did not demonstrate a clear focus on value for money issues or a full understanding of the unit cost profile. For example, while the data appendix and the team's own record of contract costs highlight some high cost areas, the council's self-assessment indicated that the authority had no schemes above the national average. Quality of service, rather than cost, was also stated to be the primary focus of service reviews. The inability to release funding from existing schemes was frequently mentioned by commissioning body representatives.
- 106 We found no evidence of a significant transfer of costs to Supporting People from health and social care budgets. However, while the Supporting People team are confident that all services are eligible under current grant conditions, issues raised in the review of the homeless hostel about the possible ineligibility of some non-housing staff and the full cost charging of one manager's time to the programme did not support this view. Some high cost services have also yet to receive a validation visit and be subject to full scrutiny to determine eligibility.
- 107 Although the possibility of reducing contract sums was noted in three of the review reports assessed by inspectors, there was little supporting evidence to explain how these could be achieved. Failure to provide details of the outcomes of value for money work within service review reports provides no transparency about the basis for future decisions on contract values. It is currently unclear how the outcomes of negotiations will be reported to the commissioning body.
- 108 We were also concerned about the robustness of cost analysis within contract negotiations. For example, one letter to a provider setting out proposed contract reductions suggested that the level of Supporting People funding for non-housing staff such as cleaners, catering and reception staff should be reduced from 33 per cent to 25 per cent, though there were no detailed breakdowns of staff time to support this. It is also highly questionable if the charges for these groups of staff would meet the grant criteria.

User involvement and partnership arrangements

- 109 At a departmental level, the social services department has strong partnerships with health, education and housing and there is evidence of close working relationships with the voluntary sector to promote user and carer participation. However, outside of service reviews, there has so far been limited user involvement to shape the delivery of the Supporting People programme. Although there are positive working relationships with providers, the commissioning body has not effectively engaged key external partners and it is unclear how links with other partnerships have assisted the strategic development of the programme.

User involvement

- 110 Although a lack of clear user and carer involvement was identified as a weakness in the shadow strategy, there has been little work to address this gap since the programme began. Feedback from the team indicated that this remained an area for further development. There are currently no formal mechanisms for involving users and carers in the programme or seeking users' views on the five year strategy.
- 111 Consultancy work commissioned by the Supporting People team to identify the range of user consultative forums in the borough has recently been completed. This shows that a wide range of participative arrangements are currently in place. For example:
- ◆ six community housing partnerships provide opportunities for all tenants and leaseholders to provide feedback and shape the delivery of housing services. Annual meetings are also held in all sheltered housing schemes;

- ◆ a Community Empowerment Network (CEN) led by the local Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) and a Ethnic Minorities Partnership Association (EMAP) supports the involvement of local people in the decision-making structures and processes within the borough; and
- ◆ there is a growing number of specialist forums designed to seek feedback from specialist groups, such as the Older People's Forum, Home Support Forum, Youth Forum, social services User and Carer Forum, and a PCT Patient and Public Involvement Forum.

112 However, there is no evidence that these have been routinely used by the Supporting People team to identify emerging needs, gaps in provision or user priorities for improvement. Lack of resources within the team is also considered to be a barrier to developing a more strategic approach and taking forward the action plan from the user consultation work. While the plan proposes a number of initiatives, such as meetings with community representatives and Supporting People presentations at existing forums, there are no agreed timelines for taking this forward.

113 Visits to some schemes and review reports do identify some positive examples of user consultation. For example, a number of accommodation-based schemes we visited held regular meetings with users, and one collected information via exit surveys. A questionnaire to external providers as part of the consultancy work on user involvement, found that all but one service had regular meetings with service users and that surveys, newsletters and exit interviews were used in some schemes to capture users' views and suggestions for service improvements.

114 Service reviews have addressed issues around the extent of resident involvement within funded schemes, and the review process has used a combination of meetings and questionnaires to solicit user views. This has led to some proposals to strengthen resident consultation within action plans, but lack of formal monitoring makes it difficult to identify any progress. No specialist expertise has been sought to ensure effective consultation with people with special needs, such as those with learning difficulties or mental health problems.

Partnership working

115 There is significant evidence of effective partnership across the council. For example, the council has recently been commended by the Government Office for London (GOL), for its work to involve both partners and the community in the Local Strategic Partnership and Community Strategy. Both housing and social services have a strong track record of partnership working to support service and strategy development.

116 Members of the commissioning body have links with other partnerships, providing opportunities to develop a more integrated approach. For example, the accountable officer currently Chairs' the joint commissioning board for drug and alcohol treatment, which is a sub-group of the Drug Action Team. To date, there has been some preliminary work to consider opportunities to develop floating support for drug misusers through Supporting People. Representatives of the group also sit on a number of related bodies, including the Older People's Strategy Group, Mental Health Accommodation Panel and a range of community safety partnerships.

- 117 There is some evidence that the Supporting People team has worked in partnership with other service areas to address wider priorities, such as reducing the level of homelessness and high rate of teenage pregnancy, resulting in the development of new pipeline schemes. The Supporting People manager is also involved in the development of the new Older People's Housing Strategy providing opportunities to develop more effective linkages.
- 118 However, there is no strong evidence that the range of links with other partnerships have been used to champion Supporting People, or to develop a clear understanding of how wider priorities should be reflected in the programme. As noted earlier, awareness of how the programme could be re-developed and aligned to support wider commissioning priorities was limited during our inspection, suggesting more scope for closer integration: considerable work is needed to build Supporting People into mainstream service planning and partnership working.

Probation service

- 119 The London area Probation service has worked as an active partner with the council in the development of Supporting People and other initiatives. For example, the service is represented on the Community Safety Strategic Partnership, Drug Action Team and Domestic Violence forum and Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group, affording good knowledge of local cross-cutting issues. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), allowing agencies to assess, share and manage risks posed by potentially dangerous offenders, are in place in the borough. Probation indicated these generally worked well, with a good level of input from the housing service.
- 120 Despite a positive approach to partnership working generally, Probation representatives expressed a low level of satisfaction with the Supporting People partnership. Weak integration of Supporting People and probation strategies, little progress in tackling the low level of provision for offenders in the borough, and lack of clarity about strategy development, were cited as problems. The Supporting People team has yet to establish clear links with the council's Youth Offending Team (YOT) to ensure that the needs of young offenders are reflected in the five year strategy, though a meeting is planned.
- 121 The Probation service views the council's approach to Supporting People as weaker than some other London Borough's that they work with: this is particularly marked in the areas of governance and strategy development.

Health

- 122 From 2001, Barking and Dagenham PCT and the council's social services department were jointly managed by the Director of Social Services. Although this arrangement ceased in July 2003, close working relationships with the council continue. Recent inspection reports have indicated a clear joint vision for taking forward older people's services and a joint mental health strategy has been agreed.
- 123 Evidence of effective joint working is demonstrated by a number of joint service initiatives, such as the development of a new intermediate care centre for older people, providing 45 intermediate care beds and a local therapy centre, and the inclusion of a health centre in one of the Supporting People pipeline homeless hostels, promoting a more integrated approach to the needs of homeless people. The PCT is also working with the council to develop a series of performance measures to address health inequalities.

- 124 However, senior managers within the PCT acknowledge that their involvement in the Supporting People programme has been limited due to other pressures. Opportunities to re-align the programme to reflect their priorities have not been fully explored. Although a joint Health and Social Care Management Team meets on a fortnightly basis, we were advised by senior PCT managers that there had been no reports on Supporting People to this forum in the last six months.

