

Inspection report

February 2005

Supporting People Programme

London Borough of Hackney

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Summary

Introduction to the Supporting People Programme

- 1 'Supporting People' is the Government's long-term policy to enable local authorities to plan, commission and provide support services which help vulnerable people live independently. The programme went live on 1 April 2003.
- 2 The aim of the Supporting People programme is to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework, delivered locally in response to identified local needs, to replace the current 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 paid for the support costs associated with housing during the implementation phase, the Housing Corporation's Supported Housing Management Grant (SHMG) and the Probation Accommodation Grant Scheme (PAGS) into a single pot to be administered by 150 Administering Local Authorities.
- 4 The London Borough of Hackney 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.

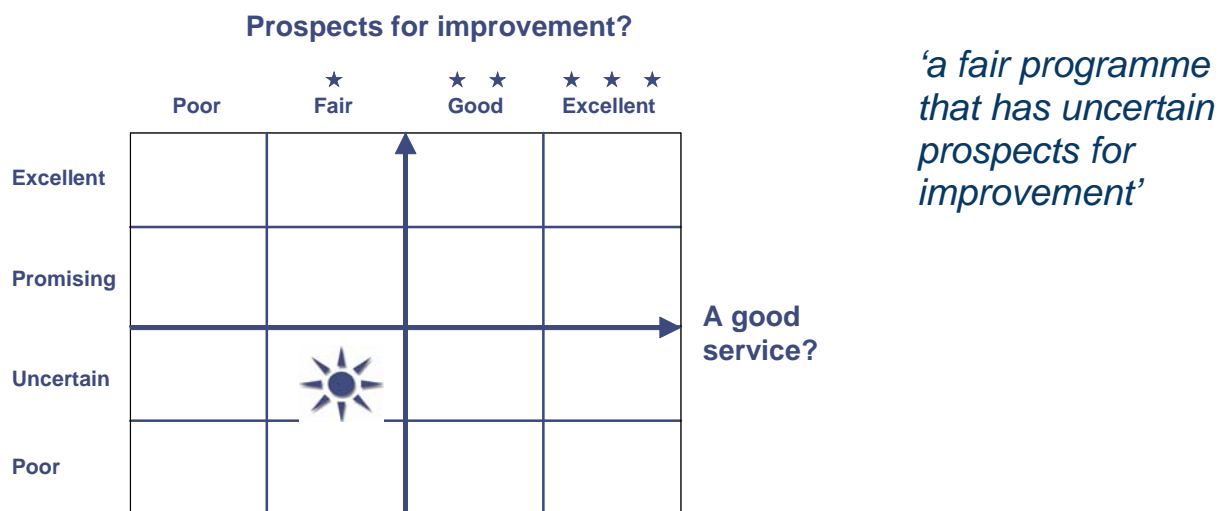
Background

- 5 London Borough of Hackney is an inner east London borough council. The population is 210,213 of which 56 per cent are from minority ethnic communities; 8.9 per cent are older people over 65 years.
- 6 The council is led by the Labour party who hold 45 of the 57 seats. The Conservatives hold nine seats, and the Liberal Democrats hold three seats. The council employs 3,300 staff across all services.
- 7 Hackney council acts as the administering authority for the Supporting People programme in its area. The council works in partnership with Hackney Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the London Probation Service in commissioning Supporting People services.
- 8 The total amount of Supporting People funding available in 2003/04 was £24,509,011 for the first year of implementation. There was a small decrease in funding to £24,114,766 for 2004/05. The council also received £392,232 in 2003/04 to fulfil its role as the administering authority; this was slightly increased for 2004/05 to £401,758.
- 9 The highest unit cost for a service is £766.17, accommodation based for people with learning disabilities. The lowest unit cost is £2.78 for a community alarm service.

Scoring the programme administration

- 10 We have assessed the London borough of Hackney as providing a 'fair', one star programme administration that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Scoring chart¹: London Borough of Hackney - Supporting People Programme



What works well

- 11 During our inspection we found a number of positive features in the way that the Supporting People programme has been implemented to date. These include:
- ◆ existing service provision is highly regarded by most residents and is providing good outcomes for them;
 - ◆ additional funding was attracted for new scheme developments;
 - ◆ the council is making use of user feedback and there is a staff commitment to further develop user involvement;
 - ◆ providers are positive about the support received from council officers;
 - ◆ contract costs have been reviewed at an early stage and some savings have been achieved part of which have been reinvested in the Supporting People programme;
 - ◆ grant payments to providers are being made on time and in advance;
 - ◆ the council has used existing consultation arrangements linked to the Housing and Social Care Partnership Board to widen partnership working and represent the needs of client groups;
 - ◆ strategic links and planning arrangements between the key partners are well embedded;
 - ◆ there is wide understanding across the majority of stakeholders about the Supporting People programme;

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

- ◆ the council has the appropriate range of skills and abilities to deliver the Supporting People programme;
- ◆ good progress is being made on developing the five year strategy; and
- ◆ formal arrangements are in place to deliver financial monitoring and management.

Areas for improvement

- 12 However, we found a number of weaknesses that need to be addressed. These include:
- ◆ high levels of desk top reviews have reduced the incidence and effectiveness of feedback about services from the users;
 - ◆ user involvement is underdeveloped particularly with groups traditionally dealt with by housing services and hard to reach groups such as homeless families and rough sleepers; outcomes for service users are limited;
 - ◆ inconsistent quality and accuracy of information for users;
 - ◆ strategic service reviews have yet to produce outcomes as none have been concluded and reported to the Chief Officers Group (COG)²;
 - ◆ leadership of the programme through the COG has been weak with a lack of focus and clear and transparent decision making;
 - ◆ analysis of user's access to services by diverse groups is under developed;
 - ◆ lack of clarity on how current performance information is analysed and used to drive improvements and development of services;
 - ◆ training for front line staff on cultural awareness by the council is slow in being delivered;
 - ◆ there are communication issues affecting a number of areas of the programme such as sharing information between stakeholders, and ensuring that information is fully understood by internal staff and external providers;
 - ◆ outstanding service charges have not been fully identified for the Supporting People programme and collection rates are low resulting in the council accruing debt;
 - ◆ staff appraisal plans are inconsistent and do not always make explicit links to Supporting People priorities and the community strategy;
 - ◆ delivery arrangements and decision making for the Supporting People programme are complex and lack clarity for stakeholders; and
 - ◆ performance on comparative indicators is variable with significant indicators for the Supporting People programme comparing poorly with other London boroughs, for example for adults with learning difficulties and physical difficulties being helped to live at home.

What works well

- 13 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has uncertain prospects for improvement. We found the following strengths.
- ◆ There is a track record of slow but steady progress over time with the implementation and development of the Supporting People programme.

² Chief Officers Group has an extended remit which includes the responsibilities of the Commissioning Body. It is referred to as COG throughout the report.

- ◆ A clear and widely understood vision to develop independent living for vulnerable people.
- ◆ Stakeholders, including key partners, leading councillors and providers are positive about the delivery of the programme.
- ◆ Users we spoke to are positive about the services they receive and there are arrangements for most users to comment on service delivery.
- ◆ Risk assessment is well developed and prioritises protecting vulnerable service users.
- ◆ Increased development of support plans gives service users a clearer understanding of the services and standards they should expect.
- ◆ The council has strengthened performance management, financial controls and reporting arrangements to stakeholders.

Areas for improvement

- 14 There are, however, some areas in which the council needs to improve.
- ◆ Service reviews should be concluded and reported.
 - ◆ Current governance arrangements do not ensure that the COG is driving progress on the programme.
 - ◆ Communication of information to providers and users through the Health and Social Care Partnership Boards and forums is not consistent.
 - ◆ Service users dealt with by housing services, and those from groups who are perceived to be hard to reach, are not well represented and their ability to influence service delivery is underdeveloped, for example the proposed Vulnerable Person's forum has not yet become established.
 - ◆ Contingency planning is under developed.
 - ◆ It is unclear to what extent longer term strategic planning to reduce the reactive provision of services has been undertaken.
 - ◆ There is limited benchmarking information on costs and quality of service.
 - ◆ There is a lack of clarity over where the responsibility lies for driving improvements because operational responsibilities are fragmented across a number of teams.
 - ◆ Progress has been slow against the business objectives of the Supporting People programme and a lack of firm arrangements to deliver them in a number of cases such as maximising the use of the IT system.
 - ◆ A lack of progress in the collection of charges from service users.

Recommendations

- 15 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.

By March 2005

- ◆ Finalise the review of the Supporting People consultation officer post. Develop and implement strategies for communication and involvement of internal staff, providers and service users.
- ◆ Ensure that the housing support needs, including those of black and minority ethnic (BME) and other groups perceived to be hard to reach are identified and suitable provision is prioritised for these needs within the five year strategy.
- ◆ Complete the current service reviews, report the outcomes and ensure action plans are properly resourced.
- ◆ Evaluate the changes to governance arrangements for the Chief Officers Group and Core Strategic Group to ensure that leadership and development of the Supporting People programme is being achieved.
- ◆ Ensure that the revised governance arrangements are clearly understood by stakeholders.
- ◆ Ensure that contact and mailing lists are kept up to date to ensure that all stakeholders are included, and the relevant members of staff are kept informed of Supporting People information.

Within six months of the publication of our report

- ◆ Assess the effectiveness of desktop reviews and ensure that service users are fully enabled to contribute to the process and help to shape future services.
- ◆ Ensure that a plan is in place to prioritise cultural awareness training for appropriate front line staff and that the training is completed within twelve months of the publication of this report.
- ◆ Ensure that appropriate contingency planning is fully in place for the protection of service users.
- ◆ Put in place a clear plan to improve collection of user service charges and methods of payment.
- ◆ Strengthen the write up of staff appraisals and ensure target setting is clearly related back to the service plan for all staff.
- ◆ Develop suitable performance measures to enable the effective monitoring of the quality of services.

Within 12 months of the publication of our report

- ◆ Identify and deal appropriately with ineligible services.

- 16 We would like to thank the staff of the London Borough of Hackney, particularly Christine Chambers, Davina Clarke and Therese Jennings, who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

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Report

Context

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

The locality

- 18 London Borough of Hackney is an inner east London borough council. The population of the area is 210,213³, living in 87,500 households. The population is augmented by five million visitors a year to visit historical, religious and academic centres. Fifty six per cent of the population are from minority ethnic communities compared to an average for England of 10.4 per cent. The borough has a lower than average level of older people over 65 years at 8.9 per cent; the average for England is 16.4 per cent.
- 19 The majority of employers are in the public sector, the council, Learning Trust, Homerton hospital and Network Rail. Unemployment stands at 6.3 per cent significantly higher than the national average of 2.6 per cent. This reflects the very high level of deprivation within the borough, fifth out of 354 local authority areas. All 23 wards are within the 10 per cent most deprived nationally, with eight in the worst 3per cent. Forty per cent of households have an income below £15,000⁴.
- 20 The average house price for the area is £240,301⁵. The combination of high deprivation, low incomes and high house prices results in a low level of owner occupation, 32 per cent, against an average for England of 70 per cent. Thirteen per cent of properties in the private sector have been identified as unfit. The council owns 33,000 properties of which 68 per cent are identified as unfit.
- 21 The area is characterised by being the third densest area in terms of population to land area in the United Kingdom. There are high levels of asylum seekers and refugees⁶. The council estimate that one in three adults have special needs.

The council

- 22 The council comprises 57 councillors. The Labour party has control with 45 councillors. In addition, there are nine conservatives and three liberal democrats. A directly elected mayor with a cabinet governs the business of the council with effect from May 2002.
- 23 The council's overall budget for the year 2003/04 is £343.7 million, with an identified under spend of £3.3 million. The social services budget for the same year was £78.7 million, with an identified under spend of £4.5 million, up from £2.6 million in 2002/03 against a budget of £73 million.
- 24 The net revenue budget for the delivery of social services for 2004/05 is £93 million and for housing revenue account, £23.1 million.

³ Census – mid 2002.

⁴ CACI – 2001.

⁵ Land registry – April – June 2004.

⁶ Housing Strategy 2003 – 2006.

- 25 The council employs approximately 3,300 staff overall.
- 26 The council's priorities as identified by the Mayor's objectives which are:
- ◆ improving opportunities and quality of life in the borough, promoting social inclusion and reducing inequality;
 - ◆ making sure the council works properly and efficiently; and
 - ◆ involving the borough in what we do.
- 27 The council lead the Hackney Strategic Partnership, 'Mind the Gap' which has determined that the partners will work to an 'over-riding priority to reduce inequalities and poverty' by:
- ◆ creating a balanced and mixed community;
 - ◆ improving services to local residents; and
 - ◆ ensuring that all Hackney's communities are part of London's prosperity.
- 28 These priorities are underpinned by six agreed themes.

The service

- 29 The council acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the development and delivery of the Supporting People programme in their areas.
- 30 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.
- 31 The total amount of Supporting People grant available to the council in 2004/05 is £24.1 million. In addition, the council receives £401,758 Supporting People administration grant to fulfil its role as the administering authority.
- 32 The London borough of Hackney was inspected early in the second year of the 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 service?

- 33 The assessment was based upon the following key issues.
- ◆ Governance of the programme.
 - ◆ Delivery arrangements including strategy and needs assessments.
 - ◆ 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.
 - ◆ Outcomes for service users.

Governance of the programme

Summary

- 34 The council has expanded existing structural arrangements for the management of the Supporting People programme, supported by formal agreements and councillors. There is a wide understanding of Supporting People across partners and other stakeholders but decision making is not transparent. Governance arrangements are complex, lack focus and are difficult to understand. The council has shown an intention to tackle these issues. Outcomes from the representative group for vulnerable people have been limited, and leadership of the programme through the chief officers group has been weak.
- 35 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.
- 36 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.

