



**STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

[www.stroud.gov.uk](http://www.stroud.gov.uk)

# **Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)**

## **Self Assessment of Stroud District Council**



2002-2003  
*Crime Reduction in Rural Areas*  
2004-2005  
*Services for Older People*

Chief Executive: David Hagg



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

## CORPORATE SELF-ASSESSMENT OF STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Introduction

The Government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council in July 2004 gives us another opportunity for self-examination, internal review and external challenge. This will help us to maintain the pace of change generated over the last few years and deliver real improvements that local people notice.

This document explains about our journey so far, where we are now and our plans to improve in the future.

### Contents

<b>Section 1</b>	Setting the Scene
<b>Section 2</b>	What is the Council trying to achieve?
<b>Section 3</b>	How has the Council set about delivering its priorities?
<b>Section 4</b>	What has the Council achieved/not achieved to date?
<b>Section 5</b>	In light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?
<b>Section 6</b>	Headline improvement plan
<b>Appendix A</b>	Summary of strengths and weaknesses

### Reading the document

The final part of section 2-5 is a summary setting out:

- **'How we see ourselves.'** We have scored ourselves (as required by the Audit Commission) using the following criteria: 4 = Strong; 3 = Strengths greater than weaknesses; 2 = Weaknesses greater than strengths; 1 = Weak
- **'How others see us.'** A summary of what various external and independent agencies have said
- **'What we plan to do next.'** In light of the challenges, barriers and opportunities identified, we set out what we are going to do in the future. All these actions are brought together in our Headline Improvement Plan (see section 6) and will be discussed with the Audit Commission following the CPA inspection in July 2004.

### Case Studies

As part of the CPA process we are also required to produce 3 case studies (called 'diagnostic assessments') that complement this document. The case studies are on:

- Public Spaces
- Balancing Housing Markets
- Decent Homes

## **Section 1: Setting the scene**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Over the years we have always tried to improve our performance. The pace of change started to accelerate in 2000 when our then Administration recognised that although the Council was financially well run, with sound if narrowly focused services, we were increasingly unable to respond to the needs of service users and residents because of our:

- Traditional departmental structure - staff and elected member loyalty was first and foremost to the service department
- Lack of a corporate centre and capacity to work effectively in joined up ways and in partnership with others
- Perceived remoteness of the Council from local people - 'Fortress Ebley Mill'
- Patchy customer focus/care and service user/community consultation across departments and,
- An inability to 'punch our weight' on the national, regional and county stage.

The building blocks of improvement put in place in 2001 have been taken forward by subsequent Administrations. In this document, we explain more about our journey so far, where we are now and our plans to improve in the future.

### **1.2 What are the local issues of concern to us?**

The issues that currently concern us as a service provider and community leader are:

#### **Population**

- The population is ageing and the profile is shifting from people under 45 to more people over 60.

#### **Economy**

- The number of large employers is declining and there is a rapid growth in micro and small businesses, which are flourishing
- The agriculture sector is in a transitional period and the impacts of a reforming Common Agricultural Policy are yet to be fully understood
- The tourism potential of the District has not been realised - very much the 'Undiscovered Cotswolds'.

#### **Regeneration**

- Stroud is relatively affluent but there are pockets of real deprivation, particularly in Stonehouse, Stroud Valleys and Cam / Dursley
- Rural isolation and access to services is a problem generally and particularly difficult in the Severn Vale and around Painswick and Wotton-under-Edge
- There is a perception that the Council is only interested in supporting regeneration in Stroud and Cam/Dursley, not the other market towns or rural areas
- The District needs to respond effectively to a number of major regeneration projects: Cotswold Canals restoration, Lister-Petter site, the regeneration of Stroud Town and Sharpness Docks.

#### **Housing**

- The annual shortfall in affordable housing units is currently 300 - a problem which is compounding year on year
- The ratio of average income to house price is at least 1:7
- The District has a relatively high proportion of older private housing and about 10% is unfit for habitation or seriously defective; the cost of putting this right is estimated to be £45m.

### Community Safety

- Crime levels are relatively low, compared to Gloucester and Cheltenham (comparable populations locally), but the fear of crime, often fuelled by perceived anti-social behaviour, is prevalent, disproportionately so amongst older people.

### Environment

- The natural and built landscapes are of a high quality and important to the District's identity and local people's sense of belonging as well as the economy, particularly through tourism
- The need to effectively manage natural resources in order to protect the climate, minimise the risk and impact of flooding and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

### Health

- Health is generally good but there are considerable variations in the impact of diseases (e.g. cancer, heart disease / stroke and respiratory disease), particularly amongst low-income groups.

### 1.3 What matters most to local people?

We have monitored the changing priorities of local people through regular telephone surveys; the first was undertaken in 1998 and the latest in 2003.

Over the five years, Crime and Disorder / Community Safety has moved to the top of the list, with anti-social behaviour and fear of crime becoming the number one concerns for local people. The average ranking for the main priority areas over the five years is shown in Table 1.

### 1.4 Tackling these issues and priorities.

We have used the issues of concern to us and the priorities of local people to shape our ambition for the District. This is expressed through our vision statement, 7 Council aims and more recently our five priorities for investment (discussed later).

We also recognised that responding to local needs and aspirations would require us to positively tackle the organisational weaknesses we identified in 2000. A failure to do so would leave us in a position where we were increasingly unable to deliver what the government, local people and ourselves wanted to achieve.

**TABLE 1: Priorities of local people 1998-2003**

Priorities of local people	Overall ranking in 2003	Average Ranking 1998-2003
Crime and Disorder / Community safety	1	2.0
Environment	2	2.3

Helping those in need / housing	3	3.3
Quality services / Access to services	4	3.5
Improving Health	5	4
Economic Prosperity / Regeneration	6	5.4
Cultural opportunities	7	7.4

In this document, we have effectively sought to answer four questions which help to describe the improvement journey we have been on in recent years:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- How well have we set about delivering our priorities?
- What have we achieved / not achieved to date?
- In light of what we have learnt to date, what are we going to do next?

Before answering these questions it would probably be helpful to the reader to say a little more about how the Council is currently organised and operated.

### **1.5 Stroud District Council - some background**

We have a strong resource base:

- Gross expenditure on the General Fund in 2003/04 of £36m (£14m net) and £35m on the Housing Revenue Account
- Capital programme over the next 4 years of some £22m (general fund and Housing Revenue Account)
- Council Tax increases in line with inflation in the last 4 years
- We are debt free.

We employ 603 staff, comprising 464 with contracted hours (the remainder being casual), equating to 380 full time equivalents. We have had Investors in People accreditation since 1998, an indication of our commitment to investing in our staff in order to maintain our capacity to deliver our priorities.

The Council has 51 councillors covering 30 wards. These are elected by thirds over a 4-year period. The Conservative Party has overall control and the Leader and Cabinet govern the business of the Council, with individual councillors within the Cabinet taking lead responsibility for one of seven portfolios:

- Deputy Leader and Community Well-being
- Economic Development and Regeneration
- Environment and Rural Affairs
- Finance & Corporate Services
- Housing
- Planning
- Housing Support

The business of the Cabinet is scrutinised by two Scrutiny Committees: Community Services and Resources and Regeneration. Opposition group members chair both and they review decisions made by the Cabinet, monitor performance and investigate matters of concern to local people. Additional committees cover standards, development control and regulation.

The Chief Executive, two Strategic Directors, Director of Corporate Services, 2 Strategic Heads and Head of Legal Services make up the Strategic Team, which acts as the management board

for the Council. There are 10 Heads of Service who report to Strategic Team members. The main service responsibilities are:

### **Strategic Director**

- Head of Housing Management
- Head of Housing Standards

### **Strategic Director**

- Head of Human Resources
- Head of Community Safety

### **Director of Corporate Services**

- Head of Accountancy and Audit
- Head of Customer Services

### **Strategic Head (Development Services)**

- Head of Planning
- Head of Environmental Health

### **Strategic Head (Regeneration and Culture)**

- Head of Regeneration
- Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism

### **Monitoring Officer/Head of Legal Services**

We return now to our improvement journey by saying more in the next section about what we are trying to achieve.

## Section 2: What is the council trying to achieve?

### 2.1 What are our ambitions and priorities for the area?

Our ambition for the District is expressed through our vision which is to *"to make the District a better place to live, work and visit for everyone, now and in the future"*. This is given shape by seven corporate aims, originally adopted in 1998, and revised in light of annual telephone surveys (see Table 1):

- Prevent and reduce crime and disorder
- Help those in particular need
- Protect and improve the environment
- Help build economic prosperity
- Maintain and improve the community's health
- Create and expand recreational and cultural opportunities
- Continuously improve the council's performance by providing 'best value' services.

In 2002, we adopted 5 priorities, which address the issues of local concern, identified in Section 1 above, and provide a further focus for investment, in terms of policy, service and partnership development:

- **Citizen First:** Delivering improved services, using opportunities identified in the Citizen First strategy to improve 'customer focus' and use electronic service delivery in partnership with others
- **Community Safety:** Delivering the community safety strategy as a Beacon Council with our partners
- **Environment:** To protect and improve the environment, with particular emphasis on the District's green spaces through a new strategy
- **Housing:** With a focus on affordable and decent housing to meet local needs
- **Regeneration:** Working in partnership to realise wealth creation, rural and market town regeneration and economic prosperity.

We recognised that if we were to deliver on these priorities we needed to continually invest in our capacity to deliver by addressing the organisational weaknesses identified earlier in the document. We have and are therefore maintaining a focus on improving our:

- **Community Leadership:** To work within the strategic framework of a community strategy and Local Strategic Partnership to ensure the Council's key priorities are delivered in conjunction with partners
- **People:** To develop Council members and staff so they can contribute effectively to the Council's objectives and business requirements, and
- **Processes:** To ensure that appropriate resources and systems are in place to meet the Council's priorities for service delivery.

The improvement actions, which we are going to take in relation to our priorities, are brought together in our Corporate Delivery Plan, which is reviewed annually. Each of our 5 priorities is underpinned by a 'single' strategy and associated action plans and delivery mechanisms. A number of other corporate strategies and plans cut across and support the delivery of the 5 main strategies and the corporate delivery plan.

Our ambitions have been informed by and are being developed in light of the work being carried out by the Local Strategic Partnership. We have adopted both of the annual Community Strategies, produced by the LSP, most recently in March 2004. This includes a long-term Vision and objectives for the District. We have made clear our response within our Corporate Delivery Plan.

## 2.2 Telling people about our ambitions and priorities

We started telling people about our priorities during 2002, initially through the Leaders webcast 'State of the District' speech and subsequently through a number of publications and our website. Internally staff have been informed through the Proud of Stroud sessions and The news and there is a high level of awareness of the priorities.

## 2.3 Can we deliver our ambitions and priorities?

We believe we have used intelligence and community consultation to good effect, have a good understanding of the area's needs and have pulled this together in our 5 key priority strategies which set out long term direction and short to medium term action plans (eg Regeneration and Culture Strategy, Housing Strategy.) We are also aware of our own organisational weaknesses and how these have affected our capacity to deliver over time.

Our ambitions and priorities have been developed in light of these factors and are meaningful and realistic in terms of what we can do ourselves and in partnership with others to improve quality of life in the District. Our priorities also reflect national and regional policy direction and are consistent with other local stakeholders, including those represented on the LSP. We recognise that we need to continue to improve our consistency in some areas including community consultation. This is being done through the Corporate Marketing Plan and newly established Citizens' Panel.

Our priorities have been the primary focus for our resource planning and allocation processes over the last 3 years. We have used 3 main mechanisms to make sure we have sufficient resource available to take our priorities forward and to work with others where necessary:

- Existing human resources have been redirected and / or refocused on priorities
- Securing external funding has been focused on priority areas for improvement. For example the Community Safety service will have secured at least £723,000 between 2002-2006.
- Revenue allocation processes have been used to identify total efficiency savings of £3.2m between 2002 and 2006. We have focused these savings and our capital resources on achieving our priorities, as summarised in the table below.

Priority	Revenue investment 2002-06 - £000	Capital Investment 2002-06 - £000
Citizen First	1490	1658
Community safety	573	74
Environment	342	280
Housing	81	1150
Regeneration	1051	4248

## 2.4 What is not a priority?

Our resource allocation processes also help us define what are not priorities. Over the last 12 months we have not allocated resources for:

- Clearing the backlog of Health and Safety Inspections within Environmental Health
- Expanding Conservation Area work
- Reviewing Car Parking Services
- Appointing an Arts Development Officer
- Investing in Corporate marketing of the Council and services.

## 2.5 How do we stay focused on our priorities?

We have annual service, corporate and financial planning cycles, which sit within the context of the 4-year Corporate Delivery Plan, 4-year Medium Term Financial plan and the Local Strategic Partnership's longer term Community Strategy.

Within this overall framework we employ a number of 'day-to-day' processes to ensure we maintain a focus on our priorities, including:

- Strategic Team and Executive Board (informal meeting of Cabinet Members) meet weekly, with both coming together on a monthly basis to review the Corporate Delivery plan, budget position and Forward Plan of Key Decisions
- There is 4 monthly agenda planning cycle for both Strategic Team and Executive Board meetings
- Individual Heads of Service attend Strategic Team meetings twice during the year (typically May /June and November/ January) to discuss their service plans and performance
- Performance Indicator information is reported quarterly to Strategic Team, Executive Board and Scrutiny Committees
- Each Scrutiny Committee establishes an annual work programme that is kept under review
- Pairs of Scrutiny Committee members have been assigned service plans to monitor during the course of the year
- Members of staff have an annual appraisal, which is reviewed after 6 months. This helps link individual objectives and training needs to service and corporate priorities
- Team meetings are held at least monthly and members of staff have a 'formal' 1-2-1 meeting with their manager on at least a bi-monthly basis
- TheE news, Hub and Proud of Stroud sessions provide mechanisms for communicating ambitions, priorities and performance to staff and members.

## 2.6 How we see ourselves

We have clear and realistic ambitions for the Council and the District as a whole and have mechanisms in place for ensuring that our resources are focused on key priorities in both short and long-terms. In terms of the Audit Commission CPA scoring, we believe our performance to be:

<b>Ambition</b>	<b>3</b> (strengths outweigh weaknesses)
<b>Prioritisation</b>	<b>3</b> (strengths outweigh weaknesses)
<b>Focus</b>	<b>3</b> (strengths outweigh weaknesses)

A full summary of scoring can be found at Appendix A.

## 2.7 How others see us

This self-analysis is supported by what others say about us:

- *"A forward looking organisation with a clear vision and priorities for the District"* (IDeA Peer Review Report, February 2003)
- *"The Council has much to be proud of in addressing its priorities"* (IDeA Peer Review Report, February 2003)
- *"SDC is a striving authority up for change"* (IDeA Peer Review Report, February 2003)
- *"There is a need to ensure that the people of the District and other stakeholders are involved with and informed about the Council's endeavours"* (IDeA Peer Review Report, February 2003).

## **2.8 What we are planning to do next**

We recognise there is still room for improvement and given the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this section, we intend to take the following steps:

**A1:** Implement the new Corporate Delivery Plan 2004-08 and undertake and report the results of an annual evaluation exercise.

**A2:** Deliver key priority strategies (Crime and Disorder / Community Safety, Regeneration and Culture, Citizen First, Environment / Green Spaces and Housing) and undertake and report the results of evaluation exercises.

**A3:** Support the Local Strategic Partnership, to deliver quality of life improvements and work on affordable housing, rural transport and creating wealth.

**A4:** Implement the Corporate Marketing Plan.

## **Section 3: Delivering the priorities**

### **3.1 Developing staff capacity**

Our staff are highly committed, dedicated and of a high quality. To support them we are putting in place a Human Resources Strategy, which has two strands. The first is the creation of a motivated and flexible, albeit relatively small, workforce, capable of high levels of productivity. The second aspect is a comprehensive range of welfare and well-being measures (e.g. confidential counselling, work life balance audit), to support staff and maintain their capacity to deliver our priorities.

The annual Investors in People review gives us regular feedback on our ongoing capacity to meet priorities and manage change. Our most recent IIP assessment highlighted that we had made significant progress in improving the standard of our people management. A major contribution to this success was attributed to the introduction of the Stroud Management Development Programme, now completed by virtually all of our senior and middle managers. A supervisory development programme has also been developed and will be rolled out from June 2004.

A number of other development points were identified and are being taken forward:

- Improving our induction processes
- Improving the planning and delivery of training and development
- Evaluating the impact of key initiatives, such as the Management Development Programme.

The completion of a work-life balance study revealed that on average, stress levels were below those for the public sector, but that there were pockets where problems were developing and needed to be addressed. Action plans have been developed and are being implemented. We will repeat the study during 2004.