Provider forum

- 125 A provider forum is held jointly with the London Borough of Havering on a quarterly basis. This provides an opportunity for the team to update providers on current Supporting People issues, and obtain their views on the future development of the programme. Meetings held over the past year have been well-attended by both internal and external providers.
- 126 Joint meetings with the London Borough of Havering were particularly valued by providers with services in both boroughs, as they felt that this promoted some consistency in the management of the programme.
- 127 Feedback from providers on the level of consultation and involvement in the programme was generally positive, though most of the 16 representatives who attended a meeting with inspectors were unclear about how they were influencing the priorities within the new five year strategy.

Customer care, access to services and information

- 128 Access to services and information about the Supporting People programme is under-developed. Although front-line staff can provide basic information about how to progress service requests, there is a lack of written information about Supporting People services and the programme does not feature on the council's website. There is no directory of Supporting People services.
- 129 The council has produced an information leaflet for users and potential users. This provides clear details about target groups and charging arrangements and contact details for the team. It includes information about how to obtain translations and offers other formats, such as audio-tapes and large print. Although the leaflet provides a useful overview of the programme, we found no evidence that it is widely available at council access points, libraries or the PCT one stop shop.
- 130 There is currently no information about the Supporting People grant administration and funded services available on the council's website, and there is no directory of services funded by the programme which can be used by front-line receptionists, providers and advice staff. We found no evidence that training had been provided to front-line staff to develop their understanding of the programme and related services.
- 131 Although access to most services is through social services and housing, there is direct access to some homeless hostels and the women's refuge, ensuring easy access to vulnerable groups.
- 132 Mystery shopping exercises to council access points during our inspection found that all respondents answered the phone quickly and dealt with enquiries in a courteous way. Most were able to provide basic information about how to progress our service request, but it was not always clear whether they fully understood the range of housing related support available locally. Calls to providers were handled well, with all able to provide clear information about how service requests could be progressed.

- 133 A Better Care: Higher Standards charter leaflet is available. This is a comprehensive document which clearly describes the help available to borough residents over the age of 18 who need long term care or support from health, housing and social services. It includes relevant service standards of the health, housing and social care partners and gives contact details for each partner agency. It contains information about how to obtain information in other languages and formats, but is yet to be updated to include Supporting People.
- 134 Provider newsletters are circulated every two to three months, allowing the Supporting People team to update providers on recent developments, publicise forum events and invite views on the strategy development process. Although these are considered useful by providers, inspectors had some concerns about the tone and presentation of information in the newsletters, with some items placing too much emphasis on the personal perspective of the author, particularly in relation to the approach taken by the ODPM in administering the programme nationally.
- 135 Recent consultancy work on user consultation has highlighted a number of initiatives to strengthen information provision, such as standards of information for providers and new information leaflets, but there was no evidence that these could be produced in line with the target date of December 2004.

Diversity

- 136 The clear corporate commitment to promoting equality and diversity is yet to be fully reflected in the Supporting People programme. The lack of information about the needs of BME communities identified in the draft strategy has not been addressed and there are gaps in information about other hard-to-reach groups. Although service reviews address diversity issues, the profile of service users within funded services is not systematically monitored by the team to identify areas of concern.
- 137 The council has recognised the need to respond to the increasing diversity of the local community. The council's community strategy includes promoting and celebrating diversity as a key theme and there is evidence of good progress in implementing the race equality scheme. Diversity action plans have been agreed by social services, with the plan for adult services recognising the potential of Supporting People to redress imbalances in service provision, though the action plan to take this plan forward is not yet finalised.
- 138 The need to establish a better understanding of the housing support needs of people from BME groups and address the lack of services for this group was highlighted as a priority in the draft Supporting People strategy, but has not been followed up. This makes it difficult to know whether culturally specific services are required by this group. We also identified some confusion about how this gap would be addressed in the future. While the draft BME housing strategy was mentioned as a potential source of further information, an early draft of this document suggests that the Supporting People team will be commissioning work to identify future needs.
- 139 There is some evidence of gaps in housing related support services for BME client groups. For example, an inspection of older people's services in 2003, found that services for black BME older people and carers were at an early stage of development, and that there was a general lack of culturally appropriate services. Equally, the new mental health strategy recognised the need to develop specific services for BME group to facilitate access to mainstream services. However, the role that Supporting People could play in meeting these needs has not been developed.

- 140 There has been no clear progress on addressing the needs of other hard-to reach groups identified in the strategy, such as people with HIV/AIDs, refugees, travellers and people with alcohol problems. A perceived difficulty in re-balancing provision means that there has been no detailed consideration of how the programme could respond to their needs. Although we were advised by councillors that the council has undertaken a recent review of its support to travellers, it is unclear how outcomes from this work are influencing the programme.
- 141 Visits to service providers found some positive approaches to diversity. For example, figures from the women's refuge show that over half of the women supported were from BME groups in 2003/04. The provision of language line within the service and use of interpreters helps to meet their language needs, and links have been made with a local college to ensure access to ESOL¹³ courses. A homeless hostel funded by the service also runs a black user group, giving people an opportunity to express their views and ensure that support is culturally sensitive.
- 142 Discussions with the Supporting People team showed a clear appreciation of equality and diversity issues. Service reviews have considered equality and diversity issues, with consideration of monitoring arrangements, equality and racial harassment policies and disabled access. This has led to some recommendations for improvement, though targets are not consistently SMART. Training on diversity is made available to providers where appropriate, either via council or external provision.
- 143 However, we found no evidence that the Supporting People team was routinely requesting information about the ethnic profile of new service users and querying providers if figures did not reflect local communities. Although a review of a floating support service found that only two out of 100 users were from BME groups and made recommendations for improvement, evidence of an improved profile were anecdotal.

Outcomes for service users

- 144 Our inspection found that pipeline schemes and the re-focussing of some existing provision for homeless people and people with learning difficulties, have resulted in benefits for some service users. However, benefits have not extended to all client groups and there is not yet a clear vision to show how gaps will be addressed. Although some users are benefiting from an increased emphasis on support plans, these are not consistently developed in all funded schemes. Risks to users have not been assessed, and there are no contingency plans to deal with potential issues, such as the withdrawal of funding.
- 145 The development of the Supporting people programme has resulted in the development of some new pipeline services that have clear benefits for service users, with future developments planned. For example:
- ◆ six beds at a new mother and baby unit which opened in April 2004. From January 2005, the programme will also fund a floating support worker to assist vulnerable young mothers in the community;