- 37 The council has put in place the key strategic planning and management groups required by the ODPM to support the implementation of the Supporting People programme. A memorandum of understanding is in place which outlines the distinct functions and responsibilities of each partner. It also covers matters relating to conflict of interest and how this should be handled, although this has yet to be tested.
- 38 The council has clear support from leading cabinet members who are well briefed and committed to the Supporting People programme. One is the Chair of the health and social care partnership board, the other a lead member for housing. They have attended and spoken at various stakeholder functions, and receive regular reports and briefings and there is evidence to show that councillors have raised the profile of Supporting People services.
- 39 The council's original structural arrangements for the Supporting People programme were in housing. Responsibility was transferred to social services to take advantage of strengths and skills of strategy and resources within the adult social services, and to further establish and use the joint planning arrangements that were already in place as a part of the health and social care partnership board.
- 40 The responsibilities of the commissioning body (CB) sit within the existing chief officers group (COG) which has an extended remit. This group also has the membership of senior officers from health and probation. The decision to use the COG was a pragmatic one as all the necessary attendees were there. Working relationships are well established and the partners are positive and fully engaged.
- 41 The role and constitution of the CB is set out in the memorandum of understanding which has been in place from December 2003. Discussions in the group have not required a vote so far; any issues have been resolved up to now through discussion.
- 42 The current arrangements for the CB are not effective, with insufficient focus being given to Supporting People issues. The council has recognised this and has addressed this aspect in a recent review of the arrangements which gives dedicated time on the agenda for Supporting People discussions. In addition formal support from the lead Supporting People officer is given to strengthen reporting arrangements.
- 43 The council has set up a core strategic group (CSG). The group's role is as a key stakeholder group that acts in an advisory and co-ordinating capacity to assist the COG with delivering broader strategic aims. The group includes members elected from the supported housing sub group of the Hackney Housing Association Group (HackHag). The group is currently considering its future role as it has been concentrating on implementing the Supporting People programme. However, we found no clear driver for change, and as a consequence the group has not reformed and re-established its new role in the programme as quickly as we would have expected. A revised terms of reference was approved by the CSG and CB subsequent to the inspection. Membership includes a representative from the Health and Social Care Forum, and two representatives from HackHag. The group will now meet bi-monthly and fit in with the CB cycle.
- 44 These arrangements sit alongside the health and social care partnership board, with links through the sub boards which are client based. A new vulnerable peoples' sub board (VSP) was agreed by the COG on 30 September 2003 to meet a gap within the existing structure along similar lines to the established sub boards.

- 45 The VPS started meetings on 26 February 2004, establishing terms of reference. The client groups are those who are not established social services clients such as single homeless, homeless families, people fleeing domestic violence, refugees, rough sleepers, offenders or people at risk of offending, people with a drug/alcohol problem, travellers and generic services. Membership is drawn from housing, who chair the meetings, probation, housing related voluntary agencies and registered social landlords (RSL).
- 46 VPS has had some early successes.
 - ◆ Overseeing the pipeline service for homeless and rough sleeping offenders, Arcola Street and allocating additional funds for a shortfall.
 - ◆ Providing a lead on setting up a new project to develop a vulnerable women's group.
 - ◆ A work plan is in development with outcomes being reported to health and social care partnership board.
- 47 However, outcomes from this group have been limited due to the turnover of officers.
- 48 The structural arrangements are complex and are not clearly understood by some stakeholders. Decision making is not transparent, especially to external stakeholders and with the COG meeting bi monthly and CSG meeting quarterly it is hard to see how the one group adequately informs and advises the other. Agendas for the CSG, for example, had grown in weight of items and those attending were unable to give items proper discussion, or sometimes be able to cover all the items on the agenda. This could lead to falling attendance which could further undermine the inclusiveness of the arrangements. The council has recognised this point and in the current review of the terms of reference there is a recommendation to return to bi monthly meetings which coincide with the COG.
- 49 Further complexity is added when all the other sub boards from the health and social care partnership board have to consider Supporting People items such as the five year strategy.
- 50 The accountable officer (AO) is also the council's deputy director of social services. The AO also chairs the COG and CSG. The council recognise that that there are potential for conflicts of interest. However, the chair rotates to another member of COG in January 2005 which will resolve the problem.
- 51 The responsibilities of the AO are clear and Supporting People forms part of the officer's remit. We raised concerns with the council that the benefits of the integrated delivery arrangements in place are the negative impact on drive and leadership for the programme. In order to drive the Supporting People programme forward the role needs firm leadership from the COG. This has not been apparent up to now.

Delivery arrangements

Summary

- 52 The council has in place a good range of skills and abilities to deliver the Supporting People programme. Additional resources are recruited as required and good progress is being made on the development of the five year strategy. However, appraisal plans, particularly for less senior staff, need improvement to ensure outcomes are properly targeted and are consistent with the priorities of the programme. Arrangements for the delivery of the Supporting People programme are complex, lack clarity for stakeholders and are vulnerable to failures in communication. Responsibilities are fragmented across several teams within social services, only coming together at the senior level.

- 53 The council are working on an integrated approach to delivering the programme. There is a small nucleus team of Supporting People staff lead by the lead officer. Other staff work across the social services department working on the different aspects of Supporting People, in particular contracts and finance. All staff come under the overall line management of the AO.
- 54 There are a range of people working on Supporting People delivery arrangements within social services with different reporting lines. The posts are as follows.
- ◆ Supporting People lead officer.
 - ◆ Partnership and review manager.
 - ◆ Temporary administration officer.
 - ◆ Review officer.
 - ◆ Commissioning officers (2).
 - ◆ Consultation officer (1 – vacant and under review).
 - ◆ Commissioning support officer.
 - ◆ Finance officer.
 - ◆ Contracts manager.
 - ◆ Contracts officer (4).
 - ◆ Administrative assistant.
- 55 The council has reviewed the staffing for Supporting People and managed longer term funding uncertainty and changing skills needs through an appropriate mix of acting arrangements, fixed term and permanent contracts. The posts were all filled at the time of the inspection except for the Supporting People consultation officer. Aside from this aspect and service reviews, staffing arrangements are sufficient to manage the overall work load.
- 56 However, there is a delay in concluding the service reviews which is due in part, to lack of capacity to write up the work for submission and agreement of action plans by the COG; the responsibility lies with the Supporting People manager, who is also involved with time consuming elements such as driving the five year strategy forward through the consultation period, the operational requirements of further service reviews and the management of the delivery of the programme.
- 57 Recruitment difficulties have been recognised by the council and Supporting People review staff have co-opted appropriate staff from the council operational teams, joint commissioners and members of the CSG. An objective view is to be provided by including external peer assessment. Hackney has an agreement with the London Borough of Haringey to undertake peer assessment as part of the service review process. Haringey will assist in looking at in-house services for Hackney and Hackney will assist Haringey with their reviews of sheltered accommodation. However, this arrangement is not yet in place.
- 58 In addition the council are working to improve the level of skills within the team by:
- ◆ identifying mutual training needs with the North and East London Supporting People Lead Officer group; and
 - ◆ establishing a forum with the London Borough of Haringey for support and to share good practice for review staff.

- 59 However, there is no evidence to show that these aims have as yet produced any outcomes.
- 60 We found a number of positive aspects to the arrangements.
- ◆ Team members have clear links to and management from their professional areas in finance and contracting.
 - ◆ Cover is available if staff who normally work on Supporting People are off.
 - ◆ Supporting People is mainstreamed within social services leading to a wide knowledge of the programme among related services.
 - ◆ Funding of additional posts to ensure that the work is adequately covered.
- 61 However, we found the following issues which result in a lack of clarity of who is driving the programme forward.
- ◆ Complex reporting arrangements and meetings are needed to co-ordinate the direction and efforts of the staff working on delivering the Supporting People programme.
 - ◆ Arrangements are vulnerable to communications failures, for example through staff turnover.
 - ◆ It is not clear how the priorities of different services plans are co-ordinated so that progress is maintained and conflicts do not arise.
 - ◆ Links with housing enabling have only recently been re-established, following the recruitment of a replacement officer, but are not at the highest level eg HackHag sub group. This is an important relationship given the need to co-ordinate the development of future accommodation based schemes for vulnerable people. There are no developments planned in the current programme.
- 62 In house services are procured in the same way as all others, through the corporate procurement framework. All service providers are subject to the same performance monitoring regime. The robustness of the regime is evidenced in that the below standard service performance of two in house services was tackled by requiring action plans to improve service in one and recouping grant from another which had been operating at below capacity.
- 63 There is evidence of some joint working between Supporting People and children and young people services to ensure that the needs of care leavers, teenage parents, young homeless people and young people with disabilities are catered for. A draft strategy⁷ was distributed in January 2005 for consultation which was the result of joint working. Subsequent to the inspection linkages have been improved through a joint Supporting People and Children and Families meeting which was held with all providers of appropriate services to look at remodelling services to meet needs. In addition commitments have been given by Children and Family services regarding their involvement in service reviews.

⁷ Hackney, A Good Place to Grow Up – Hackney’s draft strategy for children, young people and families 2005 – 2008 Draft for consultation.

- 64 Despite evidence of information sharing with providers and commitment to involvement with service users issues were raised with us through the provider survey and in discussions with providers and service users about communications which is not effective. This is commented on in more detail in the sections on partnerships and user involvement. It is highlighted here because it would be the focus of the work of the Supporting People consultation officer post which is currently vacant, and no decision has yet been taken about recruitment.
- 65 The council is making reasonable progress on the five year strategy. A project plan is in place and a dedicated project manager is working with a project team to produce the strategy and provide monitoring information to senior managers. The draft is due to be presented to CSG in January 2005 and for final approval by the full cabinet in March. We noted the following positive aspects of the development of the strategy.
- ◆ Early consultation work was undertaken with commissioning bodies through the sub boards to the health and social care partnership board.
 - ◆ Issues and concerns have been drawn from the consultation process for the community strategy and Health Improvement Plan.
 - ◆ Ongoing discussions with key stakeholders through HackHag.
 - ◆ Workshop in October 2004 to discuss overlap of issues between client groups.
- 66 However, concerns were expressed to us by a number of providers that they have been given a tight timeframe for consultation on the finalisation of the five year strategy. The impact will be to reduce the capacity for service users to feed in to the process, and ultimate ownership of the strategy.
- 67 The council has good information on the needs of traditional social services users to feed into the five year strategy. They do not currently have information on service users who would be seen as housing clients, such as rough sleepers and homeless families, but a consultant has been employed to develop this information.
- 68 The council has been working to an informal local eligibility criteria which is based on ODPM guidance. The transitional housing benefit (THB) process was based on this criteria but it has not been formally agreed and is not therefore widely known by providers. We have found evidence of ineligible services during the sample of visits to providers. The council are aware and undertaking discussions with the providers concerned to secure alternative funding. The council has recognised that it would be good practice to agree local eligibility criteria to create more confidence among providers, and it will be considered at the CB meeting in February 2005.
- 69 There is a positive approach to dealing with risk and we noted the following.
- ◆ Looking at good practice within other authorities such as Kensington and Chelsea model of risk management.
 - ◆ Advising providers on risk assessment policies on validation visits.
 - ◆ Using new service provision, such as Arcola Street, to consider risk at all stages of the development.
 - ◆ Inclusion in steady state contracts.
 - ◆ Utilising the experience of risk assessment and contingency practices and protocols already established for the mental health service, probation referrals and MAPPA.

Financial monitoring and management

Summary

- 70 The council has responded to the need for robust financial monitoring and management by putting in place formal arrangements. Processes for payments to providers and monitoring grant expenditure are working well. Officers and leading councillors are kept well informed on performance. Contingency measures with regard to funding risks have been well thought through, are agreed and in place. However, having decided to operate all block gross contracts⁸ and taken a positive approach to fairer charging, the collection of charges is weak.
- 71 There are a total of 190 contracts are in place, covering services with 75 service providers and 6,440 (excluding community alarms and home improvement agency) units of housing related support.
- 72 Service providers are being paid in good time. The performance at the time of the inspection is 99.18 per cent paid within the target of 30 days.
- 73 Financial systems have clearly defined responsibilities and controls are in place to monitor contract payments. We found the following examples of positive aspects.
- ◆ Supporting People finance staff monitor grant expenditure by contract, client group and service type.
 - ◆ Monthly and ad hoc meetings take place between the Supporting People finance officer, lead officer and commissioning team to discuss issues financial forecasts, variations and any briefings which require financial research or analysis.
 - ◆ Financial appraisals of all providers are undertaken as part of the provider accreditation and as a part of the council's management of financial risk.
 - ◆ Monthly reports are produced for the AO which are subsequently reported to the departmental management team. The corporate finance team produce regular reports for cabinet and monthly reports for the ODPM.
 - ◆ The council is currently working on ensuring that the financial information that is held on supporting people cases is accurate, through the completion of a reconciliation exercise. This was due to be completed by November 2004.
- 74 The council had not resolved all THB claims by 31 May 2003. A report was issued to the ODPM on 30 July 2003 with late claims and the reasons for delay. There were 95 contracts unsigned at 31 May 2003, most due to the outstanding THB assessments. Two contracts remained unsigned and these triggered service reviews.
- 75 Two contracts remained unsigned due to the provider being in difficulties. The council subsequently withdrew the contracts and made alternative arrangements for the service users.

⁸ Block gross contracts – under this arrangement the council pays providers the full grant including service user charges which the council has the responsibility for collecting.

