

Supporting People Inspection Report

July 2007



Supporting People

Wigan Council

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Supporting People Inspections

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Summary

- 1 Overall, we judge that Wigan Metropolitan Council administers a good Supporting People programme that has promising prospects for improvement.
- 2 Wigan is located in the north-west of England between Liverpool and Manchester. The borough includes many urban districts with a coal mining heritage as well as rural areas and is home to a population of 306,700; 2.4 per cent of which are from black and minority ethnic communities. The area has high levels of deprivation including pockets of high unemployment, poor health, substance misuse and crime.
- 3 The Council received a Supporting People grant of £7.6 million for 2007/08 which increased by approximately £500,000 for the first time since the programme began. The national distribution formula indicates that a more appropriate grant allocation would be approximately twice that currently received. The extent of this under-funding has been a factor limiting progress both in developing new forms of services and in meeting known needs. The programme funds a total of 2,654 units of accommodation-based support and 346 units of floating support. The highest cost service costs £564 per week and is an accommodation-based service for people with learning disabilities. The lowest cost service, excluding alarm services, costs £3.53 per week for low level support in a sheltered housing setting.
- 4 The programme has delivered improvements in the quality of services that service users receive. Service users have been well involved in reviews of services and their views have been fundamental in shaping improvements.
- 5 Service users have helped to develop leaflets and information about Supporting People services that are of a high quality and widely available in public offices, from service providers and via the Council's website.
- 6 Significant value for money and efficiency savings have been made with these contributing both to meeting the shortfall in grant and enhancing available support.
- 7 Positive provider relations have benefited the development of the programme; steady state contracts have been agreed and implemented with a clear emphasis on improving outcomes for service users.
- 8 Eligibility of services has been assessed and significant costs re-aligned to appropriate budgets. Provider services have improved consistently while delivering efficiency savings in excess of expectations.
- 9 There is consistent leadership of the programme evident in improving governance, corporate support for the programme, in a dedicated and skilled team and in detailed improvement planning.
- 10 However, the programme has a number of weaknesses. Service users are not well involved at a strategic level. Several improvement initiatives have been delayed; others are very recent and not yet embedded.

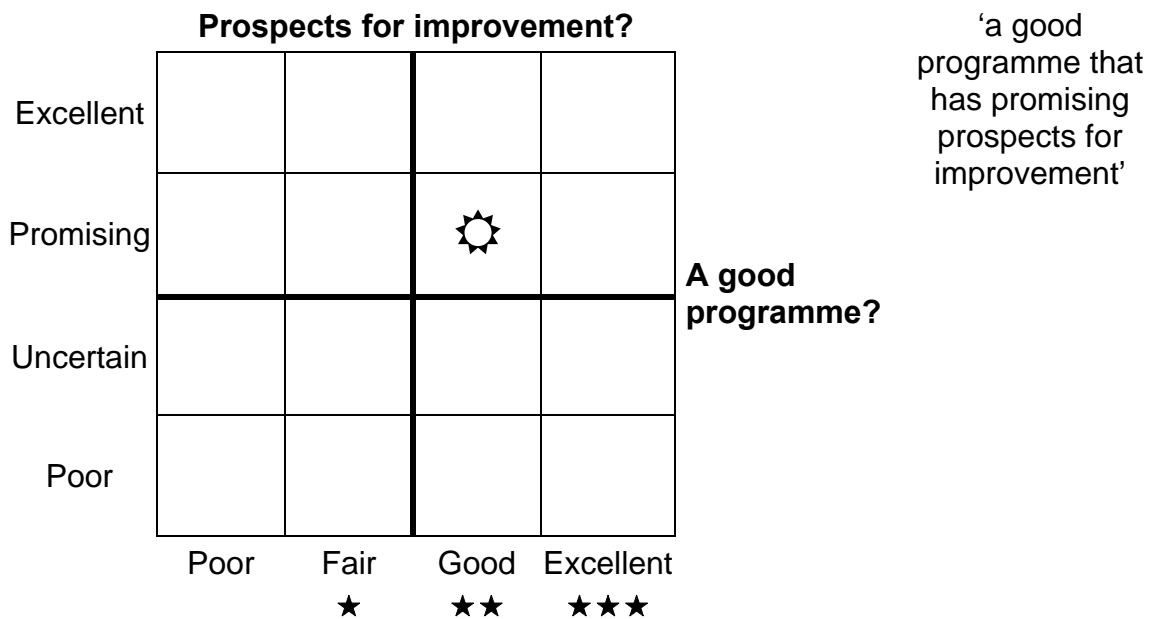
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- 11 Improvement planning although thorough in coverage is not well supported by medium-term human resource and financial planning and delivery of improvement initiatives has not been robustly monitored.

Scoring the Supporting People programme

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

Figure 1 Scoring chart²



Source: Audit Commission

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

13 We found the programme to be good because it has a range of strengths including:

- the service is strongly focused on improving outcomes for service users. Improvements in the quality of services provided and in implementing user identified improvements are impressive;
- the programme is well supported by the Council with close involvement at Cabinet level through the portfolio holder for adults' services. Corporate teams have supported the development of the programme and the Council has contributed £486,000 to date to meet the shortfall in grant and to protect services for vulnerable people;
- provider relations are good and key decisions such as those relating to eligibility, value for money and steady state contracts have been supported by effective consultation and a mature relationship;
- significant savings have been realised through re-aligning eligible costs and decommissioning where appropriate;
- value for money is a positive feature with efficiency savings in excess of Gershon expectations and appropriate focus on achieving improvements in services both in quality and quantity in high priority areas;
- work planning, risk and financial planning are strong;
- plans and priorities are based on robust and updated needs and supply information;
- access to 'move-on' accommodation has been improved by the application of appropriate protocols and by positive partner relations;
- service reviews and ongoing contract monitoring have been well organised and effective in improving service provision;
- steady-state contracts have been agreed and implemented smoothly with the exception of a small number of contracts where there are ongoing negotiations to secure improvements; and
- the contribution of the Wigan team in assisting the development of the national outcomes framework has been positive and used to promote improvements locally.

- 14 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:
- service users have not been well engaged at a strategic level in the development of the programme;
 - the roles of the Commissioning Body and core strategy and development group have overlapped and there has been some duplication and also lack of focus; some potentially ineligible costs have not been examined and savings realised;
 - the programme's improvement plan has not been robustly monitored and there is insufficient evidence that delays have been appropriately addressed;
 - efficiency savings have not been well targeted and have potentially threatened the continuance of some services; and
 - access to Supporting People services has not been thoroughly examined and potential barriers removed.
- 15 The programme has promising prospects for improvement because:
- some additional units of support have been provided in line with key priorities;
 - priorities for the service are refined in a transparent prioritisation ranking which has been agreed with providers and which is evidently informing progress;
 - over 400 individual service improvements were made as a result of service reviews, quality assessment framework scores have consistently improved as have key performance indicators;
 - value for money has improved significantly with savings to date totalling £890,000 while evidenced service improvements have been made;
 - the five-year strategy is directing the programme with appropriate emphasis on national policy as well as corporate objectives;
 - there has been consistent leadership of the programme with a keen focus on delivery of priorities;
 - a positive approach to learning is evident, in cross-authority working, in the contribution of the team to national projects as well as work with providers;
 - there is a programmed plan for the Council to attain level three of the Equalities Standard which is translated into good practice and appropriate diversity action planning in the Supporting People team; and
 - the Council has been successful in accessing additional funding and aligned its use to benefit supporting people clients.

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

- service standards to deal with service users complaints are not sufficient or appropriately publicised;
- plans for service user involvement do not sufficiently articulate intended outcomes;
- future commissioning intentions have not been sufficiently addressed in the refreshed five-year strategy;
- plans over the medium-term are underdeveloped both in relation to human resources and finances for the programme;
- there is no efficiency plan or targets for the current or future years; and
- delays in delivery of improvements have not been sufficiently challenged or addressed.

Recommendations

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

Recommendation

R1 Strengthen service user focus by:

- *developing robust mechanisms to ensure that service users influence the strategic direction of the programme including continuing and effective support for the core user group;*
- *ensuring that all actions from the service user consultation and involvement action plan are included in the programme's improvement plan and that their delivery and resourcing is actively monitored by the Commissioning Body;*
- *establishing and publicising appropriate service standards for complaints and monitoring performance against these at the core strategy development group;*
- *ensuring that closure of complaints is agreed with service users;*
- *ensuring that ongoing contract monitoring robustly challenges issues of cultural sensitivity and that improvements where necessary are implemented; and*
- *continuing the work that has begun to improve access to fairer charging. Establishing the extent of potential under claiming and putting in place targets for outcomes.*

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

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The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved influence for service users;
- improved certainty that service users who complain have their complaints dealt with appropriately;
- greater certainty that improvement actions will be delivered; and
- fairer charging arrangements that are robustly applied;

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented within nine months of the publication of this inspection report.

Recommendation

R2 Improve delivery of key priorities by:

- *routinely evaluating the effectiveness of governance structures and acting promptly to put in place improvement;*
- *refreshing the five-year strategy to include a clear indication of how the authority will seek to meet identified needs, addressing savings, eligibility, commissioning, procurement and medium-term planning;*
- *ensuring that the Supporting People medium-term financial plan is completed promptly and that it sets challenging targets for savings and the realignment of spending to priority areas;*
- *developing an overarching commissioning plan that articulates how gaps in provision will be addressed including how services will be considered for repackaging, re-tendering or decommissioning;*
- *ensuring that the delivery of the commissioning plan's objectives is actively monitored by the Commissioning Body;*
- *ensuring that the Commissioning Body routinely considers progress on the programme's improvement plan addressing issues such as target setting and resourcing and delays to ensure that priorities are delivered within challenging timescales; and*
- *ensuring that ongoing resource for delivery of improvements is reviewed and medium-term resource commitment secured to enhance certainty that improvements will be delivered.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- greater certainty that identified improvements will be delivered within timescales;
- improved medium-term planning of human resources and finance;
- improved urgency in dealing with programme delays; and
- improved clarity concerning commissioning intentions.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented within 12 months of the publication of this inspection report.

Recommendation

R3 Improve value for money by:

- *robustly assessing eligible tasks in contract monitoring visits and putting in place arrangements to retract any ineligible funding; and*
- *establishing mechanisms to target efficiency savings through discussions with providers and to monitor their achievement. These discussions to examine both cashable and non-cashable efficiencies.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- realising additional savings; and
- introducing a tailored approach to achieving efficiencies.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented within six months of the publication of this inspection report.

R4 Recommendation

R5 Improve access to services by:

- *reviewing access arrangements to housing support services to ensure that services are easily accessed by all and that shared assessment simplifies access where possible; and*
- *reviewing arrangements for access to long-term services to ensure that services do not 'silt-up'.*

14 Supporting People | Recommendations

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- increased certainty that housing support services are available to those who need it.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented within six months of the publication of this inspection report.

- 18 We would like to thank the staff of Wigan Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of inspection: on-site dates ie 1 and 2 May and 8 to 10 May incl. 2007

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Report

Context

The locality

- 19 Wigan Metropolitan Borough is part of the Greater Manchester conurbation, in the North West of England, midway between Manchester and Liverpool. The borough was formed in 1974 from 14 former authorities many of which were urban districts that contained mining communities. Two-thirds of the borough, which covers an area of 19,000 hectares, is open land and much of it is green belt.
- 20 The population of the area (2005) is 306,700. In 2005, 2.4 per cent of the population were from ethnic minority communities having significantly increased from the Census 2001 proportion of 1.3 per cent largely because of the arrival of asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants. The age structure of the population is relatively young, with more children and young people than the national and regional averages. The area is diverse and incorporates 14 small towns and villages, as well as the larger towns of Wigan, Leigh, Tyldesley, Hindley and Ashton. Each settlement retains a strong sense of local identity.
- 21 The local economy was originally built around textiles and coal-mining, and was seriously adversely affected in the early 1990s by the demise of these traditional industries. The Council has promoted Wigan as a place to locate business securing regeneration projects such as Leigh Sports Village and Wigan Pier. Most employment within the borough is now concentrated within the manufacturing, retailing and business services sectors.
- 22 Despite this success, Wigan remains a borough of contrasts. While parts of the area are pleasant and privileged, many residents suffer from multiple deprivation and inequality in several aspects of their lives, including pockets of high unemployment, worklessness, low expectations linked to low levels of attainment and skills, poor health, substance misuse and high crime. Life expectancy for both men and women is below national averages. Some 17.6 per cent of the population are in receipt of benefits compared to a national average of 11.9 per cent. Overall, the borough is the 53rd most deprived local authority area in England, and more than 37 per cent of the population live in the most deprived ten per cent of wards in the country. Within the borough some areas have a greater concentration of inequality and the gap is widening.

The Council

- 23 The Council has a long-standing tradition of Labour control with currently 46 Labour, 10 Community Action Party, 10 Conservative, 4 Liberal Democrat and 5 Independent councillors. The Council operates under the Leader and Cabinet model of executive arrangements. The Cabinet is chaired by the Leader, and comprises the Leader and nine senior councillors, each having a service-related portfolio with some also responsible for cross-cutting themes.

- 24 In the 2002 Comprehensive Performance Assessment the Council was judged to be 'excellent'. The corporate assessment reported in December 2006 that the Council was performing strongly. The annual audit and inspection letter (March 2007) judged the Council as a four-star authority whose services were improving well.
- 25 The Council's officer structure comprises a well-established Strategic Management Team (SMT) of eight directors, led by the Chief Executive. Below this is the Corporate Delivery Team (CDT), consisting of the deputy directors. There are two external providers of services, the Wigan and Leigh Housing Company (ALMO) and the Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust. The Council employs around 6,500 staff, excluding schools staff.
- 26 The Council's budget for 2007/08 is £217.9 million. Adults Services budget amounts to £60.8 million and housing £68.6 million.
- 27 In 2006/07 the Council's priorities were: focusing on borough-wide priorities shared with partners; renewing focus on customers, including equality and diversity; joining up services better to meet customer needs; and pursuing value for money in delivering services.
- 28 The Council is a key partner in the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which the Leader chairs. The partnership board sets the overall strategic direction for Wigan and oversees seven thematic partnerships which focus on the key community strategy themes. The Council's vision, community plan and Local Area Agreement themes are well integrated. Those that are particularly relevant to the Supporting People programme are:
- healthier and happier lifestyles - Ensure access to the highest quality health, social care and support services. Being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving;
 - living where you feel safe- reducing crime, disorder and the fear of crime. Narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged people and communities and the rest of the borough. Improving the number of planned discharges from drug treatment projects; and
 - people living in decent affordable homes of choice - improving access to good quality and affordable housing with appropriate support.