¹³ English as a second language classes

- ◆ Supporting People funding has been earmarked for two new RSL managed hostels to providing 71 units of accommodation for homeless people, both of which will be on stream by July 2005. One of the hostels will be co-located with a new healthcare centre and housing aid service, offering a more holistic range of services to homeless families;
 - ◆ the council has recently converted a part three residential home to an extra care management scheme for people with dementia, with staffing costs partly met by Supporting People; and
 - ◆ a new borough-wide floating support service for older people funded by Supporting People has increased the security of older people through close working with the Police, and is anecdotally felt to be contributing to improved hospital discharge rates. A specific 'home from hospital' service is due to be introduced in December 2004.
- 146 Some improvements have also been made to existing provision. For example:
- ◆ a 14 bed scheme for people with learning difficulties, which formerly provided long term accommodation with low levels of support and experienced high levels of vacancies, has been re-focussed to offer short-term support which enables people to move towards independence. There are plans for at least two tenants to move to a new block of flats, though lack of move-on accommodation is still recognised as a problem; and
 - ◆ improvements have been made in the level of support to people at one of the council's homeless hostel, which previously offered no housing-related support and was unpopular with residents.
- 147 Visits to both of the above schemes during our inspection found that the support offered met grant conditions and was valued by users. For example, feedback from staff and users at the homeless hostel indicated that the appointment of an accommodation resettlement officer had resulted in more focussed approach to helping people moving from temporary to permanent accommodation, with users reporting high levels of satisfaction with the support offered.
- 148 Discussions with service users during visits to schemes during our inspection also highlighted some improvements in user focus since the introduction of the programme, with some users pointing to improved levels of consultation in some schemes; such as more involvement in decisions around menu planning and decoration, and faster resolution of repair issues in sheltered schemes.
- 149 However, opportunities to re-prioritise services for groups without current Supporting People provision have yet to be fully explored and some key groups, such as young people at risk, BME groups, people with HIV/AIDS, offenders and refugees are yet to experience direct benefits from the programme. There are currently no firm plans to extend provision to these groups.
- 150 The council planned to include a pipeline project for the development of a 118 bed foyer scheme for young people aged 16-24 years and teenage parents, this was not sufficiently developed to be included in the original submission. Although this is recognised as valuable and filling a gap in provision for young people at risk, with many of those who experience homelessness currently placed in bed and breakfast with little support, there is no agreement on the level of support that can be offered under the Supporting People programme.

- 151 Although support planning is an essential component of the Supporting People programme, this has yet to be consistently introduced across all funded schemes. While some providers indicated that a more structured process was now in place, visits to schemes and feedback from the Supporting People team pointed to gaps: for example, there are known to be gaps in some homeless services provided by both the council and independent providers, and within the council's sheltered housing service.
- 152 As indicated earlier in this report, the risks to users and carers have not been identified in the risk log and there is no evidence of developed contingency plans to deal with potential problems, such as the withdrawal of funding, such as that which arise in relation to the withdrawal of funding from residential homes.

Summary

- 153 Overall, we judge that the London borough of Barking and Dagenham is providing a poor, zero star service in its planning and delivery of the programme. Although the initial work to establish the Supporting People programme within the authority was well-managed, our inspection raised serious concerns about the council's approach to developing 'steady-state' arrangements for the programme.
- 154 The development of pipeline schemes and some re-configuration of existing services have benefited particular client groups, but overall management and delivery of the programme is poor and lacks clear corporate ownership and direction. The Supporting People team has been under-resourced and lacked sufficient capacity to drive forward key initiatives, such as the development of the five year strategy and needs assessment work. There is currently no agreed work programme to monitor its progress on key priorities or address service gaps.
- 155 A perception that there are few cost savings to be achieved within funded service, has impeded the development of clear future priorities to re-balance existing provision, and has not been supported by a robust approach to value for money within service reviews. Policies and procedures to support the programme are under-developed and do not provide a clear framework for the transparent management of the programme. Scrutiny of financial and performance management information is weak.
- 156 Service users, advocates and carers have had extremely limited involvement in the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme. No user forums have been established as part of the programme and links with established forums that include Supporting People client groups are under-developed. Although the council has a good track record of partnership working which could benefit the delivery of Supporting People, it is unclear how links with existing partnerships have assisted the strategic development of the programme.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the evidence of service improvement?

Track record

- 157 At a corporate level, there is evidence of improved performance in the council's overall management of the authority. For example, the council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) rating rose from 2 to 3, on a scale of 1 to 4 where 4 is the highest, in 2003/04. The draft 2003/04 audit letter points to improvements in key areas, with better performance in almost all aspects of financial governance and more consistent use and ownership of the performance management framework to drive forward key priorities. Progress in developing partnership working has also been commended by both the Audit Commission and the Government Office for London (GOL), with recent GOL feedback on the Local Strategic Partnership moving the council's overall risk assessment from red to green/amber in view of good progress made in year to April 2004. Overall, 71 per cent of the council's performance indicators improved over the past year.
- 158 There is also evidence of improvement in key departmental areas linked to the Supporting People programme. While the one star rating awarded by the Department of Health for social services for adults and children, remained unchanged between 2002 and 2004. Capacity for improvement has improved over time, with both areas now rated as having promising prospects for improvement. An inspection of older people's services in 2003 also found that the council had addressed most of the issues identified in the joint review in 1997, though slow progress in increasing user consultation was raised as an issue.
- 159 Equally, the housing service has demonstrated a track record of implementing recommendations from previous inspections. Following a score of 'no star, with excellent prospects for improvement' for the repairs and maintenance service in 2000, a further inspection in 2004, covering this area and wider housing management performance, assessed the council as providing a 'one star with promising prospects for improvement'.
- 160 The social services department has made good progress in re-configuring older people's accommodation to increase independence and offer more choice. For example, five out of eight residential homes for older people have been closed and extra care housing schemes and home support has been expanded, leading to increases in the number of people helped to live at home. The Commission for Social Services Inspectorate's performance review report for 2004 also noted improvements in home support for other client groups, such as people with mental health problems, learning difficulties and disabilities, and management of delayed transfers.
- 161 In contrast to the wider positive direction of travel, senior managers recognise that the development of the Supporting People programme has not been given sufficient priority to date, leading to slow progress on key implementation issues. The commissioning body has not provided effective leadership and direction to the programme and has not succeeded in driving forward key initiatives, such as the five year strategy or the development of robust policies and procedures to support effective implementation.
- 162 Lack of capacity within the Supporting People team and insufficient engagement of key commissioning areas have posed further barriers to improvement, with current performance providing little evidence of a well-developed, managed approach to the full range of housing related support services, supported by effective business planning, commissioning and contract monitoring.

- 163 There is still a lack of criteria for prioritising future funding, leading to difficulties in making decisions when additional resources or under-spends in the programme are identified. Weaknesses in the approach to service reviews have limited opportunities to identify scope for savings and re-balance services. Because the review process has provided an insufficient focus on value for money and comparative benchmarking, the council cannot yet be assured that the services in place provide good value for money or verify its assumptions about the limited scope for savings.
- 164 Based on our inspection, we concluded that a number of weaknesses highlighted in the ODPM feedback on the draft strategy – including the lack of user and carer involvement in strategy development, inadequate risk assessment and the absence of a robust service review procedure – have not yet been satisfactorily addressed. For example, the draft strategy included specific action points to research the housing support needs of BME communities and people with learning difficulties and to develop provision for homeless people with mental health needs and offenders, but there is little evidence of progress.
- 165 Equally, although ODPM confirmed the importance of including the performance of internal providers on returns made by the council, this has yet to be acted upon.

Service user benefits

- 166 There has been some progress in promoting new services for particular client groups through pipeline funding, such as older people, homeless people and vulnerable young mothers. Some improvements to existing services for people with learning difficulties and homeless people have also been made, leading to a stronger focus on promoting independence and move-on accommodation. Conversely, some groups, such as refugees, offenders, people with HIV/AIDs, travellers, people with substance misuse problems and people from BME communities are yet to see significant benefits from the programme.
- 167 User involvement in the development of the Supporting People programme, and use of existing forums to solicit users' views on needs and priorities, is still recognised as an area for further development by the team, though there are not yet specific timelines for taking user work forward. An inconsistent approach to support planning within funded services also limits opportunities to tailor support to meet individual users' needs and to identify those at risk due to inappropriate or inadequate support.
- 168 Although there are future plans to develop a foyer to meet the needs of young people at risk and teenage mothers, there is uncertainty about whether Supporting People grant funding would be able to contribute revenue funding to support this proposal. Equally, while some initial work has been undertaken by an RSL to develop a floating support service for drug misusers, there are no firm plans to progress this.