We have also not been afraid to use external experts and recruitment to boost our capability and capacity deficiencies better enabling priorities to be delivered - for example during the Housing Options and Transfer process and in the appointments of a new Head of Culture, Sport and Tourism, Regeneration Manager and Regeneration through Sport Manager. Again this fact was positively endorsed in our most recent IIP assessment.

### **3.2 Developing Councillor capacity**

We are still in the process of helping some of our elected members to shake off the vestiges of the old Committee system and there is an increasing need to help them to balance their competing work, personal and public life commitments.

We have effective Executive and Scrutiny arrangements and recognise that to maintain the quality of our decision-making we will need to sustain and continue to invest in these, with particular emphasis on Scrutiny.

On the whole, members from across the political spectrum work well together in pursuit of our priorities and most now understand how to engage with and influence the Council's decision making and taking processes.

The Housing Transfer process did however introduce political tensions, which reduced our capacity to deliver and are still in the process of being worked through. The introduction of 'Working Together' workshops has helped members and officers come together, to talk and listen and to build our collective capacity to deliver. One of the positive outcomes from the process has been the agreement of a member / officer working protocol.

In 2002, when the Council had 'all out elections' due to boundary changes, we ran a series of briefing sessions for prospective candidates. All newly elected members go through a planned induction programme. Some member roles now require mandatory training, for example Development Control Committee.

Member training and development has been an on-going area of weakness, characterised by an ad-hoc approach. During 2004/05 we aim to become more structured and strategic in our approach and use the Best Value Review of Democratic Services to make sure that we continue to develop the capacity of elected members.

### **3.3 Developing our organisational leadership capacity**

We believe there is strong political and managerial leadership, which is enabling us to stay focused on our priorities. We have a number of mechanisms for making sure that responsibility for priorities is taken and accountability made clear:

- Corporate Delivery Plan and associated performance management mechanisms
- Comprehensive Constitution with clear delegations, protocols and job descriptions for all elected member posts
- The ethical framework is well established and the Standards Committee has an active role and work programme
- The work of our Scrutiny Committees continues to strengthen.

### **3.4 Developing our financial capacity**

We have strong financial management and control, ensuring value for money and the capacity to deliver our priorities. This has been confirmed in successive Audit Commission Annual Audit Letters.

The Medium Term Financial plan (Capital and Revenue) to 2008 is in place, allowing us to match resources to priorities. This sound revenue position is evidence that we have successfully managed the tension between the need to keep Council Tax increases in line with inflation whilst continuing to provide good quality services and community leadership in priority areas. We have kept Council Tax rises at inflation levels for the last four years.

Our capital capacity is limited with the four year Capital programme worth some £22 million. The Government Office for the SW has rated us good for both our Capital and Asset Management strategies.

The vote against Large Scale Voluntary Transfer has placed significant revenue and capital pressures on both the Housing Revenue Account and General Fund. We have responded positively to this disappointment making sure that the implications are being planned for in a way that minimises the impact on tenants and council taxpayers.

### **3.5 Developing our capacity to work in partnership**

We recognise that the issues facing the District are larger than any one organisation. As such we believe we are developing a strong culture of partnership working and showing the community real leadership when this is required.

#### **Partnership at the Sub-Regional Level**

At a County level we have taken a positive role in a number of key strategic partnerships, where pooled resources and external funding are helping us take our priorities forward:

#### **Citizen First**

- Gloucestershire Electronic Partnership

## **Community Safety**

- Gloucestershire Community Safety Partnership
- Gloucestershire Compact Steering Group

## **Environment**

- Joint Waste Management Group

## **Housing**

- Gloucester Housing Market Partnership
- Gloucestershire Rural Housing Partnership
- Affordable Warmth Steering Group

## **Regeneration**

- Gloucestershire First (providing links to SW Tourism and the SW Regional Development Agency)
- Gloucestershire Sports Partnership
- Gloucestershire Cultural Forum

We have also contributed to the development of the Gloucestershire Strategic Partnership, the Gloucestershire Public Service Agreement, where we have co-ordinated work on the Pension Credit target, and the County Branch of the Local Government Association. We have also worked closely with the county Council and other Districts to develop protocols for the redistribution of additional 2nd homes income on our priorities, as well as those on the LSP. All of this strategic partnership activity at a County level is designed to secure the best deal for local people by helping us 'punch our weight' on County and Regional stages.

## **Partnership Activity at the Local Level**

Locally we have worked hard to establish and maintain the Stroud District Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which has set out its vision for the District and is leading work around 3 priorities: affordable housing, rural transport and creating wealth. The LSP's role will continue to develop and will be important in influencing the distribution of second homes income locally and identifying local priorities for the next Gloucestershire Public Service Agreement.

We have a mixture of strong local partnerships in place that allow us to enter into a dialogue with key local stakeholders, such as the Police and Health Service, as well as our local communities of place and interest in order to identify actions and resources that allow us to deliver our ambitions and priorities. For example:

## **Citizen First**

- Village Shop and Rural Post Offices Forum
- Rural Transport Forum

## **Community Safety**

- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and associated theme and locality mechanisms
- Health and well-being Partnership
- Local Council for Voluntary Services and its Forum

## **Environment**

- Greenspaces Forum
- Flood Forum and Water Management Partnership

## **Housing**

- Tenants Compact, associated consultative mechanisms and neighbourhood agreements
- Private Landlords Forum

## **Regeneration**

- Market town regeneration partnerships in most main settlements
- Tourism Forum
- Digital Stroud Partnership

We also have bilateral working with a wide range of partners at the operational and consultative levels, for example the joint funding of Neighbourhood Wardens by Parish and Town Councils.

## **Partnership Activity with Gloucestershire County Council**

Our relationship with Gloucestershire County Council is generally good and has led to a number of collaborations, which are helping us to take our priorities forward, including:

### **Citizen First**

- Joint investment in the new Dursley Library
- SDC was a signatory to the County Public Service Agreement

## **Environment**

- Working with the County Divisional Surveyor to co-ordinate verge cutting with litter picking on main roads.
- Progressing the 'Get it Sorted' (recycling) programme through the Joint Waste Management Board

## **Regeneration**

- Working with GCC and utilities to minimise traffic disruption caused by highway works
- Resolving complicated highways issues to allow the £9m redevelopment of the Merrywalks Centre in Stroud.

## **Partnership Activity with Parish and Town Councils**

Similarly, with Town and Parish Councils, the overall relationship has improved and continues to do so. Practical partnership initiatives around Community Safety (e.g. Neighbourhood Wardens), market town regeneration (e.g. Stroud Town Concordat), rural regeneration (e.g. investment in village halls and support for Parish plans), one-stop shops (e.g. Wotton Civic Centre) and green spaces are strengthening understanding and joint working. We have also provided support around development control and standards, although aspects of these continue to challenge the relationship. We are continuing to invest in developing the relationship and have reinstated Chairs and Clerks meetings with the Parish and Town Councils and made sure that local Councils are also represented on the LSP.

### 3.6 Managing our performance

We believe we have a sound and developing approach to performance management, which links our priorities through to the objectives and targets set for individual members of staff. In doing this we provide members and managers with the right information to measure and manage performance effectively, as illustrated in Table 2 below. The Audit Commission and our IIP Assessor have confirmed our overall performance in this area and we recognise that we need to continue to invest time and effort in making sure that our systems operate effectively and are embedded in all service areas.

**TABLE 2: Main Performance Management Mechanisms**

Timescale	Performance Management Mechanism
Long term	Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy Housing Revenue Account Business Plan
Medium Term (3-4 year)	Corporate Delivery Plan Medium Term Financial / Asset Management Plan Priority Strategies (e.g. Housing Strategy)
Annual	Best Value Performance Plan Annual Budget Cycle Service Plans Individual Appraisals
6-monthly	Corporate Delivery Plan review Service Plans reviewed by Strategic Team Appraisal reviews
Quarterly	Best Value Performance Indicator Report Scrutiny monitoring of Service Plans & BVPIs Revenue and Capital Monitoring Reports Proud of Stroud Sessions
Monthly	Individual 1-2-1's & team meetings

### 3.7 Risk Awareness

Historically, we have not seen risk as a key element of our performance management, viewing it narrowly in terms of insurance. In 2003 we employed risk experts to work with us in order to establish a Corporate Risk Register and action plan. We now understand the key risks that could impact on our capacity to deliver our priorities and business objectives. The Strategic Risk Group, made up of Strategic Team and Cabinet members, has been established to oversee the management of the key risks and will meet 3 times per year. We have put in place a longer-term action plan designed to embed risk management within our performance management systems and culture.

Our Internal Audit service is effective and well regarded internally, and externally, by the Audit Commission. 6-monthly progress reports on the Audit Plan are given to Resources and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

## Complaint Handling

The 2000 Best Value Public Satisfaction Survey revealed we effectively deal with corporate complaints, with 53% of those making complaints satisfied with the handling of their complaints. This put us in the top 25% of councils nationally. Services are also dealing effectively with complaints although a scrutiny inquiry during 2004 identified the need to re-publicise, internally and externally, our complaints procedures. Plans have been put in place to do this.

### 3.8 How we see ourselves in this section

We have worked to develop the human, organisational, financial and partnership capacity required to deliver our priorities. Our performance management is developing and helping us to stay focused on delivery. In terms of the Audit Commission CPA scoring, we believe our performance to be:

<b>Capacity</b>	<b>3</b> (strengths outweigh weaknesses)
<b>Performance Management</b>	<b>3</b> (strengths outweigh weaknesses)

A full summary of scoring can be found at Appendix A.

### 3.9 How others see us

This self-analysis is supported by what others say about us:

- *"The Council is now beginning to establish a comprehensive performance framework capable of continuing service improvement" and "The Council is effectively using its performance management arrangements to adapt its working practices" (Annual Audit Letter, December 2003)*
- *"An appraisal process that is understood, well regarded and effective in identifying both job objectives and development objectives" (Investors in People assessment, July 2003)*
- *"Since the previous review in June 2002, SDC has made significant progress in improving the standard of its people management" and "Managers in the Council are increasingly viewed as role models by people"(Investors in People assessment, July 2003)*
- *"Genuine willingness to be engaged in partnerships" and "Commitment to partnerships" (IDeA Peer Review Report, February 2003).*
- *"SDC is on a steep learning curve in effectively implementing the overview and scrutiny process. Training has been provided and it is evident that working practices are improving" (Annual Audit Letter, November 2002).*
- *"There is a need to ensure that members and officers are well equipped, supported and engaged to meet the challenges ahead" (IDeA Peer Review Report, February 2003).*

### 3.10 What we are planning to do next?

However we recognise there is still room for improvement and given the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this section we intend to take the following steps:

**A5:** Implement the Human Resources Strategy (phase 1) 2004-07.

**A6:** Introduce a new Member Training and Development regime for 2004/05.

**A7:** Implement a Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan.

**A8:** Implement Procurement Strategy and Action Plan, taking an active role in the Gloucestershire Procurement Partnership.

**A9:** Fully implement the performance management framework.

**A10:** Establish (by December 2004) and implement new corporate project management system.

## **Section 4: What has the council achieved/not achieved to date?**

### **4.1 Quality services**

In recent years we have started to seek independent and external accreditation of the quality of our public facing services. For example:

- Beacon Council status achieved for Crime Reduction in Rural Areas (2002/03) and Services for Older People (2004/05)
- Website gained transactional status in the SOCITM Better Connected 2002 and 2003 survey, which is the highest rating awarded and confirms us as one of the leading District Councils in the country
- Electoral Services have achieved the Charter Mark Standard
- Plain English award for our main Revenues and Benefit application forms.

This approach is something that we will continue in the future. For example in the short term we will be pursuing accreditation under 'QUEST' and 'LEXEL' for our Leisure Centres and Legal services respectively. We have also achieved and maintained standards required by Investors in People and the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme, which ensure that our services maintain a capacity to deliver and minimise their impacts on the environment.

### **4.2 Customer and Public Satisfaction**

We also rely on customer satisfaction and comparison data in order to judge our overall performance as a council and the quality of our main public facing services. We have done this through our annual telephone surveys and the statutory Best Value Public Satisfaction Surveys, which all councils carry out on a 3-year cycle.

### **4.3 Overall satisfaction with the Council**

The 2000 Best Value Public Satisfaction Survey produced mixed results for us. We achieved an overall public satisfaction rating of 64%. The best Councils were achieving ratings of at least 72% and our performance was below the national average. The question was asked again as part of the Council's own statistically valid sample in 2003, which showed a slight decrease to 63%.

The 2004 Best Value Public Satisfaction Survey revealed that satisfaction had dropped further to 56%. There has been a downward trend nationally with concern over Council Tax levels being a major factor. This has been mirrored at a local level and exacerbated by inconsistent reporting in the local press around issues such as Large Scale Voluntary Transfer and the closure of Stroud Bus Station. We are actively trying to improve our relationships with the local media in response.

### **4.4 Performance of our main public facing services**

Each year we are required to collect a nationally agreed set of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs), which allow the Government and us to compare our performance nationally in terms of cost, quality and outcomes.

In 2002/03, the last year for which comparable data is available, there were 74 BVPIs covering our main public facing services, general use of resources and corporate health. Our overall performance was good, with 18 (35%) in the best quartile (i.e. top 25% of all Councils nationally) and 39 (75%) including the 18 upper quartile BVPI's above the national average.

Table 3 sets out our BVPI performance for our main public facing services, which includes community / private sector housing services, housing management services, refuse collection and recycling, community safety, planning, environmental health, cultural facilities and housing benefit. Similarly, Table 4 sets out the situation for the use of resources and corporate health BVPIs.

**TABLE 3: Public Facing Services: National BVPI Comparisons**

Quartile	Number of BVPIs	Percentage
Number of BVPIs in 'best' quartile	12	26%
Number of BVPIs in 2nd quartile	24	51%
Number of BVPIs in 3rd quartile	8	17%
Number of BVPIs in 'worst' quartile	3	6%
Number not available for comparison	11	-

**TABLE 4: Use of resources/corporate health: National BVPI Comparisons**

Quartile	Number of BVPIs	Percentage
Number of BVPIs in 'best' quartile	7	50%
Number of BVPIs in 2nd quartile	4	29%
Number of BVPIs in 3rd quartile	2	14%
Number of BVPIs in 'worst' quartile	1	7%
Number not available for comparison	3	-

The figures for 2003/04 only became available late in April 2004. As such it is not possible to do any national comparisons. However, we are able to use these along with figures for 2001/02 (which include the Best Value Public Satisfaction Surveys referred to earlier) to describe the performance of our public facing services in priority areas over the last 3 years.

### **Citizen first**

**Housing Benefit:** User satisfaction was above the national average for all of the areas measured and amongst the best nationally for our telephone service, clarity of forms and the time taken to make decisions. In 2002/03 our performance for all of the comparable BVPIs was above average. However, our performance in terms of the average time for processing new claims and the percentage of claims processed on time has been deteriorating since 2001/02. The percentage of cases processed correctly, for which we were in the worst quartile for 2002/03, has improved significantly during 2003/04.

**Electronic Service Delivery.** The percentage of our services deliverable electronically deteriorated between 2001/02 and 2002/03 due to a change in the way we recorded the data. There was a significant improvement in performance again during 2003/04. We are on course to meet national targets.

### **Community Safety**

**Recordable Crime.** The main crime and disorder level BVPIs (e.g. domestic burglaries per 1,000 households) show that crime levels in the District are below national averages. There have been small increases in most reportable crime areas since 2001/02, with the exception of household burglaries.

### **Environment**

**Refuse Collection and recycling.** Satisfaction with the Council's recycling arrangements was amongst the highest nationally. We were in the best quartile nationally for the amount of household waste collected per head (i.e. we were collecting less than others) and for the

percentage of the population served by kerbside collection and above average for the amount of waste recycled. There was a small improvement in recycling performance during 2003/04.

**Environmental Health.** Performance in Environmental Health, measured by a score against a best practice checklist, dipped during 2002/03. It has risen significantly during 2003/04 (58% up to 86%).

**Street Cleansing.** Satisfaction was below average nationally for the cleanliness of streets and waste collection.

**Green Spaces.** Satisfaction with parks and open spaces was amongst the best nationally.

## **Housing**

Tenant satisfaction with the opportunities provided by the Council for participation was amongst the best nationally and for the overall service provided below average.

In 2002/03, we were above average for our community housing services (e.g. the number of private sector vacant dwellings returned to occupation) and we were in the best nationally for the average number of weeks spent by homeless households in hostel accommodation.

We were above average for our housing management services and in the best nationally for the change in the percentage of non-decent homes between April 1 2002 and April 1 2003. We have however seen a significant decline in the proportion of rents collected since 2001-02 (97.64% down to 93%).