The Supporting People programme

- 29 Wigan MBC acts as the administering local authority (ALA) for the Supporting People programme in the area. The Council received a Supporting People grant of £7,626,132 for 2007/08 which is an increase of approximately £500,000 on the previous year and the first increase in grant since the start of the programme. The recently produced national distribution formula that assesses appropriate grant levels based upon a range of factors including robust needs and supply analysis, indicates that Wigan is significantly under-funded and that a more appropriate allocation would be approximately double that received. The extent of the current shortfall in grant funding is therefore, a critical factor and our judgements are made in the knowledge of the limitations that that this imposes.

- 30** The Council receives an administration grant of £231,117 to contribute towards the administrative requirements of the programme. To maintain service provision, the Council has provided additional financial support both for services and for administration totalling £486,000 in the previous three years of the programme.
- 31** The service is located within the Adults' Services Department. The Supporting People team consists of five permanent and one temporary staff:
- Lead Officer;
 - Service Development Manager;
 - Finance and IT Manager;
 - Service Development Officer;
 - Project officer; and
 - Temporary Service Development Officer.
- 32** Sixty-three contracts cover 204 services. In total, the programme funds 2,654 accommodation-based units of support and 346 floating support units.
- 33** The five-year strategy identifies that there are gaps in provision across all client groups. The largest gaps between need and supply relate to people with drug and alcohol problems, people with complex needs and homeless people. The highest cost service at £564 per unit per week is an accommodation-based service for people with learning disabilities. Excluding alarm services, the lowest cost service is £3.53 per week and relates to low level support in a sheltered housing setting.

How good is the Supporting People programme?

What has the programme aimed to achieve?

- 34 The vision for the programme is set out in the five-year strategy 2005/10:
- 'A community where the quality of life of vulnerable people is continuously improved through the provision of effective housing-related support services, which offer choice and maximise the potential for independence and social inclusion'.*
- 35 In developing the strategy a number of themes emerged which shaped the approach to taking forward the Supporting People programme:
- under-provision of funding across most service user groups;
 - reconfiguration to meet local need - identified as necessary to meet the needs of the community;
 - limited access to move on accommodation - with the need to develop improved partnership agreements and protocols;
 - partnership/joint working - was stressed as the key to delivering at a strategic and operational level; and
 - needs assessment - gaps in information about some client groups were identified.
- 36 In addition, to identifying the desired outcomes of the programme, the strategy identifies the following objectives.
- To fund services for those people in greatest need of housing-related support services.
 - To target resources at national and local priorities thus enabling Supporting People to be a delivery tool for Health, Housing and Community Safety strategies.
 - To improve the quality and cost effectiveness of services by reviewing, monitoring and facilitating the sharing of good practice.
 - To ensure that decision-making and consultation processes are transparent.

- To work with providers to ensure that the views of service users have an impact on service development.
- To strive to provide opportunities for creativity in relation to the development and delivery of services, thereby offering more choice.
- To integrate housing-related support services within the care pathways approach to service delivery and ensure services have a preventative focus.
- To enable vulnerable people to access very short-term support to deal with specific issues that impede independence (to prevent the need for longer-term service interventions).

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

37 The assessment was based on the following key issues:

- governance and partnerships;
- grant compliance, strategy and needs;
- delivery arrangements;
- commissioning and performance;
- value for money;
- service user involvement;
- access to services and information;
- diversity; and
- outcomes for service users.

Governance and partnerships

38 The DCLG 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.

- 39 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. The Council demonstrates clear corporate support for the programme. The Commissioning Body is well run and effective in its decisions; there are good inter-agency links between related services for Supporting People client groups and there are highly effective relations with service providers. However, service users are not engaged in governance, the Core Strategy Development Group has not been fully effective and the Commissioning Body has been slow to recognise and to address this weakness.

Corporate commitment

- 40 Corporate commitment to the Supporting People programme in Wigan is strong. To date the Council has provided additional funding and resources to the programme totalling £486,000. The Deputy Chief Executive of the Council has chaired the Commissioning Body since the start of the programme providing improved profile for and connections with the programme both corporately and with partners. The programme is recognised as a key contributor to achieving the Council priority of reducing inequalities.
- 41 There is evident understanding of the role of the Supporting People programme as well as the opportunities and challenges faced. Supporting People targets are monitored corporately with links to the Local Area Agreement (LAA) established. The Council has strengthened the connections between its key service strategies and its vision statements and Community Plan commitments. These links are evident in the recently refreshed Supporting People strategy and in the related service improvement plan. The level of corporate ownership of the programme has helped to maintain housing support services for vulnerable people.

Commissioning Body

- 42 The Commissioning Body is well run, attended by appropriate partners and effective in decision-making. Those attending are senior staff in their respective organisations and therefore they are able to make appropriate connections with the Supporting People programme. Agendas and minutes of meetings follow a clear framework. Decisions are supported with succinct papers and as a result the Commissioning Body is ensuring that the programme is well managed.
- 43 There is only limited evidence that service user perspectives are thoroughly considered at the Commissioning Body. Although some initiatives evidence that impacts on service users are well thought out, for example service reviews and related value for money assessments, the lack of routine engagement with users on key strategic issues is a weakness. This has had limited impact so far, but as commissioning abilities grow it will become increasingly important to ensure that these decisions are well informed by user perspectives.
- 44 Some key services are not well engaged. Although there is no requirement for Children's Services to be represented on the Commissioning Body their influence is not apparent and given the priorities that have been identified in the five-year strategy and related prioritisation model their input could be beneficial.

Core Strategy Group

- 45** The Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group have struggled to develop clear and mutually beneficial identities. In the year 2005/06, the year when the five-year strategy was developed and when service reviews were at their height, the Core Strategy Development Group held only two meetings. Although this improved to eight meetings in 2006/07 there has been some duplication in information and reporting, with the Commissioning Body being too involved in operational considerations as opposed to direction, decision-making and strategic monitoring. The programme has suffered as a result with for example, some important delays evident in the programme's improvement plan.
- 46** The authority was slow to address the lack of clarity of roles in the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Development Group. This issue was identified and actions put in place to remedy this in January 2007. The improvement plan is not detailed about how the improvement in roles will be evaluated. Some strategic focus has been lost as a result, for example insufficient attention has been paid to reviewing the resources available for the programme's improvements and in progressing a medium-term financial plan and related commissioning plan.
- 47** The roles for both the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Development Group have been reviewed in a recent governance review and appropriate amendments have been made. The Core Strategy Development Group has been given the clear responsibility for monitoring the action plans for diversity and for service user involvement. Representation of appropriate stakeholders is evident and they have made key contributions to the debate on contract awards and also on the recent development of the procurement strategy, particularly in addressing the options appraisal element to ensure value is strengthened. As a result of the changes, there is starting to emerge a better division of work with the Commissioning Body concentrating on its decision-making functions and acting upon the detailed considerations of the Core Strategy Development Group.
- 48** Linked to the review of governance the Supporting People team has established a clear process for agenda setting in respect of the Core Strategy Development Group. Terms of reference have been revised and a forward plan for the Core Strategy Development Group agenda, in relation to areas covered at intervals throughout the year has been developed. The agenda is supported by agreed standard agenda items. Minutes are available on both the Council's own website and on the Supporting People Knowledge Network (spkweb). As a result, meetings are effective and agendas are not overloaded.

Accountable Officer

- 49 The Accountable Officer (AO) is a senior officer in the Council and well placed to champion the programme corporately. The AO attends both the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Development Group ensuring that there is an effective link between the two governance levels. The AO is the Assistant Director Finance (Adults Services) and is a representative on a range of corporate groups and projects. This has assisted the prompt re-alignment of ineligible funding and helped progress a framework for jointly commissioned services. As a result, housing support services for vulnerable people are recognised as a corporate priority.

Health, Housing, Social Care and Probation/criminal justice partnership arrangements

- 50 There are strong inter-agency links between health, housing, probation/criminal justice partners including evidence of collaborative work in relation to prolific offenders. There is a variety of routes into accommodation for offenders and those at risk of offending; a 'surgery' run by Wigan and Leigh Housing; and an Housing Advice Service run by NACRO. These approaches assist service users to access appropriate services.
- 51 There is evidence of closely co-ordinated multi-agency initiatives complementing Supporting People programmes, meeting the respective needs of different agencies, and highlighting possible future forms of Supporting People investment. Significant opportunities have been created by the merger of the Drug Action Team (DAT) and the Community Safety Partnership, some are for example, expressed in the resultant joint commissioning strategy. Collaborative work has contributed to using the Council's Invest to Save monies effectively. There is highly effective liaison between the Probation Commissioning Body representative, the Youth Offending Team Manager, the Assistant Director for Community Safety and Housing Strategy (Service) Manager which improves tailored support and accommodation services for offenders. Taken together this co-ordination helps to develop services that are effectively planned to assist vulnerable service users.
- 52 The Commissioning Body ensures that links are made with key departments and partners. For example, Housing Strategy are currently pursuing innovative methods of accessing funding for capital schemes and the Commissioning Body is ensuring that priority needs identified in the strategy are considered where funding becomes available. The authority ensures that where opportunities exist alternative sources of funding are accessed to address needs.
- 53 MAPPA⁴ arrangements are in place and working effectively. There were no problems of continuity of attendance on the part of major agencies, action points arising from planning meetings are clear, and progress against them is checked at review meetings.

⁴ Multi-Agency Public Protection Protocol.

- 54 Some key strategies reference links with the programme. The 2005 Older Persons Housing and Action Plan clearly references the importance of the Supporting People programme in planning accommodation and support services for older people. Similarly, there are clear links with the homelessness strategy. These strategic connections will help to ensure that services are appropriately and collaboratively planned.
- 55 Although we note that several positive actions are evident, it is a weakness that the learning disabilities joint investment plan 2005/08 makes no reference to Supporting People and only limited mention of the role housing-related support can make to the lives of people with a learning disability. Similarly, the teenage pregnancy action plan is silent about the contribution of Supporting People services. There is the potential for some lack of co-ordination in longer-term planning of services for Supporting People user groups.

Service providers

- 56 There is an established provider forum in place which is operating effectively. The forum is used to deliver provider identified training and to share good practice between providers. Providers are regularly canvassed to establish their views and agendas reflect their needs. Events are evaluated to ensure that they address member needs effectively. Providers are meaningfully engaged in developing the programme.
- 57 Relationships are good with provider organisations. Providers working across the region indicated that their relationship with the Council is significantly better than experienced elsewhere, in particular because the Supporting People team is open, approachable, actively involves them in strategic planning and pilot projects and encourages them to be involved with ideas for meeting gaps in provision. As a result, providers feel effectively engaged and have a sense of ownership with the Supporting People programme.
- 58 Training and information for providers is good. A series of training sessions have been delivered through the provider forum, these include training on value for money, equality and diversity and the contract review process. Training is free to providers and topics are agreed with the Supporting People team through the provider forum. As a result, providers feel well informed and supported.
- 59 The Council has effectively engaged smaller providers and the voluntary sector. The voluntary and community sector is well valued and represented in formal structures. This helps to ensure that approaches taken are well informed and tailored based on sound knowledge of the impacts of its requirements on different provider organisations. This promotes a healthy and continuing relationship with the sector.

Grant compliance, strategy and needs

- 60 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. Clear eligibility criteria are in place and good progress has been made in re-aligning spending to appropriate budgets. The five-year strategy is well informed by thorough analysis of needs and a prioritisation model assists the authority to focus its resources on the most pressing needs. Appropriate protocols have been used to improve access to move on accommodation. However, eligible tasks have not been examined in some areas. Medium and longer-term ambitions are lacking in the strategy.

Grant conditions and eligibility criteria

- 61 Eligibility criteria are in place and progress is being made to retract ineligible funding. The original criteria agreed in May 2004 were updated in October 2006. A total of £575,934 in ineligible funding has been identified, of which £143,014 has been saved in de-commissioned services and reinvested in eligible services. A further £340,000 has been re-aligned to appropriate budgets leaving £92,920 that is still to be released from currently funded services. This will be appropriately retracted during years 2007/08 and 2008/09. The authority is ensuring that services are funded by appropriate budgets and that where savings need to be made they are done in a way that does not threaten services.
- 62 The authority has not thoroughly examined all eligible tasks. Although thorough assessments have been undertaken where care services are provided alongside housing support, for example in learning disability services, in other service areas tasks have not been examined. There are no plans to do so as the authority believes that costs would outweigh any potential savings and carry risks of destabilising services. In the context of significant under-funding of the programme this is a missed opportunity to make savings where tasks are found not to align with those expected under Supporting People provision. Potentially, some savings could be made and these re-directed to address needs.

Five-year strategy

- 63 The five-year strategy is a comprehensive and clear document. Needs and supply information has been used well to establish where gaps exist and where priorities lie. The strategy identifies clear links to allied council and national strategies with strategic links to relevant areas such as social care, health and community safety. Appropriate stakeholders have been effectively engaged in the development of the strategy and demonstrate evident understanding of the priorities. Needs information has been recently refreshed and the strategy updated. The executive summary is concise and clear. The strategy forms a useful basis for the development of the programme.
- 64 The Supporting People strategy includes targets for improvement in key areas of service provision. The rationale for the targets is based upon realistically achievable improvements on national baseline figures. This approach is well structured and demonstrates intentions to continually improve outcomes for service users.

