

Cheltenham Borough Council**Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 2nd
June 2003****Comprehensive Performance Assessment : Housing
Diagnostic assessments****Report of the Group Director Social and Community****1. Summary and recommendation**

- 1.1 The latest guidance on the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) for District Councils has now been issued by the Audit Commission. As part of the CPA, diagnostic assessments will be undertaken in two areas of housing.
- 1.2 The cabinet has previously considered how best to involve members in the CPA process, and its recommendations will be considered at the next ordinary council meeting. One of the cabinet's proposals is that the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees should each be involved in reviewing and scrutinising the respective diagnostic assessments.
- 1.3 This report is the first update of the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee,
- 1.4 **I therefore recommend that members note the report.**

2. Introduction

- 2.1 For fuller background information, members should refer to earlier reports to council and to cabinet.
- 2.2 The main elements of the Audit Commission's approach to CPA for District Councils are:
 - a council self-assessment
 - an accredited peer challenge of the council's self-assessment
 - a corporate assessment, informed by the peer report and the self-assessment
 - diagnostic assessments of the council's:
 - management of public space
 - progress in meeting the decent homes standard
 - contribution to a balanced housing market
 - Benefit Fraud Inspectorate assessment of benefit service

- the auditor's assessments of performance of each of the main elements of the code of audit practice
 - audited performance indicators, inspection reports and plan assessments
- 2.3 District Councils in Gloucestershire are currently scheduled for formal inspection in June 2004, although this date has been challenged because of a clash with local and European elections.
- 2.4 An officer CPA team has been established by seconding officers from their 'day jobs' and a CPA cross-party working group of members will oversee the process.
- 2.5 It has been agreed by the cabinet and the Board of Directors that the diagnostic assessments will be led at an operational level by the respective Group Directors, who will each establish cross-group working parties to prepare the council's response.
- 2.6 The relevant O&S committee will be involved in reviewing and scrutinising the respective diagnostic assessment, and for the Social and Community committee, this will be the housing themed diagnostics.

3. Housing diagnostic assessments

3.1 There are two housing diagnostics:

- "Assessing progress towards the Decent Homes Standard" (DHS) for those authorities which retain their housing stock; and
- "Balancing housing markets" (BHM) for those authorities which have qualified for additional Arms Length Management Organisation funding from central government.

Officers have sought to clarify with the Audit Commission which of the above should be completed by Cheltenham, as in theory both could apply to this council by next June when the inspection is due. It is now clear that BHM diagnostic will be the primary inspection theme.

In any event, the guidance states although only one housing diagnostic inspection will take place, self-assessments for both should be completed.

3.2 The framework for assessing progress towards the DHS will focus on the council's work to ensure that all the homes it owns meet the decent homes standard by 2010. Three broad question areas will be covered:

- how well does the council know the condition of their housing stock and their compliance with the DHS? What is the council trying to achieve in relation to the standard?
- what is the council doing to deliver its plans and meet the DHS?
- how does the council monitor its progress and how does this feed into future strategies and plans?

As a result of the substantial volume of work which has been undertaken to analyse stock options and establish Cheltenham Borough Homes, the council is well placed to respond very positively to this particular diagnostic.

3.3 The framework for assessing the council's work to help balance its local and sub-regional housing market will again focus on three broad questions:

- how well does the council understand its housing market, and from its understanding has the council developed the right proposals to help balance its housing market?
- what are the council's actions and what outcomes has it achieved in helping to balance housing markets?
- 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.

The inspector's focus will be at a strategic rather than service inspection level, and will test how well the council is taking all reasonable steps that it can to ensure that the market operates as effectively as possible within the local context.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 Preparation for CPA will be a major exercise for the council over the next twelve months. The council will need to be able to demonstrate that it can act in an integrated way and that as far as possible, the process and self-assessment are owned by everyone involved.
- 4.2 A successful CPA will be based on the council's ability to evidence best practice and to identify those areas which need further improvement. It could also lead to new freedoms for the council and a positive boost to the public perception of the authority.

5. Implications

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| 5.1 | Financial | None arising from this report. |
| 5.2 | Legal | None arising from this report. |
| 5.3 | Personnel | None arising from this report. |
| 5.4 | Equal opportunities, social justice and anti-poverty | None arising from this report. |
| 5.5 | Environmental | None arising from this report. |

Background Papers	CPA : process timetable. Cabinet report 1.10.02
	CPA : implications for members. Council report 9.12.02.
	CPA : update. Cabinet report 22.4.03.

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