## **Regeneration**

**Planning.** Between 2002/03 and 2003/04 there has been a deterioration in our turn round times for planning applications.

**Sport.** Overall satisfaction with sport and leisure facilities was amongst the best nationally.

**Museums and Theatres.** Satisfaction with our museums and galleries was below average and amongst the worst nationally for theatres and concert halls. The survey did however coincide with the Museum and Subscription rooms being closed for renovation and inconsistent reporting in the local press about the potential value for money of the new facilities.

We recognise that target setting in terms of stretching ourselves to improve has not been one of our strengths and that we still have a way to go in some priority areas to reach upper quartile performance levels nationally. We have therefore decided to focus on improving our performance in the following areas, as these are most important in terms of delivering our priorities and will stretch us:

## **Citizen First**

- Reaching top quartile performance within Housing Benefit by December 2006.
- Achieving the Governments' Electronic Service Delivery targets.

## **Environment**

- To continue to work in partnership to find cost effective ways of reducing the amount of waste going to landfill and to increase our recycling rate.
- Improve our performance in terms of street cleaning by fully understanding our current performance and the reasons for public satisfaction ratings and plan our future capacity accordingly.

## **Housing**

- To achieve upper quartile performance for rent collection by December 2006.

## **Regeneration**

- Continue to develop systems and staffing arrangements in planning with the aim of achieving upper quartile performance against the national planning checklist of best practice, customer satisfaction and statutory response times by December 2006.

## **4.5 Managing our Performance Indicators**

In recent years, as a result of Audit Commission criticism, we have greatly improved the collection and management of our statutory BVPIs. We are now confident that these are reported accurately and provide a good overall picture of our performance.

However, we recognise that the BVPIs do not cover all services and as such we have been establishing local performance indicators covering cost, quality and outcomes within our service plans. We need to improve the quality and coverage of these across the Council and do more to use the information corporately to monitor and drive performance.

## **4.6 Our approach to improving services**

Our Best Value Review Programme provides the main impetus and focus for improving our services. Much has been learned over the years and the approach to Best Value Reviews has changed considerably since the first pilots done in 1998/99. Much of the Audit Commission inspection activity has focused on public facing services and we have had some good results to date, providing further evidence of the quality of our services and our capacity to improve.

- Environmental Contracts (covering refuse collection, recycling, grounds maintenance): 2-star (good), promising prospects for improvement.
- Regeneration and Culture (covering economic development, museum service, subscription rooms): 1-star (fair), promising prospects for improvement.
- Environmental Health: 2-star (good), uncertain prospects for improvement.

Not all of our Best Value Reviews have been inspected. Nonetheless they are driving improvements in priority areas, for example the Tourism BVR identified how much more could be made of the District's tourism potential in partnership with local industry and County and Regional partners. This has driven the development of a new Tourism Action Plan within the Cultural Strategy. Similarly, the BVR of public conveniences has led to the establishment of a £550K investment programme.

## **4.7 Improving quality of life**

We have focused a lot of our time and effort on working in crosscutting ways, both internally and with external partners, to improve quality of life in priority areas. The following case studies show the extent and range of our 'on the ground achievements' over the last 3 years.

## **Citizen First**

### **Access to Services**

Our aim has been to improve customer access and deliver citizen focused services. We have developed various projects, working with partners, to take our services closer to the customer:

- A new post, Customer Contact Manager, was appointed in January 2003 to drive forward Citizen First projects
- SDC staff joined the Wotton-under-Edge Town Council one stop shop facility in February 2003
- In December 2002, we worked in partnership with other Gloucestershire Districts to commission a MORI survey and focus groups to look at how customers access our services
- Joined up with the existing Mobile Police Bus service to provide an SDC enquiry point in the hard to reach rural areas
- Working in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council to rebuild a combined library and SDC information point at Dursley
- Provided a self help interactive kiosk at Chalford Parish Council offices for the public to access SDC services and the internet
- Helped to fund two local internet cafes in Stroud and Dursley/Cam for free training for the public
- Provided computer equipment and IT support for Nailsworth parish community information shop
- Developing a corporate contact centre in Ebley Mill in 2004/05.

## Community Safety

### Cashes Green

In the early part of 2003 the Cashes Green area was blighted by anti-social behaviour, including the misuse of motor vehicles, under age drinking, criminal damage and the dealing and use of drugs.

The community in Cashes Green asked the Council's Community Safety Unit to arrange a public meeting, which brought together local people with a wide range of public and voluntary agencies, including the Police and other SDC services, to talk about improving the situation.

The actions taken to date have included:

- The Police undertaking a number of operations to arrest drug dealers and where applicable, the Housing Department have enforced breaches of tenancy conditions, including eviction.
- Complaints from dissatisfied young people that there was no where for them to go led to the Youth Service working with local people to established a new youth club.
- 7 young people were referred to the multi-agency Anti-Social Behaviour Order Group. As a first step some of those concerned were given greater support by local youth agencies. Three of the original seven have had Anti-Social Behaviour Orders served against them. In the three months following the ASBO's calls to the Police for service reduced by 80-100%.
- Other actions in Cashes Green have included footpath closures, defensive planting, introduction of Police Community Support Officers, improved street lighting, CCTV installation in sheltered housing and the creation of 8 new neighbourhood watch schemes.

A working group continues to monitor the situation and the overall picture has improved greatly with local people feeling safer and that their quality of life has improved.

## Environment

### Water Management

During October of 2000, Stroud suffered its worst flooding event for many years. In response to public concern over the flooding incidents, we arranged a series of public meetings resulting in the establishment of a Flood Prevention Focus Group, involving Council officers and members, staff from other Agencies and residents. A number of successful initiatives have been implemented through our investment (£xk between 2002 and 2008) in this priority and through joint agency working:

- Land Drainage Byelaws were introduced on 15th February 2002
- A new post of Technical Officer (Land Drainage) was created in August 2002 to co-ordinate and lead our work
- Holding an annual Water Summit
- Worked in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council Rural Services and local residents to implement flood relief works
- Completion of a detailed hydraulic study of the Slad Brook leading to the development of an action / investment plan
- Education and information materials produced for riparian owners. Future work will include working with the Cotswold Canal Restoration team to enhance the biodiversity of the area and introduce flood attenuation schemes, continuing to identify sites for hydropower schemes, and encouraging sustainable drainage practice in new developments.

## Housing

### Affordable Housing

Our most recent Affordable Housing completion is a regeneration scheme to provide 7 x 1 bedroom flats above shops at Kendrick Street, in Stroud town centre.

- The flats had been empty and semi-derelict for a number of years. The landlords contributed £155,000 to the total cost of £485,000, with the remainder funded by Council Social Housing Grant.
- Working in partnership with the Council and the landlord, Gloucestershire Housing Association appointed a local building company to undertake the conversion. The works were particularly difficult due to restricted access to the site, with all construction materials having to be delivered by hand, via the pedestrian passageway.
- This housing and town centre regeneration project has provided much needed accommodation in the centre of Stroud. Residents will be able to access all the facilities of the area easily and the refurbishment has meant a face-lift for Kendrick Street.
- The Council has attracted nearly £8.5m in funding for investment in Affordable Housing over the next two years. The Housing Corporation has confirmed that it will grant £1.225m in 2004 and £1.829m in 2005. This is supplemented by £5.2m of private sector funding, raised mainly by the Council's housing association partners and supported by £846,000 from the Council itself.

## Regeneration

### Merrywalks redevelopment

- Following a Community Planning Conference in 1996 and subsequent community consultation exercises, the single most desired facility for the town of Stroud was a new cinema.
- Stroud District Council had acquired the then vacant bus station for development purposes and subsequently engaged in the production of planning and development briefs before marketing the site. After lengthy negotiations the sale of the site was agreed and planning permission granted for a cinema, ten-pin bowling alley and retail space
- Bus services were operating from the site and had to be relocated before the development could commence. The main bus operator, District and County Councils looked at a number of solutions and after consultation, the Councils funded the move with the developers' contractors managing the implementation.
- Work on the cinema development commenced in March 2004. The cost of the scheme is estimated to be around £9 million with only a modest investment from Stroud District Council. The development will revitalise an ailing shopping centre and be the catalyst for the continued regeneration of the town by broadening its role as a destination

### 4.8 Investing in future improvements

We have spent a lot of time and effort on improving our corporate capacity to deliver our priorities by addressing the organisational weaknesses identified at the start of this document. We now have a track record of investing in improving these and delivering change. This has been done by:

#### **Establishing a clear direction**

The Strategic Team and Cabinet have worked together to develop a clear vision and limited set of priorities for the Council, aligned with those of the Local Strategic Partnership, and given shape through the Corporate Delivery Plan and resource allocation processes

#### **Introducing new Political Management arrangements**

The introduction of the Leader and Cabinet model has enabled members to more actively lead the Council, strengthening our decision-making processes

#### **Building Positive Partnerships**

We are building strong partnerships and work hard to ensure that partners agree objectives, priorities, actions, responsibilities, and funding. We need to be more critical in the way that we evaluate the performance of partnerships to ensure that we continue to invest effectively

#### **Actively Changing our Culture**

Form has followed function and organisational structures have changed in recent years to reflect the changing needs of the Council, its partners and local communities. This is helping us to be more corporate in the way that we deliver our priorities

#### **Investing in Corporate Management Processes**

We have a strong financial position and management practices and have invested in developing these further recognising we need to do more to maintain our financial stability by improving risk, procurement, best value and project management processes further as well as more rigorously test our governance arrangements

#### **Building good communication and consultation channels**

Historically an area of variable performance and one where we need to do more to transfer existing good practice across the organisation. Practical steps include the relaunch of the

residents' newsletter and the establishment of a citizens panel. Our internal communications have been improved through The news, The Hub, Proud of Stroud sessions, Members Weekly Bulletin and the Working Together programme

### **Investing in access to services**

Our IEG Statements clearly set out our approach to improving service access and delivery through IT. Significant amounts have been invested in one-stop shops and the like as well as Housing Benefit and Planning services to contribute toward improving poor performance highlighted by the BVPIs

### **Embedding Performance Management**

A co-ordinated performance management system has been put in place and this is constantly being improved

### **Building capacity through Human Resources**

The BVR of Corporate Support Services has driven the repositioning of Human Resources and led to the establishment and delivery of a new Human Resources Strategy (2004-07)

### **Investing in Community Well-being**

We are putting in place support and investment mechanisms to help local communities understand and deal with issues at a local / neighbourhood level and we have achieved Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. We recognise this is an area in which we need to do more if we are to enable all parts of the community to engage with us in meaningful ways.

## **4.9 Being open to external challenge**

We have a strong track record of opening ourselves up to voluntary external challenge and review, including:

- Improvement and Development Agency: Peer Review (November 2002), Improving Services Model Peer Review of Greenspace Management (2002), Procurement Peer Review (2003).
- Investors in People, Eco-Management and Audit Scheme, and Charter Mark accreditation assessments.
- Applying for Beacon Council status. Five applications made, twice short listed (for Benefits Administration and Tackling Fuel Poverty) and twice successful (for Crime Reduction in Rural Areas and Services for Older People).
- Participation in pilot studies. For example taking part in an e-voting pilot in 2003 and working with Sport England to trial planning friendly approaches to Leisure provision.
- Best Value Reviews: These have been improved and typically incorporate the use of external 'critical friends', stakeholder focus groups and benchmarking.
- Scrutiny processes: The Council's Scrutiny Committees are increasingly involving external experts and stakeholders as well as local people in their inquiries.

We also respond positively to recommendations made by statutory organisations, such as the Audit Commission, who regularly comment on our financial arrangements, probity, performance management and service delivery.

## **4.10 How we see ourselves in this section**

We have achieved a great deal in terms of service quality and we continue to invest in the capacity of the organisation to deliver our priorities, at both corporate and service levels. In terms of the Audit Commission CPA scoring, we believe our performance to be:

**Achievement (Service Quality)** 3 x 3 = 9 (strengths outweigh weaknesses)

**Achievement (Improvement)** 3 x 3 = 9 (strengths outweigh weaknesses)

**Investment** 3 x 2 = 6 (strengths outweigh weaknesses)

A full summary of scoring can be found at Appendix A.

#### 4.11 How others see us

This self-analysis is supported by what others say about us:

- *"The councils (featured in the book) all have a proven track record for service improvement"* (Man in the Caravan and other stories: IDeA)
- The council has a *"...Good reputation for service delivery"* (IDeA Peer Review Report February 2003)
- *"SDC is making real progress with its e-government programme. The Council has adopted a proactive and creative approach to implementing e-government and has put in place appropriate arrangements for managing and monitoring projects"* (Annual Audit Letter, December 2003)
- The council has *"...a reputation for sound financial management with member involvement"* (IDeA Peer Review Report February 2003)
- The council should *"...address weaknesses in project and contract management arrangements"* (IDeA Peer Review Report February 2003)

#### 4.12 What we are planning to do next

We recognise there is still room for improvement and given the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this section we intend to take the following steps:

**A11:** Reach top quartile performance in Housing Benefit / Council Tax by December 2006.

**A12:** Reach top quartile performance for rent collection by December 2006.

**A13:** Reach Upper Quartile performance in planning by December 2006.

**A14:** Produce a 'pockets of deprivation' map for the District (by June 2004) and develop a 3-year Community Cohesion and Well-being action plan (by March 2005)

## **Section 5: In light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?**

### **5.1 Learning together as an organisation**

#### **Self Awareness**

We have developed a strong sense of self-awareness over the last 3 years, and we have highlighted many of our corporate strengths and weaknesses in this document. This has helped us instigate and deliver change and develop our future plans, summarised in section 6. Our sound resource allocation processes and improving corporate and people management are helping us to make sure that our capacity to deliver will be maintained and enhanced in the future. A key element has been trying to improve our ability to learn from others and use good practice.

#### **Learning Together**

We have put in place a number of mechanisms to encourage organisational learning, for example:

- Corporate Working arrangements. The Council has established a range of cross-service groups to consider issues of common interest. For example the e-champions, Citizen First Strategy Group, Asset Management Group, Customer Care Focus Group, Equalities Steering Group, Joint Safety Committee
- The Council's Strategic Team and Heads of Service come together on a monthly basis to discuss a wide range of issues of common concern
- The Best Value Review toolkit encourages learning from past reviews
- All staff members have access to the Internet, which makes the sourcing of best practice information easier
- The Working Together Workshops bring members and officers together to learn from each other
- Joint policy panels. For example, bringing together Housing and Planning portfolios to help members learn in a cross-cutting way
- Scrutiny inquiries and 'hot topic' work is helping the organisation learn about its weaknesses and drive improvements. For example the inquiries into Stratford Park Leisure Centre and Housing Refurbishment
- The annual review of the Corporate Delivery Plan, done jointly by the Executive and Strategic Team, includes consideration of what has been learnt and how this can be applied in the future.

### **5.2 Learning from others**

One of the challenges in becoming more outwardly focused has been to learn from others, whether through national and regional networks or talking to and listening to partners, service users and residents. For example the following have helped us reduce service development and delivery costs:

- We initiated the Environmental Services Benchmarking Club as part of the Best Value Review of the service and this informed many of the service standards finally specified in the contract. The Club continues to provide useful comparative data
- In developing our Citizen First Strategy and IEG Statements we visited and learnt from a range of authorities considered to be best practice. This has driven the roll out of one-stop shops as well as service improvements, such as the CAPS system in planning. It has also helped us develop a website which is nationally acclaimed
- The basis of our successful Beacon bid for Crime Reduction in Rural areas was that joint working with the Forest of Dean and Tewkesbury was used to pilot, develop and roll-out initiatives

- In planning and executing the LSVT process, significant learning was transferred into the Council from external consultants and others who had been through the process. The Audit Commission cited us as an example of good practice.

We recognise that we need to be more disciplined in the way that we listen to others and reflect on our experiences. This is not always easy, given staffing levels and the pace of change, but is essential if we are to continue to encourage and support the development of a learning culture as the key to driving improvement.

### 5.3 Taking things forward

We have a clear set of strategies for taking our work forward. The Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy sets the context for our own Corporate Delivery Plan and supporting performance and financial management systems. Staff, partners and communities are engaged in planning for the future, although we recognise this is an area where we need to continue to develop. The annual review of the Corporate Delivery Plan is making sure we regularly assess our future plans and capacity in line with changing national and regional policy and local community priorities.