- 76 The contracts monitoring team carry out validation visits which examine what the Supporting People service is paying for, general health and safety issues and compliance with the information contained in the workbooks. Contract officers each have a specific service area that they cover, as each service area undergoes its service review the relevant contract monitoring officer sits on the project working group overseeing the service review to feed in to the overall review process.
- 77 This information is shared with the service commissioners, but it does not cover the qualitative issues that the service review addresses. The validation visits undertaken by the contracts team prioritise services due to be reviewed. Outcomes feed into the review process, for example mental health and older people reviews, as well services which cause concern following examination of performance outcomes.
- 78 The council has taken a positive approach to fairer charging. The policy has been in place for some years. An adjustment to charges for community care, incorporating charges for Supporting People were made in accordance with government guidance to operate one policy for both charges. This was approved by cabinet in October 2002. The policy was promoted through:
- ◆ two additional posts to carry out home visits to promote the fairer charging system, and promote welfare benefit take up;
 - ◆ a copy of the fairer charging booklet was sent to all service users, carers and providers; and
 - ◆ otherwise, there is reliance by the council on accessing the information through the report to cabinet through the council's website.
- 79 The collection of the service user charges is poor. We found the following weaknesses.
- ◆ The council is currently collecting only approximately 88 per cent of all fairer charging debts across the council. They are not in a position to identify how much of the 12 per cent not being collected is attributable to the Supporting People cases.
 - ◆ It is estimated that only about 50 per cent of Supporting People cases are currently paying their charges. We were told by providers that tenants were sent invoices when the programme started that were either incorrectly addressed or for an incorrect amount. Some Supporting People service users also received letters threatening them with court action for arrears.
 - ◆ A draft policy for collection of non payment cases has been drafted but this has not been approved yet. The proposal is to deduct non payment at source.
 - ◆ The council through its fairer charging policy does not begin to charge clients until any query on housing benefit has been fully resolved. However, the main difficulty with collection has been where there are undetermined housing benefit claims. We were told that the Supporting People team can fast track some cases with the council's housing benefit team. It is unclear what impact this approach has had.

- 80 The council has been notified by the ODPM that the Supporting People grant allocation for 2004/05 will be £23.1 million, a reduction of 1.6 per cent on the final award for 2003/04. The council has taken a positive approach to minimising financial risk. The contingency approach to savings set out below was agreed by the CSG in March 2004:
- ◆ an across the board moratorium on a cost of living increase;
 - ◆ requesting voluntary efficiency savings from larger providers and those with larger contracts;
 - ◆ bringing contract prices into line with actual take up of the services through more robust approaches to monitoring, and taking default action over poor performance;
 - ◆ finding savings through the re-structuring of services following service reviews; and
 - ◆ prioritising savings high unit cost services for service review.
- 81 In addition a contingency fund of £1.9 million has been reserved in the social services accounts to deal with unforeseen funding problems in Supporting People. This amount was developed from the basis of the value of one off costs that the council might face in the failure of services. This has to be corporately bid for each year and therefore is reassessed each year.
- 82 Overall savings have been made in 2003/04 at £702,030 and in 2004/05 this is predicted to be £411,939. These savings have been made through negotiation with service providers; in addition two services have been deleted with the agreement of the providers and from one provider due to reduced capacity and consequent reduction to the contract value. A proportion of the early savings have been reinvested in a new scheme which is about to come on line. The rest are being retained against the potential for a reduction in grant funding.

Service reviews

Summary

- 83 The service review programme has been drawn up following a robust review of strategic and financial risk to the council and formally agreed processes. Information about the reviews has been made available to providers although not all providers are well informed. Recent IT difficulties involving the spkweb have reduced the sharing of information with providers; the council was not providing alternatives. Service users have been consulted about services in a number of ways, although their involvement has been limited by such a high level of desktop reviews. Good progress has been made on the development of risk assessment and contingency planning, but there is further work to be undertaken.
- 84 ODPM guidance requires administering local authorities to review all services funded through Supporting People within three years starting from 1 April 2003. Administering local authorities 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 the ODPM through their regular performance milestone reports.
- 85 The council undertook a risk analysis of services when pricing the contracts prior to Supporting People implementation in April 2003. The CSG approved an appeals procedure, and based the review programme on two criteria.
- ◆ The need to review all services offering support to the same or similar client groups to enable a strategic review of services.
 - ◆ The financial risks to the council. Risk assessment was a thorough process taking on board advice from financial, contract, procurement and commissioning staff.
- 86 The council recognises that there is a need to develop a risk strategy to deal with the additional areas of potential risk of the closure of a provider or the sudden failure of a service. The intention is to build on their experience of dealing with two services one of which closed and the other that was failing to provide an acceptable level of service. There is a register of services where there is some element of risk/concern. This includes providers who have scored level D for any of the quality assessment framework (QAF) objectives, or where there are any financial or contractual issues such as reduction in capacity or performance.
- 87 The analysis of golden and platinum cut data, these determined the levels of grant to be awarded to the council from central government, by the council showed that services for learning disabilities, mental health and older people were the highest financial risk in terms of weekly unit cost, contract value, service take up and income collectable through charging. These client groups were then prioritised for service reviews; the programme was agreed by COG in June 2003.
- 88 The reviews on services for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems reports are not yet concluded and action plans have yet to be finalised for submission to COG. This means that the eligibility of funded services and the savings arising from reconfigurations of these services have not yet been identified.
- 89 The council has access to a range of skills and abilities to deliver the service review programme throughout the social services directorate. The council has followed ODPM guidance and the quality assurance framework (QAF) is being used as a tool to support continuous improvement of provider services. The review process was reviewed by CSG at the end of 2003.

There is a Supporting People accreditation procedure in place, based on ODPM guidance and agreed by CSG in January 2004. Project boards composed of officers have been introduced to oversee each strategic review.

- 90 Despite the apparent availability of the necessary skills and abilities, a high proportion of services reviewed within the strategic review are being undertaken as desk top reviews due to staff capacity, particularly in writing up the reviews. At the time of the inspection 110 services (56 per cent of all services) have received validation visits from the contracts team. These are shared with the review team and form part of the desktop review. Over and above this review visits have been made to eight schemes for people with learning difficulty (35 per cent), 12 for those with mental health problems (32 per cent) and visits to eight older people schemes (22 per cent) were planned.
- 91 The council's position is that they are following ODPM guidance to visit where the (QAF) or other aspect suggest the service is failing. To reduce risk the council has undertaken a visit to each provider. The council has also undertaken consultation with some service users through questionnaires, an external consultant for users with learning difficulties, service user event and newsletter.
- 92 Visits including service users were mainly confined to the validation visits by contracts staff. Consultation with service users is not included as part of these visits. Validation visits are not a formal precursor to the service review. For example, they were not undertaken for learning disability schemes because the review was underway. Our view is:
- ◆ this makes it difficult to determine whether people are receiving the appropriate service and level of support. This has been recognised by the council and they are currently working to deal with this aspect;
 - ◆ the council cannot be sure that the services being funded through Supporting People are appropriate; that is low level housing related support not care; and
 - ◆ although sample questionnaires have been issued to service users, vulnerable people and people with communication difficulties may find it difficult to complain. Ten complaints have been dealt with by supporting people officers since the implementation of the programme.
- 93 We were told that some providers in the learning disability (LD) service review were not clear about the review process, and a lot of information had to be given by the officers reviewing the service during the review visits. In particular, some providers seemed to lack an understanding of the strategic relevance of the services they were delivering. There is a mismatch between the information the council has discussed with the managers within the providers of services, and the front line staff. This is a problem for the council as the front line staff are the closest to service users and best able to communicate with them. Weaknesses in this area will result in a lack of understanding for service users.
- 94 The council has undertaken the following aimed at ensuring that providers are fully aware of the review process.
- ◆ Pre review meetings are undertaken at which the process is explained and supported housing needs associated with the client groups.
 - ◆ The providers' forum elects representatives who attend HackHag. The intention is that these reps will report back to the forum. However, attendance at HackHag in recent months has been poor.

- ◆ The next round of reviews due to take place from November 2004, and providers are informed in advance to prepare for this, with information being on the spkweb site. However, there have been technical difficulties with the site leading to a loss of information. This means that minutes of meetings have not been shared across the network of groups impeding information flows.

Value for money

Summary

- 95 The council has undertaken a review of the costs of services at an early stage and achieved significant savings which have been utilised for the commissioning of new services in line with priorities. There are processes in place to monitor value for money assessments linked to the service reviews, and procurement of services appears robust. However, the effectiveness of the delivery arrangements are yet to be formally tested as service reviews have not been fully concluded. We found further evidence that communications between the council and providers are not always effective. Staffing arrangements have been reviewed in terms of skills and abilities, but not in terms of value for money and outcomes. There is recognition by the council that further work on benchmarking costs is needed to support rigorous assessment of value for money of services.
- 96 High cost services were identified in the production of the golden and platinum cut information. Savings have been delivered in 2003/04 through a mixture of renegotiations on high cost services and dealing with under usage of services. The council has used part of those savings to commission a new scheme for vulnerable people with multiple needs.
- 97 The financial viability of provider organisations is assessed by the council utilising credit ratings and reviews of last three years annual accounts. Contracts officers are able to give the service review officers information on providers. This enables comparisons with other similar providers in the borough. Contracts officers use the Manchester VFM formula in their assessment of VFM. They also use the performance management system Red/Amber/Green (RAG) to flag up VFM. This information has also been useful in enabling the contracts team to negotiate reductions in the contract price, particularly where staff numbers have been increased to ensure that the correct level of support is being provided to the client group. One example is St Martin of Tour where the value for money process resulted in a contract variation reducing capacity by five units.
- 98 A locally agreed eligibility criteria is expected to be established as a matter of good practice as this makes the position clear to providers and service users alike. In Hackney officers are using a matrix which sets out a reasonable assessment of eligible services alongside interpretations of services which should be paid for by community care. However, this has not been formally agreed or badged as a Hackney Supporting People document and is only being used for an in house service at present although it has been discussed with providers at a recent meeting.
- 99 The council has made available ODPM grant conditions, and discussed the issues arising at provider forums and workshops. However, during our discussions with providers we found that they were not generally well informed on the subject.

- 100 One learning disability provider has done a lot of work with the council's officers in terms of defining eligibility criteria for Supporting People services for people with a learning disability. Although this is being used to guide the work of care management staff, the council has not incorporated it into the matrix that is currently being used to define eligibility.
- 101 During the course of the inspection we undertook nine visits to service providers. We spoke to front line staff and service users during the visits and in two focus groups. From a positive perspective service users were all highly satisfied with the services they received and were being positively supported in high quality environments. However, there are issues about eligibility and appropriateness of some services. For example:
- ◆ a provider with high support levels that allows users to stay as long as they wish in the project irrespective of their increasing independence and diminishing support needs. The council are aware of this and are taking action;
 - ◆ accommodation for frail elderly people visited provides personal care for all residents who are highly dependent and are able to undertake very little, without assistance. They are unlikely to develop any greater level of independence and the service is geared to slowing decline rather than reversing it. It is not clear what SP funding is providing as the service delivered by the council's in house team is ineligible. The council plan to review this service as a part of a comprehensive review of supported living services in line with a developing strategy for extra care provision. The review will sit alongside the service review for older people provision; and
 - ◆ there is awareness that Supporting People funding is supporting people with learning difficulties and very high needs. It is not clear that these services meet either ODPM grant conditions or the locally defined eligibility criteria.
- 102 We found two other issues which have yet to be addressed by the council in respect of VFM.
- ◆ The Supporting People team has identified that providers pay a wide range of different salaries to their staff. This is an area that needs to be addressed to understand the variations, and ensure that services are cost efficient and high quality.
 - ◆ It is not clear that the council has reviewed, or plans to review their staffing arrangements from the perspective of value for money.
- 103 There is an acknowledgment by officers that despite some work being undertaken with the North East London lead Supporting People officers group, further work is required to benchmark costs both within the Supporting People programme in Hackney and within a wider benchmarking group. This group work is found to be useful as many of the bed spaces are across authority boundaries.

Service user involvement

Summary

- 104 There is a network of arrangements in place to represent the interests of many client groups, but user involvement in respect of the Supporting People programme is under developed and over reliant on engagement with individuals. The council are not making the best use of resources in respect of existing networks or staff to make involvement an integral part of day to day operations. There is evidence of the council listening to user feedback and there is a genuine desire by staff to significantly improve their approach.

- 105 Engagement with service users is inconsistent and under developed. The Supporting People post set up to develop this area of work has not been effective. The post is currently vacant and the council are considering how to progress as they have had difficulty in recruiting someone with the appropriate skills. It has not been possible to implement the Supporting People user consultation policy. Involvement is governed by the corporate consultation policy on the engagement of users and carers.
- 106 There is evidence of user involvement in the development of services, particularly in respect of older people. The Older People's Reference Group was set up four years ago and is a self managed group supported by a development worker. The group is well established and holds annual forums. Initiatives within this group include two older people 'shadowing' the activities of senior managers and meeting regularly with them to become better informed. They report back into the reference group. This in turn reports to health and social care partnership board. We visited the reference group and noted the positive and enthusiastic way over 140 attendees reacted to workshop sessions and discussions. Officers hold the view that, in view of the effectiveness of this group, other health and social care partnership board sub boards could be used more effectively to develop involvement with service users through the user reference groups.
- 107 Another example of involvement is through the LD reference group which agreed the plans for inclusion in the five year strategy. The strategy also includes contributions from house meetings where users were consulted on how they thought services should be provided in the future.
- 108 However, this is not working so well for the Vulnerable Persons Sub group. The board is linked to a provider's forum as there is no reference group in place as with other sub boards. This forum has not met since the summer due to a lack of a lead worker. This post has now been filled and meetings are due to recommence. In the meantime a range of different service users are not being represented in the setting of priorities and the planning and commissioning of services.
- 109 In addition, the VPS is intended to represent the needs of disparate and diverse people. It is not clear how their needs will be best served through this arrangement.
- 110 More positively, because Supporting People has been mainstreamed into the work of the social services department, one of the benefits is that the team are automatically included in client related activities such as consultation events.