Learning

- 169 At a corporate level, the council has developed a range of activities to become a more outward focussed and learning organisation, with links with other authorities and networks, peer challenge and inspection results being used to drive improvements. A new corporate indicator to measure the percentage of managers sharing best practice across the council has recently been adopted to facilitate learning across the council.

- 170 However, successful outcomes from learning are not evident in the delivery of the Supporting People programme. Although the Supporting People manager participates in a range of wider networks, such as the London Supporting People Forum and east London sub-group, our inspection found no positive examples of learning from this work. Examples of effective procedures adopted in other boroughs to address eligibility issues have not helped to shape an agreed local approach within Barking and Dagenham.
- 171 Considerable changes within the personnel of the Supporting People team have in turn limited the ability to learn from previous experience. Current Supporting People post holders do not have a clear grasp of ODPM guidance and grant conditions and require further training.

How good are the current improvement plans?

- 172 At a corporate and departmental level, the overall approach to service planning across the council has been strengthened by the introduction of a new corporate performance management system called the 'balanced scorecard'. This links service delivery to the council's vision and the best value performance plan (BVPP) and provides a clear basis for the integration of strategy development, service planning, target setting and monitoring. The scorecard comprises five elements: community first, funding the future, performance counts, people matter and customer first.
- 173 The development of individual score cards for social service and housing provide a focus on the priorities outlined in the community strategy and reflect important national priorities. For example, the housing scorecard for 2004/05 focuses on reducing levels of homelessness and introducing choice-based lettings, while those for social services highlight the need to promote independence through integrated health and social care services. Progress on key objectives is clearly linked to performance on key indicators, such as Mental Health National Service Framework (NSF) targets and Valuing People (learning difficulties) targets. While this approach is clearly having a positive impact on overall performance, the Supporting People programme will not be fully integrated into this framework until 2005/06.
- 174 A raft of new housing plans are currently being developed and will provide a more strategic framework for the future development and prioritisation of the Supporting People programme, including an older people's housing strategy and BME housing strategy. However, current drafts of these documents are at an early stage, and it is uncertain whether they will be finalised prior to the development of the Supporting People five year strategy. Equally, more remains to be done to effectively link Supporting People with the development of accommodation strategies for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties.
- 175 At the time of our inspection, there was a lack of clear implementation plans for the Supporting People programme. Although an annual plan for the programme for 2004/05 was in place, it was not fit for purpose: for example, the plan had only generalised targets, such as 'produce strategy', and 'carry out reviews to schedule', lacked clear milestones, assigned no responsibilities to individual members of staff, and did not include time-bound targets for all activities. There was no evidence that feedback from service users and other stakeholders had been used to shape the current plan.

- 176 There was no evidence that the plan has been monitored by the commissioning body or is used by the team to drive progress. Slippage on the plan, such as the commitment to produce a draft strategy by December 2004 and to complete ODPM information requests, had not been addressed. Although the development of the new five year strategy presents a significant challenge, in terms of assessing needs, determining future priorities and consulting key stakeholders, there was no detailed plan showing how this work would be taken forward.
- 177 The principles of best value are not yet evident in the approach to Supporting People service reviews, with an emphasis on quality rather than cost, though both aspects should be considered. Additionally, there has been an inconsistent approach to developing clear action plans to drive forward needed service improvements following reviews. Where plans have been developed, targets for improvement are not routinely SMART and have not been subject to systematic monitoring.
- 178 Plans to invest the current savings on the programme have focussed on the expansion of current services rather than new proposals to address unmet needs. Recent funding announcements have indicated that there is likely to be significant resources to carry over and allocate in 2005/06, with the current under-spend of £500,000 in 2003/04 able to cover the required savings of £167,864. However, while the commissioning body agreed to expand three of its existing schemes, minutes of its meeting in October 2004, recognised that there was an absence of detailed proposals for new services. Equally, there is no agreed approach to minimise the impact of future savings, for example, through the commissioning of time-limited services or voluntary savings.
- 179 During and following our inspection, senior managers acknowledged the need to strengthen arrangements, for the planning and implementation of the programme, and provided inspectors with written statements setting out proposed actions. These include:
- ◆ producing a development plan for the commissioning body to ensure its strategic development;
 - ◆ re-launching the Core Strategy Group, with new terms of reference;
 - ◆ producing a five year strategy project plan, including plans for consultation with key stakeholders;
 - ◆ reviewing all procedures and systems with the team, with the support of the social services' business manager;
 - ◆ strengthening induction and training for new and existing Supporting People staff and increasing the focus on performance management, with clearer links to the corporate performance management framework;
 - ◆ introducing regular monitoring of the programme through the Council-wide Corporate Monitoring Group (CMG) and Resource Monitoring Group, which is chaired by the Deputy Leader to monitor high risk programmes and projects; and
 - ◆ transferring responsibility for chairing the commissioning body to the Director of Housing to ensure stronger corporate ownership and build capacity. The Deputy Leader of the Council will also act as portfolio lead for Supporting People.

- 180 A revised delivery and improvement plan for the programme 2005/06 has now been produced, to address the range of concerns identified in our inspection. This sets out clear targets, along with responsible officers. However, there remains a need to flesh out how some of the actions detailed in the plan, such as improved awareness and development of commissioning body representatives and production of new public information, will be taken forward. Arrangements for enhanced service user involvement are not yet fully incorporated into the revised plan.
- 181 Although the above actions show that the council is now taking appropriate steps to get the programme on track, we still have concerns about the team's ability to meet immediate short-term priorities. For example, the volume of outstanding work, the lack of robust needs information and the extensive consultation required to develop the five year Supporting People strategy raises, serious doubts about the council's ability to meet the ODPM deadline of 31 March 2005. As the council plans to substantially restructure the Supporting People team, it will also take time for seconded and newly appointed staff to develop a detailed understanding of the programme and be in a position to drive change.
- 182 In view of our concerns about the proposed timetable for the development of the strategy, the Council has now spoken to ODPM about extending the timescale for the submission of the five year strategy and a revised date of June 2005 has been agreed for full submission. However, there is a recognition within the first draft of the strategy that it will realistically take longer than this to develop a detailed understanding of type and volume of housing support needs across the full range of client groups and to propose new models of care.

Will improvements be delivered?

Ambition and priorities

- 183 The community strategy agreed by the Barking and Dagenham Partnership has a clear objective to improve health, housing and social care in the borough. This commits partners to working to provide seamless services to meet the needs of vulnerable children and adults. Key outcomes include improved access to and experience of social care services and an increase in the safety, independence and inclusion of vulnerable people.
- 184 Ambitions for the future development of the Supporting People programme were not clear at the time of our inspection. We found little evidence that the commissioning body, for example, was setting clear priorities for the development of the five year strategy or making plans to re-shape existing provision. Equally, while discussions with councillors reflected a strong commitment to supporting vulnerable and often excluded groups, their awareness of current issues facing the programme was limited, with little evidence of direct involvement in shaping future priorities.
- 185 Discussions with senior managers during the inspection provided some reassurance that there was a willingness to change and create a clearer direction for the programme. However, renewed efforts to spell out the programme's relationship with key corporate priorities and build corporate ownership will take time to become embedded. Equally, the commissioning body will need to mature quickly in order to meet the challenging agenda ahead.