We are very clear about what we want to achieve and this is captured in the accompanying improvement plan. It covers three main themes of activity, as set out in our Corporate Delivery Plan 2004-08:

	Theme	Outcome Sought
1	Community Leadership	To work within the strategic framework of a community strategy and Local Strategic Partnership to ensure the Council's key priorities are delivered in conjunction with partners
2	People	To develop Council members and staff so they can contribute effectively to the Council's objectives and business requirements
3	Processes	To ensure that appropriate resources and systems are in place to meet the Council's priorities for service delivery

### 5.4 How we see ourselves in this section

We need to be more disciplined and structured about how we learn from others and transfer best practice internally and externally. We have produced an improvement plan (section 6), which sets out how we are going to invest in improving our capacity to deliver our priorities. In terms of the Audit Commission CPA scoring, we believe our performance to be:

**Learning** 2 (weaknesses outweigh strengths)

**Future plans** 3 (strengths outweigh weaknesses)

A full summary of scoring can be found at Appendix A.

### 5.5 How others see us

This self-analysis is supported by what others say about us:

- *"Feedback from appraisals is consolidating learning amongst people"* (Investors in People assessment, July 2003)

## **5.6 What we are planning to do next**

However we recognise there is still room for improvement and given the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this section we intend to take the following steps:

**A15:** Improve our ability to learn from and use good practice.

## Section 6: Headline improvement plan

To achieve these things by 2008	We will need to tackle these barriers and challenges	By taking these actions
<p><b>Community Leadership</b> To work within the strategic framework of a community strategy and Local Strategic Partnership to ensure the Council's key priorities are delivered in conjunction with partners.</p>	<p>Help the LSP to sustain and build on the progress it has made. Maintain and evaluate the performance of key priority delivery partnerships. Clearly understand the distribution of deprivation in the district and ensure that the links with social inclusion, community cohesion and equalities are made in order to better engage all local people. 'Punching' our weight at County, regional and national levels.</p>	<p><b>A2:</b> Deliver key priority strategies (Crime and Disorder / Community Safety, Regeneration and Culture, Citizen First, Environment / Green Spaces and Housing) and undertake and report the results of annual evaluation exercises of progress and partnership performance. <b>A3:</b> Support the Local Strategic Partnership, to deliver quality of life improvements and work on affordable housing, rural transport and creating wealth. <b>A14:</b> Produce a 'pockets of deprivation' map for the district (by June 2004) and develop a 3-year Community Cohesion and Well-being action plan (by March 2005).</p>
<p><b>People</b> To develop Council members and staff so they can contribute effectively to the Council's objectives and business requirements; and,</p>	<p>Lack of a strategic approach to member training and development. Move away from a traditional personnel service to a strategic approach to Human Resources. Patchy customer focus and care across services. Improving the discipline with which the organisation uses and transfer good practice.</p>	<p><b>A5:</b> Implement the Human Resources Strategy (phase 1) 2004-07. <b>A6:</b> Introduce a new Member Training and Development regime for 2004/05. <b>A15:</b> Improve our ability to learn from and use good practice.</p>
<p><b>Processes</b> To ensure that appropriate resources and systems are in place to meet the Council's priorities for service delivery.</p>	<p>Continue to improve the consistency of our community consultation and communication. Low public satisfaction ratings with the Council. Under developed corporate processes - risk, procurement and project management. Sustain implementation</p>	<p><b>A1:</b> Implement the new Corporate Delivery Plan 2004-08 and undertake and report the results of an annual evaluation exercise. <b>A4:</b> Implement the Corporate Marketing Plan. <b>A8:</b> Implement procurement strategy and action plan, including taking an active role in the Gloucestershire</p>

and effectiveness of performance management systems and processes. Tackle performance in key public facing services, particularly Housing Benefits and Planning.

Procurement Partnership.

**A9:** Fully implement the performance management framework.

**A10:** Establish (by December 2004) and implement new corporate project management system.

**A11:** Reach top quartile performance in Housing Benefit / Council Tax by December 2006.

**A12:** Reach top quartile performance for rent collection by December 2006.

**A13:** Reach Upper Quartile performance in planning by December 2006.

**Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses based on self assessment and what others say about us.**

Appendix A

Theme	Score	Main Strengths	Main challenges
-------	-------	----------------	-----------------

**Question 1: What is the Council trying to achieve?**

Ambition	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>“Stroud District Council is a forward looking and ambitious organisation with a clear view of its objectives for the community. It can point to a number of recent successes in terms of service delivery and partnership working” (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Visible, accessible and ambitious leadership (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Active and inclusive Local Strategic Partnership (pr, pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>Clear leadership of strategies to build sustainable communities (pc)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Ensure departmentalism doesn't obstruct progress (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Sharpen focus on some longer term ambitions (pc)</i></li> </ul>
Prioritisation	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Clear vision and priorities for the District (pr, pc &amp; iip)</i></li> <li>* <i>Clear budget strategy (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Priorities derived from intelligence and consultation (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>National priorities addressed (pc)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Not to confuse communication with consultation (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Adopt a strategic approach to what are not priorities (pc)</i></li> </ul>
Focus	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Effective decision (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Clear links between plans (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Stroud focuses on what matters (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>Mechanisms and tools in place to sustain focus (pc)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Ensure actions flow from plans (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Ensure consistency of communication (pr)</i></li> </ul>

**Key:**

PR = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review (November 2002);  
 aal1= Audit Commission Annual Audit Letter 2001/02 (November 2002)  
 aal2= Audit Commission Audit and Inspection Annual letter 2003 (December 2003)  
 iip= Investors in People Review Report (July 2003)  
 pc = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review Follow-up (March 2004)  
 pr = Audit Commission Report, Reviewing Performance Management (May 2004)

Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses based on self assessment and what others say about us.

Appendix A

Theme	Score	Main Strengths	Main challenges
-------	-------	----------------	-----------------

**Question 2: How has the Council set about delivering its priorities for improvement?**

Capacity	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Strong political and managerial leadership and leaders visibly promoting change (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Change programme generally well received (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Good member officer relationships supported by working together (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Recognised as a good partner and genuine willingness to be engaged in partnerships (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Codes of conduct for members and officers (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Management development programme (pr &amp; iip)</i></li> <li>* <i>Managers in the council are increasingly viewed as role models by people (iip)</i></li> <li>* <i>Committed and capable officers (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>Uses partnerships to supplement capacity (pc)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>“There is a need to ensure that members and officers are well equipped, supported and engaged to meet the challenges ahead” (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>“There is a need to ensure that the people of the District and other stakeholders are involved with and informed about the Council’s endeavours” (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>The challenge remains to ensure capacity is available to support the Council’s vision and priorities (aal2)</i></li> <li>* <i>Strategic approach to member development needed (pr,iip,pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>£17million expenditure gap on the HRA (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>Scrutiny needs to focus on bigger issues (pc,aal1)</i></li> </ul>
Performance Management	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>High levels of commitment and energy of staff (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>The Council is now beginning to establish a comprehensive performance framework capable of continuing service improvement (aal1 &amp; pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>The Council is effectively using its performance management arrangements to adapt its working practices (aal2)</i></li> <li>* <i>Since the previous review in June 2002 SDC have made significant progress in improving the standard of its people management (iip)</i></li> <li>* <i>Progress in developing a performance management culture (pc)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Further strengthen arrangements for collecting and reporting on performance information (aal2)</i></li> <li>* <i>Speed up on developing and implementing risk, procurement and project management strategies (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>The Council does not have a fully integrated corporate performance management culture, which is a barrier to achieving its full potential. (prm)</i></li> </ul>

Key:

PR = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review (November 2002);

aal1=Audit Commission Annual Audit Letter 2001/02 (November 2002)

aal2= Audit Commission Audit and Inspection Annual letter 2003 (December 2003)

iip= Investors in People Review Report (July 2003)

pc = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review Follow-up (March 2004)

prm = Audit Commission Report, Reviewing Performance Management (May 2004)

**Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses based on self assessment and what others say about us.**

Appendix A

Theme	Score	Main Strengths	Main challenges
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Staff understand what is expected of them (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>The Council is aware of the importance of using performance information to drive service improvement and is using the service delivery plan as a key tool to achieve this (prm)</i></li> <li>* <i>Inductions, appraisals, staff meetings ensuring that people are able to explain the objectives of the organisation at a level appropriate to their roles (iip)</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Question 3: What improvements has the Council achieved / not achieved to date?</b>			
Achievement in quality of service	9 (3 x weighting of 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Good reputation for service delivery (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Innovative service delivery partnerships (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Some good levels of service indicated by BVPIs (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>A range of services externally recognised including Beacon Council status (pc &amp; pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Low Council Tax rise and increased investment in priorities (pc)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Focus on needs rather than existing users (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Ensure engagement of hard to reach in the community (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Co-ordinate consultation and participation (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Demonstrate continuous service improvement (aal2)</i></li> <li>* <i>Address below average overall public satisfaction (pc)</i></li> </ul>
Achievement of improvement	9 (3 x weighting of 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Effective partnerships delivering quality of life improvements in priority areas.</i></li> <li>* <i>Performance indicators heading in the right direction (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>Best value reviews help to drive improvements in services (pc)</i></li> <li>* <i>Examples of improvements linked to priorities (pc)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* <i>Maintain high standards of service delivery (pr)</i></li> <li>* <i>Make sure new strategies deliver outcomes (pc)</i></li> </ul>

**Key:**

PR = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review (November 2002);

aal1=Audit Commission Annual Audit Letter 2001/02 (November 2002)

aal2= Audit Commission Audit and Inspection Annual letter 2003 (December 2003)

iip= Investors in People Review Report (July 2003)

pc = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review Follow-up (March 2004)

prm = Audit Commission Report, Reviewing Performance Management (May 2004)

**Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses based on self assessment and what others say about us.**

Appendix A

Theme	Score	Main Strengths	Main challenges
Investment	6 (3 x weighting of 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Effective management of Housing options/LSVT (aal1 &amp; 2)</li> <li>* Dedication of resources to project management (pr)</li> <li>* Identification of risk management as an issue and evidence of some risk management activity (pr)</li> <li>* 'Good' asset management plan (pr)</li> <li>* The Council has effective arrangements in place for the production of financial statements and the Council's general financial standing is sound (aal1 &amp; 2 and pr)</li> <li>* Partnership working (pc)</li> <li>* An investor in people (pc)</li> <li>* External challenge to drive improvement (pc)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Detailed guidance for a consistent approach to procurement (pr)</li> <li>* Consistency of project management (pr)</li> <li>* Create risk management strategy and develop risk management expertise (pr)</li> <li>* Closely monitor extent of effectiveness of consultation and communications mechanism (pc)</li> <li>* Invest in getting overview and scrutiny right (pc)</li> </ul>
<b>Question 4: In light of what the Council has learnt to date, what does it plan to do next?</b>			
Learning	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Feedback from appraisals is consolidating learning amongst people (iip)</li> <li>* Awareness of successes and what needs to be done (pc)</li> <li>* Mechanisms in place to encourage learning (pc)</li> <li>* Learns from others (pc)</li> <li>* Encourages innovation (pc)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Evaluate initiatives and evaluate effectiveness of partnerships (pr)</li> <li>* Take time to evaluate initiatives, partnerships and performance (pr,iip)</li> <li>* Identify major successes in terms of outcomes (pc)</li> <li>* Work on internal learning (pc)</li> </ul>
Future Plans	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Robust future plans and strategies in place (pc)</li> <li>* Sustained focus on achieving ambitions (pc)</li> <li>* Consults on formulating plans (pc)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Maintaining and building capacity</li> </ul>

**Key:**

PR = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review (November 2002);  
aal1=Audit Commission Annual Audit Letter 2001/02 (November 2002)  
aal2= Audit Commission Audit and Inspection Annual letter 2003 (December 2003)  
iip= Investors in People Review Report (July 2003)  
pc = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review Follow-up (March 2004)  
prm = Audit Commission Report, Reviewing Performance Management (May 2004)

**Summary of Strengths and Weaknesses based on self assessment and what others say about us.**

Appendix A

Theme	Score	Main Strengths	Main challenges
-------	-------	----------------	-----------------

**Scoring Criteria**

- 1 = Weak
- 2 = Weaknesses outweigh strengths
- 3 = Strengths outweigh weaknesses
- 4 = Strong

**CPA Bands for District Councils**

- 48 to 60 points = Excellent
- 42 to 47 points = Good
- 36 to 41 points = Fair
- 30 to 35 points = Weak
- 15 to 29 points = Poor

**Total Self Assessment Score = 44**

---

**Key:**

- PR = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review (November 2002);
- aal1=Audit Commission Annual Audit Letter 2001/02 (November 2002)
- aal2= Audit Commission Audit and Inspection Annual letter 2003 (December 2003)
- iip= Investors in People Review Report (July 2003)
- pc = Improvement and Development Agency Peer Review Follow-up (March 2004)
- prm = Audit Commission Report, Reviewing Performance Management (May 2004)

## COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (CPA)

### PUBLIC SPACE IN THE STROUD DISTRICT

#### Introduction

The Government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council in July 2004 gives us another opportunity for self-examination, internal review and external challenge. This will help us to maintain the pace of change generated over the last few years and deliver real improvements that local people notice.

This document is about our role in protecting and developing public space in the District and is one of three case studies (called 'diagnostics') that complement the Corporate Self-Assessment document. The other two case studies are on Balancing Housing Markets and Decent Homes.

#### Contents

Section 1: How well does the Council contribute to the management of the physical environment?	Page 2
Section 2: Does the Council help keep the locality clean?	Page 6
Section 3: Does the Council work with partners to improve community safety?	Page 8
Section 4: Does the Council contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people?	Page 10
Section 5: In light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?	Page 12
Section 6: Public Spaces Improvement Plan	Page 13

#### Reading the document

As part of their CPA Inspection the Audit Commission will score each of the four main questions (in effect sections 1-4 of this document) on the following basis:

A= Very low need for improvement focus;

B = Low need for improvement focus;  
C = High need for improvement focus;  
and,  
D = Very high need for improvement focus.

We have scored ourselves on this basis to help our improvement planning and as such at the end of each section you will find a 'What we are planning to do next' heading. In this we show how we rate ourselves and what we are going to do in the future. These future actions form part of the Public Spaces Improvement Plan, which is set out in section 6 and this in turn has fed into our Headline Improvement Plan, which can be found in section 6 of the Corporate Self-Assessment document. We will be discussing this with the Audit Commission following the CPA inspection in July 2004.

Overall we believe our performance is good in relation to public spaces and therefore there should be a low need for improvement action ('B' above). This said we have identified some weaknesses in this document that we will be tackling.

## SECTION 1: HOW DOES THE COUNCIL CONTRIBUTE TO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT?

---

### **Our Commitment to the Environment**

Our commitment to sustainable development stretches back to 1996 when we signed the Local Agenda 21 Strategy for Gloucestershire. We also adopted an environmental policy in 1998. In recent years the Stroud District Local Strategic Partnership, has made clear its commitment to sustainable development in its Community Strategy and it is taking an increasingly long-term view of the economic, social and environmental issues that the District faces. Similarly, our annual telephone surveys of local people have shown environment to be the second priority behind community safety.

These factors have, at different times, informed the development of our vision, aims and key priorities. Three of our five key priorities are particularly relevant in terms of public space:

- *Community Safety*: Delivering the community safety strategy as a Beacon Council with our partners;
- *Environment*: To protect and improve the environment, with particular emphasis on the District's green spaces through a new strategy; and,
- *Regeneration*: Working in partnership to realise wealth creation, rural and market town regeneration and economic prosperity.

These key priorities are given shape through a number of strategies, action plans and delivery mechanisms (e.g. partnerships) including those for Regeneration, Culture, Greenspaces and Crime and Disorder. The draft Local Plan and associated planning policy documents, Housing Strategy and Asset Management Plan are also important in securing high quality public space.

### **Managing our Environmental Impacts**

We have management systems in place that allow us to identify our direct and indirect impacts on the environment, to take the appropriate action to reduce these as far as possible and to report our performance publicly. As part of our commitment to protecting and improving the environment we have, since 1999, sought external and independent accreditation of our environmental management systems to the two relevant

international standards: European Union Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (known as EMAS) and the International Standards Organisation's IOS14001. We are one of only a handful of Council's in the UK to have achieved these testing standards.

### **Understanding Local Environmental Issues**

We have and do use a number of mechanisms that allow us to clearly understand local environmental issues and how these are influenced by economic and social considerations. For example:

- Sustainability assessment of the local plan;
- Environmental Impact Assessment of major developments;
- Green/ public spaces audit and digitisation;
- Market Town Health Checks / Environmental Audits and Parish plans;
- Contaminated Land Audit;
- Air Quality and Radon surveys
- Crime and Disorder Strategy Audit
- Landscape Character Assessment;
- Industrial Heritage Audit of the Stroud Valley's;

- Research by the Council and others (e.g. Stroud Valley's Project or Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust).

We use the information generated to develop policy, services and partnerships to tackle the issues that arise.

