

1. 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 markets?

We recognise the need for up-to-date and accurate information as the basis for policy planning and service delivery. We use a wide range of information sources to help:

- understand our housing market and predict future trends
- inform a wide range of partnerships both within the borough and surrounding areas
- develop and review strategies and proposals
- meet the changing housing needs, priorities and aspirations of our communities and national priorities.

1.1 Does the council have the right research base to understand its housing market?

Housing needs information

Our housing strategy is based on a comprehensive suite of surveys published in November 2000 and updated in March 2003, undertaken by the consultants Fordham's, Marchaven and In house/Rand, comprising of: a cross-tenure housing needs survey; a private sector stock condition survey (1,000 property sample); and a public sector stock condition survey (100%).

The regular updating of this information enables us to monitor house prices, private rented costs and affordability, with data analysed by geographic area, income, age, gender, ethnicity, ability, etc., to enable us to identify patterns of need in different parts of the borough and for different household types. The surveys also provided hidden homelessness figures. As a cross-tenure survey, the Housing Needs Survey reflects the needs, demands and movement of all tenure types within the housing market, across all wards. It now includes relevant data sets from the 2001 census.

This information supplements that which we collate directly, notably through the Joint Housing Register¹, homelessness P1E returns, housing advice statistics², and needs identified through partnership special needs housing strategies which focus on specific communities such as Older People and BME.³ We are currently leading on the feasibility of a county-wide approach to choice based lettings⁴ for all social housing to improve our monitoring of housing need.

We use several sources of data, including census and annual residential land availability surveys, for monitoring the numbers, size and type of housing. On a county-wide database⁵ we hold records of completions and planning permissions by number for over 20 years, by type for the last 4 years, and by size for the last 3 years. We have complete data on the number and size of council and RSL stock. We track trends in housing, land development costs and house prices on the ODPM and Land Registry websites, information we use to inform planning obligation negotiations with developers.

This information, which is shared with our partners; tenants and other stakeholders, is used in our consultation on both the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) and Local Plan to consider the impact on the housing market and to predict future trends.

Stock condition

Our sample private sector and RSL stock condition survey, undertaken every five years, collects data on energy efficiency levels, which has been supplemented by annual HECA surveys and housing needs survey data. We are considering extending this approach to include a sample inspection of the council's own stock in 2005-06.

We update information on empty homes annually using the council tax register, but we also encourage and respond to complaints about private sector voids, concentrating our enforcement effort on the 100 properties (on a rolling basis) that have been empty longest. We plan to use GIS to map RSL and local authority owned affordable housing to help monitor and balance the provision of new housing on a tenure basis.

We also gather information on the stock from private sector housing grant enquiries, nuisance complaints, grant inspections, and referrals from various initiatives such as 'Warm and Well', 'Care Direct'⁶ and 'Care and Repair'⁷. Issues relating to private tenants living in properties suffering from disrepair, overcrowding, lack of amenities and/or fire safety deficiencies have been reflected in our housing needs allocation policy. Our progress in tackling identified problems in the housing stock is actively managed through IT systems such as Uniform⁸ and our new corporate Performance Management System (TEN).

Sub-regional housing markets information

Cheltenham Borough covers a relatively small area bounded on three sides by Tewkesbury Borough and on the west by Cotswold District. There are considerable flows of workers into and out of Cheltenham.

For a decade the six housing districts of Gloucestershire have worked closely together on cross-boundary strategic regeneration. Travel-to-work patterns and inter-district migration are closely monitored and are important influences in community development, housing patterns and planning. In November 2003, the six districts and the Supporting People Team jointly commissioned a single housing needs survey to provide a comprehensive county-wide picture of housing and support needs.

The results of this survey will be linked to a six-figure postcode allowing users of MAIDeN, the county-wide web based GIS, to build up estate and community profiles. This approach has been successfully put into practice with both the Gloucester and Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Housing Partnership cross-boundary strategic enabling bids to the Housing Corporation.