'We do not have to go out there and sell ourselves' (Manager).

- 111 However, one of the results of the council's own user survey undertaken in April 2004 shows that 49 per cent service users who responded do not believe they are influencing services or are unsure about it.
- 112 The council has taken a number of steps to consult with service users and the wider community.
- ◆ In July 2003 the wider community was consulted through a questionnaire on the strategic priorities for the five year plan.
 - ◆ April 2004 the user survey was undertaken – 41 replies were received.

- ◆ Two 'Speak Out' sessions have been held in association with an independent advisor targeting hard to reach groups. The outcome from the 2004 event was that the council needed to 'broaden engagement with service users'. Examples of how the outcomes fed into the five year strategy are a condition in the developing steady state contracts that support and housing management should not be delivered by the same staff, and services should be provided at a mutually agreeable time to both user and provider.
 - ◆ Supporting People staff have gone out to talk to service users in their own home where the users have asked them to do so.
 - ◆ Some service users have been interviewed through validation visits or the service review process. However, as previously highlighted the numbers involved are very low as most reviews are desk topped based.
- 113 Housing has worked closely with the Supporting People team to raise the profile of clients who are often 'invisible'. Some of this work is taking place at the vulnerable people board which is currently chaired by housing. We were told that front line housing staff receive regular briefing information at their team meetings and receive copies of the supporting people newsletter.
- 114 Housing has funded a part time post to work solely on the five year strategy and housing issues: this post sits in housing and feeds into the supporting people team. The post holder led two focus groups in October and the outcomes will feed into the five year plan.
- 115 The council do not have an inclusive forum; user and carer involvement is limited for some service users as indicated above. The arrangements are delivered through the existing forums of the Health and Social Care Forum, linked to the health and social care partnership board and the supported housing sub group of HackHag. The first group have representatives from voluntary and community groups. The second group consists entirely of officers.
- 116 The council is reliant on providers undertaking consultation with service users on a one to one basis. During our visits to a sample of schemes, and in talking to service users in the focus group we found:
- ◆ generally service users have good engagement with house meetings and individual meetings with support workers;
 - ◆ one provider undertakes regular surveys, meetings and other events to ensure that residents play as full a part as possible in the project. Residents in this project are asked to be more involved in staff selection and training events fare provided or users, such as assertiveness, interviewing and contributing to meetings, to enable them to play a full and meaningful role in the interview process;
 - ◆ in another scheme, residents are involved in monthly house meetings, with good attendance and the minutes circulated. A complaints book is planned for implementation; and
 - ◆ the council does organise service user events and many of the service users that we have seen have attended these days.
- 117 We looked at how users could influence services through the complaints procedures. Supporting People complaints are dealt with in the first instance by providers. Supporting People officers have deal with ten complaints from groups and individuals from the implementation of the process. This provides insufficient evidence to determine whether service users find the process accessible.

- 118 The council has recognised this as an issue and both service users and a random sample of the local community have both been surveyed as part of on going work to improve the complaints process. This has involved asking people what would prevent them from making a complaint and how the complaints processes can be improved.
- 119 The council engages with hard to reach groups through the network arrangements linking the health and social care partnership sub boards, reference groups, and membership of CSG. At the present time there is no forum linking the views of children and young people with Supporting People, although the council has plans to establish a youth parliament linked to the LSP.

Partnership arrangements

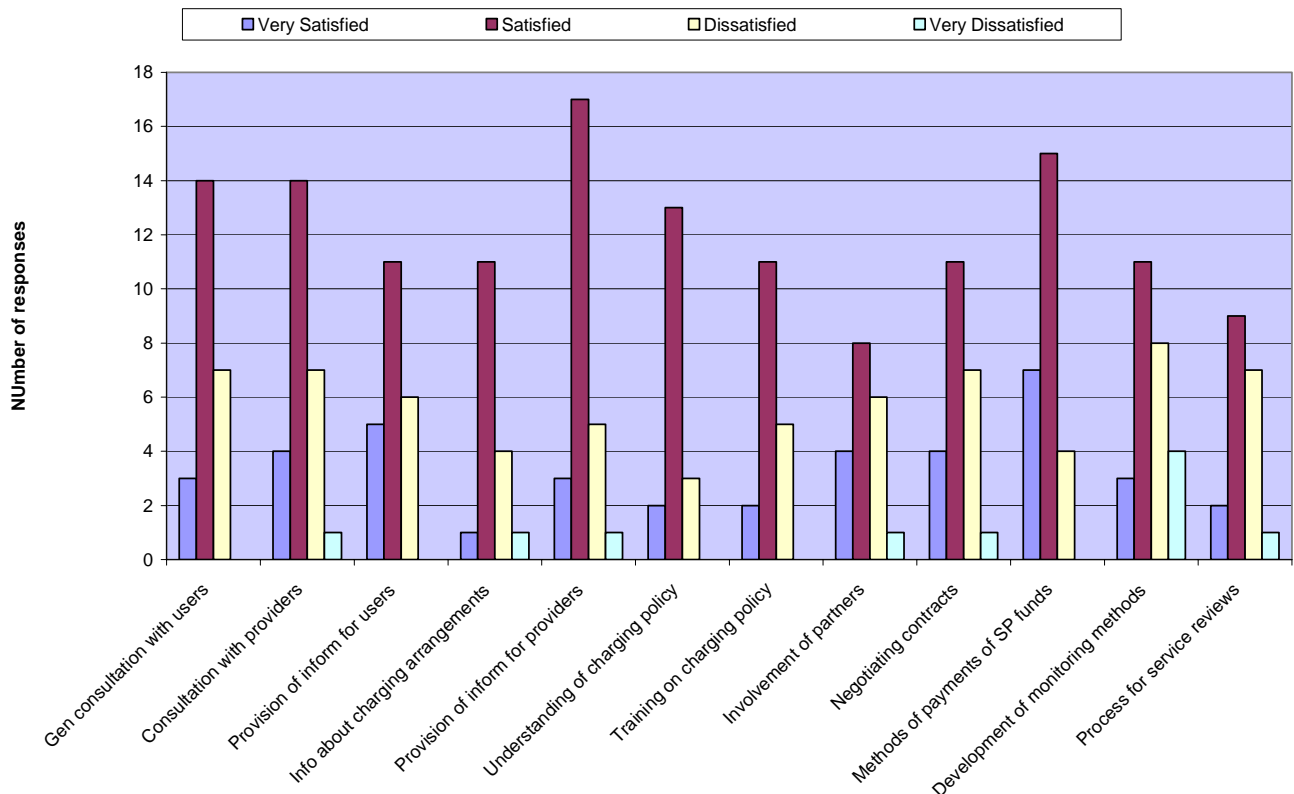
Summary

- 120 This is an area of strength for the council. Strategic links and planning arrangements between the key partners are well embedded; with the exception of enabling of new supported housing developments. Good working arrangements exist between the key partners, although there are issues with communications particularly with front line provider staff. Providers are positive about the support received from the Supporting People officers.
- 121 Supporting People arrangements are integrated within the arrangements for the health and social care partnership board which is a work stream of the LSP. Most of the sub boards have user reference groups, and Supporting People has been discussed at each of these.
- 122 Although the Chair of the HackHag sub group was positive about the information and involvement of providers, we found that the arrangements did not appear to be working effectively for all providers.
 - ◆ Some providers we met who attended the provider's forum, found it to be very helpful in sorting out operational issues and sharing information and concerns.
 - ◆ Others did not know about the provider's forum and as a consequence had never attended these meetings.
 - ◆ Others who did attend have not seen minutes from the core strategy group or the commissioning body and did not know who the provider representatives who attended the core strategy group on their behalf. The council told us these minutes had been lost from the spkweb and agreed to circulate minutes by email to ensure shared information.
 - ◆ Some providers we met did not know if there was a protocol covering how core strategy group representatives were chosen or what their role is or how they feed back to other providers. The council explained that this was due to lack of attendance by the two representatives. Agreement has been reached to replace these members with three others.
 - ◆ Another provider regularly attends the provider forum and is aware of the timetable for the completion of the five year strategy but has no involvement in this. This person is not aware of what work is being completed and what impact this will have on the services.
 - ◆ An in house provider believed that they were 'not allowed' to attend the provider forum. Senior managers were able to show that this is not the case from the terms of reference for the group and plan to take up the issue to ensure that all providers have access to the same information.

- ◆ There are no protocols in place to share information among providers, particularly good practice.
- 123 Providers are complimentary about the Supporting People team and the support and training they provide to them. For example, we were told that the phone is answered promptly; staff are able to deal with the queries that are raised and are very helpful.
- 124 We found evidence to show that the council is working with the regional implementation group of the Association of London Government (ALG) on cross authority issues and designated services. The Supporting People manager chairs the North and East London Supporting People Lead Officers Group which provides for the sharing of good practice and learning. The council are also members of the East London Supporting People officer group which has ensured the inclusion of Supporting People into the East London Housing Investment framework.
- 125 We found strong links between the Supporting People programme and health, probation and housing through the strategic planning process and operational level. Partners praised the council for enabling a good range of partnership working which are appreciated the partners we spoke to.
- 126 Social services have good working relationships with the Homerton PCT and the joint commissioning arrangements allow for the development of a good knowledge of needs from the users who traditionally are assisted through social services.
- 127 We found from the minutes of a range of meeting that probation services and health are regularly represented on both the COG and CSG. This has resulted in a good understanding of strategies within Hackney as well as through the Health and Social Care Partnership Board.
- 128 A particularly good example of positive outcomes from the partnership working is the development of a facility which will cater for multiple needs. This was originally to be a rough sleepers initiative and benefited from the input on an equal partnership basis of probation and health services. Additional funding was provided through Supporting People grant.
- 129 Officers from the probation service confirm that they have been involved in the homelessness strategy and the working group for service reviews.
- 130 Housing is represented at MAPPA⁹ and attends regularly, with a named person senior enough to make decisions. Housing was confirmed as having engaged with the supporting people agenda and has representation at a range of strategic and operational groups/boards.
- 131 One weak area was in respect of enabling new supported housing developments. Formal meetings between the officers responsible for enabling and the Supporting People manager have only recently started up again. They lapsed when a member of staff moved on. There are no new supported housing developments included in the council funded capital programme, nor have any been supported for Housing Corporation funding.

⁹ MAPPA – Multi Agency Public Protection Agreement.

- 132 We looked at what outcomes had been achieved from partnership working and found the following.
- ◆ Issues were raised with us in a number of areas about ineffective communication with providers. Examples are, a lack of understanding of the review process, who in the council is responsible for what, whether responsibilities lay with the council or their own organisation, feedback on strategic relevance questionnaires and the programme of service reviews. The council has clearly made efforts to inform providers, but this appears to be targeted at the senior level within organisation. It is important to remember that the front line service staff work directly with service users and they need to be properly engaged and informed. The council needs to find ways of ensuring that their providers keep their staff well informed and this will assist with the understanding of service users as well as embedding the Supporting People priorities across front line services.
 - ◆ The creation of the Tenancy Sustainment Team has enabled the creation of specialist support worker posts for rough sleepers to access. Since Supporting People has been operational, partnership working has developed with the TST, and joint support plans have been put in place for tenants. This is a new arrangement drawn up via a service level agreement in partnership with NIHHA, who jointly run the scheme.
- 133 There is some evidence of cross authority working eg East Thames Housing Directors Group but the outcomes from this type of arrangement are unclear.
- 134 Hackney is part of the North East London cross authority group and the East London Group. Probation also attends these groups and they are a forum for discussion and debate about general issues, currently the cross London five year strategy statement and the distribution formulae.
- 135 We undertook a provider survey sending out 75 questionnaires and received a return of 26 responses; a response rate of 35 per cent. The full results are set out in the table below but the key messages are:
- ◆ good rates of satisfaction, 83 and 85 per cent, for understanding the charging policy and grant payments;
 - ◆ less positive rate, averaging 72 per cent, for communication and information with providers and users generally; and
 - ◆ considerable dissatisfaction, 46 and 42 per cent, in the first instance with developing monitoring methods, in the second instance with the process for reviews.

Figure 1: Provider survey undertaken in September/October 2004

Access to services and information

Summary

- 136** Liaison and information to provide access to services for offenders is working well; for other users quality and accessibility is variable. It is clear that some information has been developed with stakeholders and users. The council has obtained a crystal mark for plain English on their leaflets and information. However, not all the information we viewed was accessible by people with communication difficulties. Information is often undated making it difficult to establish whether it is current. Information on the website is limited and contains inaccuracies.
- 137** Hackney has a positive approach to working with probation services in rehousing offenders. There is an agreement to share the process of recruitment to homelessness posts, and the homeless persons unit provides direct liaison over cases. This results in staff having better access to information. Probation services highlight positive working practices with the housing advice service and staff participate in joint surgeries. The services have developed a good protocol for someone coming out of custody and vulnerable; they can access a fast track service in the homeless persons unit on the day of release. Information is exchanged under a protocol and usually results in emergency provision.
- 138** The council has produced the following information for service users which we have reviewed.
- ◆ Fairer charging leaflet, which has been crystal marked by the plain English campaign – contains information on charges for Supporting People and care, useful information on assessment, welfare benefits and frequently asked questions. The document was developed with stakeholders, and includes a strapline for availability in other formats and community languages. However, the leaflet is sixteen pages long and too densely packed with information.

The time taken to respond to queries is 21 days for disputed charging related queries. This conflicts with the corporate response time which is ten days, and it is not made clear that the council requires twice the time for investigation.