### **Planning a quality local environment**

During 2005 we expect to have an adopted Local Plan for the first time. However, this has not prevented us from effectively implementing and enforcing the policies, standards and specific design guidance of the draft Local Plan. Further we have a positive approach to pre-application discussions with developers and the provision of Supplementary Planning Guidance for specific sites and topics, have seen the Council secure high quality developments. For example the:

- Housing Development at Ebley Wharf; and,
- Stroud Cinema Proposals

We recognise that our use of Section 106 agreements (in effect a mechanism to secure wider community benefit from developments) has not always been effective in the past. This is an area in which we are actively trying to improve our performance, particularly around

affordable housing and green spaces, which are priorities for the Council.

Supplementary Planning Guidance has been produced for the former and will be in place for the latter during 2005. We have also started work on producing Supplementary Planning Guidance for the Cotswold Canals restoration, again we expect to publish this during 2005, and this is one of the major public spaces challenges facing the district.

We are starting to plan positively for the move towards a Local Development Framework aiming to develop strong links with the Community Strategy and the land use and spatial elements of Town and Parish Plans.

### **An effective development control service**

During 2002/03 and 2003/04 performance against government targets in terms of the speed of decision-making in development control declined. It was clear to us that Government targets would be increasingly unachievable unless we invested in new systems and staff.

A new IT system was introduced in to the planning service during 2003/04, at a cost of £107k, and as with all new systems

performance has dipped while it has been bedding in. Although we have taken one step back we believe this will enable us to take a giant leap forwards over the next 3 years and we have set ourselves the target of being in the top quartile nationally by December 2006. Despite our current relatively poor performance against the statutory PI's in this period our level of customer satisfaction is high with 70% of customers being very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service that they received in the processing of their applications.

### **Securing environmental enhancements when we do things**

When we build things we have a track record of improving the local environment and meeting local needs. For example:

- The development of the Museum in the Park,
- The refurbishment of the Subscription Rooms and its forecourt,
- Environmental enhancements to Church St Car Park, Stroud and Market St Car Park, Nailsworth.
- Refurbishment of derelict town centre buildings for social housing at Delmont's Lot, Stroud; Pin Mill, Dursley and Kendrick Street, Stroud.

We have also used derelict or obsolete assets to enable others to achieve our Regeneration priority. For example:

- Transferring ownership of Woodchester Mansion to the Woodchester Mansion Trust;
- Leasing Kingshill House to the Kingshill House Trust;
- Transferring ownership of the Weavers House to the Dursley Town Trust and matching funding the SWRDA by contributing £125k to its successful renovation.

### **Maintaining the local environment**

Our performance in terms of ensuring that the local environment is well maintained has been inconsistent. Individual services have performed well and there have been some successes but overall this is an area that until the last 12-18 months we had not really thought about how we could join up services internally and externally.

We have been trying to improve things more recently, for example through:

- The introduction and expansion of the Neighbourhood Warden service;
- The introduction of Parish Council Cluster Groups for Community Safety;

- Improved arrangements with Gloucestershire County Council, including making sure verge cutting (GCC) and litter picking (Our responsibility) coincide on high profile routes;
- The establishment of Market Town Regeneration Partnerships to bring local communities and key agencies together to identify and plan local environmental improvements (e.g. Stroud Town Concordat);
- The establishment of a Market Town Vitality Index, which includes local environmental quality;
- The completion of a District wide green and public spaces audit with Parish and Town Council's; and,
- Working with other agencies to establish a new countywide system for reporting and dealing with abandoned vehicles.

We recognise we need to do more over the next few years (see the 'what are we planning to do next' section)

### **Dealing with pollution, noise and nuisance.**

Our Environmental Health Service has recently been inspected by the Audit Commission and achieved a 2-star (good)

rating. A detailed improvement plan has been put in place and will be implemented over the next few years. The main areas for improvement are the:

- Level of Health and Safety Inspections
- Communication with businesses
- Electronic service delivery
- Promotion of the services available.

Air quality within the District has been assessed, leading initially to the joint declaration of an Air Quality Management Area with Tewkesbury Borough Council. Further detailed survey work has proven that pollution limits are within national guideline and the AQMA has been rescinded.

We have adopted the concordat on good enforcement and the Audit Commission inspection confirmed that our approach to enforcement is a good one. They also commented that service requests are responded to quickly and were impressed with the helpfulness and professional attitude of staff responding to out of hours service requests.

### **How we see ourselves**

Overall we believe we contribute positively to the management of the physical

environment and would rate our performance as good (i.e. a low need for improvement focus).

**What we are planning to do next?**

However we recognise there is still room for improvement and given the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this section we intend to take the following steps.

PS1: Upper quartile performance in planning by December 2006.

PS2: Establish new local development framework by March 2007.

## **SECTION 2: DOES THE COUNCIL HELP KEEP THE LOCALITY CLEAN?**

---

### **Refuse Collection**

Gloucestershire's Joint Municipal Waste Strategy sets out a timetable for stabilising waste growth by 2018 and thereafter reducing growth to minus 3% by 2027. Our Environmental Contracts Service, which achieved a 2-star (good) rating with promising prospects for improvement from the Audit Commission, has led the Council's work and has used the waste hierarchy to its full:

- Refuse collection and recycling is the Council's most highly recognised service by local people: 88.6% of people in our 2003 Household Survey recognised the Council delivered the service.
- We have consistently been in the best 25% nationally for the amount of waste collected (i.e. we are collecting a lot less than most other district councils);
- Between 2001/02 and 2002/03 our recycling rate went up from 17% to 21%, in both cases we were in the top 25% nationally;
- In 2000/01 we were again in the top 25% nationally for satisfaction with recycling facilities, which now includes

100% coverage of the district with kerb side collection.

### **Street Cleaning and Public Conveniences**

In 2000/01 only 63% of local people were satisfied with the standards of cleanliness in the district. This was below average when compared nationally. We recognise we need to do more in this area.

However, where localised problems have occurred, such as Stroud Town centre, we have worked with partners to improve the situation, in this case by jointly funding an 'enhanced' cleaning regime.

Public Convenience management was subject to a Best Value Review during 2002/03, which has resulted in a new strategy and a £550k investment programme. The focus is on improving the satisfaction of local people with the facilities.

### **Dealing with other nuisances**

We attempt to clear fly tipping (on the highway) within 24-hours of it being reported. Our staff, particularly neighbourhood wardens, and local communities identify hotspots for graffiti

and fly posting and we try and deal with these promptly and typically within 5 days. The number of abandoned vehicles has increased by 46% over the last 3 years and during 2002/03 972 vehicles were dealt with. We have responded positively and by using 24-hour notices following police checks we are typically able to remove vehicles within 2 days. We are currently piloting a fast track process, in partnership with Gloucestershire Police and Fire Service, designed to remove burnt out, stolen and abandoned vehicles within 24 hours of one being reported.

Dog fouling is a perennial issue and the Dog Warden Service continues to promote good practice and responsible dog ownership is actively promoted, with approximately 40 events / talks every year. In 2003/04 an additional £10k was invested in providing a further 49-poop scoop bins, bringing the total to 250.

Whilst enforcement activity, in terms of litter and dog fouling, is limited, partly due the lack of witnesses willing to come forward, it is intended that we make better use of our Neighbourhood Wardens and the Police Community Support Officers in the future.

**How we see ourselves**

Overall we believe we contribute positively to helping to keep the locality clean and would rate our performance as good (i.e. a low need for improvement focus).

**What we are planning to do next?**

However we recognise there is still room for improvement and given the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this section we intend to take the following steps.

PS3: Building on what has been learnt over the last 18 months develop and implement a 'public spaces / street scene' action plan by March 2005.

PS4: Work in partnership to deliver the Gloucestershire Joint Municipal Waste Strategy.

PS5: Deliver £550k of investment into public conveniences over the next 4 years.

PS6: Deliver year on year improvements in street cleaning.

## **SECTION 3: DOES THE COUNCIL WORK WITH PARTNERS TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY SAFETY?**

---

### **A Beacon Council**

In 2002/03 we achieved Beacon Council Status for Crime Reduction in Rural Areas and this clearly identified the strength of partnerships that exist at County, inter-district, district and local levels. We play a lead role at all levels in supporting and facilitating partnership working. At a strategic level we are leading the merger of the Stroud and Cotswold District Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CRDP) because of the commonality of issues and partners across the combined area.

We recently completed the Home Office self-assessment of the Stroud District CRDP with partners and this revealed that the partnership is performing well with clear aims and objectives. Improvements have been identified including establishing better links with the business community.

### **Investing in Community Safety**

Community Safety is one of our 5 priorities and has been a major area for investment into service and partnership development.

By reallocating efficiency savings, redeploying existing staff and securing external funding we have increased the size of the Community Safety service from 1.5 FTEs in 2001/02 to 16 FTEs in 2002/03. The successful establishment and roll out of Neighbourhood Wardens service, without Government funding, has been a major area of investment for us.

### **Crime and disorder in the District**

The aims and objectives of the CRDP are set out in the 3-year Strategy (2002-05) and supporting audit and annually reviewed action plans. The performance of our CRDP at tackling crime and disorder is above average nationally for the main crime areas where statistics are gathered: domestic burglary, robberies, theft of and from motor vehicles, violent and sexual offences. Overall we are 11<sup>th</sup> out of the 46 other CRDPs in our family group. In other words the District typically has higher crime levels than those areas, which are most similar to it. Although our crime levels are about half of those for Gloucester and Cheltenham, which have comparable population levels locally.

Fear of crime, particularly amongst older people, continues to be an area of concern, as revealed by national surveys

(we tend to be above regional averages for most areas of concern) and our own annual 'perceptions of crime' survey. Between 2001 and 2003 the latter revealed an increase, from 28% to 33%, in the percentage of people who felt that their lives were restricted by crime.

### **Section 17**

As a Council, we have a strong approach to section 17 and all services are playing their full part, for example through the Anti-Social Behaviour Group, Safer Estates Initiative and Secure by Design. At a local level we have led a number of inter-agency and partnership based interventions into local neighbourhoods with demonstrably positive impacts.

### **External funding**

We have been very successful at identifying and securing external funding to take particular initiatives forward and worked with others to pool budgets and deliver services on a County-wide or inter-district basis when this is more appropriate (e.g. MAIDeN Crime Analyst, ASTRA Project, Domestic Violence Project, Racial Incident Group).

### **How we see ourselves**

Overall we believe we work well with

partners to improve community safety and believe this to be an area requiring a 'very low need for improvement focus'.

**What we are planning to do next?**

However we recognise there is still room for improvement and given the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this section we intend to take the following steps.

PS7: Lead the production of a new 3-year Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy for 2005-08.

PS8: Extend neighbourhood warden service to provide district wide coverage by March 2008.

PS9: Produce a 'pockets of deprivation' map for the district (by June 2004). Develop a 3-year Community Cohesion and Well-being action plan (by March 2005)

## **SECTION 4: DOES THE COUNCIL CONTRIBUTE TO ACTIVITIES TO POSITIVELY ENGAGE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?**

---

### **Youth Council**

We established a Youth Council and Cabinet in 2000, with the membership being elected from the secondary schools within the district. The Youth Council has further developed with input from the Youth and Community Service and it has its own constitution, setting out its roles and responsibilities. The Leader of the Youth Cabinet also sits on the Stroud District Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

### **Understanding Needs**

Our approach to consulting young people has historically been ad hoc, although this has supported the planning and delivery of a number of services and initiatives, including:

- . Development of the Museum in the Park;
- Establishment of the Regeneration through Sport service; including the creation of a Talented Young Sports Performer Grant Programme, wheeled sports guide and advice, Gloucestershire Sports Partnership and Active Sports.

### **Involving Young People**

To provide a more strategic overview we have worked with the Youth Council, during 2004, to identify what services the Council provides and supports, and how appropriate these are in light of a joint needs assessment. The aim is to have a Services for Young People action plan, as part of wider Community Cohesion/Well-being work, in place by March 2005.

### **Supporting and providing services for young people**

We provide or support the provision by others of a wide range of activities for young people, including:

- Our Museum Service and Subscription Rooms provide education programmes, activities and workshops;
- Tourism supports various events (e.g. Joust) and festivals, which have educational programmes associated with them;
- We grant aid the local Education Business Partnership, which is also represented on the LSP;
- We continue to invest in play equipment, through the Rural and

Community Investment Scheme. We also provide support and advice to Parish and Town Councils with adopted play equipment;

- Leisure Services runs the KAPER's scheme during the summer holidays as well as providing a full range of conventional activities for young people (e.g. swimming lessons).
- We are investing £100k over 4-years in creating a network of high quality skateboarding facilities throughout the District;
- Through Core Grant support we enable a number of voluntary organisations to provide specialist services to young people (e.g. Door Youth Project, SHARE Counselling).
- Our Community Safety Service has invested in local community facilities, such as Youth Shelters, as well as put in place supportive mechanisms with the Youth and Community Service, in particular joint funding of outreach work across the District.
- We have a multi agency and partnership based approach to anti-social behaviour.
- Our Homelessness Service provides talks to local secondary schools.

- The Regeneration Service financially supports the Princes Trust which funds young entrepreneurs;
- Our Regeneration through Sport Service is building a strong network of local clubs with clear youth development policies.

PS9: Produce a 'pockets of deprivation' map for the district (by June 2004). Develop a 3-year Community Cohesion and Well-being action plan (by March 2005) including a focus on children and young people.

### **Child Protection**

A comprehensive Child Protection Policy and supporting procedures has been developed. We did this in consultation with a number of agencies including the NSPCC, Sport England, neighbouring councils, Social Services and the area child protection committee.

### **How we see ourselves**

Overall we believe we contribute to activities to positively engage children and young people and believe this to an area requiring only a 'low need for improvement focus'.

### **What we are planning to do next?**

However we recognise there is still room for improvement and given the barriers, challenges and opportunities identified in this section we intend to take the following steps.







**SECTION 5: IN LIGHT OF WHAT THE COUNCIL HAS LEARNED TO DATE WHAT DOES IT PLAN TO DO NEXT?**

---





**Taking things forward**

Although we believe our overall performance in terms of public spaces is good we recognise there are areas in which we need to improve if we are to take our priorities forward in a way that local people notice. We are very clear about what we want to achieve and this is captured in section 6.



**SECTION 6: PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

To achieve these things by 2008		We will need to tackle these identified barriers and challenges		By taking these actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <i>Regeneration:</i> Working in partnership to realise wealth creation, rural and market town regeneration and economic prosperity.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ To capture the land use and spatial elements of town and parish plans and the community strategy within a local development framework.</li> <li>□ Securing further investment in the planning service.</li> <li>□ To ensure that contributions through the planning process are maximised and targeted effectively to satisfy areas of identified need.</li> </ul>		<p>PS1: Upper quartile performance in planning by December 2006.</p> <p>PS2: Establish new local development framework by March 2007.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <i>Environment:</i> To protect and improve the environment, with particular emphasis on the District's green spaces through</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ To join up our public spaces services internally and with others externally.</li> </ul>		<p>PS3: Building on what has been learnt over the last 18 months develop and implement a 'public spaces / street scene' action plan by March 2005.</p>

**SECTION 6: PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

To achieve these things by 2008	 We will need to tackle these identified barriers and challenges	 By taking these actions
a new strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Achievement of the Government's arbitrary recycling targets.</li> <li>❑ To work much more closely with local communities on public space and local environment matters.</li> </ul>	PS4: Work in partnership to deliver the Gloucestershire Joint Municipal Waste Strategy.  PS5: Deliver £550k of investment into public conveniences over the next 4 years.  PS6: Deliver year on year improvements in street cleaning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <i>Community Safety</i>: Delivering</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Tackle 'fear of crime'</li> </ul>	 PS7: Lead the production of a new 3-year

## SECTION 6: PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

To achieve these things by 2008		We will need to tackle these identified barriers and challenges		By taking these actions
<p>the community safety strategy as a Beacon Council with our partners.</p>		<p>particularly amongst older people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Help communities to understand and tackle their own needs.</li> <li>❑ Better understand the needs of our communities of place and interest, particularly those who might be classed as hard to reach and / or living in 'pockets' of deprivation.</li> <li>❑ Work with others to help build functioning, more cohesive and sustainable rural and market town communities.</li> </ul>		<p>Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy for 2005-08.</p> <p>PS8: Extend neighbourhood warden service to provide district wide coverage by March 2008.</p> <p>PS9: Produce a 'pockets of deprivation' map for the district (by June 2004). Develop a 3-year Community Cohesion and Well-being action plan (by March 2005) including a focus on children and young people.</p>

**COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (CPA)**

**BALANCING HOUSING MARKETS DIAGNOSTIC**

**Introduction**

The Government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council in July 2004 gives us another opportunity for self-examination, internal review and external challenge. This will help us to maintain the pace of change generated over the last few years and deliver real improvements that local people notice.