- 186 A perception within the council and its wider partners that there is virtually no flexibility around Supporting People funding, poses a significant barrier to the future strategic direction and ambitions for the programme inside and outside the council. This will need to be addressed if a more positive approach to the role of housing related support in improving health and well-being of vulnerable people is to be harnessed for the benefit of vulnerable people.

Capacity

- 187 The council's decision to fund social services to formula funding levels has led to substantial increases in departmental funding, giving new potential to improve performance and address gaps in services. For example, the department has been earmarked for the next stage of a corporate customer first initiative, which will provide enhance training and development for frontline staff and refurbishment of public offices.
- 188 Recent evaluations covering housing management, social services and regeneration have recognised the council's approach to partnership working as a strength. While these arrangements have not yet been maximised to benefit the delivery of the Supporting People programme, there is scope to develop closer links between the programme and existing partnership work. The PCT has also signalled its intention to take a more pro-active role in the commissioning body, with a newly appointed Director of Commissioning assuming responsibility for representing the PCT's interests on this group.
- 189 There are plans to strengthen the capacity of the Supporting People team to take forward current priorities. Two new posts have been included in the team and revisions to current team management arrangements are being taken forward. Short-term capacity is also being enhanced, with the departmental business manager now tasked to review existing policies and procedures within the team. Housing strategy staff will also contribute to the development of the new strategy.
- 190 The commissioning group have yet to demonstrate the capacity to make difficult decisions, such as de-commissioning existing services, re-balancing provision or the investment of savings. Failure to prioritise service reviews to focus on high risk, high cost services and address value for money within the review process, means that there is currently limited understanding of the scope for change and the mechanisms for resolving future funding issues are yet to be tested.

Performance management

- 191 Although the introduction of the balanced score card has led to a stronger corporate focus on performance management, monitoring of the Supporting People programme under this framework will not commence until April 2005. At the time of our inspection, there was little evidence of a systematic approach to performance management of the team's activities: existing plans lacked clear targets and progress against the plan was not routinely monitored by the commissioning body.
- 192 Not all members of the Supporting People team currently have individual targets and exchange of information and learning is not promoted via regular team meetings. While inspectors were advised that the size of the team had led to an informal approach to staff management, the overall approach to staff management needs to be significantly strengthened to support the induction and development of new staff. Although there is good access to training within the council, such as the leadership academy training for front-line staff, this has not demonstrably helped to develop the skills and competencies of the team. These issues are now addressed within the new delivery and improvement plan.

- 193 There are effective information technology systems within the Supporting People administrative function, allowing the team to produce both financial and performance reports. However, weaknesses in the collection and use of performance management information remain an issue. For example, the lack of emphasis on ensuring that internally funded services return performance information in a consistent way has hindered the return of mandatory returns to the ODPM and, in our view, current plans to address this by September 2005 need to be brought forward. Equally, there is little evidence that the performance of external services is subject to scrutiny: available information has not been routinely analysed within service review reports or presented to the commissioning body.

Summary

- 194 In summary, we judge the Supporting People programme in Barking and Dagenham to have **uncertain** prospects for improvement. We identified a number of factors which point to capacity for improvement within the service, including an emerging track record of corporate and departmental improvement, as well as proposals to strengthen the Supporting People team and promote greater corporate ownership. Discussions with senior managers and Members since our inspection have demonstrated a strong desire and commitment to improve the management of the programme.
- 195 There are however some areas which will pose barriers to future progress. For example, considerable work is still required to develop councillors and commissioning body representatives' understanding of the programme and promote strong corporate ownership. Failure to prioritise service reviews to focus on high risk, high cost services and address value for money within the review process means that there is limited understanding of the scope for re-balancing services and the commissioning body is yet to demonstrate its ability to make difficult decisions about future priorities.
- 196 The volume of outstanding work, the lack of robust needs information and the extensive consultation required to develop the five year strategy also raises serious doubts about the council's ability to meet the ODPM deadline of 31 March 2005. To date, the council has failed to satisfactorily address weaknesses identified in the shadow strategy by the ODPM evaluation in February 2003, and bring together clear needs information for BME and other hard to reach groups. Housing support strategies to inform the commissioning priorities for the Supporting People programme, such as the BME housing needs strategy and older people's housing strategy, are still to be agreed.
- 197 The new Supporting People delivery and improvement plan shows that the council and its partners are now beginning to take appropriate steps to address many of the weaknesses in our report. However, there remains a need to flesh out how some of the actions detailed in the plan will be taken forward and proposals to develop greater service user involvement need to be given greater priority. Developing the skills and competencies of existing and new team members will also take time and this could impact on the ability to drive forward the programme in the short-term.

Appendices

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

Performance indicators

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

- ◆ 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.