Information on special needs/supported housing

The Supporting People review took place in 2002, and in 2003 a robust inter-agency homelessness review provided additional data on Cheltenham's most vulnerable sectors. During the development of the homelessness review, we introduced, in partnership with other agencies, an initial housing assessment process⁹ to assess both housing and related support needs and supplement existing information collated as listed previously. It is hoped to extend this pilot project across the county to identify population migration. The priorities identified at a borough wide level will be fed through the County-wide Supporting People Core Strategy Group. The continued development of the suite of special needs housing strategies enables partnership fora to detail the needs of such communities.

1.2 How well does the council develop and evolve its strategies and plans

Community stakeholders and partners consultation

Following extensive consultation with residents, businesses and partners, Cheltenham's Community Plan sets out the key challenges for the town. We have aligned our corporate business plan 2004-2007 to help ensure that we can deliver on the issues that matter most to local people, recognising the important role that housing plays in tackling these. This

recognition is reflected in our latest HIP⁷, which is formatted to show how housing will deliver the agreed priorities for Cheltenham as well as relevant national and regional priorities and strategies. In both the HIP and Homelessness Strategy we have mapped the connecting strategies at a local, national and regional level to demonstrate the connections and identify cross-cutting priorities, to reflect how we will deliver at a local level to meet the priorities. Our business plan also provides an overall framework for our existing service-specific strategies, which will be reviewed to reflect the community priorities.¹⁰ Our internal planning process also provides focus, by making links not only between priorities and resource allocation, but also between priorities and business plans, group plans, service plans and individual appraisals. The developing capital strategy which is overseen by a cross departmental programme board, will underpin housing priorities and facilitate better long term planning of key housing schemes. Improved risk management processes are further refining the authority's approach to addressing capacity and service delivery issues. All strategies and plans are developed in full consultation with surveys and focus/discussion groups, which feed into an annual round of major stakeholder conferences.¹¹

We have also published supplementary planning guidance (SPG)¹², including that for the provision of affordable housing through the planning system, in consultation with representatives of the House Builders Federation, RSLs, and the public.¹³ Where we require models of large or contentious proposals for development, we have worked with developers and consultants to facilitate public consultation on these proposals. We are also a partner in an initiative to engage the public in assessing local character throughout the borough (CUCAP)¹⁴.

Links to regional and national priorities

Both the local plan & housing strategy make clear reference and links to national and regional policies and priorities and how they impact on local needs. We are an active member of the Regional Housing Forum and the County Housing Strategy Group. The Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Partnership is specifically identified in the regional housing statement. We are about to participate in preparing options for future development in the Gloucester/Cheltenham city region, which will form part of the regional spatial strategy for the south west.

Mechanisms to prioritise proposals to help balance housing markets

The information in 1.1 is taken, analysed, consulted upon and fed into the policy making process mainly through partnership strategies. We feed this information across our groups and divisions to ensure a cross-cutting approach to delivering strategies.¹⁵ This information and subsequent consultation has been used to inform an **area based approach to regeneration** on a 'worst first' basis. Our current schemes are Hesters Way/St Marks; Whaddon Lynworth & Priors; the lower High Street and more recently, Springbank. These will be followed by more work in West Central.¹⁶

We aim to achieve a number of balances to deliver sustainable communities, including affordable and general needs housing; rented, purchased and shared equity; flats and houses; young people and older people; ethnic profile; extra needs and able-bodied; and residential and commercial. We are using a number of mechanisms to achieve these balances, including:

- Initiatives to reduce further the already low proportion of long term empty properties
- We are attempting to address the significant requirement for affordable rented housing in Cheltenham through our **best value joint commissioning partnership**, which will build on the success of the Cheltenham Housing Investment Partnership, tighter planning obligations and a lowering of the affordable housing threshold (and increased percentage on new developments in our SPG).
- Over the last 5 years, 92% of new housing development in Cheltenham has been on brownfield sites.
- We are addressing town centre regeneration through a comprehensive '**Civic Pride**' bid covering the town centre and its 'walk to work' areas – including the regeneration of housing in St Peter's and St Paul's wards.
- We have co-ordinated the development of **partnership special needs strategies**, and have played an active role in the development of the Supporting People initiative and strategy development.
- Deliver programmes which recognise that jobs are also required to sustain communities.¹⁷

1.3 Does the council have the right strategies and plans to help it balance the housing market?

All strategies and plans

Cheltenham Strategic Partnership has identified the need for affordable housing as a key priority to safeguard the economic, environmental and social well being of the town. Our business plan includes the following as a top priority: *"we will increase the provision of affordable housing, particularly in the social rented sector, and work towards a balanced housing market"*.