This document is about our role in balancing housing markets in the District and is one of three case studies (called 'diagnostics') that complement the Corporate Self-Assessment document. The other two case studies are on Public space and Decent Homes.

**Contents**

Section 1: How well does the Council understand it's housing market and from it's understanding has the council the right proposals to help balance its housing markets?	Page 2
Section 2: What are the Council's actions and what outcomes has it achieved in helping to balance housing markets?	Page 5
Section 3: How well does the Council monitor its progress and impact in helping to balance housing markets and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?	Page 10

**Reading the document**

As part of their CPA Inspection the Audit Commission will score each of the three main questions (in effect sections 1-3 of this document) on the following basis:

A= Very low need for improvement focus;  
B = Low need for improvement focus;  
C = High need for improvement focus;  
and,  
D = Very high need for improvement focus.

We have self-scored ourselves on this basis to help our improvement planning and as such at the end of each section you will find a 'What we are planning to do next' heading. In this we show how we rate ourselves and what we are going to do in the future.

Overall we believe our performance is good in relation to balancing housing markets and therefore there should be a low need for improvement action ('B' above). This said we have identified some weaknesses that we will be tackling.

## **SECTION 1: HOW WELL DOES THE COUNCIL UNDERSTAND ITS HOUSING MARKET AND FROM IT'S UNDERSTANDING HAS THE COUNCIL THE RIGHT PROPOSALS TO HELP BALANCE ITS HOUSING MARKETS?**

---

### **1.1 Does the Council have the right research base to understand its housing market?**

We have a clear understanding of the local and regional housing market from a wide range of sources.

Within the District there is 81% home ownership and high levels of in-migration to the district accounting for a significant level of housing demand. 61% of the projected increase in households in Stroud District is estimated to be the result of in-migration. Data indicates that 95% of residents are happy with their current home, although the district has a high level (85%) of under occupation in the private sector. There is a shortfall in all types of affordable dwellings of up to 300p.a. 50% of those in housing need indicate that they could afford up to £88,000 or no more than £75 per week. House price and income levels are monitored as part of the survey work to update the Housing Needs

Survey.

Our research is used in a number of service areas to determine priorities, and inform both the Housing Strategy/Action Plans and the Local Plan. The 2003 update to the Housing Needs Assessment informed a review of our Interim Planning Statement on Affordable Housing. This decreased the affordable housing threshold and increased the required percentage on qualifying sites.

A comprehensive countywide HNS is underway, jointly commissioned by the 6 Gloucestershire District Councils and the Gloucestershire supporting people team. By adopting a common approach to the methodology results can be better compared and assist in the development of the sub regional picture. On behalf of the LSP we are the only Gloucestershire Authority to commission a Key Worker study as part of the countywide HNS.

### **1.2 How well does the Council develop and evolve its strategies and plans?**

The Housing and the Housing Renewal Strategy explain how local issues relate to countywide, regional and national priorities. The strategy recognises that not all national and regional priorities, or

investment opportunities, are available to the District, but also highlights good practice achieved through strategic cross-boundary partnerships, and influencing the sub-regional housing priorities of the SWRHB.

The Local Plan was developed in the context of national and regional priorities and targets. This is set out in the plan. We have a good track record of consulting and involving residents and stakeholders in strategy and plan development.

The Council has an effective relationship with the Local Strategic Partnership that has as one of its six key themes, 'Improving Housing opportunities'. The LSP affordable housing Syndicate Group identifies two objectives:

- ❑ To take every Opportunity to maximise the supply of affordable housing units available to local people in need
- ❑ To maximise investment in the private and public housing stocks in order to reduce the number of units which are unfit for habitation.

Our Corporate Delivery Plan reflects the priorities of the LSP and the Community Strategy. Affordable housing is expressed as a priority and actions and milestones

are set out. The Council's Strategic Team and Executive Board regularly review the CDP

The LSP priorities are also reflected within the Housing Strategy and the Local Plan 'Interim Planning Statement' on affordable housing. Priorities are also determined from feedback from the public through consultation on key documents, annual telephone survey, talking to key partners and as part of research (HNS).

Resources within our Capital Programme have been prioritised to support initiatives that address housing need, and to lever-in funding from external organisations, including the Housing Corporation and Social Services.

At a Countywide level, the Housing Strategy Officers Group in consultation with the Housing Corporation prioritises projects that provide housing with support. The Supporting People Team, assist in the prioritisation by coordinating assessments of need.

### **1.3 Does the council have the right Strategies and plans to help it balance the housing market?**

#### **Housing Strategy**

The Housing Strategy is informed by Housing Need Surveys and by a large number of partners in the private, public and voluntary sectors and linked through complementary policies and strategies. The partners include the Stroud Locality Planning Team (LPT), Social Services, and PCTs. The Health Improvement programme (HImp) both refers and links directly to our Private Sector Housing Policy, Homelessness Strategy, and the policies within the Local Plan and interim planning statement on affordable housing.

The new Housing Strategy (currently in draft form) will sequentially address national and regional priorities contained in the Government's Communities Plan (and the SW Regional Communities Plan). The new draft of the Strategy contains a SMART action plan.

#### **Local Plan**

The Local Plan Inquiry took place in spring 2003 and the inspectors report is expected not later than the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2004 although some key sites may be reported earlier. The Local Plan allocates sufficient land to meet RPG and GSP policy to 2016 though its current end date is 2011. The Local Plan has clear affordable housing

policies that have been updated in light of the 2003 HNS update and draft PPG3. An Interim Planning Statement (IPS) has been updated to reflect new information, reducing thresholds (15 units) and increasing percentage provision (30%) on development sites. An 'Exceptions' policy is in place. The Local plan sets out clear policies for open market housing to meet private sector needs. Current policy protects smaller houses in areas of identified affordable housing need from large extensions and encourages a mix of house types and sizes in order to create more balanced communities. Policy allocates appropriately located sites, which following an urban capacity study, focus on brownfield land. Policy is also provided for considering 'windfall development'.

Provisions to be sought via s106 agreements are set out for allocated sites in the local Plan and work is in progress to produce supplementary Planning Guidance on s106 agreements in 2004. A residential design guide has been adopted and includes guidance on community safety.

Relevant local plan policies and the housing strategy have been worked on jointly at officer level and politically at joint

policy panels. Housing officers are represented on the Locality Planning Team that delivers the HImP. The Local Plan incorporates relevant land use issues from other SDC strategies – regeneration, tourism, green space etc. A key part of Planning and compensation act 2004 is to ensure integration with other strategies and plans, particularly of external agencies. The District Council is currently setting out its Local Development Scheme.

### **Private Sector Housing Strategy**

In July 2002 the District Council adopted a Private Sector Housing renewal policy that was agreed in June 2003 in light of the requirements of the Regulatory Reform Order. The change in legislation provided an opportunity for the council to review its policy for private Sector housing and integrate the work carried out in this area with other wider strategic objectives such as improving the health of the community, building economic prosperity, reducing crime and disorder and helping those in particular need.

### **What we are planning to do next**

- Review thresholds for affordable housing in light of new information coming from Countywide Housing needs survey

- Publish results of the Countywide Housing Need Survey in mid 2004, including a Stroud-specific Keyworker Study
- From the updated HNS study, formulate a local definition of Keyworker
- Review effectiveness of HNS methodology and Countywide approach
- Include a Housing Strategy target to update the survey
- Identify derelict, under-used, obsolete, vacant buildings and sites for affordable housing purposes
- Implement proposals in draft PPS3 to secure more affordable housing.
- Consider final version of PPS3 and its implications on affordable housing provision within the District
- Review guidelines in IPS relating to SDC understanding of the role of land values in considering affordable housing provision
- Clarify affordable housing in terms of Keyworkers
- Consider Local Plan Inquiry Inspectors recommendations

## **SECTION 2: WHAT ARE THE COUNCIL'S ACTIONS AND WHAT OUTCOMES HAS IT ACHIEVED IN HELPING TO BALANCE HOUSING MARKETS?**

---

### **2.1 How well is the council working corporately to help balance the housing market?**

It was challenging to make a realistic assessment concerning future resources with the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of the LSVT process. Following the 'no' vote we have developed the draft Housing Strategy and allocated £350,000 in the capital programme for the next two years following the demise of the LASHG.

From a resource perspective we will:

- Asses funding options in the light of LSVT and the demise of LASHG
- Assess how we support bids for Housing Corporation and other resources.
- Identify as a target in the housing strategy what proportion of our affordable housing shortfall is to be met, how we will do that, and what proportion of our short and medium term capital funding will be used.

- Identify grant requirements for each allocated Local Plan site and an estimate for windfall sites
- Use the Asset Management Plan to meet our resource requirements by directing funding to our greatest priorities, including the identification of Council owned sites for development, transfer to RSLs, or possible transfer to Community Land Trust organisations.
- Quantify housing renewal expenditure against other housing priorities in the Action Plan within the new Housing Strategy
- Assess how we maximise resources and lever-in private sector funding through prioritisation of grants to landlords, facilitate equity loans, etc.
- Confirm our resource position as an action within the new Housing Strategy.

### **Capacity to deliver Strategies and plans**

Our strategic housing, planning and regeneration functions are integrated through close working relationships. Multi-agency working at countywide level takes place through the Housing Strategy Advisory Group. The formation of the LSP has joined up the working of the key players and is moving towards the

coordinated delivery of our strategic housing objectives.

Staff resources have been divided between policy formation and the need for complex operational scheme specific negotiations. A revised IPS on Affordable housing has been put in place to clarify the council's position and work is underway to produce SPG on 106 agreements to clarify the Council's position further. This will provide a consistent and clear framework for site-by-site negotiations/discussions.

Two of the Cabinet portfolio holders cover Housing. This level of representation reflects both the commitment to housing issues and the workload relating to Housing Transfer. Both Housing and planning issues relate to all of the Council's seven corporate aims and these links are demonstrated in service plans. Joint Planning and Housing Policy Panels for Members are commonly held, reflecting the interdependence between the Council's Local Plan and its Housing Strategy.

### **Partnerships**

The Council makes extensive use of partnership working to aid the delivery of its housing objectives. The Council is actively involved with agencies at all levels

acknowledges that the challenges involved in balancing housing markets requires an integrated approach across a range of organisations.

Housing partnerships are consolidated in terms of the Gloucester Housing Market partnership (GHMP) focussing on the Principle Urban Area (Gloucester) and the Gloucestershire Rural Housing Partnership (GRHP) focussing on the rural parts of the four Glos rural districts. The Housing Strategy Group represents all six local authorities, and now has permanent County Council and Housing Corporation representation, with representation as required from PCTs. The GRHP has permanent representation of the Housing Corporation, the Countryside Agency and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council.

The GHMP has attracted £30m of HC funding to develop 1,300 affordable homes with associated community facilities to meet identified needs in the sub-regional market.

### **Community Leadership, Equalities and Social Exclusion**

The Council has taken a robust approach in overcoming barriers to delivering its local plan objectives through its stance at

the LPI and individual planning applications.

Available data indicates that people of ethnicity are primarily homeowners and there is no evidence to suggest that our housing services are not available to the whole community. An action plan in our housing strategy is to produce a BME Housing Strategy and part of that process will be to establish if there are any unmet needs, and proposals to address them. The ratio between our BME population and targets set within our housing allocations policy will also be examined in detail. Through the GHMP the significant BME needs of the Principal Urban Area are being identified and met through opportunities on the major Local Plan sites that straddle administrative boundaries.

A Special Needs Allocations Group exists within the Council to identify the particular housing and support needs of the community. It provides solutions through adaptation or re-provision in council, RSL, and private sector stock, taking a team-based approach with Occupational Therapists. Residents are invited to participate in consultation exercises and feedback is included in developing our plans and strategies.

## **2.2 Is the Council pursuing the right actions and initiatives to help balance the housing market and are there outcomes for local residents and the housing market as a whole making the right kind of difference?**

### **Housing Development**

The Council is revising its Housing Strategy. The Local Plan Inquiry has taken place and we await the Inspectors report.

We have:

- ❑ Appropriate allocations in the Local Plan to ensure supply over plan period.
- ❑ 72% of completed new development on PDL exceeding the ODPM target of 60%. Densities are routinely above 30dph.
- ❑ Actively encouraged pre application discussions and have implemented a development team approach on larger applications.
- ❑ Assisted in the preparation of Development frameworks for major sites
- ❑ Established a User Group for Development Services
- ❑ Put in place SPGs for Affordable Housing, residential design, landscape

assessment and outdoor play space provision.

- ❑ Provided guidance documents on historic buildings, Conservation Design guides, trees and development
- ❑ We are currently in the process of developing a playing pitch strategy and guidance on canal restoration.
- ❑ Increased staff numbers in Development Control to effectively manage the increase in planning application numbers

Social/affordable Housing developments and partnerships

- ❑ Approximately 490 affordable homes have been developed over the past 10 years. In rural areas, affordable housing has been provided to address specific local needs, including exception sites. In urban areas, refurbishment projects have met general housing need.
- ❑ Current proposals mean that the council provides on average 49 affordable homes each year against a need of 300.
- ❑ The Council operates a Key RSL Policy involving 7 RSLs who are monitored on an annual basis.
- ❑ Partners are expected to comply with

the provisions of our Key RSL Policy and are monitored against this both in terms of development and management performance.

- There are specific arrangements within the GHMP and GRHP for joint commissioning partnerships in that there are primary developing associations and RSLs as recipients of developed stock to manage.
- RSLs must comply with the Councils residential design guide, and strive to meet Housing Corporation Scheme Development Standards, including HQI assessment, 'Secure By Design', and Lifetime Homes standards.
- We meet Government targets for reduced use of B&B accommodation.
- The LSP has commissioned research to support a Key Worker initiative.
- The Housing Strategy Advisory Group is developing a countywide approach to Choice Based Lettings by combining experiences and resources, to examine the outcomes of pilot schemes, investigating IT resources to manage CBL schemes, and consider the benefits of a multi-district CBL scheme. This work is programmed for 2004.
- We have reduced the council tax discount for second homes from 50%

to 10% and directed part of the resource to the LSP to support their priorities

In Stroud in the past 3 years we have developed:

- Stonham's Temporary Accommodation Resource Team (S.T.A.R.T) 2 units for single homeless males including ex-offenders and those recovering from drug and alcohol abuse.
- 20 units of supported move-on accommodation for young people.
- 3 units of accommodation for people with learning disabilities, with floating support.
- Hardwicke: wheelchair accessible dwelling as part of the Millennium project.
- Dursley: four units of supported accommodation for people with learning disabilities.
- Minchinhampton: 4 units of supported housing for people with profound physical and mental disabilities.
- The Countywide Floating Support scheme for young people, including Teenage Parents was expanded.
- Flats in two sheltered housing schemes have been reconfigured to address hospital bed blocking issues in partnership with local Health Trusts.

The structure for developing the Gloucestershire Supporting People (SP) Strategy gives us a seat on the County-wide Core Strategy Group of officers and the Commissioning Body. SP Strategy development is considered at our Housing Policy Panels and the final Strategy is considered by the Executives (Cabinet) of each local authority within the County prior to adoption. A review programme of projects funded by the Supporting People programme is agreed and underway. Service users are involved at a higher level through an Inclusive Forum and are consulted as part of service reviews.

The Council works closely with SHELTER, and has consulted a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies that provide housing, care, and advice services to the homeless. A wide range of issues and actions arose from a Consultation Day and the review process identified gaps in service provision. We have set targets to address these in our Homelessness Strategy.

The Supporting People Strategy, and Supporting People funding are major elements in the delivery of homes and services for people with special needs.

The priorities for these services will become clearer on publication of the Supporting People Strategy in 2004.

The Homelessness Review process acknowledged evidence of good service delivery by the Council directly, and through inter-agency collaboration, with minimal incidences of homelessness and rough sleeping.

### **Private sector Housing**

The Housing Renewal Policy was published in July 2003 and integrates the former policy for Private Sector Housing with other wider strategic objectives such as improving the health of the community, building economic prosperity, reducing crime and disorder and helping those in particular need. The current finance available to effect this policy is set out in the Capital Programme as £1,205,000 for each of the four years through to 2007/08. The local House Conditions Survey 2001 showed that £37.58 million is required to deal with unfit and urgent disrepair in the private sector stock across the District. Clearly insufficient funding is available to meet all the needs of the District; therefore the council works in partnership with all other sectors to try and meet the needs

identified and ensure that resources are prioritised towards those in greatest need.