- 65 The Commissioning Body has recently reviewed progress made in comparison to the five-year strategy and this has informed its decisions about future funding. The review compares outcomes in key areas; delivery of applicable Community Plan and LAA objectives; national and local outcomes measures; stated strategy objectives and the extent that identified needs have been met. Recommendations for the use of this year's additional resource are well aligned to the strategic objectives and priority areas that have been agreed.
- 66 There has been only limited consideration of the gaps identified in the Supporting People strategy. Little or no progress has been made in closing these and there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the Commissioning Body has attached appropriate priority to this area. Although the strategy has been updated it does not indicate how known gaps in provision will be tackled in the future. The extent of the funding gap is very clearly a limiting factor with regard to future commissioning, however, given that it is a medium to longer-term strategy, there is scope to give a clear message about the authority's intentions. For example, the authority does aim over time to align a greater proportion of its spend to higher priority services through realising efficiencies and re-configuring services. The lack of stated future intentions weakens the document as a strategic tool.
- 67 The Council has been slow to develop an accessible summary of the Supporting People strategy. A summary leaflet has only recently been produced and distributed and it is positive that it can be made available in different formats. The lack of an accessible summary may have limited the understanding and knowledge of the strategy and its priorities to a wide customer base.

Needs mapping, analysis and review

- 68 The Council has undertaken comprehensive needs mapping. Shortfalls in service provision for client groups have been clearly identified and the information was used to inform the five-year strategy. A programme of prioritised strategic reviews of client group sectors is currently underway to support the approach to service provision. An early indicator of the effect of this approach is seen in the area of refugee support provision where the review proposes developing a 'drop in' model of service delivery to enable greater access and a more flexible service. As a result, the Council is intending to develop this type of service later this year. Individual research projects to determine specific needs have also been carried out, for example a study of older peoples housing and health needs.
- 69 There is an integrated approach to collection and gathering of data to support needs analysis. There are effective systems in place to collect and update housing-related support needs information. Information that is both qualitative and quantitative is systematically collected to feed into and update a shared needs and outcomes analysis. This information is stored on shared drive and used to inform priority bids for funding that align to strategic priorities.
- 70 Wigan Supporting People team have developed a prioritisation model to distinguish between higher priority needs. This is based on regional data and unmet need and was developed in 2005 and refreshed in 2007. This is a helpful and transparent way of focusing on the most pressing needs.

- 71 The Council is using effective strategic service reviews and tailored research projects to inform its future service provision. A programme of prioritised strategic reviews of client group sectors is currently underway to support the approach to service provision. Individual research projects to determine specific needs are also being carried out, for example the Council has recognised the gaps in service provision for travellers. There are two traveller sites and three showman sites in the borough. The Council has commissioned, through the gypsy and traveller forum, a survey with Greater Manchester partners to understand the needs of this group. The survey results will be delivered in December 2007 and be used to inform a strategy for the authority.

Strategy for access to move on accommodation

- 72 The Council has effectively recognised and assessed the barriers to move on accommodation. Approaches have been developed which include development of formal protocols; effective use of nomination rights and introduction of bond schemes to minimise the shortage of accommodation. The housing waiting list has also been reconfigured to address move on issues with a band identified specifically for people ready to move on. Providers indicated that move on was not a significant issue which supports the evidence that this approach is effective.
- 73 There has been only limited progress in addressing the integration of housing related support within the single assessment process. However, plans are in place to address this as part of an access review which is due to be completed by September this year.

Delivery arrangements

- 74 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. The team bring significant skills and expertise to the programme and have developed helpful relationships with corporate colleagues and with service providers. There is an evident focus on corporate, national and local area agreement (LAA) objectives in the work of the team. Risk assessment and management arrangements are robust and data returns to the CLG are accurate and timely. However, progress on the programme's improvement plan has not been effectively monitored at the Commissioning Body and the current improvement plan is incomplete. Although fairer charging arrangements are in place their availability is not proactively promoted.

Supporting People team

- 75 The team, although small, have the appropriate skills and capacity to effectively deliver the Supporting People programme. Team members come from a range of backgrounds and bring different skills and strengths to the team. There is good access to training and future training needs are identified through supervision and employee development review meetings. For example, a team member is undertaking a national vocational qualification in supply chain management. The team effectively manages the programme.

- 76 The Supporting People team accesses expertise from corporate services to enhance capacity. For example, Adults' Services administrative support; IT support and health and safety teams all assisted in developing the accreditation process. These corporate teams supplement the resource available to the programme.
- 77 The team communicates promptly with providers. Improvement plans and Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) notes are delivered within reasonable timescales. Improvement plans produced by the Supporting People team following the review visit are seen by providers as helpful and supportive in improving services. Providers have easy access to and are supported effectively by Supporting People team.
- 78 The team provides helpful guidance for providers. For example, the team has recognised that it needs to assist providers to compete in contract re-tendering and has provided information at the core strategy development group, the provider forum and through a newsletter article. This is a supportive approach that develops trust and recognises the valuable contribution of the provider sector.

Work planning

- 79 The Supporting People strategy forms the basis for work planning. An annual action plan is linked to the strategy and this is then reflected in individuals' objectives and targets. Links are in place with other key strategies such as housing and homelessness. Team members understand their role in delivery and this is reinforced by regular one-to-one meetings and annual appraisals. Strategic priorities are closely reflected in the work of the team.
- 80 The process of work planning has recently improved. Although annual work plans linked to the strategy have been a feature since the strategy was developed, the format of the plan and clarity of links to other key strategies and national priorities has not always been evident. The 2007/08 work plan has recently been developed using a revised corporate template and development process which has strengthened these areas and enhanced the focus on key priorities.

Local Area Agreements (LAA)

- 81 The Supporting People programme is explicitly referenced in the Local Area Agreement. Supporting People has been included in the annual refresh of the LAA by aligning the development priorities and funding. Many of the LAA outcomes are relevant to the programme. Specific targets are in place relating to independent living and access to move on arrangements. These targets are broken down by the Supporting People team into the key service user groups with outcomes showing that the majority of targets have been met or exceeded.

Performance monitoring and management

- 82 Progress on work plans has not been adequately reported to the Commissioning Body. A report has recently been provided to the Commissioning Body but this summarised the achievements of the previous two years. Although the report was comprehensive it identified some significant slippage for example in undertaking a review of emergency accommodation for homeless families with support needs which will now be completed two years after the original target. The lack of regular progress updates has reduced control of the programme and the Commissioning Body has been unable to be fully effective in assessing programme resource needs and impacts of any delays.
- 83 Performance monitoring arrangements have been recently improved. A comprehensive performance monitoring framework outlining the governance arrangements for the programme was developed in December 2006. Prior to this framework being developed, the budget and performance Indicators were reported to the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Development Group. A minimum of two reports have been submitted each year to Cabinet including an Annual Report for 2005/06. The recent improvements recognise that previous arrangements were not comprehensive and in particular develop monitoring beyond financial and key performance indicators. This is a helpful development that is starting to improve the level of awareness of progress and blockages.
- 84 The revised performance monitoring arrangements are still relatively new and further development is needed. The improvement plan for 2007/08 has yet to be fully populated with targets and outcomes measures. It is a concern that the improvement plan is incomplete two months in to the year to which it refers. This introduces some doubt about how effective performance improvement and work planning is.
- 85 There is a clear and consistent approach to contract monitoring. On-going contract monitoring is based upon a transparent assessment of risks with low risk contracts being visited on a six-month frequency and higher risk contracts having a range of increased measurement, monitoring and intervention where necessary. A planned visit standing items sheet has been produced which covers improvement plan monitoring, performance, risk, health and safety, support plans and service user consultation. As a result, meetings are focused and providers, staff and users are clear about the purpose and outcomes of the visit. Effective controls are in place to ensure that services are provided to agreed standards.

Fairer charging

- 86 A clear fairer charging policy is in place for the programme. The policy identifies those groups of people who are eligible for charging and sets out the basis on which charges will be applied. The policy and working arrangements have ensured a consistent service in this area.

- 87 The fairer charging assessments are customer-focused and effective in supporting users. Those referred to the service are contacted directly and offered home visits and full benefits checks. Joint working arrangements with the Department of Work and Pensions and Housing Benefit (HB) mean that the financial assessment team can provide a single assessment service across these areas and are successful in supporting customers to access benefits through for example the pension credits route.
- 88 However, take-up up-to-date is low and fairer charging is not proactively promoted. The Supporting People team is not aware of the scale of under-claiming of fairer charging. Although applicants are referred for assessment through HB returns, there has not been assessment of service users who are not eligible for HB. Some service users who are entitled to assistance may not be receiving it and a lack of knowledge of fairer charging may be discouraging some who need housing-related support from applying for it.
- 89 The authority has been slow to recognise the need for improvement. A draft promotion leaflet is currently being consulted upon and the intention is to support it with information on the website, leaflets in key access points and awareness raising with providers. However, there are no outcomes targets or success criteria agreed. Potential service users may not be aware of assistance that is available to them.

Risk management

- 90 Risk assessment is thorough. The risks to the Supporting People programme have been assessed in relation to the following categories:
- financial monitoring;
 - contract review and monitoring;
 - operational delivery of the Supporting People programme; and
 - service providers and strategic partners.

This detailed approach has ensured that all risks are identified and appropriate risk management arrangements have been developed accordingly.

- 91 A risk register is in place which is monitored on a regular basis by the Commissioning Body. A corporate business continuity planning event was recently held to which all providers were invited. However, it is a weakness that providers are only obliged to be working towards having contingency and business continuity arrangements in place. Risk management plans are in place and health and safety aspects of these have been checked both at validation visits and ongoing contract monitoring opportunities.

CLG SPLS data upload

- 92 Uploads are carried out on a quarterly basis as requested by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) department. Wigan Supporting People upload their SPLS Data on time and the data sent to the CLG is complete with no errors.

Commissioning and performance

- 93 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. Service reviews were well organised and used effectively to encourage improving services. Steady state contracts have been agreed and in most cases implemented. Cross authority working is productive in sharing good practice and reducing burdens on providers. Effective risk-based contract monitoring arrangements are in place. However, service standards for handling service user complaints are not sufficiently tailored or publicised; commissioning proposals have not been developed to enable prompt and effective use of this year's additional funding.
- 94 All service reviews were completed in line with the previous Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) requirements. Sixty three reviews covering approximately 240 services were completed. Approximately 400 individual improvements were identified for all the services that were scrutinised through the service review process. These improvements were based upon the observations of Supporting People officers, the comments from stakeholders and the input from service users. A thorough and comprehensive approach characterised the reviews which formed a good platform on which to improve services and to ensure value for money.
- 95 The contract review process is a positive driver for service improvement. Providers indicated that contract review reports and improvement plans are comprehensive and helpful catalysts for change and service improvement. Supporting People team members are considered to be knowledgeable, they effectively challenge service provision and are very keen to engage with providers in constructive discussions both during and after reviews. This approach supports providers in improving services for users.
- 96 Steady state contracts have been issued. These were developed and agreed with providers and implemented smoothly. Contracts include comprehensive monitoring of outcomes for service users. There is a sound platform for the continuance of services, offering stability in the provider market and encouraging a keen focus upon improved outcomes for customers.
- 97 There is a strategic approach to sector reviews. For example, there is a comprehensive review of sheltered housing underway which is mapping existing supply and methods of provision as well as developing consideration of alternative options. This approach means that difficult decisions for example, regarding reconfiguring provision which may result from review are supported by an evidenced rationale.

Quality assurance

- 98 Clear quality assurance arrangements were in place for the reviews. Consistency was achieved by ensuring that all validation visit reports were agreed by the Service Development Manager and all service review reports were agreed by the Lead Officer and then presented to the Commissioning Body for approval.

- 99 However, moderation systems were not in place to ensure transparency in review assessments. Although opportunities existed to develop cross-authority partnerships or other moderation arrangements for example, utilising members of the Core Strategy Development Group, these were not felt to be necessary. This seems to be borne out in practice as no appeals were received.

Reporting

- 100 All service reviews were reported, discussed and recommendations agreed at the Commissioning Body. The Commissioning Body actively challenged recommendations and the content of several reports.
- 101 Follow up reports following validation visits are reported to the Commissioning Body. This is particularly evident where there are concerns and specific requirements to improve. The Commissioning Body is well advised and knowledgeable about such issues.

Cross-authority

- 102 Cross-authority working is effective and generating benefits for the programme. The team has taken part in a wide range of cross-authority working aimed at improving consistency and sharing good practice. Supporting People representatives attend all meetings, participate fully and take the lead in some areas such as in discussions about an outcomes framework. Bolton Supporting People team has attended two Wigan validation visits and a member of Wigan's Supporting People Team attended Stockport's home improvement agency visit. Action taken by Wigan includes:
- adopting the North West Accreditation Process;
 - adopting the Greater Manchester Sheltered Housing passporting arrangements;
 - passporting of St Helens MBC's review findings of community alarms;
 - representation in the planning group for service user consultation in relation to the National Supporting People Strategy; and
 - drafting the data recording forms and guidance for the North West which fed into the National Supporting People Outcomes.

These approaches have helped to share better practices and reduce burdens particularly for providers who work in neighbouring authorities.

Improvement planning

103 The authority has a robust approach to encouraging service improvements. Formal contract monitoring meetings have been held for approximately 35 services which have enabled the Supporting People team to monitor action taken in response to service reviews. The approach being adopted is risk based; meetings with providers are held every six months unless a service is considered to be high risk which would trigger more frequent meetings. Quarterly service updates are completed by providers which identify:

- the number and nature of complaints;
- health and safety incidents;
- incidents of abuse; and
- changes to staffing.

There is close involvement with service providers and the Supporting People team use the range of information collected to focus improvements.