The business plan will inform strategy preparation, service planning and resourcing to assist the council in tackling its key priorities. We have established a partnership consultation and development structure, co-ordinated by the corporate centre to ensure that all existing and developing strategies have influenced the development of our housing strategy and housing investment foundation document.^{18&10}

Local plan

Our local plan was adopted in 1997 and is currently being reviewed. The emerging plan seeks to secure a mix of housing types and sizes based on identified needs. Its overall housing requirement to 2011, as set by the structure plan, is likely to be met substantially on brownfield sites. It also contains a clear policy on affordable housing and a five-year target based on an up-to-date housing needs survey. As a result of the housing needs survey we are seeking through the plan to reduce to 15 the size threshold for sites on which we can negotiate for an element of affordable housing, and to increase to 40% the percentage of affordable housing sought. We have also adopted SPG on amenity space, play space, sustainable development, and security and crime prevention to help achieve liveable residential environments, and on planning obligations.

Housing Strategy Statement

The housing strategy is built on the demand model based on the cross-tenure housing needs assessment and review. The update takes account of information supplied by the land registry, local estate agents, developers as well as the survey itself.

A new county-wide assessment has been commissioned for early 2004 using exhaustive local and national data sources, including Gloucestershire's inter-agency web-based GIS 'Maiden'. Together with the districts and county council, supporting people is a joint commissioner.

Information provided will be used to update our inter-agency special needs housing strategies.

Our current strategy was updated in 2003. A new 'fit for purpose' three-year strategy will be published in September 2004. This will complete the current area regeneration programmes and draws future requirements from the 2004 county-wide housing needs assessment, the revised local plan, and community and corporate plan priorities.

Private sector housing strategy

Our new housing renewal policy came into effect on the 1st August, 2003 and builds on our extensive work in the private rented and owner-occupied sectors, including grant and loan related activity, energy efficiency initiatives, work on the private vacant stock and enforcement activity, particularly in relation to HMOs.

Since declaration in 1996, extensive improvement works have been undertaken in the Lower High Street Renewal Area.¹⁹

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

We recently moved to a cabinet style government and took the opportunity to restructure. This involved a move away from perceived 'silo' departments to a group structure aimed at enhanced corporate working.

Use of resources

Over-arching co-ordination is now provided by the policy division which prepares our business plan and supports the preparation of the thematic strategies. An officer strategy co-ordination group works to ensure that there is effective corporate working on all key strategic issues. Our asset management working group provides a corporate approach to the use of resources, which feeds into the Corporate Asset Management Strategy, The HIP and HRA Business Plan.

Capacity to deliver strategies and plans

A corporate, cross divisional, working group drafted the latest housing investment strategy, which was formatted to outline how combined housing and related services deliver to corporate and community plan priorities.

Housing and planning officers have worked jointly on the local plan review, including the development of new SPG for affordable housing in conjunction with our partner RSLs.

Partnerships

Borough-wide policy and delivery initiatives are developed within the multi-agency Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and its themed groups; for housing these are primarily the 'Regeneration', 'Health Improvement' and 'Crime and Disorder' partnerships. These LSP themed groups also facilitate a more co-ordinated approach between ourselves and other statutory agencies (in particular the Primary Care Trust, Social Services and the County Council), all of whom have important stakes in a balanced housing market.²⁰ Alongside these themed groups lie specific partnerships of multi-agencies and internal cross-departmental groups.

We take a corporate approach to service delivery planning, and performance is monitored through quarterly reports to cabinet and other members. This approach is reflected in the links

between our corporate business plan, service delivery plans and individuals' appraisals.