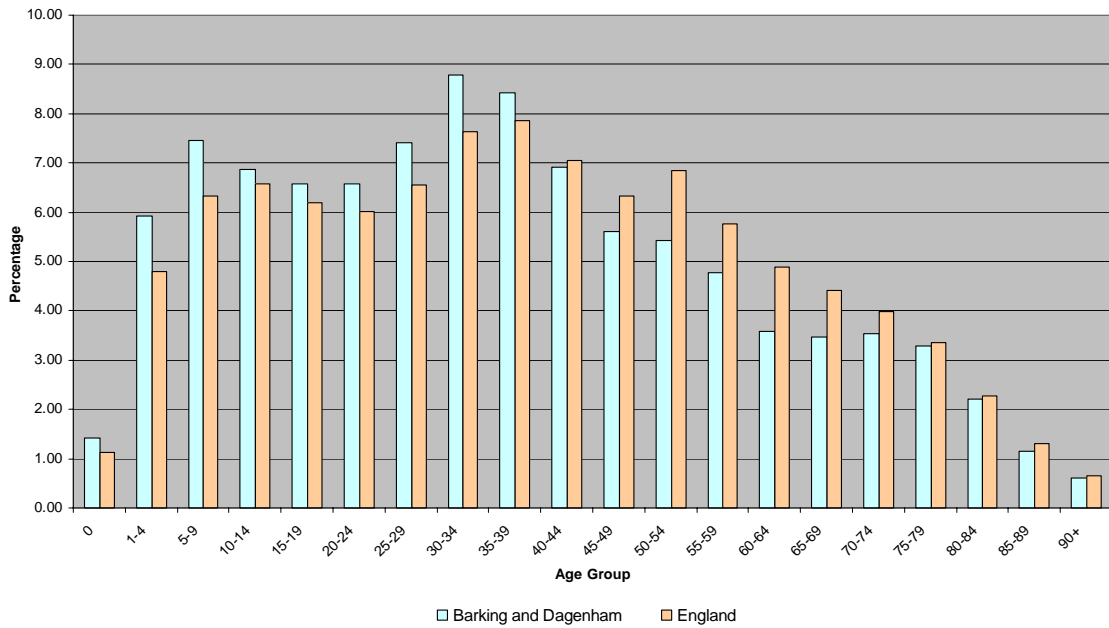
Demographic information

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

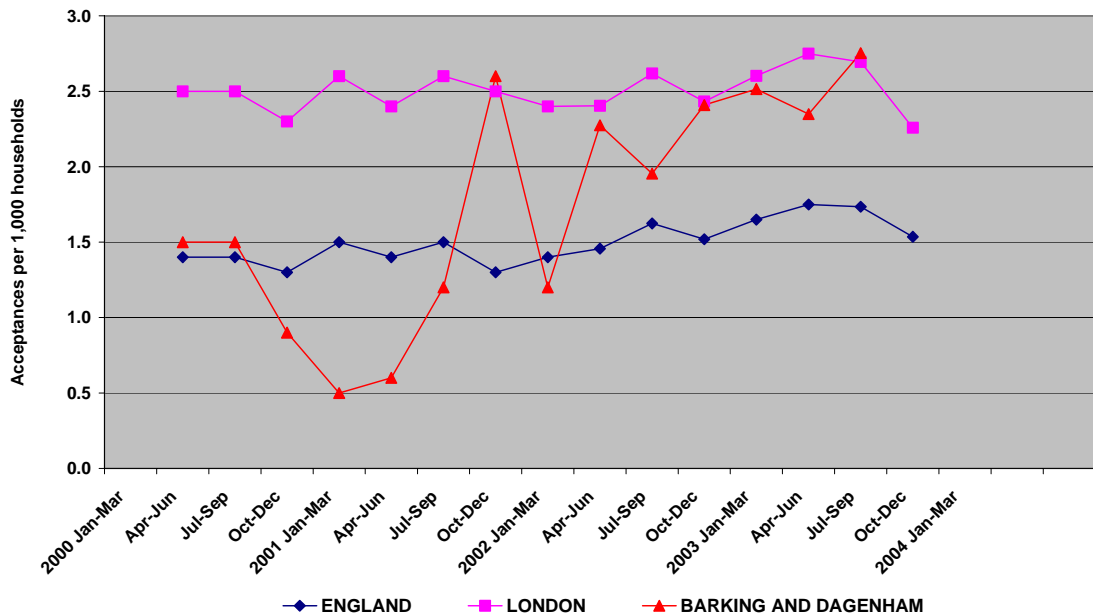
Measure	Barking and Dagenham	England
Population (mid-2002)	167300	-
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2002)	14.23	16.41
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2002)	19.14	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate April 2003)	3.3	2.6
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ¹⁴	26	-

¹⁴ Deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

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)



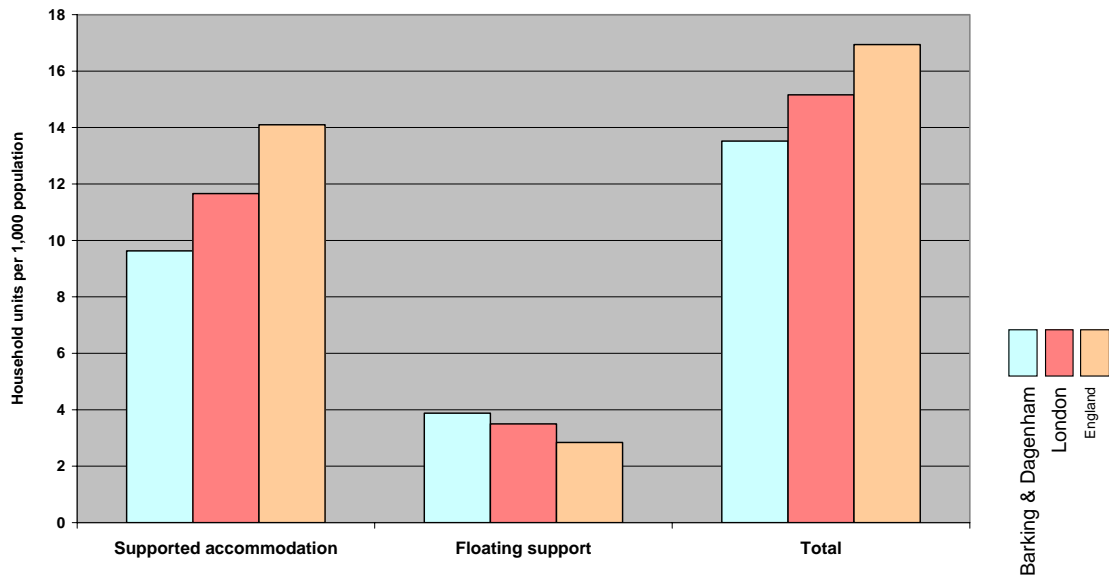
Performance information

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- ◆ relevant best value performance indicators.

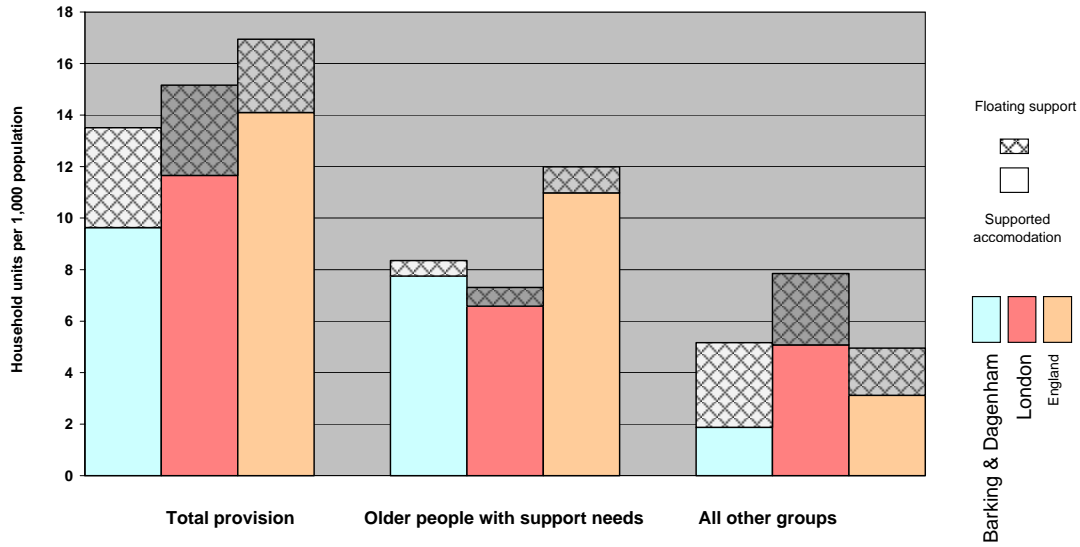
Supporting People data

Total service provision funded through Supporting People¹⁵

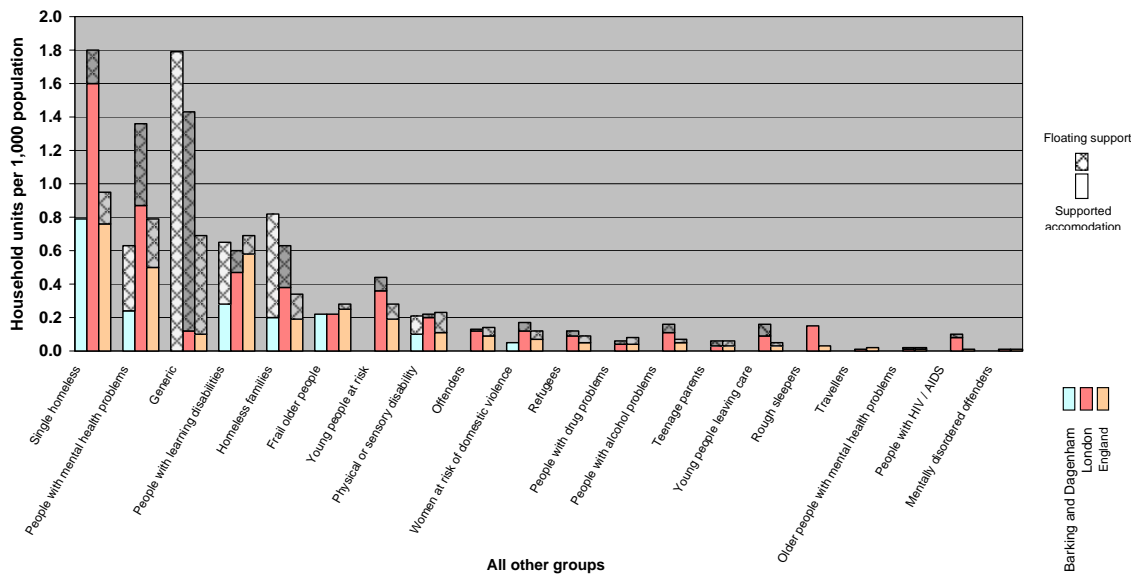


¹⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹⁶



Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹⁷



Funding for Supporting People in 2003/04

	Final Supporting People grant 2003/04	Pipeline allocation June 2003	Administration grant 2003/04
Barking and Dagenham	£ 4,544,327	£ 118,714	£ 206, 308.09