104 The programme has ensured that services have improved. At the time of original validation visits 75.3 per cent of services were assessed at level C or above with 20.1 per cent at level D and 4.7 per cent not applicable. This situation has improved significantly and at present 94.3 per cent of services achieve level C or above, 0.1 per cent achieves level D and 5.7 per cent are not applicable. However, it is disappointing to note that targets have not been set and monitored or supplementary Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) requirements used to drive improvements above minimum standards. Overall, however, service users have experienced improvements in the services that they receive.

Complaints

105 The complaints policy is clear and recently updated. Providers have responsibility for dealing with complaints in the first instance. Any complaints referred directly to the Supporting People team are passed to the relevant provider and their actions in response are monitored in contract meetings and in monitoring returns. Complaints are handled reasonably with providers closely involved. Actions to resolve dissatisfaction are followed up.

106 There is evidenced learning from complaints. The Commissioning Body has received reports with outcomes for service users clearly identified. Complaints received vary greatly and are highly individualised but where possible the team has tried to share improvements across provider services.

- 107 The approach to dealing with complaints from service users although developed with providers could be improved. It is positive that complaints are routinely reviewed in contract monitoring meetings, however, department service standards are not tailored for Supporting People circumstances in that they do not make clear specific standards for providers and for the SP team. The standards that are in place are not publicised to service users and closure of complaints is not agreed with them. The Supporting People team are not sufficiently encouraging prompt complaint resolution and service users do not know how long they should expect to wait to have their complaint dealt with.

Appeals process

- 108 Processes are in place to challenge decisions within a clearly defined timeframe. A three stage appeal process was agreed and is in place. Service providers consider that the process is accessible and clear. Service providers are satisfied with the opportunities to challenge decisions although the process remains untested.

Outcomes

- 109 Commissioning proposals are inadequate. Some limited commissioning of services has been agreed for 2007/08, for example, the funding of a floating support service for people with complex needs, however, providers have been requested to submit proposals to develop or extend existing services, linked where possible to high priority areas, that can be set up immediately and then be ended by March 2008. Although this reflects uncertainty about the level of future grant, this is an area that would have benefited from a longer-term commitment.
- 110 The Supporting People authority has been slow to address aspects of future service provision. Although the Supporting People strategy was concluded within government timescales, actions to address the future have been slow to develop. At present there is only a discussion paper that seeks to move towards a medium-term financial strategy and which starts to articulate how needs identified within the strategy will be provided for.
- 111 The authority has not developed a commissioning plan. Priority groups and future commissioning decisions are identified in other documents such as the developing medium-term financial plan (MTFP), the procurement policy and Supporting People strategy but in the case of the MTFP this is still in draft form and the procurement policy is so recent it has not yet been used. The lack of an overarching commissioning plan means that the information is not pooled and is therefore less effective in directing change.

112 It is clear that the Commissioning Body has focused on the priority needs identified in the strategy. There is evident support at Cabinet level for the re-alignment of spending to appropriate budgets and to areas of greatest need. The adults' services portfolio holder has been a keen supporter of the need to ensure that the Supporting People budget funds only eligible supported housing services and that other departments fund other necessary provision. There has however, been very little service development and gaps in provision remain which are a consequence of the budget shortfall. The limited development has been targeted at the key priority areas identified in a prioritisation model encouraged by the Commissioning Body.

Value for money

113 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. The programme has a well developed strategy and methodology for achieving value for money which has ensured that services that are funded provide value for service users. Appropriate use has been made of benchmarking and the cost and value 'matrix' has focused negotiations with providers on where improvements are required. Improvements in service quality together with reductions in costs have been delivered. Contract awards have encouraged improvements in value. However, efficiency savings have not been targeted well and have potentially threatened the continuance of some services. The Council has not thoroughly reviewed the use of the administration grant it receives to manage the programme to ensure that it delivers optimal value.

How do costs compare?

114 Average costs per unit of services in Wigan⁵ are slightly higher than national and regional averages when community alarms are excluded. The higher costs are largely attributed to specific higher cost services. These services are those providing for those who experience domestic violence, people with a physical disability and services for single homeless people. These services have been closely examined to establish the cost and value drivers.

Table 1

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Wigan	£ 0.48	£ 41.25	£ 41.25	£ 94.05
North West	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003

- 115** As a result of service reconfiguration including some decommissioning and re-alignment of service costs, average unit costs have reduced. Accommodation-based unit costs have reduced by £31.80 per week (20.4 per cent) and floating support services have reduced by £36.19 per week (40 per cent).

How is value for money managed?

Defining Value for Money (VFM)

- 116** The value for money policy and methodology have been developed with providers and were agreed and in place in September 2005 in time for inclusion in service reviews. Wigan's definition of value for money is thoughtful and sensitive both to the needs of providers and service users.

Methodology for contracted services

- 117** The Supporting People team have thoroughly assessed cost and quality elements and achieved a transparent assessment of services' value for money. There is particular emphasis on the contribution of the service to desirable outcomes which includes assessing key performance indicators as well as quality assurance framework outcomes, demand for the service, service user views and stakeholder views in relation to quality and strategic relevance of the service. The assessment scores these elements and combines the scores with cost elements in a ranked matrix that defines categories from high, reasonable or low quality with high, reasonable or low costs. All service review reports to the Commissioning Body referenced these value for money assessments. The programme ensures that the services it funds provide value for money for service users.
- 118** The contract review process has ensured continuing focus with providers on value for money. The cost and quality matrix has assisted ongoing discussions. The clear scoring of each factor in the assessment ensures that conclusions are seen as objective and further allows providers to see where change in one element or another can effect the most significant improvement in value.
- 119** Improved outcomes following service reviews and value for money assessments have been actively pursued. Where the conclusion is made that value for money needs to be improved recommendations to the Commissioning Body have been made about intended remedial action to negotiate revised contract prices or to revise the number of hours of support or the way the service is delivered. The team have then entered into negotiations with providers with clear intended outcomes.

Benchmarking

- 120 Benchmarking has been used effectively. Services have been benchmarked against other similar local, regional, and national services in relation to cost per hour of support and weekly unit cost. The process has been applied consistently across external and internal services. Benchmarks have informed:
- the range of overheads considered appropriate;
 - the quartile/average figures for non-staffing costs;
 - the need to consider the reasons for any apparent high unit cost or high overhead/non-staffing percentage; and
 - the need to hold individual negotiations with providers.

The approach taken has ensured that benchmarks are used appropriately as the starting point for further evaluation of cost drivers and value drivers.

Procurement

- 121 A sound Supporting People procurement strategy has recently been developed. The strategy explicitly seeks to ensure that new services are commissioned with a focus on value for money, including building capacity and maintaining the stability of the sector. The strategy requires commissioners to consider a variety of options prior to service commissioning and as a result, maintain a focus on VFM outcomes. There has been no commissioning of new services to date and so the impact of the procurement strategy is not yet evident.

Improving VFM

- 122 Value for money savings have been identified and savings achieved. Although actual cash savings have been relatively modest at £137,849, this amounts to approximately two per cent of the total Supporting People budget. There has been an appropriate and effective focus on extending the value of services by getting more for the same as opposed to driving cash savings.
- 123 Commissioning decisions and changes to services have been thoroughly researched and thoughtfully implemented. The Commissioning Body has based its decisions on thorough and transparent assessments of value for money. To date nine services have been reconfigured to better meet the needs of service users and four have been appropriately decommissioned. Relevant stakeholders were closely involved where changes were necessary and this minimised the impact of changes for service users.

- 124** The team has examined high costs imaginatively. For example, the Supporting People team is engaged in ongoing dialogue with a provider about the high costs of a high priority service. The team have demonstrated both a concerted and sensitive approach. The provider is focusing on relocation planned for 2008 as a way to reduce costs which are primarily based on a high staff to service user ratio. A move to new larger premises will mean the delivery of the service with the same staff number supporting more users and resulting in a reduction in the cost per head. The approach taken by the Supporting People team is pragmatic, based on delivering a service that meets the needs of service users and although they are challenging, their intervention does not threaten the continuance of provision.
- 125** Awards of inflationary contract uplifts are based on value for money assessments of services. In 2007/08 contracts were awarded inflationary uplifts for the first time since the start of the programme. The uplift has been applied at 2.5 per cent for services that are demonstrating value for money; at 1.25 per cent where VFM has not been fully achieved but benchmarking indicates that costs are closer to an acceptable figure and nil where services are assessed as not achieving value for money where there is insufficient progress towards this aim. This approach is proportionate, rewarding those who provide value for money services and providing some incentive to those who are not.
- 126** The Council has added stability to provider services where costs threaten the continuance of strategically relevant services. Where a provider of a number of services for vulnerable groups had been struggling for four years in a significant deficit position and where the likely outcome was the loss of a number of these services, the Supporting People programme agreed part-funding to support retention of these services. The increased grant in this year enabled this decision. This was a difficult decision which was debated extensively by the Commissioning Body. The funding negotiations improved value and secured four additional dispersed units of accommodation for people referred by Housing Aid. Although this decision reduced funding available for the development of new services it protected the delivery of existing services for a range of vulnerable services users.
- 127** Although efficiency savings have been made they have not been sufficiently well targeted. A total of £710,000 in savings has been made since the commencement of the programme which is in excess of Gershon expectations. However, over half of this is due to not applying annual contract uplifts as opposed to directly identifying or encouraging more efficient and effective working practices. Both high and lower cost services have been treated in the same way. This approach carries with it some risk of endangering services where there is less room for efficiencies.
- 128** There is no efficiency plan for the current year. As contract uplifts have been awarded for 2007/08 the forecast efficiency savings have dipped from approximately £187,000 in 2006/07 to £39,541 in 2007/08. The authority has not considered how efficiencies will be delivered and gains made for service users.

Cross-authority approach

- 129 Limited progress has been made in the area of cross-authority commissioning. Although Wigan is represented at the cross-authority group which is investigating joint opportunities, there has been no commissioning of new services to date and no future opportunities have been identified. Opportunities for improving both value for money and service availability for users may be missed.

Administration grant

- 130 The Council is unable to demonstrate it gets good value for money from the administration grant. The administration grant of £231,000 has been supplemented by £40,000 in council funding but this additional contribution has been largely targeted on completion of initiatives in advance of inspection. Benchmarking comparisons have been made comparing administration grant and salary costs across 21 local authorities and the decision has been taken to reduce costs by relocating the team. However, there is little evidence of comparative work undertaken to demonstrate that the level of spending is reasonable for what is achieved. The team has not sufficiently challenged itself to ensure that it delivers optimal value.

Service user involvement

- 131 Strengths and weaknesses are balanced. The programme has engaged service users imaginatively and at key points. A variety of approaches have been used with service users informed of improvements made as a result of their comments. However, user involvement has faltered at strategic levels and a clear strategy for involvement and consultation has only recently been developed and its actions are not fully integrated in the programme's improvement plan. There is insufficient focus on the intended outcomes of service user involvement.

Opportunities

- 132 There is a proactive approach to service user involvement. Service users are engaged through a variety of routes. There is a service user group which is actively involved in reviewing newsletters, publications and leaflets. Customers have recently been involved in the selection of a training consultant to deliver training to the service user peer group. Questions for the consultant interview were developed through the service user group and two service users were on the interview panel. These are positive initiatives that help to ensure that the programme is well aligned with service users' needs.
- 133 The Supporting People authority has mapped relevant community and advocacy groups as well as specialist agencies but there are limited outcomes of the work to date. This work is relatively recent and at the time of inspection there were only future intentions to meet with those agencies who work with key user groups twice per year. To date some agencies have been involved where necessary but there has not been a consistent or concerted effort to engage with the wider expertise that is available in such groups and this has limited the contribution that service users have made to the programme.

- 134** Service user engagement within the governance structure of Supporting People is not well developed. Service users are not currently represented on the Core Strategy Development Group or elsewhere within the formal structure. Plans are in place to address this through re-establishing the core user group. However, to date this aspect of service user involvement has proved difficult to maintain with the result that some urgency in developing and delivering improvements has at times been lacking.

Involvement in contracting and monitoring

- 135** Service users were well engaged in the service review process. Alternative approaches such as service user events or individual approaches were used to ensure engagement. Pre-review discussions held with providers determined both the nature of their user engagement and whether there were particular requirements, such as the need for translators or pictorial questionnaires. This ensured that service users influenced the assessment of providers and their services.
- 136** Service users have been kept informed about service improvements. The Supporting People team ensured that assessments of services made at the time of reviews were shared with service users and that they were updated and involved where necessary about any improvement actions. Providers are clear that this communication happens. The team have sufficiently prioritised this area and encouraged the engagement of service users in the performance of the service they receive.

Outcomes from user involvement

- 137** Wigan Supporting People has been proactive in delivering service user identified improvements. Suggestions from service users during the validation visits to schemes have been used to improve services. These include service users being given copies of support plans; improved cover in the absence of scheme managers, added security for residents, overnight visitors allowed and improved guidance on how to use equipment. Service users can influence improvements that improve their quality of life.
- 138** As the service user consultation and involvement plan is recent having been consulted upon during 2006 and finalised in December 2006, there are only a few identifiable outcomes so far. The action plan related to it identifies key improvements but all are planned for the future, and although it is positive that some actions are included in the annual service improvement plan, not all are. Additionally, it is not sufficiently focused upon outcomes in that there are no indicators of success which assist focus. Potentially, this reduces the certainty that improvements will be delivered.

Access to services and information

- 139** Strengths outweigh weaknesses. Information about Supporting People services is well promoted in a wide variety of public access points, through newsletters and via the Council's website. There are examples of service users' involvement in helping to develop information about the housing support services that are available. However, access to services has not been thoroughly examined and the lack of co-ordination of arrangements for access to long-term services may be restricting the availability of short-term units to those who need housing support.