The policy was updated in March 2004 due to changing circumstances and operational reasons to optimise effectiveness:

- Changing the criteria for patch and mend grants.
- Extending the Home improvement Grant to include works necessary to meet the decent homes standard.
- Allocating £40,000 for grants to be given in accordance with the County Homes Energy Action Plan Project.

Through the HRP and our partners we:

- Provide Care Line Grants
- Continue to give assistance to householders via discretionary renovation and repair grants and through doing so has helped 812 households since 1996.
- Provide patch and mend grants, Regeneration grants, Private Rented sector grants and HMO grants
- Maintain a budget to cover mandatory and discretionary DFGs and has helped 327 households through this route since 1996.
- Grant aid to Local care and Repair for adaptations, garden assistance,

community safety and safer bathing programmes.

- Energy efficiency grants.

### **What we are planning to do next**

- Determine the priorities of the LSP for the use of resources from the reduction of Council Tax concessions to second home owners
- Ensure priorities and action points are considered for inclusion in the Corporate Delivery Plan where appropriate
- Consider opportunities for allocating land and review land in public ownership following final PPS3 publication
- Organise a CLT seminar
- Consider whether a CLT could assist employers initiatives to support employees and whether such a CLT could benefit from Planning obligation policies.
- Possible update of IPS if the CLT option is taken forward.
- Consolidate our 'Information Scheme' so that there is a central system, which can be monitored and easily updated to ensure that all relevant data is to hand.
- Through the Health and Well-being Partnership, consider the role of a

financial advisor to work with older people to provide advice on equity release schemes

### **SECTION 3: HOW WELL DOES THE COUNCIL MONITOR ITS PROGRESS AND IMPACT IN HELPING TO BALANCE HOUSING MARKETS AND HOW EFFECTIVELY DOES THIS FEED INTO FUTURE STRATEGIES AND PLANS?**

---

#### **3.1 How well does the council monitor its progress and assess the impact of its work to help balance the housing market?**

The council's approach to monitoring is integrated within the corporate performance management system.

##### **Local Plan Monitoring**

- The Planning Strategy team developed a housing land availability-monitoring database that has been adopted and refined by GCC for use by all the Gloucestershire Districts. Delivery is managed through adjustments to policy.

- Monitoring of applications and permissions is carried out monthly with data on completions fed in from Building control and the NHBC. Annual surveys are carried out to validate data.
- Numbers of social housing units are monitored as part of the housing land availability study and are reported to scrutiny.
- Reports to members are submitted annually via an Information Sheet on housing numbers compared to Structure Plan requirements and % commitments/completions on previously developed land.
- Records are maintained on 106 obligations, a new system for monitoring the progression of Section 106 agreements is being developed in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council.
- Work programme includes the development of a sustainability checklist or 'green index'.
- We continue to monitor new government guidance, comment appropriately and implement as necessary through modifications to policy.

##### **Housing Strategy/Private Sector Housing Action plans**

The Housing Strategy contains measurable targets, these feed into service plans and appraisals. Service Plans and PI's are reported quarterly to the Council's Strategic Team. Scrutiny Committee monitors performance indicators on a quarterly basis. Additional monitoring carried out is through customer satisfaction surveys and landlord forum. Joint working groups such as the Social Housing Advisory Panel and the Affordable Housing Working Group, regularly review and monitor progress.

We hold 2 landlords Forum per year; produce a Newsletter for private landlords and letting agents. The Council has consulted local private landlords and letting agents on future grant policy, and the development and improvement of the Fit to Rent, Deposit Bond and Rent in Advance schemes.

#### **3.2 Has the Council learnt from what it is doing to help balance the housing market to develop and improve its future strategies and plans?**

Through monitoring the delivery of the Local Plan and the Housing Strategy

alongside legislative changes we have responded by:

- Revising the IPS on affordable Housing to take into account PPG3 and issues with delivery
- Commissioning a revised Countywide HNS
- Constantly updating planning policies through the preparation stages of local plan in light of comment, new information, monitoring – revised deposit; pre-Inquiry/proposed changes/suggested further changes at Inquiry.
- Reviewing outdoor play space and playing pitch provision through a Green Spaces Strategy.
- Preparing for new planning system – in work programme
- Improving monitoring in work programme
- Next stage on Local Plan is to consider Inspectors Report against national and local priorities and to modify the LP accordingly – if necessary
- Employment monitoring – indicates need to balance housing and employment provision which led to employment study.

In reviewing the private sector housing renewal policy we consulted a wide range

of stakeholders including recipients of previous grant aid, resulting in:

- The development of 5 key priorities addressing quality/condition of the stock, helping the vulnerable, regenerate communities, reduce health risks associated with housing and help reduce crime/fear of crime.
- Work with a local Building Society to further develop their equity release loan arrangements to provide an acceptable product for the significant number of elderly householders living in poor condition housing who are cash poor but equity rich.

#### **Methods for gathering and assessing best practice**

District Liaison groups on planning and housing share information on best practice and provide learning between Gloucestershire authorities.

An affordable housing group consisting of Cabinet members and officers meet to provide an on going dialogue on affordable Housing.

The affordable housing syndicate group of the LSP has reported examples of best practice and considered their relevance to the Stroud context. These have been

taken forward by the District Council's affordable housing group and developed in to an action plan that also feeds in to the Housing Strategy.

The annual feedback from the Government Office for the South West on our Housing Strategy has helped to develop our future approach. In the last assessment by GOSW in Dec 2002 the Council received an above average rating and for the 5 years up to 2002 we received a well above or above average rating. We are currently in discussion with GOSW and the Community Housing Taskforce to agree a timetable in which we will submit a revised Housing strategy and HRA business plan seeking fit for purpose status.

In connection with the Housing Renewal Strategy, the District Council has a seat on the National Steering Group for policy tool development.

#### **What we are planning to do next**

- Review guidelines in IPS relating to SDC understanding of the role of land values in considering affordable housing provision
- Review CPO opportunities following confirmation of the Planning and

Compulsory Purchase Act.

- Explore whether a CLT would provide an appropriate additional route for provision of Affordable housing, either within or outside a RSL structure.
- Use Parish Plans to help identify land and/or funding to pump-prime start-up. When PPS3 published, review possibility of identifying exception sites as allocations
- Seek feedback on the Rent2Buy initiative from Key RSL Partners

## COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (CPA)

### DECENT HOMES

#### Introduction

The Government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Council in July 2004 gives us another opportunity for self-examination, internal review and external challenge. This will help us to maintain the pace of change generated over the last few years and deliver real improvements that local people notice.

This document is about our role in achieving the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) for the Council's own dwellings. It is one of three case studies (called 'diagnostics') that complement the Corporate Self-Assessment document. The other two case studies are on Balancing Housing Markets and Public Space.

#### Status of this document

In the light of the Housing Transfer Proposal and outcome of the tenants' ballot the Council has re-evaluated its ability to fully meet the DHS. Changes to Housing Revenue Account (HRA) services will continue which may impact upon available resources. A long term way forward still needs to be found and the position will continue to develop.

#### Contents

Section 1a: What is the Council trying to achieve in relation to the standard?	Page 2
Section 1b: How good is the base information to help the Council understand what needs to be done to meet the DHS?	Page 4
Section 1c: Has the Council evaluated a range of options, which would enable it to achieve the DHS and other objectives?	Page 5
Section 1d: Are there robust strategies and plans in place to help the Council meet the DHS?	Page 6
Section 2a: Has the Council maximised its capacity to deliver the DHS?	Page 9
Section 2b: Are work programmes designed to meet the DHS and have these been delivered?	Page 9
Section 3a: How well does the Council monitor its progress towards meeting the DHS?	Page 11
Section 3b: How well does the Council learn from itself and others?	Page 11
Section 4: Decent Homes Improvement Plan	Page 12

#### Reading the document

As part of their CPA Inspection the Audit Commission will score each of the four main questions (in effect sections 1-4 of this document) on the following basis:

A= Very low need for improvement focus;  
B = Low need for improvement focus;  
C = High need for improvement focus;  
and,  
D = Very high need for improvement focus.

We have self-scored ourselves on this basis to help our improvement planning and as such at the end of each section you will find a 'What we are planning to do next' heading. In this we show how we rate ourselves and what we are going to do in the future. These future actions form part of the Decent Homes Improvement Plan, which is set out in section 4. This in turn has fed into our Headline Improvement Plan, which can be found in section 6 of the Corporate Self-Assessment document. We will be discussing this with the Audit Commission following the CPA inspection in July 2004.

The Council has undertaken a great deal of work in relation to Housing Options in striving to produce a viable way to achieve the DHS.

There remains a major problem in meeting the full interpretation of the DHS. This is

an issue of key importance to the Council. However it is not one that can be addressed solely through changes to existing processes.

Our processes and performance in relation to striving to achieve the DHS within available resources we believe to be good. Therefore there should be a low need for improvement action ('B' above). However we do acknowledge that some improvement can be made particularly in the collation and use of data on individual properties. We have identified these in our improvement plan as areas that we will be tackling.

### **SECTION 1a: WHAT IS THE COUNCIL TRYING TO ACHIEVE IN RELATION TO THE STANDARD?**

---

#### **Our Commitment to the Decent Homes Standard**

The Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2001, revised annually, sets out the Council's aims to:

- Clear the investment backlog
- Improve housing standards
- Provide attractive housing
- Contribute to regeneration
- Ensure meaningful consultation
- Enhance tenant involvement in governance
- Deliver high quality, accessible services

- Ensure that the landlord service is provided in the best possible way

Since the initial publication of the Plan, the Council has added one further aim:

"To meet the DHS by the Transfer of its Housing Stock to Hill & Vale Housing, a prospective new registered social landlord created by the Council and its Tenant Representatives specifically for this purpose."

One of the Council's five key priorities is:

- *Housing:* With a focus on affordable and decent housing to meet local needs.

The Council's Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan reflect the need for investment in the Council's Housing Stock together with the resources available for this and other priority work.

During 2004, as part of the annual review of our Corporate Delivery Plan, we have set out the next steps required in relation to our landlord service and the DHS. These include:

- To Implement programme to achieve Decent Homes Standard by 2010.
- Invest £1.2 m p.a. on improving standards in private sector housing stock.

#### **Aiming for a secure future**

Our aim is to ensure that fully resourced work programmes can be undertaken to our housing stock. This is to ensure that all property components are replaced when required so that none are left in old and/or poor condition beyond their useful lifespan. If such programmes could be resourced and implemented the DHS would be met.

#### **Involving others**

All issues to be addressed within the HRA Business Plan are considered by 9 elected Tenant Representatives and 9 Councillors who serve on the Housing Forum. There is wider debate on those same issues at the Tenants and Residents' Forum, the United Sheltered Accommodation Panel; the Village Voice Panel and the Tenants' Steering Group. A Tenants' newsletter 'Keynotes' is also used to communicate issues to all tenants and leaseholders.

The Council has strong and well-developed Tenant Participation (TP). Over one-third of all tenants are served by a recognised tenant body/organisation. TP priorities are categorised into 5 aims in the

Stroud District Housing Partnership Agreement ('Tenant Compact').

Our contractors have been involved in the HRA Business Plan during the Housing Options process through "tool-box" talks.

Issues of Crime and Anti-social Behaviour are addressed through a well developed Community Safety Strategy and Partnership in which Housing plays a key role, particularly through an active Safer Estates Initiative.

Our Housing Strategy draws upon national and regional priorities. Objectives from both this Strategy and the complementary HRA Business Plan are developed through Service Plans involving staff and incorporated into individual staff appraisals. This maintains the thread of action from Corporate aim to individual action.

The Council works in partnership with its key Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners to secure the provision of new social housing. Additionally the Council holds monitoring meetings with all key RSL partners with a housing stock of any significance within the District in order to address progress on a range of issues of common interest including, management arrangements, allocations, redevelopment needs/opportunities. The Council is continuing to liaise with The Housing Corporation to play complementary roles

in monitoring progress towards the Decent Homes Standard of RSL stock within the District.

### **Housing options**

Whilst the Council is proud of its housing service, RTB sales, annual subsidy reductions and the need to meet the DHS have all challenged its future viability. The Council does not have adequate resources to maintain all aspects of its Housing Stock and protect the current level of other services. This led to the 2003 Housing Transfer Proposal, which was not supported by a majority of tenants when balloted in November/December 2003.

The Audit Commission undertook studies of the Council's Transfer process both at the Housing Options appraisal stage and again prior to ballot. The Audit Commission commended the Council on its process and cited a number of areas of good practice.

In responding to the resultant challenge posed by the No vote in December 2003 the Council announced a process of re-assessing the extent to which it will be able to meet the Standard. The Council remains committed to meeting the Standard whilst preserving other services to tenants as far as is possible.

### **Other relevant initiatives**

The Council's Housing Landlord service complies with the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice in Rented Housing. All Council staff recently underwent Diversity Training and undertook an assessment to ensure that awareness of Diversity issues remains high.

In partnership with Gloucestershire County Council the Council has established an in-house Occupational Therapy team to help meet the housing needs of tenants who have a disability. The team works closely with tenants and Council staff to produce the right solution, through adaptation, transfer or new-build.

### **Private Sector Stock**

The Councils private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy recognises the Governments aim to increase the number of vulnerable households in the private sector living in decent homes.

Grant aid is specifically targeted to vulnerable households and eligible works include those necessary to meet the DHS.

Many households fail the DHS simply because they are 'cold'. The Council works in partnership with the Severn Wye Energy Agency to deliver energy efficiency improvements to reduce fuel poverty and

improve thermal comfort for vulnerable households.

### **SECTION 1b: HOW GOOD IS THE BASE INFORMATION TO HELP THE COUNCIL UNDERSTAND WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO MEET THE DHS?**

---

The Council recognises the need to have robust data on the Quality, Quantity and Affordability of Accommodation and the supply and demand equations that influence this market. Housing Needs Surveys and Stock Condition surveys have been regularly conducted.

The Council completed an in-house Stock Condition survey in 2001 to establish a baseline for its Decent Homes assessment. The sample was 100% external and 8% internal across all property types.

The results of that survey were used to inform a new 10-year programme of work to the Council's dwellings. This was used in the preparation of the HRA Business Plan. However the level of expenditure required to both meet the DHS and preserve the range of current services to tenants made the HRA Operating Account financially unsustainable. Council commissioned in 2002 an Options Appraisal, which resulted in a recommendation that Transfer

represented the best long-term option for improving homes and services.

Development of the Housing Transfer Proposal required a revised Stock Condition Survey by external independent surveyors. FPD Savills completed this new survey in March 2003. The sample size was 10% internal and external profiled across property types. Detailed property elements were surveyed and their condition and remaining/unexpired lifespan assessed.

Key conclusions from FPD Savills' survey included: -

- The Council was broadly correct in its previous projection of expenditure requirements over a 30-year period
- The previous conclusion that expenditure in the next 10 years could be less than average was overly optimistic
- A flatter/ more consistent average spend is required over 30 years, resulting in an increase in expenditure of £1 million p.a. for the next 10 years

A contemporaneous survey of the Council's remaining non-traditional dwellings also revealed:

- Additional expenditure requirements of £5.35 million over the next 30 years of which £4.4 million is required in the first five years

- Of this, £3.7 million relates to the Council's 103 Woolaway properties
- Whilst the Woolaways had been clad externally to delay the rate of their deterioration, they have continued to suffer from corrosion of the re-inforcing bars and cracking of the concrete columns

FPD Savills' survey included a Decent Homes assessment of the 10% of properties surveyed, including a projection of future failures (potential non-decents). This revealed that 28% of the Council's dwellings failed the DHS as at January 2003.

Pending the outcome of the Housing Stock Transfer ballot, the Council's data was maintained on behalf of the Council by FPD Savills with quarterly updates provided to them of work undertaken. This process has continued post-ballot. However given the ballot outcome the Council is now considering: -

- Inputting the data into the stock condition module of the Council's integrated housing management system.
- Ongoing processes for improving the 90% cloned data from the stock condition survey.

FPD Savills' survey focused on each aspect of the DHS criteria, including repair, fitness and energy efficiency. It also

included a base level asbestos survey, from which an asbestos management plan has been developed. This will be in place by May 2004 as required by legislation.

To complement the surveys' assessment of the level of investment required in the stock, the HRA Business Plan includes a supply and demand analysis that forecasts future demand for the stock to inform investment decisions. This draws upon the ORS Housing Needs Survey carried out in 2000 and updated by the Ark Community Housing report in 2003. There is a generally high demand for all Council-owned stock. Whilst some individual properties for older people may experience lower demand, there are no areas that could be defined as hard to let.

The Council seeks to maximise the use of all its assets. All low density, high expenditure per dwelling projects are assessed to see if demolition and rebuild would be possible. A small sites register is maintained through which underused land is reviewed for development.