A comprehensive overview of the organisation is also reflected in the best value performance plan, published each June.¹⁰

Fora, such as Youth Housing, Homelessness, Older Persons' Housing, meet regularly and review progress against tailored housing strategies. An annual cross-tenure housing conference also pulls together the year's work and reviews future developments. There is also an element of housing review within each of the Regeneration Partnerships agendas where housing development is an issue.

Community Leadership, Equalities & Social Inclusion

Work continues to develop and improve partnership strategies to take an holistic approach to delivering housing and support schemes for specific communities within the Borough – for example, we have commissioned a locally based BME group to undertake a review of the needs and aspirations of Cheltenham's BME communities to ensure that our existing service delivery is effective in this area.

The Government's (ODPM) Community Cohesion guidance and recent National Pathfinder project will require us, during 2004, to develop and adopt a Community Cohesion strategy to strengthen and build community cohesion.

2.2 Is the council pursuing the right actions and initiatives to help balance the housing market and are the outcomes for local residents and the housing market as a whole?

Housing Development

Our local plan policies reflect the sequential approach to the development of land for housing. There is currently a 5-years supply of land in the borough. We have published an urban capacity study, which we update annually. This indicates that the residual of the structure plan housing requirement is likely to be met by windfall sites on brownfield land. However, most of these sites will be too small to provide an affordable housing contribution. Where possible we negotiate for an element of affordable housing and consistently use planning obligations to secure agreed provision.

We adopt an urban design approach to new development and have prepared design guides, including one for domestic alterations and extensions. We have prepared development briefs for larger sites, such as that for Cheltenham Spa Railway Station, and are intending to prepare more utilising additional funding through the Planning Delivery Grant.

We have a housing renewal policy which is intrinsically linked to the housing investment foundation document, setting delivery performance objectives for the next three years. Our new neighbourhood regeneration division is building on the Charter Mark success of the previous private sector housing division.

Social/affordable housing development and partnerships

Management information and analysis would suggest that proportionately, we are delivering on this agenda within available resources²¹. Recent changes to funding through local authority social housing grant capital (LASHG) and social housing management grant/supporting people revenue have restricted most authorities' ability to deliver quality solutions.

Cheltenham has a best value joint commissioning partnership for affordable housing development (Cheltenham Housing Investment Partnership). RSLs developing in Cheltenham

were invited to complete an exhaustive process, linked to financial sustainability, local commitment and management, rent structures and added value. Three RSLs were chosen in 2000. A new commissioning partnership, along similar lines, is currently being developed to meet the challenges of cross-boundary strategic development and the Housing Corporation's new Partnering arrangement.

Delivery –

- Affordable and general needs housing
- Rented, purchased and shared equity
Between 2000-04

affordable completions (rented)	253
shared equity/Low Cost Home Ownership	40
vacant properties back in use (council action)	117
private homes improved with grant aid	1,402
dwellings in HMOs registered since 2000	722

We have invested heavily in our HIP, with £5.35 million spent on LASHG between April 2000 and March 2003, and a similar level of expenditure on the full range of renovation grants, including the provision of disabled facilities grant assistance. During this period, housing corporation allocations to the authority totalled £6.6 million.

Affordable homes have been provided in 10 out of Cheltenham's 14 wards, with 92% of all new development on brownfield sites. Development sites are now fairly scarce, and land availability tends to dictate special/ geographical development, although new SPG will help to maximise affordable housing provision through planning obligations, having due regard to the existing tenure balance in the immediate locality of each application. On-site provision is now being required in all but the most exceptional circumstances.