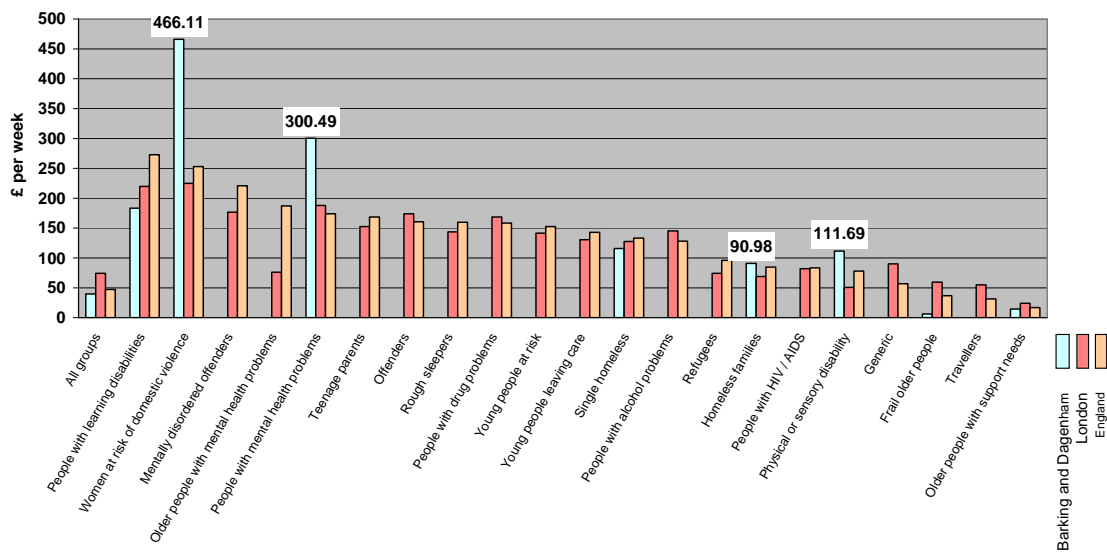
¹⁶ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

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

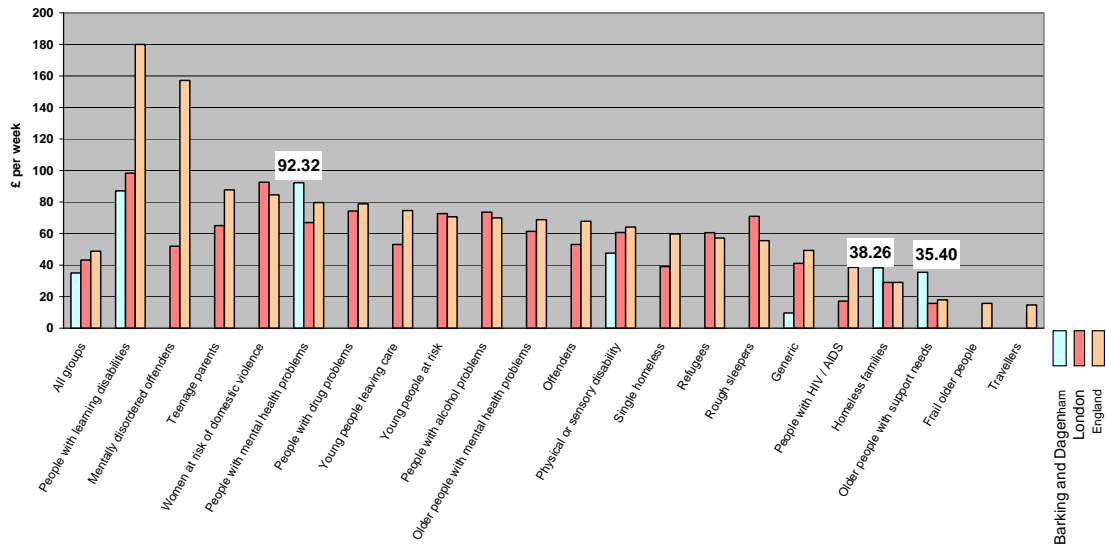
	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Barking and Dagenham	£0.52	£24.49	£35.55	£67.07
London	£0.97	£42.37	£48.73	£68.40
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

