

Cheltenham Borough Council
Social and Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee

27 November 2003

Comprehensive Performance Assessment - update
Report of the Group Director Social and Community

1. Summary and recommendation

1.1 This report updates members on the progress of the CPA and in particular the progress on the two housing diagnostics: balancing the housing market and decent home standards.

1.2 **I therefore recommend that members**

- 1) **Note the progress made to date on the two housing diagnostic assessments**
- 2) **Offer any comments or observations on the current drafts**
- 3) **Receive a progress report at a future meeting**

2. Introduction

2.1 Members will recall that a report was presented to its meeting in June which outlined the corporate approach to the CPA assessment and the details behind the two housing related diagnostic assessments. Since June significant work has been undertaken at all levels to demonstrate how much of the existing activities of the council can be effectively measured against the CPA criteria. Set out below is a summary of progress against the corporate assessment and the two housing assessments.

3. CPA corporate assessment

3.1 As part of the CPA inspection process the council is asked to submit a corporate self-assessment. The Audit Commission has given councils guidance on the development of this document.

3.2 The corporate self-assessment is an important piece of evidence and the starting point for the inspection. The aim is to present a picture of the council through the document to the inspectors by;

- Identifying areas where we perform well and those in need of improvement
- Demonstrating self awareness and our ability to assess strengths and weaknesses successfully and prioritise areas for improvement

- Providing an honest, evidenced based appraisal of actual progress in improving services and the council's recent track record.
- 3.3 The corporate assessment document is restricted to twenty pages framed around, setting the scene, the general context in which the council operates, and the four key questions of;
- What is the council trying to achieve?
 - How has the council set about delivering its priorities for improvement?
 - What improvements has the council achieved / not achieved to date?
 - In light of what the council has learnt to date, what does it plan to do next?
- 3.4 Since September the CPA corporate project team has been consulting with a number of staff, members and partners to obtain views on the council's strengths and weaknesses. This has enabled the drafting of an initial corporate self assessment document which answers the four key questions and responds to the ten themes within the guidance of ambition, prioritisation, focus, capacity, performance management and achievement in quality service, achievement of improvement, investment, learning and future plans.
- 3.5 The most common themes coming from the consultation exercises were:

Strengths

- Community & corporate planning
- Partnership working
- Supporting the town's economy through festivals and parks and gardens
- Consultation processes
- Recent and planned activity – Recreation centre, Cheltenham Borough Homes, regeneration in Hesters Way, unified reception, introduction of risk management
- Certain front-line service delivery areas
- Staff commitment

Areas for improvement

- External & internal communication
 - Reputation management & self promotion / proactive public relations
 - Strategic leadership & management
 - Human resource activities – support for management, members & staff
 - Performance management
 - Prioritisation and determining non priorities and sticking to both
 - Capacity management including resource levels, programme and project management (links also to prioritisation and retaining focus)
- 3.6 The feedback also produced many specific examples, which need to be considered, some where we can learn from our successes and others where we need to consider opportunities to improve.

4.0 I&DeA Review Exercise

- 4.1 The first drafts of the corporate assessment and the first drafts of the diagnostics formed the base information for a recent two-day review exercise undertaken by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA). The aim of this work was to:

- Formulate an external view on whether these first drafts reflected the view of the council they obtained during their visit
 - Assess the council's strengths and weaknesses
 - Support the council in the development of an improvement plan.
- 4.2 During the visit the I&DeA team met with a number of members, staff, partners, and the board, through workshops, meetings and interviews – a mini version of a CPA Peer Challenge. The results of their work will be used to further develop the self-assessment documents, our self-scoring summary and our improvement plan. The visit also proved beneficial as a learning exercise in terms of the preparation and administration needed for our formal peer challenge (week commencing 1 March 2004) and inspection (week commencing 12 July 2004).
- 4.3 Formal feedback from the I&DeA work has yet to be assessed but the comments at the conclusion of the exercise indicated that the council is very self-aware identifying its strengths and the areas in need of improvement. Planned or commenced improvement action now needs to be progressed. The view was also expressed that the council undersells its achievements needing to emphasis these more when it has opportunity to do so but also by proactively self-promoting.
- 4.4 Over the coming months the presentation of the self-assessment documents will be improved and electronic Internet versions will be created with links through to key supporting evidence. The documents will be widely circulated for comment starting with members and staff sessions in early December. The self assessments will continue to be reviewed and amended as a result of comments received from the findings of the peer challenge exercise, and to reflect development and change within the council through to submission to the inspectors in mid May 2004.

5.0 The housing diagnostic assessments

- 5.1 Members will recall that the council is required to complete two housing diagnostic assessments – balancing the housing market and decent homes. Should Cheltenham Borough Homes be awarded its 2 Star rating as a result of the recent Housing Inspectorate review, then we will be assessed only on the balancing housing markets assessment, with the decent homes standards assessment being used as simply supporting evidence.
- 5.2 The balancing the housing market assessment comprises of three key questions, which the inspection will focus upon. These were chosen to give the council the opportunity to look in detail at its activities and test how they are being delivered against the council's corporate priorities as well as those set regionally and nationally.
- 5.2.1 In advance of the inspection a five page document is being prepared responding to the assessment questions and backed up by documented evidence supporting the council response. Appendix 1 set out the current working draft version of the document.

In order to give members a feel for the shape of a final version of the document Appendix 2 contains a copy of the completed version from Exeter City Council who where rated excellent in their CPA score.

- 5.3 The decent home standards assessment also comprises of three key questions upon which the inspection will be focused. If the 2 Star rating is awarded following the recent Housing Inspectorate review, then this assessment will only be required to be completed to give supporting evidence to the balancing housing markets diagnostic.

- 5.3.1 A four page document is being prepared to respond to the assessment questions which will again be backed by documented evidence to support this response. Priority at this stage has however been given to the balancing housing markets diagnostic in light of the recent Housing Inspectorate's review of Cheltenham Borough Homes and on the basis that they hope to achieve the 2 Star rating.

Appendix 3 set out the current working draft version of the document, and to give members a feel for the shape of a final version of the document Appendix 4 contains a copy of the completed version from Exeter City Council who where rated excellent in their CPA score.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 Preparations for CPA are well underway and the council is on target to meet the forthcoming deadlines in the coming months. Officers are mindful of the role that CPA can play in assessing how well the council is delivering its services. Many of these are the council's core activities.
- 6.2 There is a danger that CPA could be viewed, as potentially diverting resources from delivering services; it is however important to recognise that CPA is a national framework for assessing how well we deliver our services. Many of the questions in the CPA assessment are not dissimilar to those that the members and the public ask the council every day. The work currently underway provides the council with the means of evidencing the responses to the questions and being compared to other district Councils and improving service delivery.
- 6.3 Whilst still awaiting the final details of the outcomes of the CPA process, there will be increased freedoms and flexibilities for those authorities achieving a positive assessment.

7.0 Implications

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| 7.1 | Financial | None as a direct result of this report |
| 7.2 | Legal | None as a direct result of this report |
| 7.3 | Personnel | None as a direct result of this report |
| 7.4 | Equal opportunities, social justice and anti-poverty | The housing services being delivered contribute to the council's equal opportunities and social justice agendas. |
| 7.5 | Environmental | None as a direct result of this report |
| 7.6 | Health and safety | None as a direct result of this report |

Background papers	2 June 2003 – Comprehensive Performance Assessment - Housing diagnostics assessments report to Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
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Accountability

Councillor Clive Lloyd – Neighbourhood and
Community

Scrutiny Function

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny
Committee