Access and referral to services

- 140** Referral routes into and from short-term services are not well co-ordinated. With the exception of homelessness, learning disability and mental health services where access is either a statutory duty or co-ordinated via a panel, other services are accessed via individual provider agencies. The Supporting People team does monitor referrals through the quarterly service updates submitted by providers but there is little to demonstrate that this has been robustly analysed to identify where there are problems or barriers. Potential access difficulties may exist that the Supporting People team is unaware of.
- 141** Providers have been well advised of Supporting People access requirements and referral routes. There is an evident awareness of the need to ensure that limited services are made available to those who would benefit most from housing support services.
- 142** Protocols are in place with local authority teams and the arms length housing organisation relating to substance misusers, offenders and young people. These protocols include regular meetings and monitoring, appropriate training and formal referral arrangements. Access to and move on from these services is well structured.
- 143** The health initiative providing specialist health visitors for vulnerable and homeless people demonstrates good practice in social inclusion. The outcome is that people who would otherwise have not received a housing-related service are advised of and supported to access supporting people assistance.
- 144** Access to services is not appropriately monitored at present. Monitoring and tracking of queries and routes of access is a very recent initiative. There are no co-ordinated arrangements for access to long-term services. Those who may need longer-term solutions are assumed to be assisted by providers. Outcomes measurement is not yet used to identify problems and to tailor improvements such as targeted marketing. The team cannot be certain that those in the greatest need are accessing services.

Information

- 145** The Supporting People programme is well promoted. Helpful information is available in public outlets. A Supporting People leaflet has been developed. Information is clear and helpful to customers. Alternative formats and languages are available and contact details are clearly displayed in the leaflet. This clear information is well targeted at service users and advocates.
- 146** A good Supporting People newsletter is provided for frontline staff and service users. The news bulletin is presented in a clear style with alternative formats and language options offered. The bulletin contains information about service reviews, service user information and general interest items. Information is also provided about Supporting People team contact details and how to access the Supporting People directory. The newsletter was introduced in November 2006 and service user input has yet to be fully developed, although there are plans to address this through the recently re-established core user group. Communication with staff and service users is improving understanding of the programme and what it can offer.
- 147** Although their involvement has not been consistent service users have been involved in the development of some information and publicity. The recently restructured core user group has for example agreed the user targeted summary of the strategy and agreed the general leaflet on Supporting People services. As a result, information is better tailored to service user needs.
- 148** The Council is being proactive in its approach to promoting the role of Supporting People. The Council has recently published articles in its external newspaper 'Borough Life' about how the Supporting People programme has improved lives of service users. The article, entitled 'There's no place like home' used a real life case study to demonstrate positive outcomes. This is increasing wider knowledge of the benefits of the programme.

Directory

- 149** A comprehensive directory of supporting people services is in place. The directory gives clear details about the type of services providers are delivering, access and contact details. The directory also contains a helpful list of other voluntary organisations which is informative for customers. The directory is widely available and makes it easier for vulnerable people to find out what services are available locally and how to access them.
- 150** Clear information about homelessness is available on both the Council and arms length management organisation (ALMO) websites. Links to information are easy to follow by using a directory of services. Information and contact details about homelessness and housing advice are easy to understand and follow.

Website

- 151 The Council's website is easy to navigate and contains a lot of useful information on the Supporting People programme. Separate areas provide information for service users and providers. Key policies and service information are also available. Existing and potential service users can find information on what services are available and how to access them. Useful links are also provided to other organisations that can provide advice and support to vulnerable people to supplement housing-related support.

Access to fairer charging

- 152 Information on fairer charging is not widely circulated and limited efforts have been made by the Supporting People team to promote fairer charging with service users and providers. A revised leaflet is available which informs service users what fairer charging is and how an application can be made. There is a reliance on service providers to ensure that service users have access to information on fairer charging and to encourage applications. However, there has been limited promotion of the assessments. As a result, existing and potential service users may be unaware of the assistance that is available to them.

Diversity

- 153 Strengths outweigh weaknesses. Provider services have been examined with regard to their focus on diversity and equality. There is a strong corporate focus in this area which has assisted the Supporting People team in identifying diverse needs and translating these into actions. Analysis of service uptake has been undertaken with some areas reflecting fair access and others where further examination is being undertaken. Some work has been done to research the needs of traditionally excluded groups but this is recent and it is too early to say what outcomes may emerge. Engagement with these groups is lacking.

Identifying diverse needs

- 154 The Council is well informed of the diversity and equality needs present in the communities it serves. Baseline data, such as the housing needs survey, census data, client record data and homelessness returns, have been effectively used to provide solid information about needs and supply. This informed the development of the five-year strategy and strategic priorities for the service. A wide range of stakeholders were involved in the process contributing to a comprehensive understanding of requirements.
- 155 The Supporting People team ensure that services have a focus on diversity and equality issues. Diversity and inclusion are explored and challenged at validation visits as a component of the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). Client information data is used to establish that services demonstrate equal access for customers. The authority ensure that continuing attention is paid to meeting a wide range of needs present in the community.

- 156** The Council encourages better practice in diversity. The Council has a clear action plan to achieve level three of the Equalities Standard which is reflected in actions in the Supporting People programme. Providers have been provided with free training on equality and diversity to support the delivery of the Council's equality and diversity aims. This is a helpful and supportive approach which demonstrates the Council's commitment.
- 157** The Council has used client record data and census data to establish uptake of services by black and minority ethnic (BME) users. This information has indicated that the proportion of service users from BME groups is higher when compared to the proportion of the population. This suggests that there is positive access with a good level of support services for refugees. However, low access to sheltered housing by BME groups has also been identified and barriers to access are currently being examined so that appropriate actions to address some possible inequity can be progressed.
- 158** Ongoing research is undertaken to broaden knowledge of needs present. A housing needs research project was completed in February 2007. This was based on assessing the needs of people with learning disabilities. This project supports survey work undertaken by the Supporting People team to identify the levels of and range of needs of people with learning disabilities who currently benefit from Supporting People services. This up-to-date and detailed knowledge can be used to tailor service provision.

Excluded groups

- 159** The Council has undertaken an analysis to identify excluded groups of vulnerable people. Specific related surveys have been commissioned for example relating to Gypsy and traveller communities and refugees which have been used to inform strategic planning. However, this work is recent and it is too early for outcomes to be identified from this work.
- 160** Engagement with some hard-to-reach groups has been slow to date. Although excluded groups have been identified it has been difficult for the Council to find effective routes of engagement, for example with BME and lesbian and gay communities. Involvement of these groups is not yet effective.
- 161** The Council has a clear process in place to ensure a focus on diversity. All service areas of which Supporting People is one, undertake a comprehensive service needs requirement assessment. The process brings a consistent approach to services identifying and developing areas for improvement. This process has been used effectively to enable the Supporting People service to develop a diversity action plan.
- 162** The Council has a strategic focus on diversity. A corporate diversity policy officer assists in promoting a work stream approach supported by diversity champions to ensure that diversity is an integral part of each individual's job. Supporting People service providers are monitored on their diversity focus through the contract and assessment framework.

Cultural sensitivity

- 163** There has been only limited attention to issues of cultural sensitivity. The consultation undertaken during the service review programme allowed the Supporting People programme to address some issues of cultural sensitivity with providers. Some user generated service improvements resulted but very little related to cultural needs. Although there is a requirement of providers to provide culturally sensitive services there is little evidence that this is robustly assessed, challenged and improvements sought.
- 164** Appropriate efforts have been made to involve service users widely. In advance of service reviews the Supporting People team met with providers to determine how users may be best involved and to plan for particular communication aids such as translators or pictorial questionnaires. The approaches used have been mindful of cultural needs and the importance of ensuring the widest engagement.

Outcomes for service users

- 165** Strengths outweigh weaknesses. The programme demonstrates strong focus on improving outcomes for service users. This is evidenced in validation visits, ongoing contract monitoring and improvement planning with many examples of user identified improvements that have been made. Some limited additional support has been provided through service efficiencies and external funding has been accessed and used to promote change that directly improves outcomes for service users. The contribution of the Supporting People team to the development of the national outcomes measures has been positive and used to enable prompt take-up of the measures locally. However, little progress has been made in addressing gaps in service provision and future plans in this area lack ambition.

Supporting People service improvements

- 166** The Council can evidence clear improvements to the quality of services for users. An improvement register collates identified service improvements to service delivery. Qualitative improvements include: the review of night cover in a service where vulnerability was perceived; over night stays for service users' families; improved security measures and improved facilities such as new central heating and shower rooms. In addition, a number of services have been reconfigured to provide additional units of support for service users. These include four units for single homeless people; six units for women at risk of domestic violence and five units of floating support for young people at risk.
- 167** The Council has been proactive in delivering service user identified improvements. Suggestions from service users during the validation visits to schemes have been used to improve services. These include improved cover in the absence of a scheme manager, added security for residents, overnight visitors allowed and improved guidance on how to use equipment. Service users can see that action is taken in response their comments.

- 168** The Council has used significant external funding to address Supporting People gaps. Resources have been accessed by Supporting People and the housing strategy team which include sources such as; Invest to Save, the neighbourhood renewal fund (NRF), the Council's general fund and the Learning Disability Development Fund. A variety of projects have been funded and include a bond guarantee scheme, housing options worker and a sanctuary scheme. As a result, there are clear improvements for service users who have been supported through these schemes.
- 169** The Council can evidence clear improvements to the quality of services for users. QAF scores have consistently risen since the commencement of assessment with almost 100 per cent of services now being scored at level C or above as compared to approximately 75 per cent at the start. These are real improvements that service users will experience.

Choice for service users

- 170** Some changes to services is improving choice for service users. As a result of service reviews, a number of schemes have been remodelled to provide a wider range of services for users. For example, the provision of additional floating support services and additional mental health move-on accommodation. However, some weaknesses remain in the range and accessibility of services, for example, in services for older people and for people with learning disabilities which require longer-term strategic consideration and possible re-modelling.
- 171** Lack of provision has not been sufficiently addressed. The gaps identified in the five-year strategy still exist and plans to address these are insufficiently developed. The medium-term financial plan that is currently in draft starts to address this issue but it is being developed in year four of the programme which indicates some lack of ambition in the face of budget constraints to develop creative solutions to meeting supply shortages.

Support plans

- 172** The Supporting People team has ensured that support planning is effective for service users. Support plans were found to be in place in schemes we visited, they had been agreed with service users and were in most cases subject to regular review. Plans demonstrated that there had been joint working, for example with the Drug Action Team to complement other plans in place. As a result, service users benefit from a joint and co-ordinated approach to support provision.

Outcome measurement

- 173** The Wigan Supporting People team has been actively involved in developing the national outcomes framework. The team have worked with partner Supporting People authorities to help develop and pilot the new measures. Wigan is now well placed to implement the measures having liaised with providers as the measures were in development. Steady state contracts include reference to the measures and as a result the benefits of comprehensive outcomes measurement will be realised promptly.

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

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

- 174 Drivers for improvement outweigh barriers. Some increases in support units available have been made which although small in number, have been well targeted relative to a transparent prioritisation model. Services have improved considerably while cost savings have been realised. However, failings in the governance relationship between the Commissioning Body and the core strategy development group were not recognised and acted upon early in the programme.
- 175 The Council has made improvements to services which benefit service users. The scope for additional provision is limited by the extent of under funding and the authority has been innovative in providing additional support from existing resources. There is some evidence of change in provision to address gaps identified in the strategy:
- supported by the Supporting People team and housing strategy team, a local provider has secured Housing Corporation funding to develop a mental health accommodation-based project. This will enable an additional 8 units of support to be provided for the same level of revenue funding and provide access to a further 6 move-on units;
 - an additional 15 units of floating support are being provided from existing resources; and
 - through reconfiguration of services, 4 additional accommodation units and 11 floating support units have been provided.
- 176 The improvements in provision have been thoughtfully targeted. Acknowledging that all service needs cannot be fully satisfied, the Supporting People authority has developed and agreed with providers an objective basis for ranking priorities for services. The resulting prioritisation model categorises priorities in order from bands one to three. The improvements in the programme have been targeted at the band one priorities. These include services for people with drug and alcohol problems, those with complex needs and services for single homeless people. Where services have been improved or enhanced providers have been well engaged and key priorities have been addressed.
- 177 Service reviews were well programmed, thoroughly undertaken and resulted in improved services. Sixty three service reviews were completed in line with the previous Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) deadline. An improvement register details service improvements delivered or developed following validation visits. This provides evidence of improvements in 36 out of a possible 46 service groupings, approximately 400 individual improvements. This has promoted a culture that is focused on improving outcomes for service users.

- 178** Key and service performance indicators demonstrate overall continuing improvement in each of the last three years:
- KPI 1 - service users who are supported to establish and maintain independent living demonstrates improving performance for all but one service user group; young people at risk;
 - KPI 2 - service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements shows significantly improving outcomes for all service user groups;
 - SPI 1 - service availability demonstrates generally improving performance for each service user group; and
 - SPI 2 - utilisation levels demonstrates improving utilisation levels with the exception of a slight decrease relative to older people which reflects some outdated provision prompting the review of older persons services.
- 179** In addition, Wigan participated in the national outcomes pilot work. It has helped to shape this important national initiative, piloting the use of service user outcome indicators in eleven services. The learning has been used to include the outcomes requirements in the steady state contracts. This proactive approach ensures that service users experience prompt benefits from the improved focus on outcomes.
- 180** The programme has demonstrated improving value for money over time. Significant savings have been realised over the period of the programme to date amounting to £890,000. At the same time the team have encouraged, and providers have delivered service user identified improvements. Case studies we viewed provided real examples that demonstrate how Supporting People has benefited lives of service users from a range of needs groups. Savings are in excess of efficiency expectations and were achieved while improving the quality of services for users.
- 181** The authority has been slow to recognise a lack of clarity in the identity of the Commissioning Body and the Core Strategy Development Group. New terms of reference and revisions to the memorandum of understanding were introduced in January 2007, and formal consideration of advice and decisions made by each group are now routinely considered at meetings. There is an evidenced improvement in the outcomes focus of the groups and a growing maturity in the relationship. However, because the changes are recent they are only just starting to have effect. Had the need for change been acted upon earlier the programme may have progressed more effectively particularly in regard to addressing service gaps and monitoring progress.

How does the Council manage performance?