Supported Housing Schemes

Delivering in partnership

- Young people and older people - young people specific and supported - as well as competing in the general housing market we have developed a balance between residential supported into community floating support and onto sustainable independent accommodation for young people with additional support needs. Between years 2000 and 2003 new schemes include 9 units at Winchcombe Street (24/7), doubling of Bromford Housing Group's floating support provision, 4 units per year pilot pathways care leaver (floating) linked to regeneration schemes, 4 units per year full mobility for severely disabled young people, 8 units supported independent living for young single parents, doubling of the private sector rented bond scheme, dispersed Foyer amongst others. Schemes are widely distributed across the town and in the main linked to local provision and facilities.
- Older people specific and supported - older people were the largest sector of support within the Supporting People strategy and funding. Cheltenham has 490 rented and 26 leasehold shared ownership sheltered council dwellings, plus 334 RSL units.
- Ethnic profile - our housing needs survey and Census 2001 provided a comprehensive picture of housing needs amongst the BME community and together we produced a housing strategy tailored to the sector. As part of the new Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Market Partnership we will be commissioning a regional FBHO association work with communities to develop and action/delivery plan.
- Extra needs and able bodied - working closely with Social Services Department (SSD), Occupational Therapy (OT),

PCT, National Star Centre College, users and carers we have a spread of accessible and adapted accommodation throughout the borough. New schemes have been located so that people with limited mobility can choose to live in a residential environment close to the local college for continuing education or near town/commercial centres. The emphasis is on integrated independent living and extended housing choice. We have an integrated approach to support services such as disabled facilities, care and repair, lifeline alarms, care direct and other provision to help achieve this.

- Residential and commercial - jobs are required to sustain communities and, with limited land availability, we attempt a balance between residential and commercial development. We now concentrate on cross-boundary strategic development to address land availability and sustainable community issues.

Front line services and Supporting People

Following the restructure and the establishment of the ALMO, we have established a specialist homelessness and allocations team alongside our staying-at-home services (i.e. disabled facilities grants and lifeline alarm service); this is within the same division as the council's co-ordinator of the Supporting People programme.²² Achievements to date include an overall reduction in the number of placements being made into bed and breakfast accommodation, including hitting the government target to end the long term use (defined as 6 weeks) of B + B accommodation as temporary accommodation for homeless families with children or where a member of the household is pregnant by March 2004, showing that more homelessness preventative action is being taken when the overall number of applications is increasing. The team also includes a Welfare Rights Advisor who actively works with the homelessness and allocations officers to assist clients facing homelessness in dealing with housing affordability issues. The advisor also liaises closely with our Housing Benefit Section to ensure that housing benefit applications are processed quickly. Our Lifeline Alarm customer base has increased 10% in the last 6 months, enabling more vulnerable people to remain in their own homes longer. Protocols for the resettlement of care leavers into permanent housing have also been established.

Individual officers within the team have also been identified as links for vulnerable groups at both operational and strategic levels. A thorough review of homelessness was undertaken by a wide partnership of stakeholders and in wider consultation. This review provided the basis of the homelessness strategy, where key priorities, actions and resources were identified to take a proactive preventative approach to homelessness. This has included the provision of family mediation, the expansion of rent deposit schemes and the provision of furnished temporary accommodation as an alternative to bed and breakfast accommodation.

Private sector housing

Recognising resource constraints, our housing renewal policy outlines a revised approach to targeting renovation grant assistance only at those owner occupiers in greatest need of health and safety related repairs and improvements. This policy is resulting in a shift of resources away from significant expenditure on the direct funding of repairs for owner occupiers with equity, allowing the planned development of loans or equity release as alternative funding streams and freeing up staff resources for mandatory HMO inspection and enforcement activity.

The renewal strategy plans for the continued availability of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), and introduces a new discretionary support grant which is used in conjunction with, or instead of DFG, to undertake associated repairs, or to provide an alternative form of move-on assistance to help clients relocate to more suitable accommodation. We continue to support and work closely with the local home improvement agency, which is currently extending its 'Handyman' service, in addition to safer bathing and home from hospital initiatives.

Work in respect of vacant property is maintained within the policy and we continue to use a 'carrot and stick' approach - a combination of grant incentives and compulsory purchase action where attempts at co-operation with private owners fail to bring properties back into use. A significant number of affordable housing units have also been provided through the creative conversion of a number of vacant buildings.

Clear targets for enforcement activity on houses in multiple occupation link closely to our assessment of the number of properties where we have a statutory duty to inspect for fire safety, a clear area of risk for the authority. The duty to inspect is reflected by our registration scheme, which will need to be kept under review as the government's licensing proposals emerge.