- ◆ Service level agreement – a legal document written in plain English covering the aspects of the arrangement between the council and provider. The two page document for services users to sign does not state if it is available in community languages or different formats.
- ◆ Financial assessment forms are issued to service users. Users are issued with a payment card which can be used at any post office. The form sets out the payment methods.
- ◆ General leaflet on Supporting People – this has clear and useful information although it is undated so it would not be possible to establish when any of the information is out of date. A reviewed document is currently out to consultation with providers and users. The council confirm that in future all policies and leaflets will be dated.
- ◆ Service users' bulletin June 2004 – timely and useful in feeding back the outcome from the March user consultation event but is densely packed with information making it difficult to read, particularly by people with communication difficulties. Again, there is no indication that it is available in different formats and community languages. It is not clear whether service users were involved in producing the bulletin which would help with accessibility.
- ◆ The council's Better Care Higher Standards charter refers briefly to Supporting People. It is currently being re-written to be issued by the end of 2004, emphasising the requirement of Supporting People grant funded services compliance with funding conditions.

- 139 There is a Supporting People page on the council's website which links to the spkweb. The site has basic information about contacts and some policy documents. There has been a problem with the inclusion of minutes of the various group meetings and a check we undertook on 15 November 2004 found that this still had not been resolved. Although the council provide out of hours services for emergencies, the information on the website states that services, for example for homeless people and those fleeing domestic violence, can only be accessed between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm. We found that the usefulness of the site is limited for vulnerable people trying to access services.
- 140 The majority of service users we have spoken to have been referred to Supporting People funded projects through established referral routes such as social services or local hospitals. Service users told us that they would not have known how to access services without the help of statutory agencies; no one we met had ever seen any information about the Supporting People programme in Hackney. This is confirmed by the results of the council's own user survey undertaken in April 2004.
- 141 Written information about services is not made available to residents by providers. Providers are supposed to use a pro-forma check list, although this is not consistent. Reference to service information is made at sign-up stage and appears on the check list. Organisational information, such as the diversity strategy does not appear to filter down to users. Sign up check lists are provided on letting. However, service users we spoke to on visits to providers were not able to produce a copy.

- 142 The council also produce newsletters which are aimed at providers and have been spasmodically produced until this year; they have been produced in February and June 2004.
- 143 We undertook a range of mystery shopping telephone calls. Generally the respondents treated the caller in a courteous, polite and professional manner, and in all but one case, the caller received all the information they needed. We raised two issues with the council during the inspection referring to one call which was poorly received and other examples where the caller was passed to several different people before the queries were answered. The council has now introduced customer services standards which are being monitored.

Diversity

Summary

- 144 The council recognise they need to broaden their approach to involvement with service users, and in particular with people from BME communities. Analysis of access to services for diverse groups is not well developed given the high level of diversity, and the framework around health and social care partnership board is not consistent. It is unclear how the council will address the identified priorities. Progress on training internal staff in cultural and diversity awareness is behind other good performing councils, and there is a lack of analysis on the diversity of front line staff delivering services through providers.
- 145 Hackney has very diverse communities characterised by the following.
- ◆ One of the highest birth rates in the country and, unusually, this is increasing. Infant mortality (death under one year) and stillbirth rates are both about 50 per cent above the national average.
 - ◆ The average life expectancy at birth in the City and Hackney is 73.2 for men and 79.7 for women, two years and 0.4 years lower respectively than for England as a whole.
 - ◆ The incidence of mental illness is markedly higher in Hackney than elsewhere. Episode rates for schizophrenia are more than four and a half times the national average. Mental health hospital admission rates are well above most comparable inner city areas. This is particularly true for African and Caribbean communities among whom the rates are extremely high.
 - ◆ Hackney's BME community is not only large; it is also very diverse including a significant population of refugees and asylum seekers. During 2002/03 the council dealt with 1,754 refugees; during 2003/04 this figure dropped to 1,426. Current figures are not available.
 - ◆ A recent survey found people from 22 countries in one hostel alone. There are ten major ethnic groups in Hackney, including one of London's largest Orthodox Jewish communities (10 per cent of the total population) and 88 different languages spoken.
- 146 The council use the following methods for consulting with hard to reach groups.
- ◆ Meeting with service users during the service reviews.
 - ◆ Discussing with providers issues on the gender of reviewers.
 - ◆ Established a BME working group from which a representative has access to the CSG. The representative from the BME working group has not attended the meetings. The team is considering other way of involving representatives from the diverse communities on this group although nothing has been finalised as yet.

- 147 The H&SCP has a well established framework to enable partners including users, BME and other community groups, representative and advocacy organisations into the development of service for local people. Hard to reach groups are represented through the newly created vulnerable persons sub board which aims to address directly the needs of specific excluded groups such as refugees, rough sleepers and women subject to domestic violence. A proposal has also been put forward from RSLs around gun crime within the black community. The council is currently completing an assessment of need among hard to reach people which is due to be completed by December 2004. This will feed into the five year strategy. The council's approach in this area will be undermined however as this sub board does not yet have a user group linked to it.
- 148 Hackney has a common data set in order to quantify its diverse populations. For example, there are two particular groups where information is not available and the census has not helped. There is a large group of Turkish people but these are identified in the census as white European. There is separate information on the Charadi community which has provided needs mapping information for the strategic review in respect of LD.
- 149 Priorities arising from identified needs and gaps in provision so far are:
 - ◆ extra care bed spaces for frail elderly people;
 - ◆ provision for young people with borderline learning difficulties or mental health problems, and substance abuse; and
 - ◆ floating support services for a number of client groups.
- 150 We did not find any evidence to show that the council had analysed their service provision to see whether service users from BME backgrounds are adequately represented. This will make it difficult for the council to demonstrate that they are meeting one of the main objectives of their approach to the delivery of the Supporting People programme. What they have done is to develop some services which are culturally sensitive. The need has been demonstrated by the communities themselves. This aspect is to be addressed through the service reviews.
- 151 However, the council is not able to demonstrate that its providers reflect the diversity of the service users' profile. For service users who are unable to access highly specialised and culturally aware services their cultural needs are not being met. There are no firm plans in place to deal with this aspect of diversity.
- 152 The ethnic background of council staff is broadly similar to the make up of the population in the borough. Corporately the council has stated objectives to ensure that all sections of the community receive services which are appropriate to their needs. In support of this, diversity training has been undertaken across senior to third tier managers. However, given the high levels of diversity in the population progress in this area has been slow. The current target is to train only 35 per cent of staff by March 2005.

Outcomes for service users

Summary

- 153 Existing service provision is highly regarded by the residents we spoke to and is providing good outcomes for the majority of service users. The council attracted additional funding through pipeline funding for new services in line with priorities and attracting a high level of usage; a positive impact has been the reduction of repeat homelessness applications. However, there is a lack of performance information on quality. Provider performance on support plans, for example, is inconsistent.
- 154 Through the transitional housing benefit scheme two floating support services were developed. The services have been in place for just over 12 months, and usage is over 95 per cent of take up, through put averaging 8 per cent per quarter, and over 95 per cent of all those service users receiving support plans.
- 155 Through the pipeline funding process the COG agreed £282,484 of ODPM funds to four schemes totally thirty units directed at rough sleepers, people with mental health problems and vulnerable youngsters. For the Arcola Street scheme the funding was insufficient for the appropriate staffing levels. Savings from elsewhere in the Supporting People budget were approved by the VPS.
- 156 These new schemes were developed in line with the priorities outlined in the shadow strategy.
- 157 There has been a positive impact on homelessness through the Supporting People programme. The council have recorded a reduction in the number of repeat homelessness applications where tenants have been receiving floating support services through the tenancy sustainment officer. These figures have not yet been quantified by the council. There are regular liaison meetings at an operational level between housing, social services and the Supporting People team. This has assisted with providing a joined up approach to services as a significant number of tenants/clients present across services.
- 158 The Supporting People programme has produced greater clarity, both within the council and externally, for providers and users around service provision and cost. Officers would like to do further work on identifying with providers what outcomes should be identified for each scheme. It is intended that future outcomes for service users will be assessed against the measurable outcomes which have been included in the pipeline schemes and will be included in the steady state contracts that will be issued following the completion of service reviews.
- 159 The council has stated that where services are reconfigured or decommissioned it is expected that the provider will inform and consult with the users affected by the changes. Supporting People officers would expect to be involved in the process including drawing up action plans.
- 160 We undertook a number of visits to existing schemes delivered by a range of providers and for different client groups. Feedback from service users was very positive. We found the following.
 - ◆ Accommodation for frail elderly persons visited was of good quality, very clean and inviting with a homely atmosphere. Tenants spoken to were very positive about their environment and the staff who care for them.
 - ◆ We were told that one of the significant outcomes for some service users of the SP programme has been that they are getting an increasing voice to influence service delivery.
 - ◆ A positive outcome for some service users has been the improvements made by the generalist floating support services. In particular, these have

helped vulnerable people deal with anti-social behaviour which threatened their independence.

- ◆ Resident feedback indicated that their scheme provided a good opportunity to become independent. Key worker meetings take place twice a month, and informal support is available more regularly.
- ◆ Resident feedback in one accommodation based scheme has brought about changes, such as refurbishment of the lounge. House meetings take place monthly, with things changing as a result.
- ◆ The mental health scheme we visited was a positive example of where tenants have been able to develop independent living skills after being discharged from long stay mental health hospitals.
- ◆ The council does provide move on housing arrangements for some of the temporary Supporting People projects, however many of the service users told us that they felt that it was difficult to move on to permanent housing in Hackney.

161 Some of the service users we spoke to said that most providers had discussed an individual support plan with them, and they had access to a copy of it. For some these have provided an opportunity to develop and empower residents as many have had years of living in hospitals or other institutional settings and on the streets and have previously passively accepted services rather than played an active role in their delivery and development.

162 Other residents we spoke to have a support plan, which is reviewed every three months. These are user-led, focusing on the key objectives, including move-on. Referral work is undertaken with other agencies, such as action to tackle substance misuse, employment issues, access to education and training. Service users support plans can be discussed with other organisations where relevant, such as probation services.

163 We also found that one service provides a 'service statement' which specifies the service to be provided but does not contain any service user outcomes. Although the council believe that the Supporting People programme has increased the provision of support plans, we found through our sample of visits and discussions with service users that practice is inconsistent. The council has developed a model service statement which covers the range of outcomes required of the service; this will be part of the steady state contracts and is not in place at the moment.

164 The council has reviewed high needs provision in the service reviews for learning difficulties, mental health and older people to ensure that the activities being undertaken are eligible for Supporting People grant. There is a current bid for extra care funding from the Department of Health. In the review of mental health provision the council has concluded that the existing high level provision needs to be restructured to ensure that it is better fitted to strategic needs, particularly in relation to step down housing related support from acute hospital provision.

Supporting People Case Studies

165 Supporting People is improving the opportunities available for independent living which is having a positive impact on the quality of people's lives. Below are two of the many example of how the Supporting People programme is making a difference to the lives of vulnerable people living in Hackney.

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| Supporting People Case Study 1 |
| <u>Service User Group: people with learning difficulties</u> |
| <u>Type of service: supported accommodation for people from a specific ethnic background and gender</u> |
| <u>Issues to be addressed</u> <p>The client had lived in a variety of residential settings. She had been hospitalised with suspected angina and had been assessed as requiring a service which had sleeping cover. She was obviously insecure and lacking in confidence and had unclear expectations. Her physical health was unstable and she needed lots of close support to carry out those tasks she was capable of.</p> |
| <u>Action taken</u> <p>Moved into a shared house with 24 hour cover and two other residents. Cultural needs were provided for and the development of greater levels of independent living.</p> |
| <u>Outcomes for the service user</u> <p>The client's communication skills have improved, as has her confidence in dealing with the requirements of daily life getting herself up and dressed in the morning to go shopping and cooking. She has made extensive use of the opportunities offered to her to widen her interests and skills. For example, she currently attends classes in computing, dancing and dress-making, all of her own volition. Although the client is much more sure of herself when dealing with other people and when carrying out simple tasks, there are still some areas where she clearly still needs support. Her health has become more stable, but still needs regular monitoring.</p> |

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|---|
| Supporting People Case Study 2 |
| <u>Service User Group: adults with mental health problems</u> |
| <u>Type of service: supported accommodation</u> |
| <u>The case study is in the client's own words</u> <p>'Before I came to PB I was in a psychiatric hospital, facing jail for a crime that I didn't commit. I was in a paranoid and psychotic state of mind. I couldn't live at home because I thought that people thought that I was an evil little toad. I was also paranoid about mental health services, and feeling persecuted.</p> <p>When I moved to PB about five years ago, I had lots of opportunity to discuss and consider whether medication suited me, and other support to help me live my life. The move felt like a fresh start, and I was still able to keep in contact with my old friends.</p> <p>Five years down the line, I haven't been in hospital and am now living in my own flat that I take a pride in. Over the last year I have got a clearer understanding of who I am, without having to keep questioning it. I have participated in the canteens and woodwork, and also external art courses funded by PB. I am now a keen novice cyclist and have successfully stopped smoking!'</p> |

Summary

- 166 Overall, we judge that the London Borough of Hackney are delivering a **fair**, one star service in its planning and delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- 167 Existing service provision is highly regarded by most residents and they are experiencing good outcomes. Providers are positive about the support they receive from the council and they are being paid on time. Savings have been achieved on contract payments some of which has been invested in the Supporting People programme. The strategic links and planning arrangements between the key partners are well embedded, and we found a wide understanding of the programme by the majority of stakeholders. The council has access to a range of skills and abilities to deliver the programme, and good progress is being made on developing the five year strategy.
- 168 However, service reviews have not yet been concluded with a firm action plan agreed, resourced and put into place. User involvement is underdeveloped particularly with groups traditionally dealt with by housing services and hard to reach groups such as homeless families and rough sleepers. This is made worse by the high level of desktop reviews. Leadership of the programme through the COG has been weak with a lack of focus and clear and transparent decision making. The impact of this is increased as governance arrangements are complex and not well understood by stakeholders.
- 169 There are communications issues affecting a number of areas of the programme such as sharing information between stakeholders, and ensuring that information is fully understood by internal staff and external providers. The council has made improvements to the performance management framework performance. However, performance on comparative indicators is variable with significant indicators for the Supporting People programme comparing poorly with other London boroughs, for example for adults with learning difficulties and physical difficulties being helped to live at home. In addition, outstanding service charges have not been fully identified for the Supporting People programme and collection rates are low resulting in the council accruing debt.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the evidence of service improvement?