- 182** Drivers and barriers for improvement are balanced. The strategy has shaped the programme and this is reflected in improvement planning. The Commissioning Body has provided consistent leadership and encouraged a clear focus on improvement priorities. Performance reports have been adequate and have recently improved to more fully enable monitoring of a wider range of programme objectives beyond key performance indicators. Some barriers exist including a lack of focus on ongoing efficiencies. Commissioning proposals are not sufficiently developed to enable prompt take-up of additional grant. Some delays in delivery of improvement initiatives result from flawed monitoring and proposals to address slippage are inadequate.
- 183** The Supporting People strategy has been used to set and maintain the direction of the programme. Key national and corporate objectives are articulated. The strategy uses detailed analyses of needs by group making clear where gaps in provision exist. It is realistic about where the Council can be most effective in bringing about service improvements. Service reviews, value for money assessments, risk-based contract monitoring, contract renewal negotiations and performance monitoring have followed an evident theme set by the strategy, of reducing inequalities through improving services and focusing on service user needs.
- 184** The Council has a well developed focus on diversity issues. Currently, the Council has achieved level two of the equalities standard and aims to achieve level three by October 2008. Diversity has been mainstreamed in order to ensure that it is embedded and an integral part of all aspects of service delivery. We found this to be the case in our discussions with staff at all levels. Diversity impact assessments are undertaken on policies and strategies and diversity and equality is addressed in key strategies, for example the corporate consultation policy. This approach encourages a culture that values diversity.
- 185** Future plans are well informed. For example, the plan for service user consultation and involvement is informed from a number of areas including Wigan Council's consultation toolkit; national Supporting People guidance issued by the Communities and Local Government department; the Adults' Services department's research and governance framework; providers and the views of local service users about how they wish to be consulted. The consultation and involvement working group comprising representatives from the Supporting People team, the Housing Strategy team and providers oversees work in this area and the group can seek representation from users, advocates and independent representatives. The authority ensures that its future aims are based on sound knowledge and effective consultation.

- 186** The annual service improvement plan and target setting aligns closely with the vision and priorities set in the five-year strategy. The plan has recently been improved and very clearly identifies links with corporate and national policy as well as other strategic priorities. Targets have related to the key performance indicators and service performance indicators. Performance has been reported to the Commissioning Body and to Cabinet. This approach helps to improve service quality for service users now and in the future.
- 187** The Commissioning Body has provided appropriate leadership for the programme. The right things have been focused upon including national and strategic priorities through the development of the prioritisation framework and in engaging with corporate colleagues and political leaders. They prioritised consideration of key improvements well ahead of inspection. KLOE comparisons with excellent descriptors were compared to current practice and the self-assessment was developed around 12 months prior to inspection and routinely updated, revised and improved by agreement with the Commissioning Body. This approach has ensured that improvements are focused upon at a high level and that their delivery is effectively supported.
- 188** With some exceptions performance reporting is generally sound. A range of appropriate measures are taken routinely and reported at appropriate levels including at the Commissioning Body, to the Council's Cabinet and to providers. In addition, to financial monitoring, improvements are monitored through change in quality assessment framework (QAF) scores and the direction of travel of key and local performance indicators is also reported. However, we did find that targets for improvement in key performance indicators were not thoroughly and routinely reported upon. Overall, it is clear that the authority measures performance of the programme across a wide range of indicators and reports this information appropriately ensuring that improvement actions result.
- 189** Performance reporting is improving. The Council is rolling out its corporate approach to performance reporting with its improved 'performance plus' system. This establishes a corporate standard which references regional and corporate priorities, key performance trend indicators, SMART⁶ targets and narrative comments upon progress. This is a robust methodology which is in the process of being applied to the programme and will ensure that more rounded performance information is considered at key governance levels.
- 190** The Supporting People team are self-aware with appropriate attention to learning. The cross-authority group is used effectively to share practice as are opportunities to engage with providers. We saw evidence of two way learning and sharing of practices as well as direct training provided by the team. The team clearly listen and amend their practices and requirements accordingly. Although we commented about some weaker elements of complaints handling we also saw how processes were changed as a result of complaints and contract monitoring strengthened. The approach is supportive of continuous improvement.

⁶ Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

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

- 191** However, some elements of efficiency and value for money are under-developed.. Although significant savings referred to elsewhere in the report have been realised, some elements of the approach are lacking for example, efficiency savings have been made in the main by not applying annual contract increases and in the 2007/08 year there is no articulated approach to achieving ongoing Gershon efficiencies. Value for money efforts have failed to examine eligible tasks in some services. Although savings have been made in the past there is less certainty about the future performance in this area.
- 192** Future commissioning aspirations are not well developed or sufficiently planned. Although the review process has been used effectively to improve and remodel existing services there has only been limited achievement in addressing gaps in provision. In the current year some additional grant has been awarded but plans are insufficiently detailed to allow for its prompt and effective use. The Supporting People team have funded some priority areas and asked providers for their proposals for services benefiting high priority service areas that can be provided and potentially decommissioned within the year. This is a short-term approach which the Supporting People programme is intended to avoid.
- 193** There are some aspects of the performance of the programme that have not been routinely or effectively considered at formal levels. Although it can be seen that finance and key performance indicator (KPI) reports are a routine feature at the Commissioning Body meetings there is less evidence that the programme outputs are regularly compared to the strategic objectives of the five-year strategy. Recent inspection preparation activity has narrowed this gap and a more complete performance reporting system is being developed but the fact that so many initiatives and improvements have been very recent and are not yet fully embedded is a weakness.
- 194** The service's improvement plan has not been robustly monitored. We found some areas of significant slippage that have not been challenged. The Commissioning Body and Cabinet were updated in March 2007 with a report that summarised the progress made as compared with the strategy. Several areas where significant delays have occurred were listed. It has recently been identified that improvement plan monitoring would benefit by being underpinned by milestones and progress updating and by its actions being prioritised. However, this is the second year of its use and the programme and service users would have benefited from these observations being made sooner.
- 195** The Improvement Plan (2007/08) does not sufficiently address delays in the previous year's plan. It cannot be established that any slippage has been addressed appropriately, for example, by refined targets, increased monitoring or additional resource allocation. For example, a review of emergency accommodation for homeless families with support needs was due in 2005/06 but is now scheduled for completion in March 2008. Similarly, a review of domestic violence provision originally planned for 2005/06 is now scheduled for completion in December 2007. Minutes of meetings do not show that these issues have been challenged.

Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

196 Drivers for improvement outweigh barriers. The team has the appropriate skills and accesses corporate support. Provider relations are good and trust has developed which has enabled potentially difficult issues to be resolved promptly. Training and development has been well targeted and corporate strengths in diversity have translated into actions in the Supporting People team. The recently agreed procurement strategy forms a good basis for future change and limited funds have been enhanced by access to further funding streams with Supporting People influencing investment for priority service user groups. However, human resources and finances are not well planned in the medium-term to support delivery of the programme's improvements.

Access to the appropriate skills, tools and finances to deliver improvement

197 The Supporting People team although small includes the skills necessary to focus on programme priorities. Skills include financial expertise, contracting skills and service delivery skills. The team are evidently capable and providers that we met with were clear that the team's skills and approach were highly positive aspects.

198 Corporate support is readily accessed. The programme receives support from a range of corporate teams including the corporate procurement manager; the adults' services department; the corporate performance team; and the housing strategy team. There is evidence of working arrangements that routinely engage these teams and add to the resources and specialist knowledge available to assist the achievement of the programme's aims.

199 The authority has developed a sound plan to effectively engage service users in contributing to improvement. The Corporate Consultation Strategy 2004 provides clear strategic direction and more recent initiatives support the increasing role of service users. The consultation and involvement working group is overseeing the development of an initiative to engage service users in contract monitoring through the recruitment of lay assessors/peer reviewers. This process is currently underway and will provide improved opportunities for service users to monitor delivery of improvements and to shape provision.

200 There is evidence of good joint working. The principle of adoption of existing good practice approaches including the use of single model contracts for joint commissioning of services between social care and the Supporting People team has been accepted. This approach will promote joined up and complementary services for service users.

201 The relationship with providers is mature and benefits service users. It is a clear strength that providers feel fully engaged in the Supporting People programme and its development. A particular example of this maturity is the recent agreement to apply differential contract uplifts based on value for money assessments. This is typically a highly sensitive area but discussions were focused on improvement, equity and effectiveness and resulted in appropriate awards being made together with strengthening the case for improving value.

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- 202** Supporting People is effectively championed at Cabinet level by the Adult Services' portfolio holder. There is continuing development at Cabinet of portfolio roles which can support the further development of the programme. Current discussions are focusing upon developing cross-cutting themes such as diversity and equality, improvement, customers and health and vulnerable people. This has the potential to join up directorate working and to enhance the knowledge of and support for the programme.
- 203** Although IT systems are generally effective and support staff in undertaking their roles, further development would benefit the programme. Client record data and contract information is maintained on accessible and reliable systems. We saw evidence of good record keeping and robust analysis enabled by effective use of IT. However, it would be preferable if systems were interactive. Currently they do not enable providers to update information, access forms or submit Quality Assessment Framework information online. This places some additional burden on Supporting People team members when their resource could be better directed.
- 204** The improvement plan for the programme relies too heavily upon limited team resources. The plan is comprehensive identifying important initiatives that develop the programme's effectiveness. However, there are 85 initiatives listed of which 67 rely solely on resources within the Supporting People team. The team numbers five people plus a temporary post. A corporate project has begun to review support services and it is positive that the Supporting People accountable officer sits on the project team and so is well placed to encourage greater assistance for the programme. In the absence of improved support and assistance it is difficult to see all the improvement initiatives being delivered within agreed timescales.

Financial and human resource planning

- 205** Appropriate training opportunities exist. Supporting People staff are receiving corporate training on equality and diversity and further access to training that is specific to their needs. This includes training on specific diversity issues relative to mental health; learning disabilities and a wide range of service user-focussed issues. This is provided through specialists and adults' services colleagues. It is also positive that providers are offered access to appropriate training. Training is used effectively to help staff to address the needs of the programme.
- 206** An appropriate staff appraisal and development system is in place. Appraisals are annual with routine one-to-one opportunities formalised and adhered to throughout the year. Staff have personal objectives agreed with them that clearly align with the service's improvement plan. This helps to ensure that actions are appropriately assigned and provides some monitoring of delivery.
- 207** Staff turnover and absenteeism is low. Absenteeism is 1.86 per cent compared to a council average of 6.05 per cent. This reflects appropriate working practices that have engaged staff and met their development needs appropriately.

- 208** The Council has established a clear plan to meet level three of the Equalities Standard. The focus on achieving level three is detailed in a project initiation document. A project board meets every four to six weeks and reviews reports from each of the work stream groups. This approach allows the Council to keep track of progress and identify areas for improvement.
- 209** Although additional finances have been provided for the programme a continuing commitment is not evidenced. The Council has contributed £486,000 over the four years of the programme. This is in recognition of the budget difficulties faced. However, medium-term financial planning is under-developed with no clear future commitment or recognition of programme demands, challenges or requirements articulated in an agreed plan. This makes future planning difficult.
- 210** Human Resources have not been planned over the medium term. The demands of the programme have changed over the first three years of the programme and are set for further change as contracts repackaging and commissioning receive greater emphasis. The full extent of the required future change is mapped out in the service improvement plan; however, there is no evidence that human resources future planning has been integrated with the forward planning of the service. The extent of delays and slippage of previous years' plans gives rise to concerns about the resources available. This weakness limits the potential of the programme to deliver the range of improvements identified.

Procurement

- 211** The recently agreed procurement strategy is comprehensive. The strategy is specific to Supporting People and articulates how decisions about future services will be made. It requires commissioners to consider a range of options prior to commissioning a service and as a result maintain a focus on achieving better value. Although as yet untested the plan provides a good basis for future procurement.
- 212** The Council is exploring opportunities for funding to support work in neighbourhood renewal areas. A themed multi-agency approach is being developed to address areas of significant deprivation. Supporting People are a key partner in this process alongside housing, health, police, education and community safety. This approach should ensure that there is a joined up and co-ordinated approach to tackling issues of vulnerability in these areas.

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Investing, and attracting inward investment, to deliver improvement

- 213 The Council has been effective in leveraging in external funding to complement of Supporting People funding. This includes funding from the Council's Invest to Save budget; neighbourhood renewal funding, private finance and health funding and grants aimed at specific needs groups such as older people and those with learning disabilities. Since the commencement of the programme approximately £4 million in additional funds has been accessed. Only a small proportion is available directly to the SP programme but these funds and resources, accessed with the assistance of the Supporting People team and housing colleagues are being directed to benefit Supporting People service user groups. Qualitative and quantitative data relative to Supporting People priorities has ensured that the Council is able to apply quickly and comprehensively to access alternative funding streams to benefit service users.