Plans for future regeneration activity are already underway, with a town-wide map of multiple deprivation highlighting the areas for more detailed investigation. The Cheltenham Regeneration Partnership provides the cross-cutting multi-agency focus for this work and involves representation from all of the main community based neighbourhood projects.

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?

Our comprehensive suite of housing and community development strategies undergo rolling reviews with partners, stakeholders and users throughout each year. Annual milestones include the autumn capital bidding round and the housing investment round.

Our business plan sets out a series of strategic targets for each corporate priority. For example, there is a specific target for affordable housing provision.

For each set of strategic targets, a series of performance indicators is being developed within TEN to monitor our progress towards achieving the corporate aims. This sets the framework for the review of our overall performance and of constituent groups, monitored and reported to members by a performance review group. We plan to better communicate performance information to staff, key stakeholders and the wider community via both the council's web-site and internally by means of the intranet.

Local Plan monitoring

We use a county-wide database⁵ to collect and manage information on residential development. We publish an annual residential land availability report, which monitors residential planning permissions and building rates by brownfield/ greenfield, size of site, tenure and size of dwellings, and assesses these against structure and local plan requirements. We also continuously monitor the provision of affordable dwellings and contributions secured through planning obligations. This has led to our seeking

through the review of the local plan to reduce the size threshold on which we can negotiate for an element of affordable housing.

In terms of risk management, the shortfall of land for affordable housing provision has been highlighted as an area that needs to be addressed and annual monitoring reports will continue to inform members. We recognise that more work is required to measure effectively the impact of our planning policies and market conditions on the balance of the housing market, and to evaluate the risk of not meeting assessed need requirements. We will be addressing these issues through the local plan review process.

Housing Strategy/Private sector housing action plans

Housing Strategy and Renewal policy documents set out national and local performance indicators and planned programmes and performance pathways that are monitored at least quarterly using the corporate TEN performance management system. These targets are linked back to both identified needs from borough-wide surveys undertaken at least once every five years and to community and corporate plan priorities.²³

Corporately, best value reviews are used to develop achievable improvement plans linked to specific strategies. These reviews identify a baseline (or position statement) of where the service is now in terms of service quality and effectiveness. By comparing current activity with the vision of what the service needs to be, it is possible to challenge the service strategy and to develop an improvement plan which better enables the strategy to be delivered.

In undertaking these reviews, the project teams makes use of Viewpoint, the council's citizen's panel; other satisfaction surveys; focus groups and other relevant feedback material from any associated stakeholders. Frequent use is also made of benchmarking information via the Exeter Group of authorities and from Housemark, the Audit Commission and other published sources. The best value performance plan also provides a useful point of reference regarding service plans and projected performance targets.

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?

Main feedback takes place at Partnership Board meetings where project plans are amended in line with lessons learnt. Results from customer feedback exercises – surveys, planning for real - are also fed directly into Board meetings and affect future plan development.

We enhance this feedback from partnership board meetings by using a wide variety of monitoring and learning mechanisms through our involvement and consultation structures as detailed in section 2; to both evaluate existing and develop future plans and strategies. Examples include: Annual Housing conferences, seminars and workshops; Partnering days with developers; Housing Investment Partnership meetings; and meetings with developers, private landlords, RSL's, statutory and voluntary agencies.

This feedback combined with good practice and research via:

- CIOH/Housemark/BURA/ODPM web sites
- National and regional conferences and workshops
- Networking

is fed into the local policy making process of which there are many examples.²⁴

Contextual Information

¹ The joint housing register covers applications for housing and transfer requests for both Council and RSL properties. It is reviewed annually to ensure an accurate measure of need and is used to inform analysis of suitability of stock against current and future needs and demands and reviews of our allocation policies.

² A Comprehensive range of statistical information is collated by voluntary sector organisations commissioned by us for the provision of a range of housing advice services. This monitoring information is detailed and reviewed under our service level agreements with these organisations and is fed into the development of appropriate strategies, for example our Homelessness Review and Strategy.