Summary

- 170 The Supporting People programme has all round support from stakeholders including service users who are positive about the services they receive. There is also some evidence of learning from research, dealing with service failures and pilot work. Recent changes to the governance arrangements show the council has recognised weaknesses and addressed them. However, outcomes from service reviews have not yet been implemented. This means that there is a limited evidence to show service improvements for the Supporting People programme. In other related areas of the council there is evidence of significant service improvement, for example in social services and housing benefits service from a very poor base. However, although some service users will have experienced improved outcomes this does not indicate that services will be improved in the delivery of the Supporting People programme.
- 171 In respect of the delivering improvements to the Supporting People programme a track record has not yet been developed because the programmed service reviews have not been concluded. This means there is limited evidence of how the council will make improvements to services, take difficult decisions in respect to decommissioning and recommissioning services, and develop new services to meet the identified priorities.
- 172 The council were able to demonstrate that they had responded well to two Supporting People contract failures on the part of the providers, and put in place alternative arrangements for the protection of vulnerable service users. In related services the council is able to demonstrate improvements for example:
- ◆ the council has developed a track record of improvement in social services. The progress from a very low base has been significant. Services for children are now rated as serving most children well, for adults services the rating is as serving some people well. Both services are judged to have promising prospects for improvement; and
 - ◆ the council historically delivered a very poor service in respect to processing housing benefits; this had a direct impact on the resolution of THB queries, undermined tenancy support and homelessness services. An externalised contract was brought back in house with a backlog of 36,000 claims. These have now been dealt with and the service has significantly improved. Other staff involved with delivering Supporting People services, are now able to resolve queries; housing benefit staff now answer the phone and will call back. Housing benefit claims are being sorted in weeks rather than months.
- 173 The council has achieved Investors in People across the council. The Assessment Report of June 2004 recognised a:

'transformation of the leadership and management of people, business planning, learning and development, performance management and a focus on customers and improving services'.

174 Two areas for improvement were raised.

- ◆ Monitoring of staff appraisal action plans to help with the embedding of performance management. We were provided with evidence of recording only.
- ◆ Monitoring and review of training on diversity. We found that slow progress had been made in rolling out this training to all staff, and again, there was no evidence of monitoring and review to ensure the effectiveness of the training.

175 Service users are satisfied with services that are currently provided. The residents we spoke to were generally pleased with the services they received. In respect of achieving further benefits as a result of the new arrangements, we found that limited direct benefits for service users have been achieved in the following areas.

- ◆ Increased numbers of service plans in place giving clarity on service delivery and potential for monitoring by the council.
- ◆ Greater protection for vulnerable people through the priority given to risk assessment and registration.
- ◆ Greater levels of feedback on services from service users through the validation visits and service reviews.

176 However, there were less positive aspects.

- ◆ Although there has been improvement in this area, not all clients had support plans in place despite being a requirement of Supporting People grant funding. The council confirmed they are taking action to obtain full compliance by providers.
- ◆ Nearly all services were in place prior to the implementation of the Supporting People programme and there was limited evidence of improvements being made.

177 The council recognised the weaknesses of the arrangements in respect of a range of clients who would traditionally engage with housing services. The problem was tackled by an additional sub board for vulnerable people within the health and social care partnership arrangements, but progress in setting up the sub board was slow and the linked user forum has yet to be set up reducing the influence for a range of client groups who are not well served by the existing Supporting People programme for example women fleeing domestic violence.

178 As these arrangements are recent, It is not yet evident whether the diversity of needs of such different client groups will be properly addressed.

179 The council has responded positively to the perceptions of weaknesses in the delivery of the Supporting People programme in the following areas.

- ◆ There has been a positive response to the criticism of the shadow strategy through ODPM evaluation in respect of risk assessment. There is a well thought through risk register in place covering all aspects of the Supporting People programme.
- ◆ The weakness of the leadership by the COG on Supporting People is being addressed through a review of the formal meeting arrangements to focus on Supporting People matters with regular support from Supporting People officers.
- ◆ The meeting arrangements of the CSG are being altered to ensure any matters are thoroughly discussed before presentation to COG.

- ◆ The council have reinvigorated meetings between the Supporting People team and the contracts team. The aim has been to strengthen communications and offset some of the management issues arising from main streaming the Supporting People programme.
- 180 However outcomes from these changes cannot yet be assessed as they have recently been put in place.
- 181 The council are also able to demonstrate some evidence of learning through the following examples.
- ◆ Use of research for future planning for older people's services and their greater expectation levels.
 - ◆ Currently piloting a new service with GPs to counteract the high levels of emergency admissions to hospital. This comes from the research by the Kings Fund into the possible causes for the increasing admissions. Research has shown that the majority of these admissions are not known to either social services or to district nursing services and the pilot will look at ways of identifying these people earlier.
 - ◆ From the failure of two services during the implementation year the council is developing a strengthened risk strategy to complement the risk register currently in place.
- 182 However, the council are not able to show how services have been shaped in response to this learning, and how things are being done differently as a result.

How good are the current improvement plans?

Summary

- 183 The council has been using the Supporting People service plan to drive progress in the delivery of the programme. While the objectives are user focussed, key tasks are focussed on process, where positive progress has been made, and not on quality and outcomes. Progress has been variable, often slow and will be undermined by a lack of outcomes from the service reviews, and a lack of targets. The council has made positive progress on risk assessment and to an extent with contingency planning. However, the application of best value principles for the delivery of the Supporting People programme is variable with weaknesses evident in respect of competition and consultation.
- 184 Inspectors will consider how the council has applied the best value principles to the development of plans for the improvement of services as a part of the inspection. The council's approach to developing the service plan for Supporting People does not overtly address best value principles, for example, competition has yet to be addressed to ensure that the programme is delivering value for money. However, the remaining areas have been addressed in the following ways.
- ◆ The challenge element of best value is an integral part of the service review process which broadly follows the ODPM guidelines. Services will be assessed for strategic relevance, and it is anticipated that any new services will be procured through the council's corporate procurement process.
 - ◆ The council's ability to compare services will be based on robust cost benchmarking against other providers and internal cost controls. In the first instance, the development of benchmarking is at an early stage and has yet to demonstrate significant outcomes on which the council can base future planning. In the second, we found no evidence to show that the council has examined the housing related support costs for internal service providers which are funded through the Supporting People grant.

- ◆ There is a framework in place for consultation with stakeholders including service users. We have found inconsistencies in the approach as set out in the section on user involvement under Judgement 1. For example, there is no user forum for the vulnerable people's sub board, and the approach to consultation with hard to reach groups needs to be developed.

185 In addition to the five year strategy, the council has in place a service plan known as the Supporting People programme business objectives 2004/05. The objectives of the service plan are firmly user focussed and the subject areas cover the essential areas of the programme. However, the key tasks are process focussed, and there is little included about service quality. Performance critical indicators have been identified for each of the key objectives. However, monitoring against these indicators is not possible because there is no performance information or targets included, for example, reduction in the number of queries/complaints and charging income is maximised.

186 The following paragraphs summarise progress against the key objectives of the service plan.

187 An update on the progress of the key tasks was drawn up on 15 October 2004 in advance of the inspection. The key tasks identified will help to drive forward improvements to the service, but the effectiveness of the plan is undermined in the following ways.

- ◆ A lack of targets on the performance critical indicators and links to the outcomes for service users.
- ◆ Longer term objectives which need to be firmly routed in the five year strategy and link to the community strategy.
- ◆ A lack of milestone dates within the year in order to assess the priority of actions.

188 The programme of service reviews seems realistic and, although the time frame is tight, the council appears to be on target to complete them within the deadline of March 2006. However, progress on writing up the outcomes and implementing action plans for the service reviews on learning disabilities and mental health has been delayed. We see this as a barrier to achieving demonstrable outcomes for service users, and providing the council with the flexibility it needs to reconfigure services to be in line with the strategic priorities.

189 Outcomes from the service reviews include assessment of need and priorities for the future development of services. There is no performance critical indicator for this area although it is a key plank of developing priorities for the five year strategy, and there is no comment on the progress of this aspect in the update. We noted that the council has identified further work is required on benchmarking, and that further work and training is required on the IT system in order to fully utilise its capabilities.

190 Assessment of risks attached to the Supporting People programme is progressing well. There has been thoughtful working in this area, and a risk register is in place. There is a draft risk and contingency document currently in development which spells out and quantifies risk in some detail. Contingency planning in general is less well developed and this is also the case with the draft document. It is also unclear when this document is to be approved and the timetable for implementation and training for staff and providers.

- 191 Progress is slow on the objective dealing with key stakeholders in the following areas.
- ◆ Development of stakeholder and service users' consultation and feedback strategy. The council has yet to review the vacant Supporting People consultation officer post and additional council resource only recently engaged to draft the document.
 - ◆ The spkweb is being used as the principle vehicle for making documents available. However, there are technical IT difficulties which have meant that the information is not accessible or has 'disappeared'. Concerns were raised with us by providers about inconsistencies in the provision of important information such as minutes of the CSG meetings, schedule of consultation events and dates of key meetings, as well as the future timetable of service reviews. Subsequent to the inspection these problems have been resolved.
- 192 Progress has been made in respect of financial issues in that payments are being made electronically through the IT system. The council will further improve financial monitoring and the ability to produce useful reports when the IT system interfaces with the new corporate financial management system. However, this is not a priority area for the council. Plans to improve information and access to the system would produce the following benefits when the council timetable them for implementation.
- ◆ Providers will be able to access their own records and send PI returns electronically to the IT system. However, there is no confirmed date by when this is due to happen.
 - ◆ Steady state contracts will contain more information about access arrangements, eligibility criteria and outcomes the provider is expected to achieve.
- 193 Linked to the issues around the IT system is the lack of progress on improving the collection of service user charges. A process is in place, and the Supporting People manager is now receiving monthly progress reports. However, targets are not being met which will further undermine efforts to improve collection rates, and therefore income to the authority.
- 194 Progress on the five year Supporting People strategy is slower than CSG and COG had agreed. The schedule for the production of the strategy has been revisited, and time for consultation on the potential priorities with stakeholders has been reduced. Other key tasks which are an integral part of the strategy such as managing efficiency savings and evidencing user input into the decision making process, show no progress in the progress report on business objectives 2004/05 dated 15 October 2004.
- 195 The council has made positive progress against all key tasks with respect to contracts and procurement including:
- ◆ contract validation visits to providers, 105 in all; and
 - ◆ procurement of mental health and learning disabilities steady state contracts for consideration by councillors in January 2005. This will be dependent on the completion and agreement of the actions plans arising from the service reviews.
- 196 Applications for full accreditation are being progressed, although none are yet certified. Completion for the 58 who have applied is expected to be December 2004; all providers have received written feedback on the progress of their applications. All accreditations were completed by the end of November 2004, subsequent to the inspection.

Will improvements be delivered?

Summary

- 197 The delivery of the Supporting People programme is well supported by leading councillors and there is a clear vision staff are working towards. Strong working relationships have been established with key partners. Performance and risk management has been improved. However, cross authority working is underdeveloped, particularly in respect of a longer term approach to managing future need in the borough. Responsibility for driving improvements is dissipated resulting in slow progress against the business objectives. Work on focussing staff effort is being implemented, but there are inconsistencies in the undertaking and outcome of appraisals. Progress on the integration of funding streams, and reducing levels of desktop reviews is slow, and value for money practices have yet to be firmly embedded.
- 198 The future delivery of the programme is positively supported by the commitment from lead councillors, key partners and with the involvement from service providers. The council with partners have a clear vision of developing services to enable greater levels of independent living, and this has been fully communicated to stakeholders. We were told that external partners are confident that some senior officers within the council are clear about the vision for supporting people in Hackney. For the key partners, effective delivery of the programme is seen to be assisting in achieving national health targets.
- 199 However, we found some uncertainty among the officers themselves who were not entirely clear what the goals are for the future. There is awareness in the council that because there is high provision of services for the range of users in the borough, this may be attracting people from other authority areas where they are less well provided for. Meetings are taking place with other boroughs on Supporting People issues, and on the developments due through the Thames Gateway, but there is little evidence to show the council is developing plans to manage future demand through joint working. This is a critical area for development.
- 200 The Audit Commission progress assessment report for the council on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment of 2002, dated July 2004 highlights improvements in the investment in IT infrastructure, performance and financial management. The council has put effort into improving the 'back room' functions of social services in order to deliver better services to users. This also applies to the Supporting People programme and includes:
- ◆ embedding performance management across all services to include annual appraisals for all staff, routine performance monitoring, reporting through managers to senior managers, stakeholders and councillors;
 - ◆ achieving explicit links from the community plan and, in the case of Supporting People, to the business objectives through the appraisal process. We found evidence in some appraisal forms to show this was happening;
 - ◆ employing a methodology to enhance project management control, Printz 2; and
 - ◆ implementing robust financial controls on grant payments.