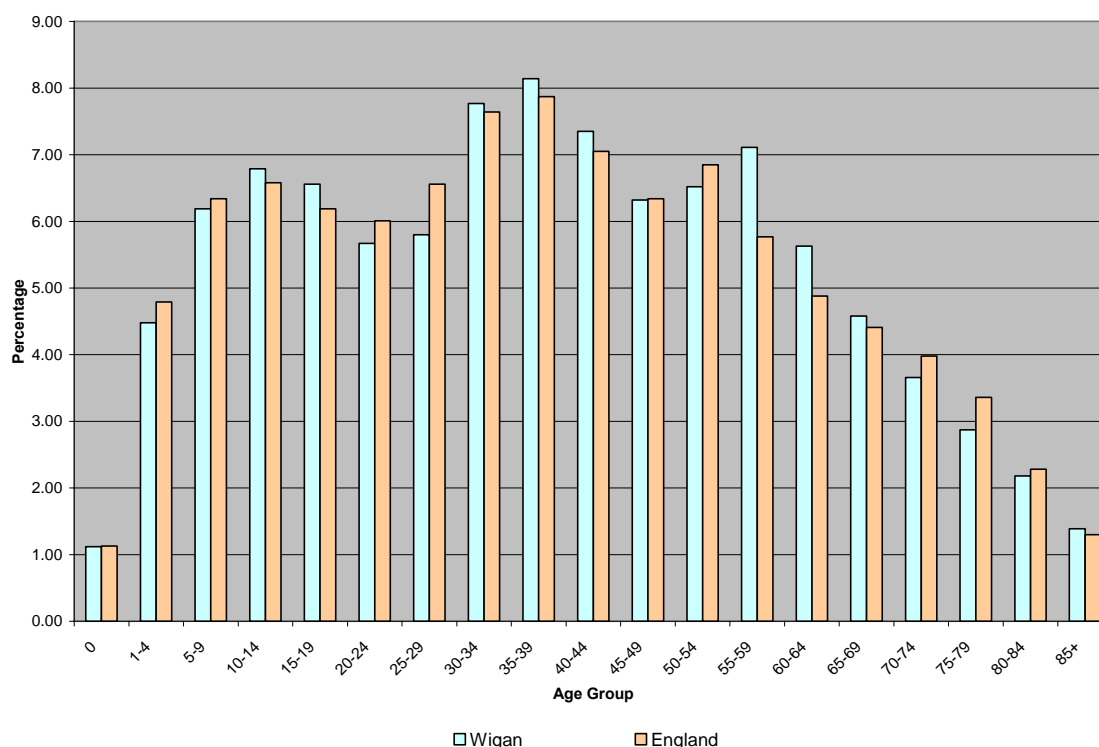
Appendix 1 – Demographic information

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

Table 2

Measure	Wigan	England
Population (mid-2005) ⁷	306,700	57,851,100
Percentage of the population aged 65+ (mid-2004)	17.4	18.5
Percentage from minority ethnic groups (all groups other than White – British 2004)	1.3	10.44
Percentage unemployment (claimant count rate) ⁸	2.8	2.4
Deprivation Index (1 highest, 354 lowest) ⁹	50	-

Figure 2 Percentage of the population¹⁰ in each age group compared with England



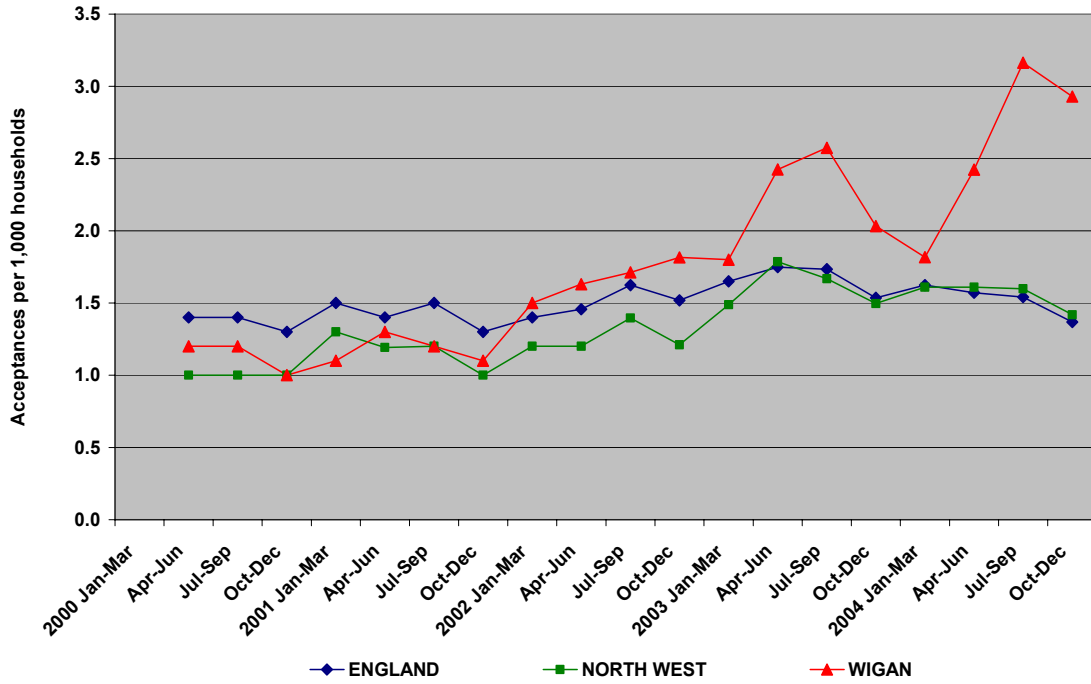
⁷ Source: mid-year population estimates (2005).

⁸ Source: claimant count with rates and proportions (May 2007).

⁹ Source: deprivation Index 2004, average ward score for the authority.

¹⁰ Source: mid-year population estimates (2004).

Figure 3 Households accepted as homeless between 2000 and 2004 compared with the region and England (acceptances per 1,000 households)



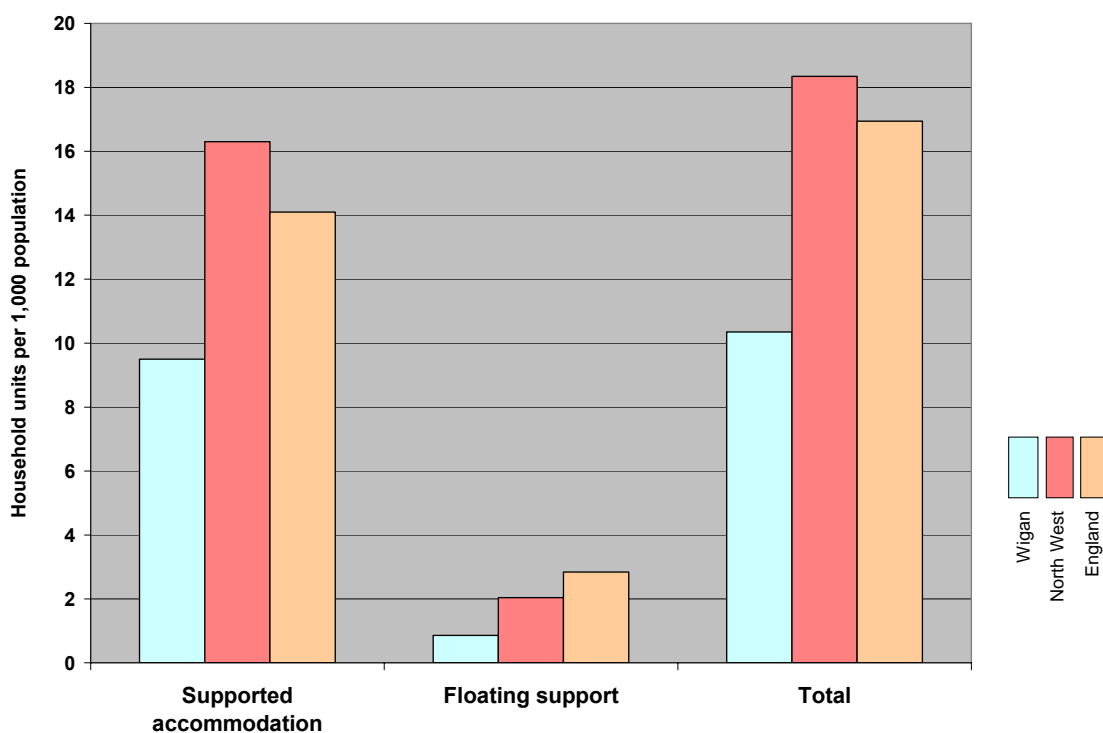
Performance information

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

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

Supporting People data

Figure 4 Total service provision funded through Supporting People¹¹



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

Figure 5 Services for older people with support needs compared with the region and England¹²

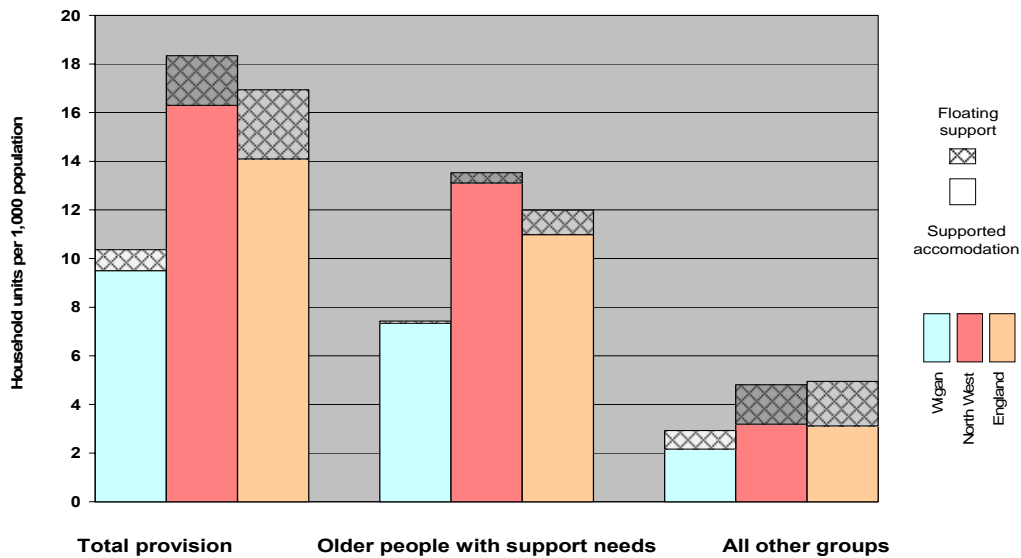
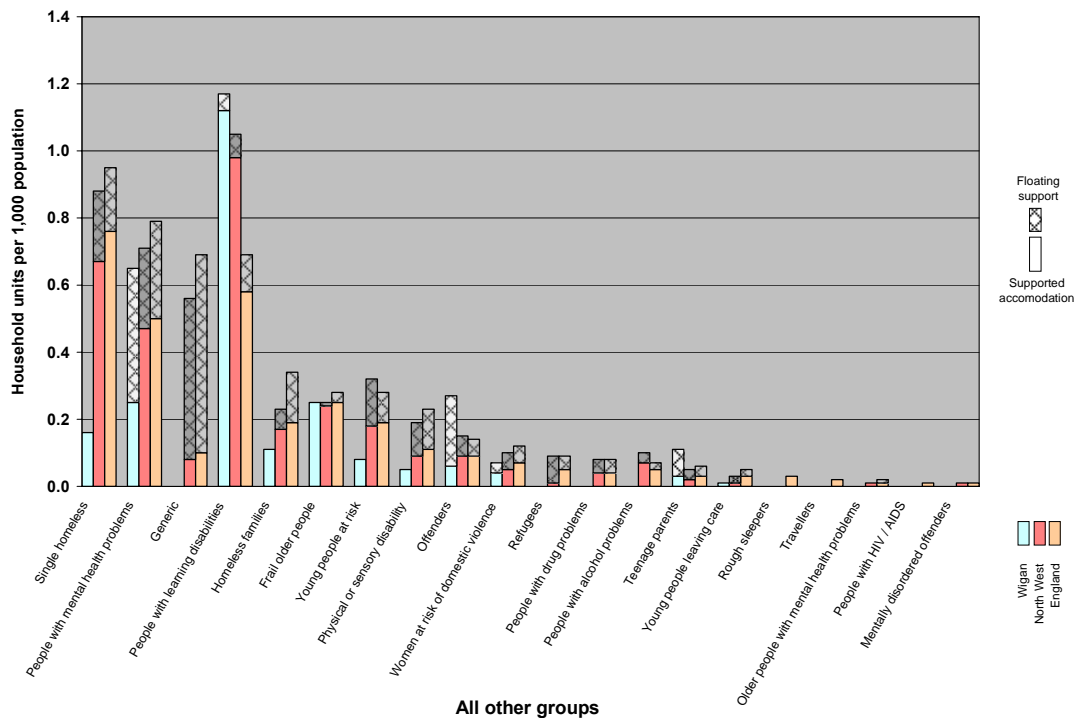


Figure 6 Services for other groups compared with the region and England¹³



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

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

Table 3 Funding for Supporting People¹⁴

Wigan	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Final Supporting People grant	£ 7,457,783	£ 7,377,127	£ 7,170,457
Pipeline allocation	£ 58,306	£ 151,800	£ -
Administration grant	£ 257,534	£ 251,558	£ 231,117

Table 4 Unit costs of Supporting People services in 2003/04 (£ per week)¹⁵

	Per head of population	Per unit	Per unit excluding community alarms	Per unit excluding community alarms and sheltered housing
Wigan	£ 0.48	£ 41.25	£ 41.25	£ 94.05
North West	£ 0.86	£ 33.04	£ 39.06	£ 91.57
England	£ 0.70	£ 28.30	£ 34.71	£ 76.37

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

¹⁴ Source: Grant allocations, ODPM.

¹⁵ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003.