In mid-2001 a survey commissioned by the Council to assess Private Sector House Conditions and their Energy Efficiency was undertaken. The resultant report gave the Council an accurate picture of the state of this sector.

### **SECTION 1c: HAS THE COUNCIL EVALUATED A RANGE OF OPTIONS**

### **WHICH WOULD ENABLE IT TO MEET THE DHS AND OTHER OBJECTIVES?**

---

In 2002 a Housing Options Appraisal evaluated a range of options for the future of the service. It examined how each of these would contribute to meeting objectives set by Councillors and Tenant Representatives for the future of the housing service.

The Options Appraisal concluded that Large Scale Voluntary Transfer was the best option. The Housing Options report also included an organisational impact assessment.

A review of the assumptions that underpinned the Housing Options Appraisal was undertaken by an independent housing consultancy. It concluded that no more reasonable assumptions could be made.

An Independent Tenants' Advisor (ITA) was appointed at the Housing Options stage. A Tenants' Steering Group was established to appoint and work with the ITA through the Housing Options stage and in the subsequent pre-ballot stage. A Housing Consultative Working Group was established for Tenant/Councillor liaison and met at monthly intervals throughout the process.

The Council worked with Tenant Representatives to develop a Housing Transfer Proposal that not only led to the attainment of and future adherence to the DHS, but also meet the aspirations of tenants for the preservation and improvements of services. The Proposal included many aspects of the new Community Gateway model.

A prospective new landlord "Hill & Vale Housing" was formed and Board Directors appointed.

The lack of political consensus for the transfer option together with an active "anti-campaign" resulted in a very demanding pre-ballot consultation period. The Transfer proposal was rejected by tenants at the ballot with 56.7% against the Transfer and 43.3% in favour with a turnout of 76.8%.

Council halted the transfer process in December 2003. However we are mindful that in accordance with the Communities Plan the Council is currently expected to conduct a new Housing Options Appraisal and have this signed off by the Government Office for the South-West by July 2005.

The Council now faces a substantial challenge in relation to its housing service. There is a shortfall between expenditure required and resources available of £17 million over the next six years alone. The

results of future housing options appraisal work cannot be pre-judged. However, the Council is mindful that when sensitivities were conducted on the first Housing Options Appraisal none of the variances used would have affected the recommendation for Transfer.

The Council is conscious of the need to assess how to use the resources that it does have available to meet the DHS as far as this is possible. This may mean that work that does not contribute to the standard is not undertaken. Other resources may be diverted which would clearly affect service provision to tenants in those other areas.

Demolition and rebuild may now need to be considered for low density/potentially high spend properties such as the non-traditional properties.

#### **SECTION 1d: ARE THERE ROBUST STRATEGIES AND PLANS IN PLACE TO HELP THE COUNCIL MEET THE DHS?**

---

The Council's latest Housing Strategy and HRA Business plan were published in July 2003. The Council decided not to produce updated documents until the outcome of the Housing Transfer ballot.

The Council's Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan achieved "Above average" or "Well above average" ratings in each of the last 5 years of such assessments up to 2002. Both documents have associated Action Plans.

The Council had concluded that Housing Transfer provided the best way of meeting the DHS whilst preserving and indeed enhancing services to tenants.

In Easter 2003 the Council conducted a postal survey of all tenants to determine what tenants wanted from their housing service and by when. This information was used to further inform the Housing Transfer Proposal document that was delivered to all tenants in late September 2003.

In March 2004 Cabinet considered a further report from FPD Savills which concluded that the full interpretation of the DHS could not be met. There are insufficient resources to replace all property components as and when due, so as to avoid the age or condition of any components contributing towards failure of the DHS. However it was foreseen that the Council could reach a strict/minimal interpretation of the DHS by 2010. By ensuring that individual properties do not have a sufficient number of property components that are either old or in poor condition failure of the DHS can be

avoided. However this approach would result in an increasing investment backlog.

In July 2004 Cabinet will consider a further report on what steps could be taken to reduce expenditure on other HRA service areas releasing resources to be invested in the Major Repairs Programme in future.

As always, tenant representatives are involved in this process through the Housing Forum, consisting of nine elected tenant representatives and nine Councillors.

Negotiations with the Government Office for the South-west (GOSW) have been ongoing to establish the timescale in which the Council needs to complete a revised Housing Options appraisal and have this signed off by GOSW.

Progress on Partnering issues have, to an extent, been on hold during the two years that the Council has been undertaking the Options Appraisal and Transfer ballot. However the Council is seeking to develop a corporate procurement strategy. A Procurement Peer Review was undertaken in June 2003 and a Procurement Group has been established.

The Housing Strategy sets out the context of housing supply and demand within which the Council's Landlord service operates. The HRA Business Plan draws on this data to inform investment

decisions. The Asset Management Plan contains an assessment of the challenges faced by the Council in meeting DHS. The Council's Capital Strategy reflects the financial assessments made in the HRA Business Plan. Both the Asset Management Plan and the HRA Business Plan achieved "Good" ratings in 2002.

Partnership working on Community Safety issues has led to co-ordinated investment e.g. Home Office Safer Communities funding to provide both home security packages and CCTV in sheltered schemes.

**What are we planning to do next on issues within Section 1 (the following are proposed improvement actions):**

**DH1:** Train all housing staff to have a sound awareness of the DHS. Provide all staff involved in Repair and Maintenance with more advanced training to enable them to interpret whether or not properties meet the DHS.

**DH2:** Incorporate management and updating of DHS data and calculation of DHS failures back in-house. Use results of GoSW's current work on DHS IT systems to inform choice of software system.

**DH3:** Supplement/replace existing cloned DHS data with actual data on individual

properties from information gathered from surveys, void inspections etc.

**DH4:** Undertake a local options appraisal/asset management review of the Council's 103 Woolaway properties

**DH5:** Implement organisational change to clarify as far as possible HRA expenditure from other Council activities to enable clearer HRA priorities to be delivered.

**DH6:** Develop the Council's approach to Partnering through the corporate Procurement Group.

**DH7:** Continue to consider and pursue the most appropriate long term option for delivery of the housing landlord service to achieve the full DHS, meet tenants' aspirational requirements and achieve wider objectives. Continue to liaise with GoSW/ODPM to agree the most appropriate route and timescale.

**DH8:** Improve our liaison and complementary working with the Housing Corporation to monitor progress towards the DHS of Registered Social Landlord's Housing Stock.

**DH9:** To include an assessment of compliance with the decent homes standard in the next local house condition survey (2006) in order to be able to

monitor future progress in reducing the number of vulnerable households in non decent homes

**SECTION 2a: IS THE COUNCIL DELIVERING ITS PLANS TO MEET THE DHS?**

---

In 2002 a Housing Options Appraisal by Beha Williams Norman Ltd demonstrated that the Council could not meet the DHS and maintain the current level of services to tenants whilst operating a viable Housing Revenue Account. The Housing Transfer proposal was developed to preserve current services; satisfy tenants' aspirations for improved homes and services whilst meeting the DHS.

After the Transfer Proposal failed to achieve majority support from tenants in the December 2003 ballot, the Council immediately embarked upon a review of its other expenditure on housing services. Such action is being taken to maximise its capacity to deliver its ambitions to meet DHS by making cutbacks and changes in other areas.

The Council also has up to date information on the condition of all of its non-traditional properties following a sample survey by Curtins Consulting Engineers in September 2003. The survey results question the viability of the Council's 103 Woolaway type PRC

dwellings. Cabinet in March 2004 agreed to undertake a local option/asset management appraisal of these sites to determine the future way forward.

The Council has engaged in three Strategic Partnerships for the delivery of new social housing. However for the achievement of the DHS in its own stock, no partnerships for delivery have been progressed as a consequence of the focus on the Housing Transfer Proposal.

Stroud has no difficult to let or low demand estates and regeneration funding will not be an option to be considered.

From April 2003 the HRA has had no long-term windfall from Supporting People funds. This was because prior March 2001 these services were subsidised from the Council's General Fund. Consequently there are no resources from this source to assist in meeting the DHS.

Service charges are reviewed annually to ensure that they cover the full cost of the services provided.

**SECTION 2b: ARE WORK PROGRAMMES DESIGNED TO MEET THE DHS AND HAVE THESE BEEN DELIVERED?**

---

The Council met the national target for reduction in the number of non-decent homes between 1 April 2002 and 31 March 2004.

Annual figures for the percentage of Council dwellings meeting the Decent Homes Standard are:-

1 April 2002 = 67.2%

1 April 2003 = 75%

1 April 2004 = 80.5%

Whilst the Council's overall position in relation to the Decent Homes Standard is median in comparison with other Council landlords, its performance in reducing the percentage of non-decent homes in 2003/04 is upper quartile.

Our 2002/03 and 2003/04 programmes were developed using data from our in-house 2001 Stock Condition Survey. Our 2004/05 programme is being developed with FPD Savills to reflect the detailed findings of their 2003 survey and establish an expenditure profile that will make the most impact upon achieving the DHS.

The Council has projected expenditure requirements over the next 30 years. A focus on high repair cost areas is being undertaken to influence those work programme priorities finally implemented.

Through consultation with tenants the Council has established a Lettable Standard to which all vacant properties are improved prior to re-letting.

Adaptations for disabled tenants are funded at over £214,000 per annum from the Housing Revenue Account without means testing.

Expenditure against the Housing Investment Programme has been over 90% in recent years, typically nearer 95% of budget.

A Maintenance Focus Group made up of Councillors, Tenant Representatives and staff looks at all service issues relating to repair and maintenance of Council dwellings.

Performance against objectives is reported in Service Plans, Housing Strategy Action Plan, and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2003/04. The latter also reports against the Tenants' Compact Action Plan each year.

Tenants are consulted over the content and priorities within the Annual Repair and Improvements Programme through the Housing Forum.

The programme of providing all homes with central heating was completed in 2001/02. The uPVC window replacement programme will be completed by 2005.

**What are we planning to do next on issues within Section 2 (the following are proposed improvement actions):**

**DH10:** Learn from ongoing ODPM research into the most appropriate IT systems for managing DHS data, in particular to enable improved modelling of data on future works and assess impact upon the DHS.

### **SECTION 3a: HOW WELL DOES THE COUNCIL MONITOR ITS PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING THE DHS?**

---

The Council has used FPD Savills to establish its Decent Homes position and they currently continue to monitor progress towards meeting the standard.

The Council is currently implementing a revised structure in its Housing Contracts Team which includes a Housing Asset Manager who will act as the Council's Decent Homes Officer. Part of this team's duties will involve moving away from sample stock condition surveys except for validation purposes. The Council will be building 100% stock condition data from its ongoing survey work and works programmes. This will provide an enhanced degree of accuracy as the Council works towards 2010.

Quarterly statistics are reported in Service Plan updates to Strategic Team, the Cabinet Member and Scrutiny Committee.

The Council is in the process of developing a more robust risk management process as part of Service Plans. These risk management processes will be applied to the decent homes target when the post-ballot review is complete.

### **SECTION 3b: HOW WELL DOES THE COUNCIL LEARN FROM ITSELF AND FROM OTHERS?**

---

Continuous improvement is one of the Council's seven corporate aims.

A Best Value review of public sector housing services has yet to be undertaken. This was postponed as a consequence of the Council's decision to pursue Housing Transfer.

However, learning from others has been pursued through: -

- Previous membership of CIPFA housing maintenance benchmarking club
- Peer Reviews including specific IDeA peer review on procurement.
- Housing Maintenance Focus Group
- Tenant satisfaction surveying
- The Council's last HRA Business Plan was published in July 2002. Following those submissions no local housing authority in the Southwest region achieved "Fit for purpose" status at that stage. However feedback from GOSW indicated that the council's HRA



Business Plan was, at that time, amongst those closest to achieving Fit for Purpose status





- Attendance at regional seminars on the DHS has continued. Seminars on CDM regulations, Asbestos and Legionella issues have also been attended resulting in revised service procedures.
- Some tenants are involved in operating a local management co-operative providing many local housing services. This provides a valuable learning environment for both tenants and the Council
- Objectives are set before staff attend training courses and evaluated after the training has been undertaken
- The Council has many multidiscipline groups that enable Council staff and those from outside agencies to work with (and learn from) each other e.g. the crime and Disorder Partnership. In 2002/03 the Council, along with two other local Districts, was awarded Beacon status for Reducing Crime in Rural Areas. In March 2004 the Council was notified that it had achieved Beacon Status for its services to older people.

**What are we planning to do next on issues with in Section 3 (the following are proposed improvement actions):**





**DH1110:** Undertake Best Value Review of the Housing Service, including benchmarking of DHS performance and stock expenditure requirements.

**SECTION 4: DECENT HOMES STANDARD IMPROVEMENT PLAN**



<b>To achieve these things by 2006</b>		<b>We will need to tackle these identified barriers and challenges</b>		<b>By taking these actions</b>
--	---	--	---	--------------------------------

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Improved staff knowledge/awareness.</li> </ul> <p><i>Outcome sought: All housing staff to have appropriate level of knowledge and skill in relation to their role and the DHS.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Subjective nature of some assessments which can lead to inconsistent interpretations.</li> </ul>		<p><b>DH1:</b> Train all housing staff to provide a sound awareness of the Decent Homes Standard. Provide all staff involved in Repair and Maintenance with more advanced training to enable them to interpret whether or not properties meet the DHS.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Improved use of existing data and data collection and analysis.</li> </ul> <p><i>Outcome sought: Self-reliance in data gathering and analysis.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Computerised Information systems have lagged behind the ODPM's data requirements.</li> <li>□ New systems and work processes required to ensure best use is being made of existing data sources e.g. from staff inspecting void properties.</li> <li>□ Inclusion of DHS in future private sector house condition surveys</li> </ul>		<p><b>DH2:</b> Incorporate management and updating of DHS data and calculation of DHS failures back in-house. Use results of GoSW's current work on DHS IT systems to inform choice of software system</p> <p><b>DH3:</b> Supplement/replace existing cloned DHS data with actual data on individual properties from information gathered from surveys, void inspections etc.</p> <p><b>DH8:</b> Improve our liaison and complementary working with the Housing Corporation to monitor progress towards the DHS of Registered Social Landlord's Housing Stock.</p>

**SECTION 4: DECENT HOMES STANDARD IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

To achieve these things by 2006		We will need to tackle these identified barriers and challenges		By taking these actions
				<p><b>DH10 9:</b> Learn from ongoing ODPM research into the most appropriate IT systems for managing DHS data, in particular to enable improved modelling of data on future works and assess impact upon the DHS.</p> <p><b>DH9:</b> To include an assessment of compliance with the decent homes standard in the next local house condition survey (2006) in order to be able to monitor future progress in reducing the number of vulnerable households in non decent homes</p>
<p>□ Making Best Use of Assets and Available Resources.</p> <p>Outcome sought: <i>Well informed decision making on allocation of resources.</i></p>		<p>□ Housing Revenue Account and General Fund expenditure has traditionally been interlinked. Where possible greater separation may assist control and prioritisation of resource use</p> <p>□ Help tenants and their local communities understand the opportunities and constraints upon resources for major investment in existing housing.</p> <p>□ Better understanding of the longer term consequences of investment decisions.</p>		<p><b>DH4:</b> Undertake a local options appraisal/asset management review of the Council's 103 Woolaway properties</p> <p><b>DH5:</b> Implement organisational change to clarify as far as possible HRA expenditure from other Council activities to enable clearer HRA priorities to be delivered.</p> <p><b>DH6:</b> Develop the Council's approach to Partnering through the Corporate Procurement Group.</p> <p><b>DH1110:</b> Undertake Best Value Review of the Housing Service, including benchmarking of DHS performance and</p>

**SECTION 4: DECENT HOMES STANDARD IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

To achieve these things by 2006		We will need to tackle these identified barriers and challenges		By taking these actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Work with tenants and others to help analyse the best way forward for individual estates of dwellings that are in need of major future investment.</li> <li>❑ Adoption of partnership working principles for engagement of contractors/developers may improve resource use.</li> </ul>		stock expenditure requirements.
<p>Providing the Landlord service in the best way.</p> <p>Outcome sought: <i>Maximise the resources that can be made available to meet the DHS as fully as possible.</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Moving forward successfully from the Housing Transfer ballot outcome.</li> <li>❑ Better understanding of the true opportunities and consequences of available housing options for the future.</li> <li>❑ Difficult, or perhaps inappropriate, timetable within the Communities Plan for reconsideration of Housing Options.</li> </ul>		<p><b>DH7:</b> Continue to consider and pursue the most appropriate long term option for delivery of the housing landlord service to achieve the full Decent Homes Standard, meet tenants' additional aspirational requirements and achieve wider objectives. Continue to liaise with GoSW/ODPM to agree the most appropriate route and timescale.</p>