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

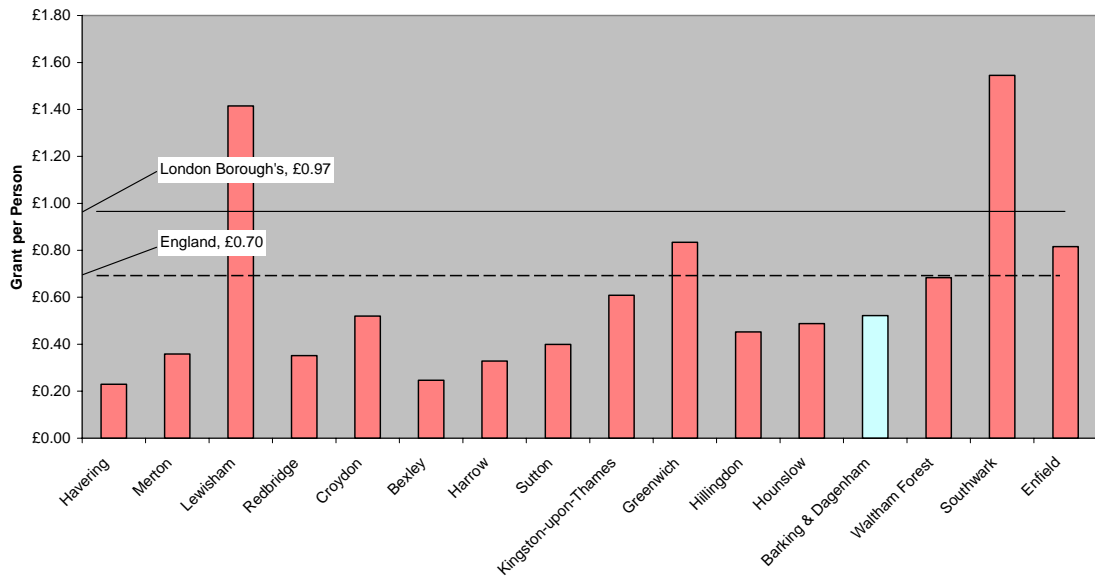


¹⁸ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

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

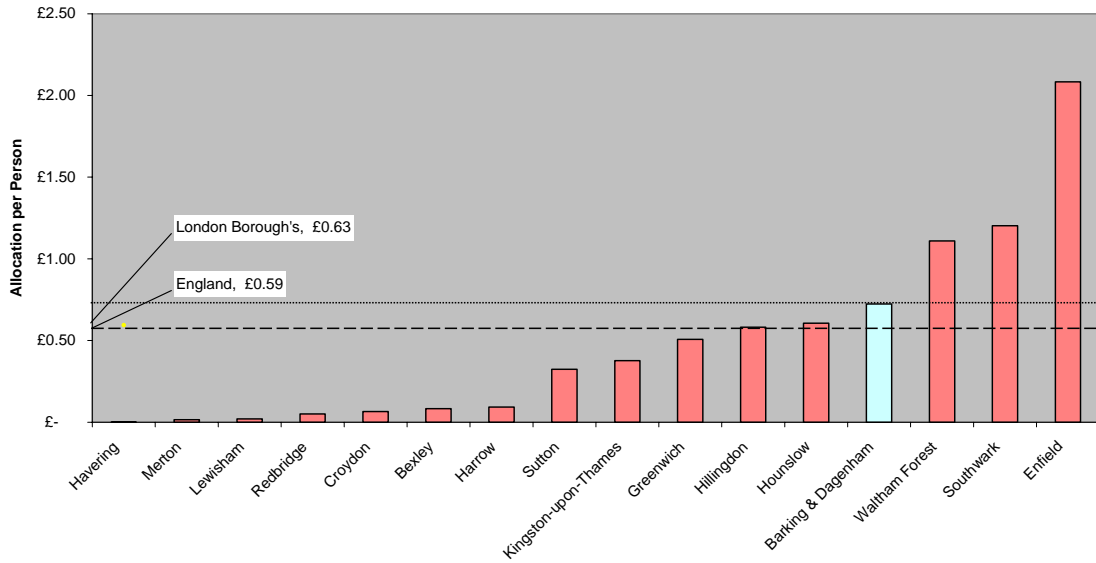


Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours¹⁹, all London Boroughs and all English councils (2003/04)

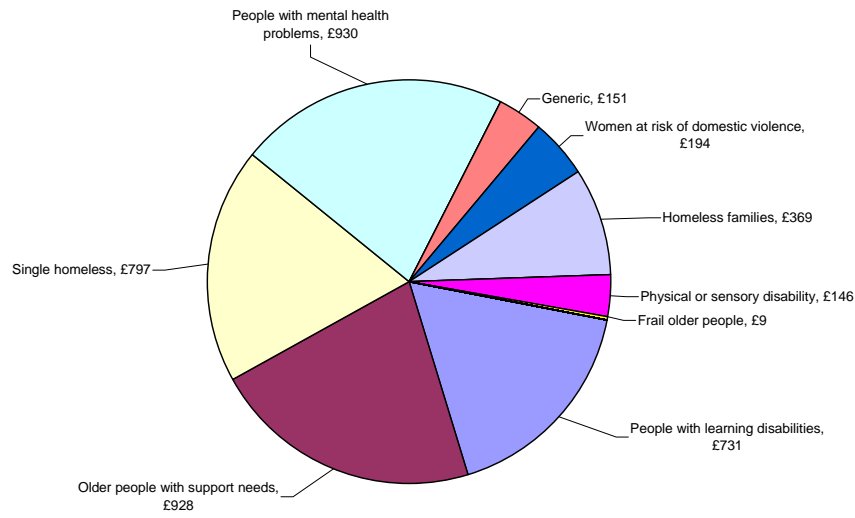


¹⁹ A comparator group of similar councils.

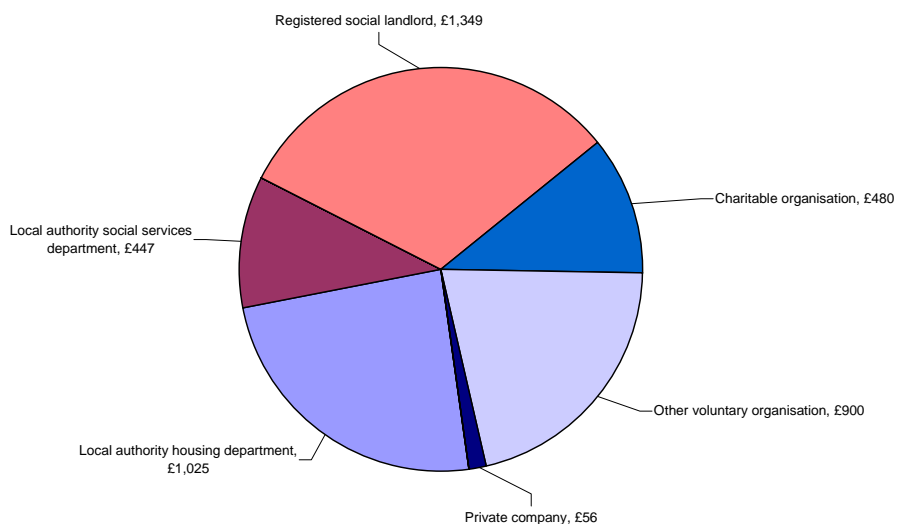
Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours, all London Boroughs and all English councils



Share of spending between user groups (£000s)



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



Social Services star ratings November 2004

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

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

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.

Barking and Dagenham	
Significantly above average (★★★★)	Percentage of change in previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5). Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40).
Above average (★★★)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6). Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31).

Barking and Dagenham	
Average (***)	<p>Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care (C26).</p> <p>Admissions to hospital of people aged 75 or over due to hypothermia or a fall (C33).</p> <p>Items of equipment costing less than £1,000 delivered within three weeks (D38).</p> <p>Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39).</p> <p>Admissions of adults aged 18-64 to residential or nursing care (C27).</p>
Below average (**)	<p>Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29).</p> <p>Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30).</p> <p>Older people helped to live at home (C32).</p> <p>Delayed discharges for older people (D41).</p>
Significantly below average (*)	<p>Employment, education & training for care leavers (A4).</p> <p>New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks (D43).</p>

Best value performance indicators

Performance on relevant indicators in 2002/03 compared with London Boroughs

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

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

Documents reviewed

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

- ◆ Corporate documents:
 - ◆ area and council demographic profile;
 - ◆ Community Plan;
 - ◆ Performance Plan 2004/05;
 - ◆ external auditors reports;
 - ◆ Corporate Procurement Strategy;
 - ◆ Housing Strategy 2003/06;
 - ◆ Homelessness Strategy 2003/08;
 - ◆ Better Care: Higher Standards 2003/04;
 - ◆ Older People's Services scorecard pack and commissioning strategy;
 - ◆ Tackling Teenage Pregnancy Strategy;
 - ◆ inspection of Children's Services, 2002; and
 - ◆ inspection of Social Care Services for Older People, 2003;
- ◆ Service documents:
 - ◆ Supporting People Shadow Strategy and ODPM evaluation;
 - ◆ minutes of Commissioning Body and Provider Forum;
 - ◆ Risk Assessment;
 - ◆ Supporting People Annual Plan 2004/05;
 - ◆ Consultation Strategy;
 - ◆ service review timetable and procedure;
 - ◆ service review documentation; and
 - ◆ Supporting People provider newsletters.

Reality checks undertaken

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

- ◆ visits to projects with Supporting People funding, including meetings with service users and managers;
- ◆ meeting with Commissioning Body representatives and Commissioning Managers;
- ◆ focus group meeting with provider service managers and questionnaire to all external service providers funded via Supporting People;
- ◆ meeting with Lead Member and opposition councillors; and
- ◆ search of the council's website to find information on Supporting People.