Figure 7 Unit costs of supported accommodation compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁶

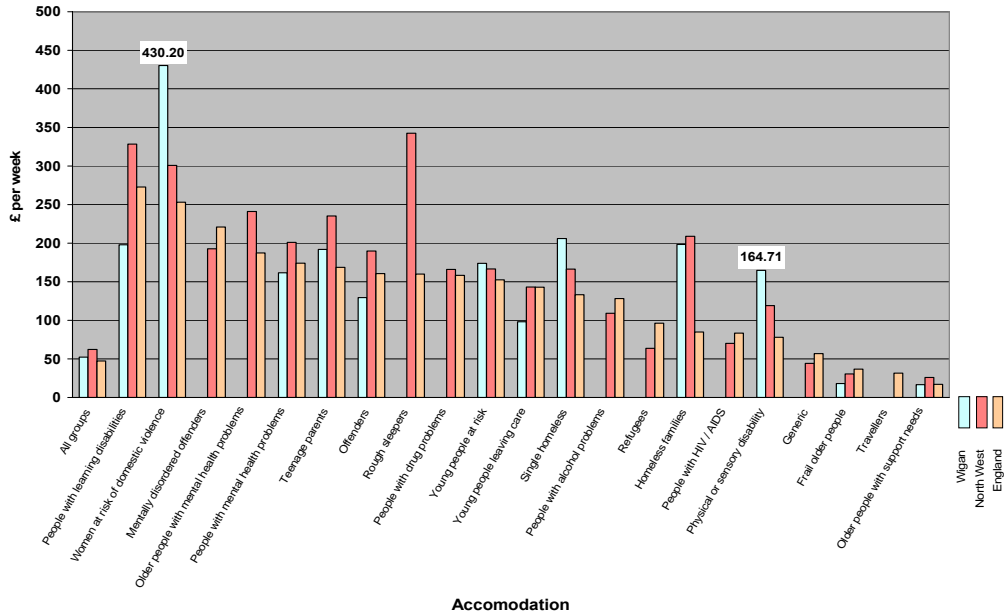
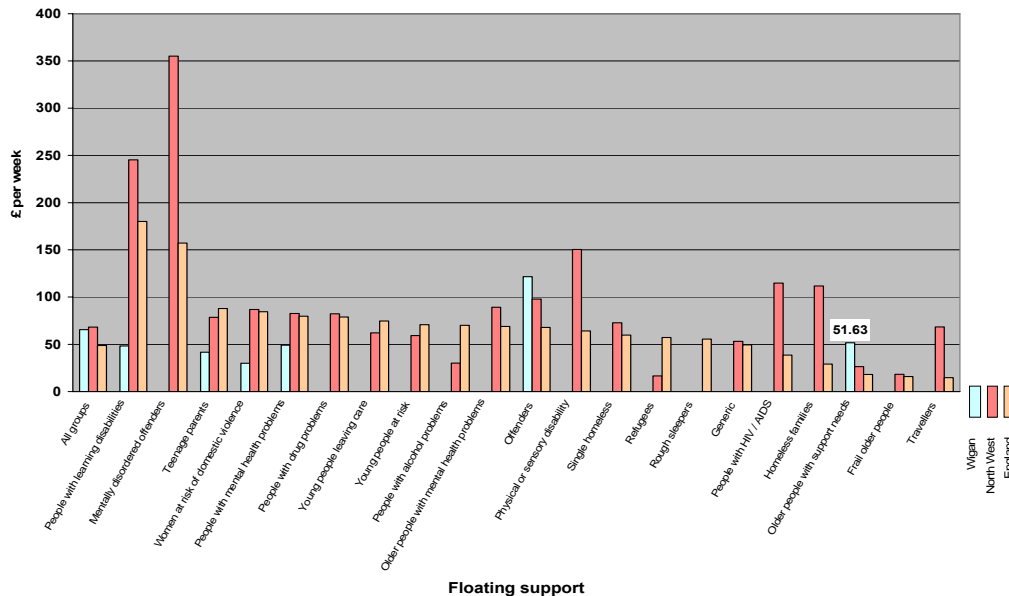


Figure 8 Unit costs of floating support services compared with the region and England (labels show costs in the highest 25 per cent)¹⁷



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

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

Figure 9 Supporting People grant per head of population per week compared with nearest neighbours,¹⁸ all metropolitan boroughs and all English councils (2004/05)

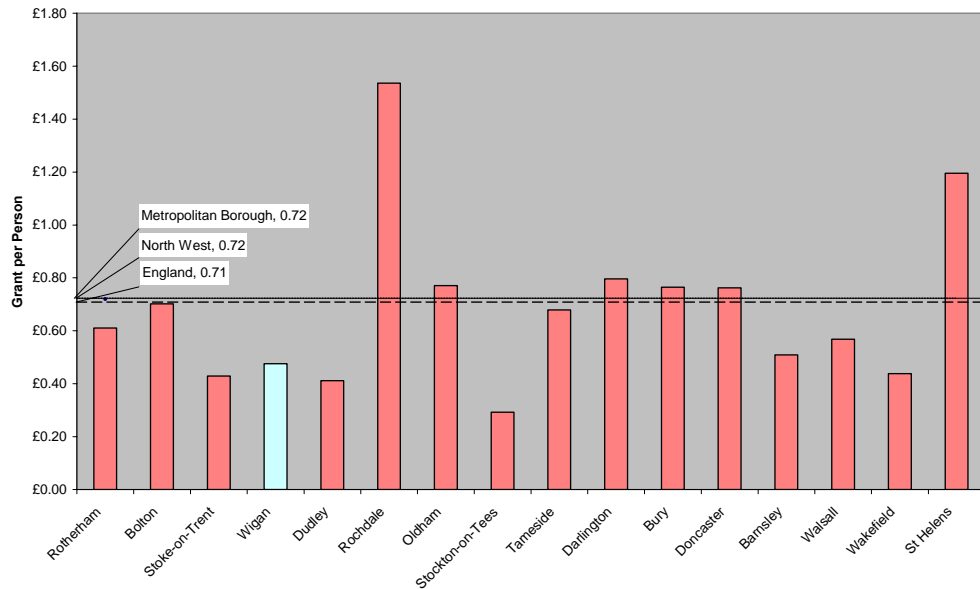
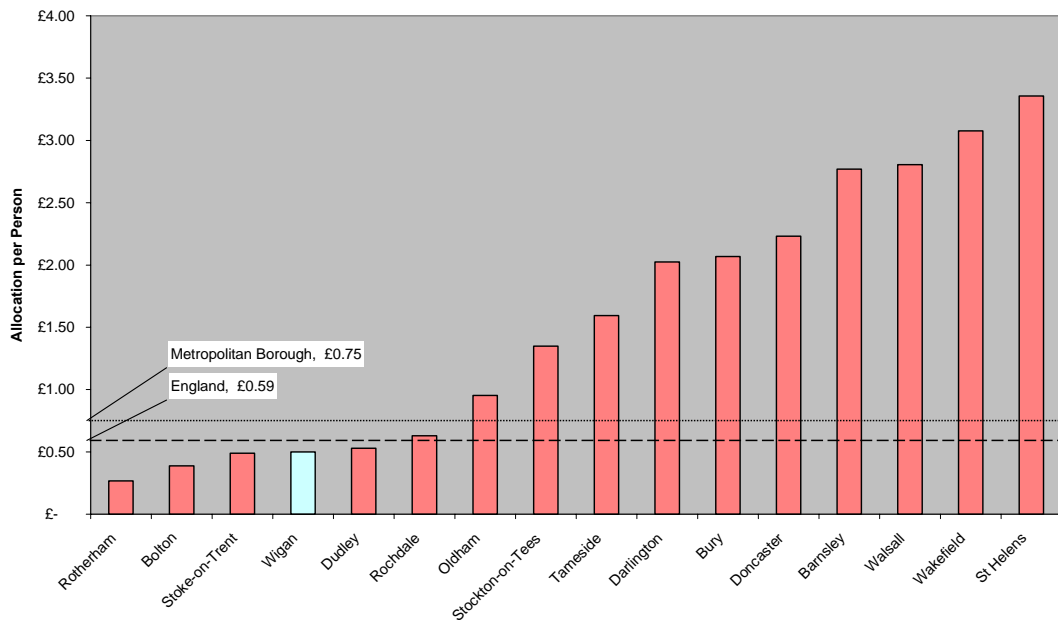


Figure 10 Pipeline allocation per head of population compared with nearest neighbours,¹⁹ all metropolitan boroughs and all English councils



¹⁸ A comparator group of similar councils.

¹⁹ A comparator group of similar councils.

Figure 11 Share of spending between user groups (£000s)²⁰

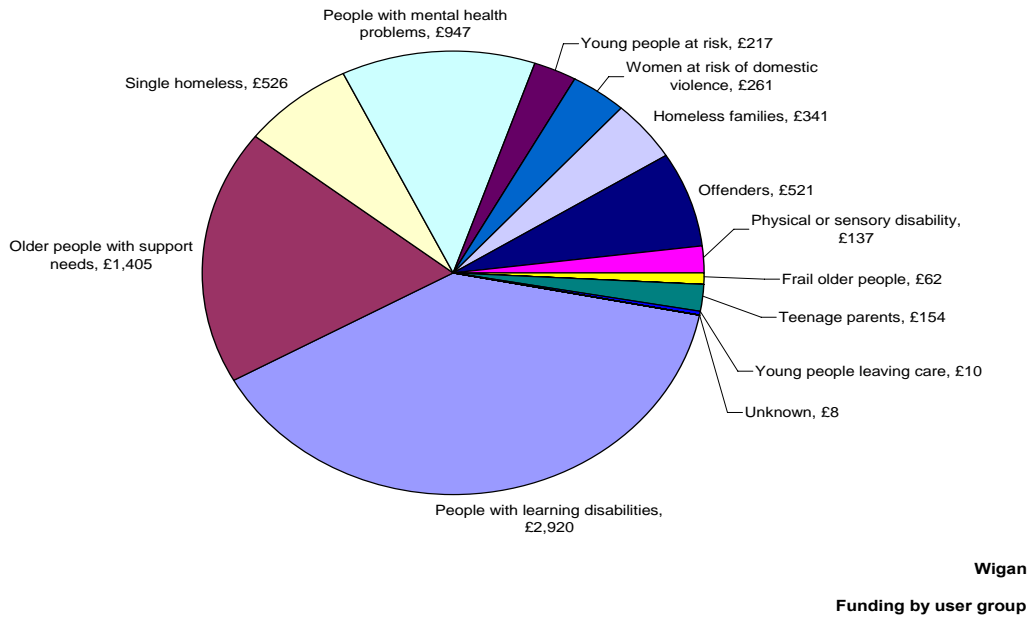
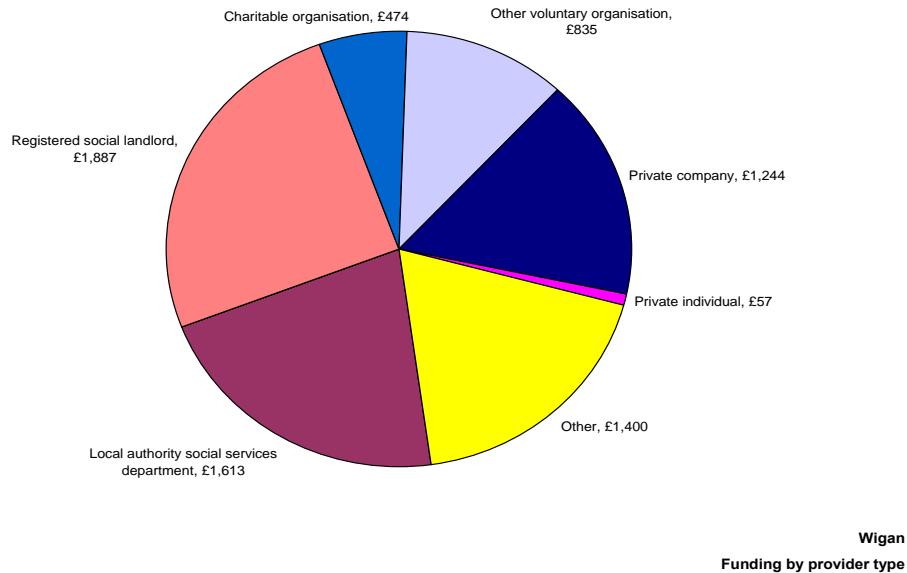


Figure 12 Share of spending between types of provider (£000s)²¹



²⁰ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

²¹ Source: Platinum cut data, ODPM November 2003. Excludes community alarms, home improvement agencies, leasehold schemes and pipeline services.

Social services star ratings December 2005

Table 5

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

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

Social services performance indicators

Table 6 Performance Assessment Framework indicators 2003/04

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

Wigan	
Significantly above average (★★★★)	Adults with learning disabilities helped to live at home (C30) Older people helped to live at home (C32) Delayed transfers of care (D41) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that they can contact social services easily (D58) Percentage of items of equipment and adaptations delivered within seven working days (D54)
Above average (★★★)	Adults with mental health problems helped to live at home (C31) Adults and older people receiving a statement of their needs and how they will be met (D39) Admissions of supported residents aged 18 to 64 to residential/nursing care (C27) Adults with physical disabilities helped to live at home (C29)

Wigan	
Average (***)	Emergency psychiatric re-admissions (A6) Admissions of older people to residential/nursing care (C26) Adults and older people receiving direct payments at 31 March per 100,000 population aged 18 or over (C51) Physically disabled and sensory impaired users who said that their opinions and preferences were always taken into account (D57)
Below average (**)	Percentage change on previous year in total emergency admissions to hospital (A5) Adults and older clients receiving a review as a percentage of those receiving a service (D40) Employment, education and training for care leavers (A4)
Significantly below average (*)	

Best value performance indicators

Table 7 Performance on relevant indicators in 2005/06 compared with metropolitan boroughs

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

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

Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - visits to supported housing schemes, talking with service users, managers and frontline staff;
 - visits to a number of service user access points to assess information available for service users;
 - a questionnaire survey to providers of housing-related support services;
 - a focus group of service providers;
 - file checks including service reviews and complaint files
 - meetings with Supporting People lead officers and support staff;
 - meetings with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet lead for adults' services;
 - meetings with commissioning managers, representatives of service users; and
 - the Probation service and the Primary Care Trust.

Appendix 3 – Positive practice

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

Contract monitoring

- 1 Risk-based contract monitoring has been developed. The approach recognises the importance of ongoing close contact with provider services and the importance of continuous improvement. Risks are assessed to focus limited team resources. Low risk contracts (based on transparent criteria) are visited on a six monthly frequency with higher risk contracts having a range of further measures and monitoring in place together with more frequent contract visits.

Joint working

- 2 Close collaborative working between the Drug Action Team, Probation, Community Safety, the Youth Offending Team and Housing Strategy has led to a joint commissioning plan and the ability to access additional resources (Invest to Save) to benefit service users.

Identifying value

- 3 The value for money matrix has established a transparent framework for assessment identifying the relationship between cost and quality. Individual items, for example staff to client ratio, are ranked and contribute to the overall judgement, for example high cost, medium quality. The resulting clarity about factors that positively or negatively affect value helps to focus negotiations with service providers on improving value.