- 201 We found a number of positive aspects which will support the delivery of improvements in the future.
- ◆ The council is in the process of updating the financial IT system. When the system is fully implemented it is expected that one of the benefits it will provide is a diary facility to assist staff in terms of debt collection of service user charges.
 - ◆ Three local performance indicators have been developed covering throughputs, support plans in place, and cost and price of service. Performance management arrangements are tight and all members of staff have a work plan that can be tracked back ultimately to the community plan.
 - ◆ There are future plans to increase choice for service users and the development of future service provision include:
 - ◆ undertaking work on dependency profiles to aid planning;
 - ◆ Introduction of choice based lettings for affordable housing; and
 - ◆ ensuring that move on quotas for supported housing is protected under the new choice based lettings scheme.
- 202 Given the poor perceptions and inspection results the council has received in the past, a great deal of effort has been put into identifying and managing risk, and we found at the heart of this work was a determination across staff levels to ensure that service users were properly protected and continue to receive the services they needed, for example:
- ◆ we looked at two examples where the council had managed the loss of two services since Supporting People implementation, and found that these objectives had been well met;
 - ◆ the council have prioritised the development of generic floating support so that they can be more responsive; and
 - ◆ the council are considering how they can build integration of the different funding streams to try and remove some of the uncertainties of single funding streams. However, it is not clear what progress has been made.
- 203 However, we have some concerns over the capacity to deliver the programme in the future and the identified needs.
- 204 The service has suffered from the turnover of some critical members of staff and the key posts for Supporting People are acting arrangements. The effects of uncertainty on staff are reasonably managed through clear reporting arrangements, regular one to one supervision and the development of personal work plans. Appraisal updates are intended to further reinforce the focus of their work, but need to be supported through explicit links to Supporting People priorities in the appraisal action plans.
- 205 Another issue in respect of capacity is the inability to undertake many of the visits to schemes through the service reviews. This has resulted in a high level of desktop reviews, and means that wider involvement of service users, which are intended to be an integral part of the service reviews, has been limited.
- 206 The timetable for inclusion of the outcomes into the five year strategy is extremely tight. Providers have expressed their concerns to us that consultation on the five year strategy is too short to be fully effective. Although the council has consulted with providers in general terms on the Supporting People programme during regular meetings, leaving too little time for adequate consultation. This undermines the ownership of the strategy by providers on whom the council are dependent for delivery of services.

- 207 There are a number of areas where the council are not meeting their own timetables or delivering against plans in addition to those highlighted in the previous section, 'How good are the current improvement plans?'
- ◆ Although it is planned that staff will shadow other Supporting People staff in Haringey to exchange good practice and strengthen skills, there are no firm plans in place and the issue is still subject to discussion.
 - ◆ Although there are a number of performance reports generated on various aspects of the programme, they are not user friendly and it is not clear how these are analysed and used to drive improvements and development of services.
- 208 The Supporting People plan, which is incorporated into the Supporting People programme - business objectives 2004/05, was approved by the COG in April 2004. Progress is monitored through the CSG and COG, additionally through one to one monitoring of the Supporting People lead officer by line management. However, there are a number of key areas that are the responsibility of other officers, for example contracts, finance and IT over whom the Supporting People Manager has no management responsibility. It is unclear who drives improvements in these areas if there is a failure of performance, or conflict between competing priorities.
- 209 Officers believe that there has been a substantial change in the culture of social services overall from unrestricted access to services to one where access criteria has been thought through and implemented to target services where they are most needed. However, there is an acceptance that there needs to be further change to embed value for money practices and deal with people who are still within the system receiving an inappropriately high level of support/care.
- 210 There are work streams in place for each of the health and social care partnership sub boards and these are linked back to the community strategy through a series of key deliverables to departmental service plans. They should then link to individual works programmes. Progress is monitored through appraisals, PIs and quarterly and bi annual review with councillors. Supervision meetings should take place once a month. However, they are not directly monitored but through staff surveys and the twice yearly diagonal slice meetings:

'It is embedded culture - we don't keep records on whether they take place'. Manager

- 211 This also applies to staff appraisals. This point was raised by the IIP inspectors in the feedback to the successful IIP accreditation across the council achieved in July/August 2004. This is a key activity in order to focus staff on the outcomes required by the council and should be formally monitored. The council confirmed that 93 per cent of appraisals had been undertaken, confirmed by report to senior managers. Currently, spot checks should be carried out by managers but we were not provided with any evidence that this is happening systematically.
- 212 Staff appraisals also cover training needs which are recorded on individual development plans. Targets are set which should link to the service plan. We reviewed a sample of appraisal forms and found that while targets are set they do not all link back to the service plan. This weakens staff understanding of what outcomes they should be delivering to.

- 213 The council are considering the procurement of IT support to develop electronic reporting for 2004/05 to improve the transfer of information from providers to the council. It is not clear what outcomes the council is anticipating from this investment, and timing has yet to be agreed as the council has not prioritised this. Officers told us that more resources are needed to enable staff to understand and use the reporting function on the IT system. We conclude that the current system is under-utilised.

Summary

- 214 We have judged that the Supporting People programme has **uncertain** prospects for delivering further improvements.
- 215 There are a number of strengths in the delivery of the programme. Supporting People has good support from leading councillors, stakeholders and service users who are positive about the service they receive. Significant progress has been made in respect of risk and performance management. The council is responding to identified weaknesses in the governance arrangements, and can demonstrate improvements within the areas of social services for children and housing benefit. However, this has limited relevance in respect of Supporting People.
- 216 Confidence in the ability of the council to deliver improvements is undermined by the lack of concluded service reviews; there is a limited track record of dealing with de-commissioning and re-commissioning services and dealing with those difficult decisions. While performance management has improved there are inconsistencies in approach to appraisals. Outputs demonstrated through the relevant indicators show variable performance (see Performance Information in the Appendix). Performance against the Supporting People service plan objectives is also variable and slow, with progress being made against process tasks rather than quality of service and outcomes for service users.

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.

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 profiles;
 - ◆ Corporate Plan 2004/05;
 - ◆ Community Strategy;
 - ◆ Performance Plan;
 - ◆ Housing Service Plan;
 - ◆ Housing Strategy 2003-06;
 - ◆ Mental Health Accommodation Strategy;
 - ◆ Homeless Strategy;
 - ◆ BVR Services for Older People Draft Report; and
 - ◆ Corporate Assessment Report;
- ◆ Supporting People documents:
 - ◆ minutes of Chief Officers Group, Core Strategic Group, HackHag and Cabinet meetings;
 - ◆ reports to cabinet;
 - ◆ Better Care Higher Standards;
 - ◆ shadow strategy;
 - ◆ leaflets and newsletters;
 - ◆ Commissioning Plan 2004-05;
 - ◆ all groups Terms of Reference;
 - ◆ strategic priorities consultation survey;
 - ◆ Supporting People service user consultation survey;
 - ◆ progress reports; and
 - ◆ Supporting People progress business plan.

Reality checks undertaken

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

- ◆ visits to projects involved with Supporting People, meeting with service users, staff and managers;
- ◆ meeting with the Core Strategic Group, Chief Officers Group and Commissioning Managers;
- ◆ focus group meetings with service users, provider staff, and provider managers;
- ◆ meeting with leading councillors including the Mayor;
- ◆ mystery shopping phone calls;
- ◆ shadowing financial controls process;
- ◆ viewing; and
- ◆ search of the council's website to find information on Supporting People.

List of people interviewed

We met a range of people involved with the service.

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Amanda Tooth | Housing Development Manager, Probation Services |
| Ann Saunders | Chair of Learning Difficulties Sub Board |
| Barry Day | Director of Service, City and Hackney PCT |
| Bob Morgan | Deputy Director Social Services (Accountable Officer) |
| Brian Gardener | Supporting People Project Officer Reviews |
| Carl Blakey | Head of Commissioning Children, Young People and Families |
| Christine Chambers | Supporting People Manager |
| David Lucas | Human Resources Manager |
| Eve Oldham | Joint Commissioning Manager, Older People |
| Fiona Darby | Head of Benefits |
| Fran Pearson | Lead Member Equalities Health and Social Care |
| Gary Cronin | Head of Finance - Community Care Charging |
| Hugh Fenwick | Head of Performance Review |
| James Simpson | Housing Associations and Partnerships Manager |

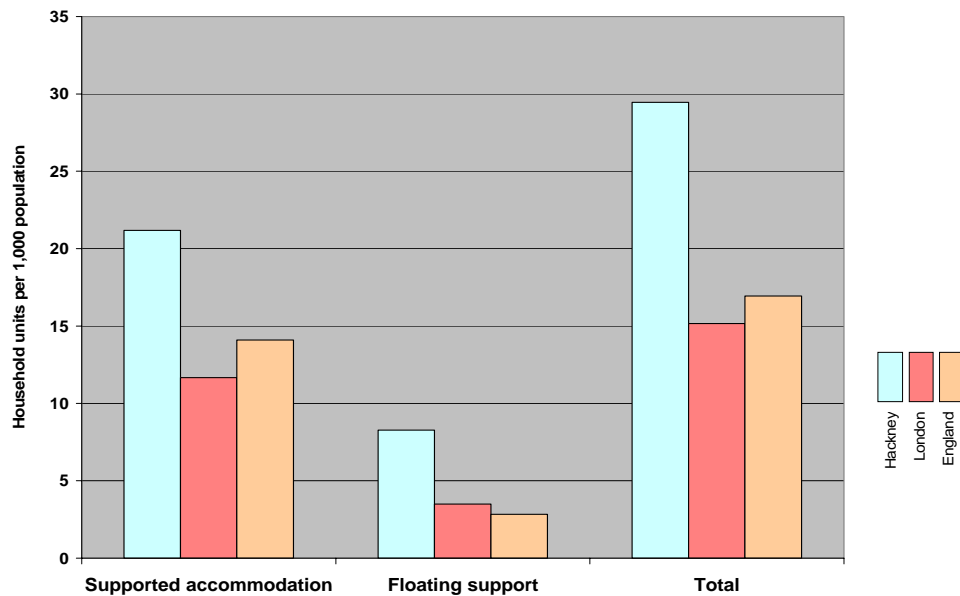
| | |
|-----------------|--|
| John Flowerday | Acting Head of Commissioning Adults |
| Jules Pipe | Mayor |
| Kartik Shah | Supporting People Finance Officer |
| Kate Gilbert | Assistant Chief Officer, Probation |
| Lee McManus | Supporting People Contracts Manager |
| Margaret Ryder | Policy and Performance Manager |
| Marion Goodrich | Deputy Chief Executive of City and Hackney Teaching Primary Care Trust |
| Mary Richardson | Director of Social Services |
| Peter Snow | Community Safety Coordinator |
| Sandra Howard | Acting Assistant Director, Community Care |
| Sandy Atwell | Supporting People Contracts Officer |
| Steve Goodman | Assistant Director of Children and Families |
| Zulfiqar Mulak | Acting Assistant Director, Housing Needs |

Performance indicators

In order to judge the quality of a service, it is important to compare the performance of that service against other suppliers across a range of sectors. The aim is not exact comparison, but an exploration of how similar services (or elements of services) perform in order to identify significant differences, the reasons for them, and the extent to which improvements are required.

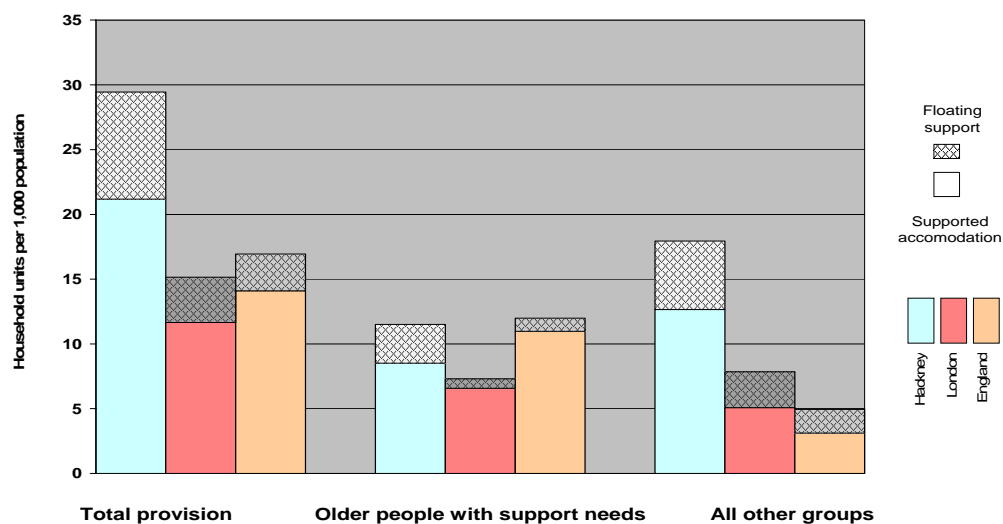
Where possible, we have compared the council with other councils in its Audit Commission family group (councils with similar general characteristics). We have also compared the council with the best and worst performing 25 per cent of London Borough councils for that indicator.

Total service provision funded through Supporting People¹⁰



Hackney has identified the following gaps in accommodation based and floating support services for mentally disordered offenders, people with alcohol or drug problems, HIV/Aids, refugees, teenage parents, women at risk of domestic violence and young people leaving care. Current records show no services being provided for older people with mental health problems/dementia and for travellers. The council believes these groups are accessing services under different groups. There is current research underway to confirm the accurate situation.

Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹¹

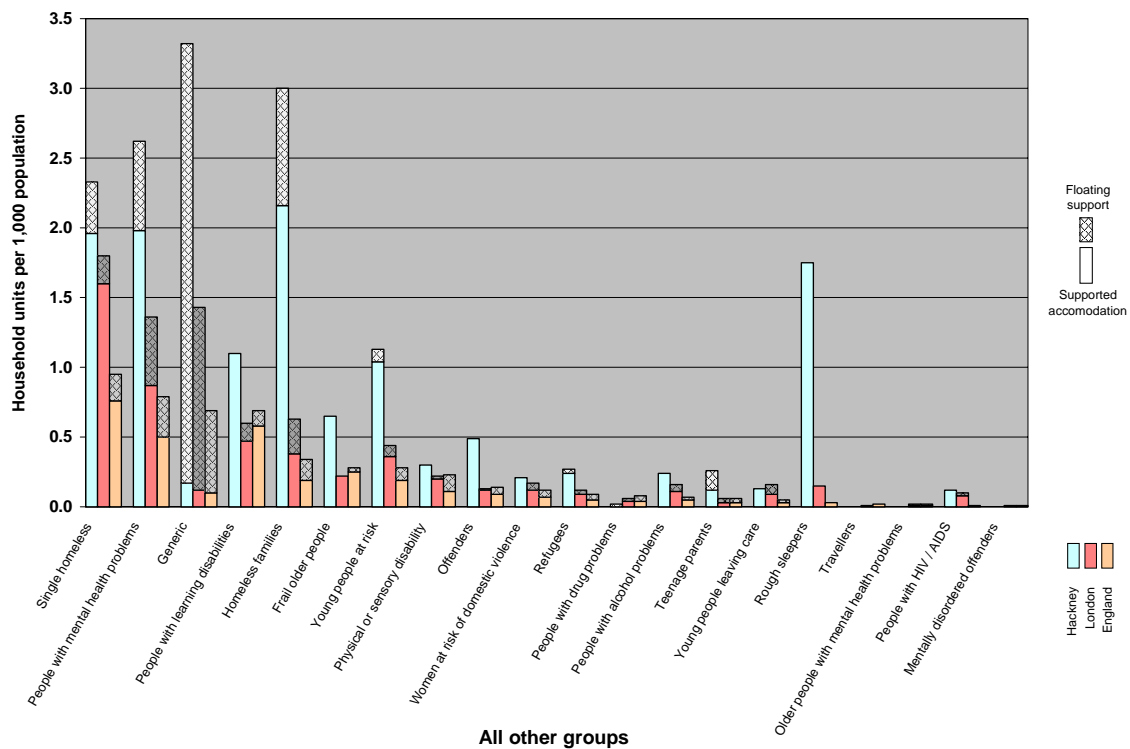


¹⁰ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

¹¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

The council has found that there is an over supply of accommodation for older people with support needs and plan to decrease the number of units for this client group and increase alternative floating support. There are plans to increase accommodation for frail elderly people, this is a priority, and for older people with mental health problems/dementia.

Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹²

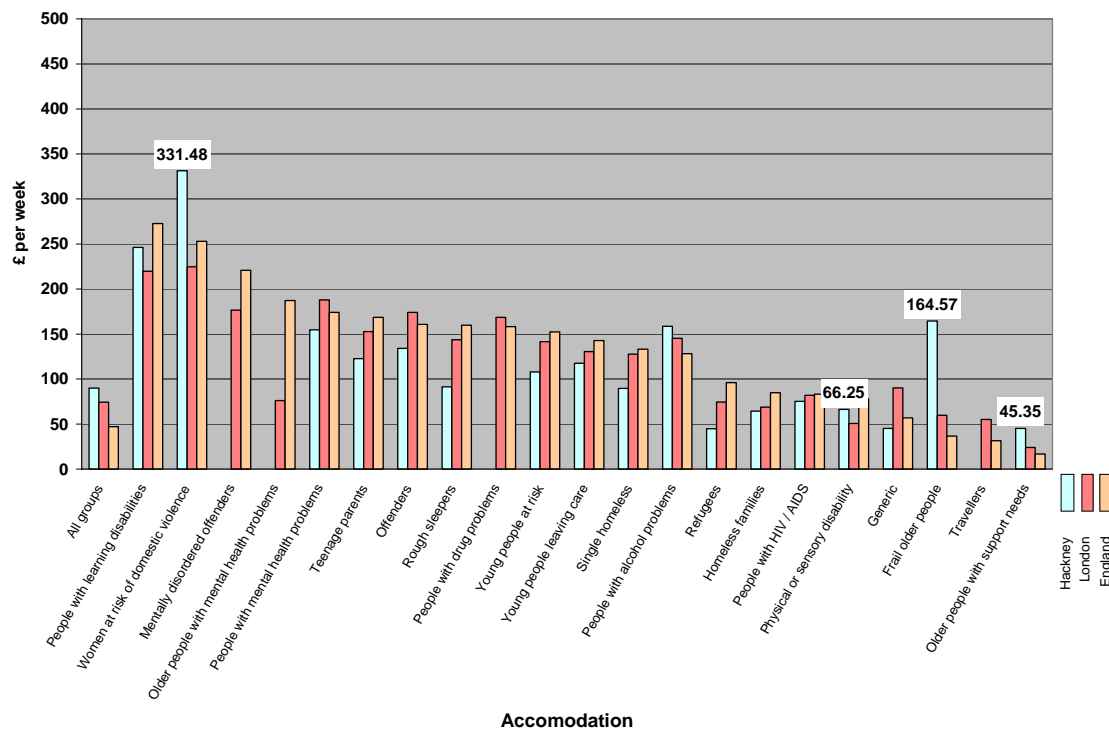


Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)

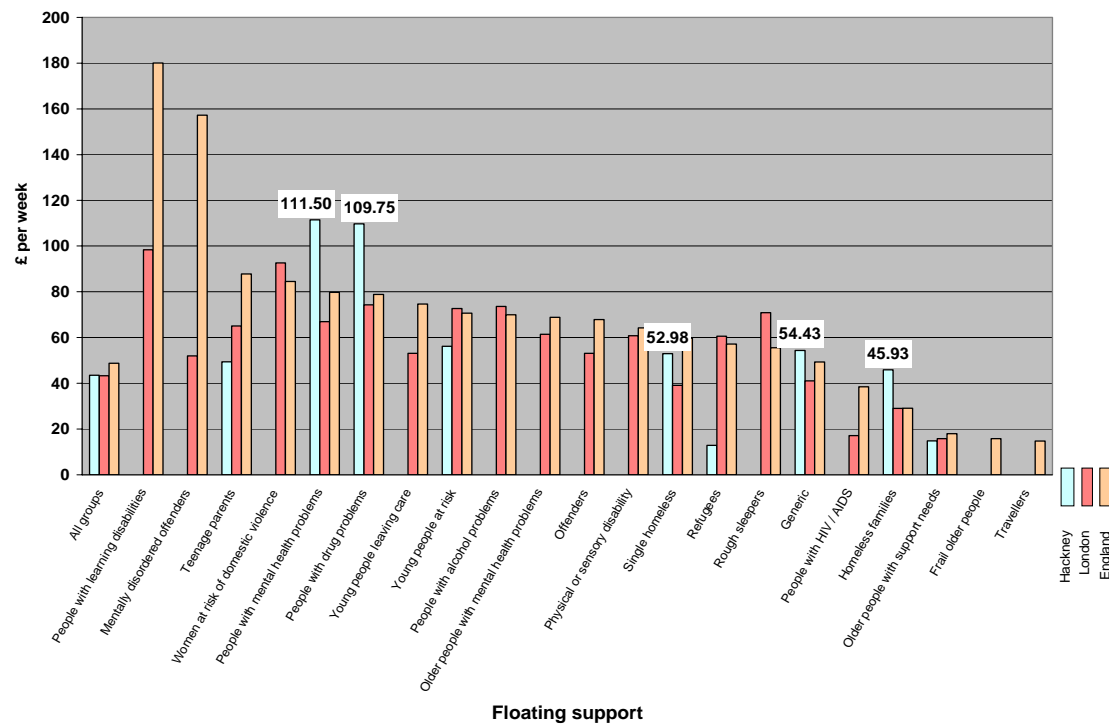
| | Per head of population | Per unit | Per unit excluding community alarms | Per unit excluding community alarms & sheltered housing |
|---------|------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Hackney | £ 2.27 | £ 48.64 | £ 63.90 | £ 77.48 |
| London | £ 0.97 | £ 42.37 | £ 48.73 | £ 68.40 |
| England | £ 0.70 | £ 28.30 | £ 34.71 | £ 76.37 |

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

Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent) ¹³

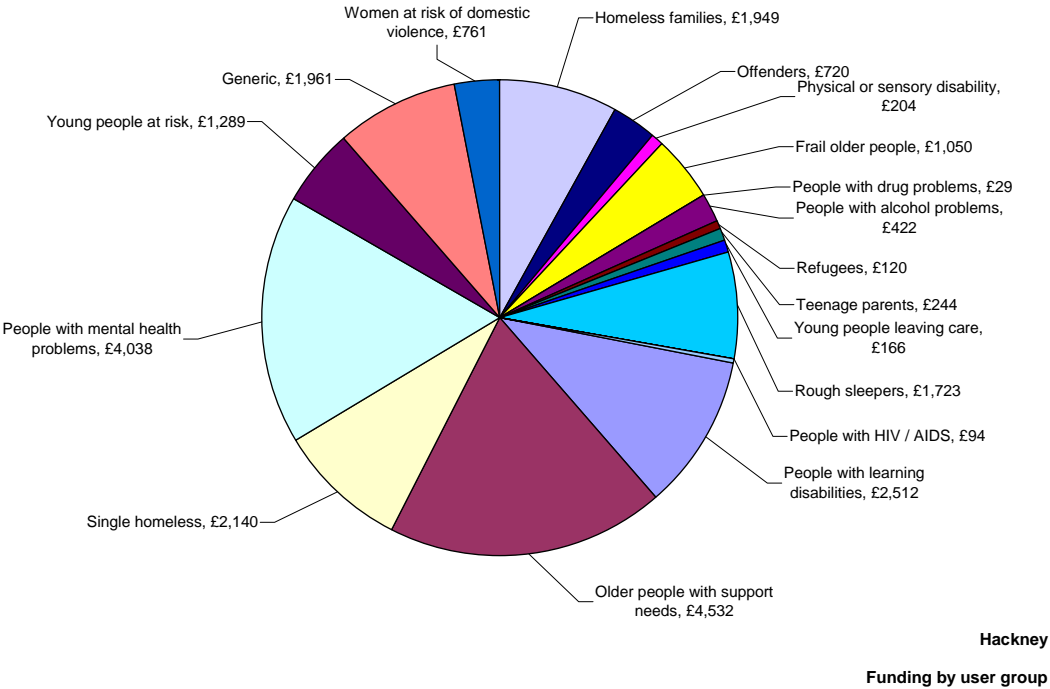


Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)

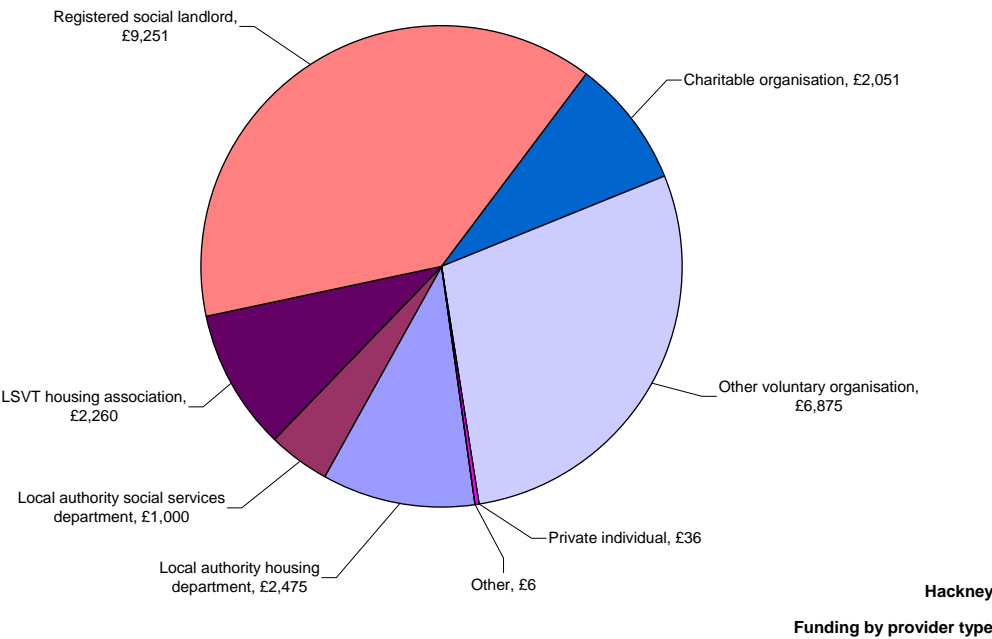


¹³ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Share of spending between user groups (£000s)



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



Social Services star ratings November 2003

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

| | Serving people well? | Prospects for improvement? | Performance rating (CPA equivalent) |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Adults' Services | Some | Promising | ★★★ (3) |
| Children's Services | Most | Promising | |

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

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

| Hackney | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Significantly above average (★★★★) | Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31). |
| Above average (★★★) | Admissions of older people to residential or nursing care (C26). Fallen to above average. Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54). Admissions of adults aged 18-64 to residential or nursing care (C27). |
| Average (★★) | Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6). Older people helped to live at home (C32). Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4). |
| Below average (●●) | Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30). Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29). Delayed transfer of care (D41). New clients for whom length of time from first contact to first service was more than six weeks (D43). |
| Significantly below average (●) | Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58). |

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.

| Hackney | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Within the best 25 per cent | Domestic violence refuge places (BV176). |
| Average | <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> <p>Length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation (BV183a).</p> <p>Length of stay in hostel accommodation (BV183b).</p> |
| Within the worst 25 per cent | <p>Council homes which did not meet the decent homes standard (BV184a).</p> <p>Average time for processing new housing benefit claims (BV78a).</p> |

Overall Hackney has considerably in excess of service provision for both accommodation based and floating support compared to other London boroughs and England as a whole. The council receives the second highest level of Supporting People grant, and this is in keeping with the very high levels of deprivation within the borough – fifth out of all English council where first is the most deprived and 354th the least.