³ We continue to co-ordinate the development and review of a suite of special needs housing strategies, including:

- A Housing Strategy for Older People
- Youth Housing Strategy – making things happen
- A Housing Strategy for people with Learning Difficulties
- A Black and Minority Ethnic Communities Housing Strategy for Cheltenham
- A Housing Strategy for Mental Well Being and People With Mental Ill Health In The Community

Strategies to be developed in 2004/05 include:

- Housing Strategy for People With Sensory and Physical Impairments
- Housing Strategy for Carers

⁴ We are coordinating a county review of choice based lettings systems in a move away from the traditional use of registers and waiting lists. Current surveys show that only a third of those who qualify to be on the list bother to sign up. The waiting list is no longer seen as an effective way to address housing need.

⁵ The Gloucestershire Housing Land Availability database was set up and is used by all six District Councils and the County Council for monitoring residential completions and land availability.

⁶ Care Direct is a follow on from NHS direct. A telephone advice and information service, piloted in the county, used by carers and those wishing to access care and personal support services.

⁷ Care and Repair is our local Home Improvement Agency supported by an annual revenue grant, currently £33,300. Services provided include – Home Improvement Agency services across the county are currently subject to a review by Supporting People whereby it is hoped that a consistent standard and level of core services may be commissioned across the county. This review is subject to wide consultation with major stakeholders which we feed into at both an operational level through the Neighbourhood Regeneration division and at a strategic level via Community Services division to inform the decision making structure of the Supporting People Initiative.

⁸ Uniform is one of the council's main business system databases which is used extensively for private sector grant and housing enforcement related activities as well as other council functions. A new version of the software with greater functionality and an imbedded link to a geographical information system (GIS) has recently been installed. This will allow mapping of service demand activity and enhanced tracking of affordable housing provision.

⁹ The Initial Housing Assessment process was developed with a wide range of partners represented on the Homelessness Review Working group. The process is adopted whereby an individual approaches any one of a number of agencies across the Borough seeking information and assistance with housing or housing related support. The process includes an initial assessment of current or future housing need and any previous or current housing related support. This information is fed into a central collation point whereby the level of housing and support needs can be more effectively measured across the Borough with the removal of the

'double counting syndrome' effectively removed; signposting to services for an individual can be effectively supported and a tracking device through an individual client code enables us to analyse the process by which people try to access relevant services. This assessment process supplements the more limited returns on statutory homelessness figures, to enable us to determine wider levels of homelessness and the need for supported housing and housing related support to meet special needs. This can then inform both the accessibility of service provision at an operation level as well as the strategic review and development of services to meet needs.

¹⁰ Links to the corporate business plan are reflected in each division's service delivery plans and ultimately within individuals' appraisals. This cascade principle underpins Investors In People and will be evidenced through the roll out of the corporate performance management system. Link to diagram page 3 Our Business Plan 2004/07.

¹¹ Housing plans are developed each year together with residents, potential residents and key stakeholders including: developers; Cheltenham's Housing Investment Partnership – a best value joint commissioning partnership for affordable housing solutions; Cheltenham Borough Homes – our arms length management organisation (ALMO); Cheltenham Federation of Tenants and Residents Associations; private landlords; and many others listed in our HIP documentation.

¹² As well as undertaking the statutory requirements for public consultation in the process of preparing and reviewing local plans, during the second review of Cheltenham's local plan we published issues papers to seek views from the wider community. A summary was delivered to all households in the borough via our newspaper, The Clarion, together with a freepost comments form; this included a question about issues in the Cheltenham Viewpoint questionnaire. We also set up a Local Plan Stakeholder Group, comprising people representing a range of different community interests, to comment on emerging drafts of the plan before the first deposit stage. At first deposit stage, the main points of the plan were summarised in The Clarion. All documents and response forms were also available on our website.

¹³ The SPG on affordable housing is currently undergoing revisions to take account of representations and will be subject to further public consultation before being adopted by the council in May 2004.

¹⁴ The Cheltenham Urban Character Assessment Partnership is jointly funded by Cheltenham Borough Council, English Heritage, and CABE, as well as in-kind contributions from local amenity groups. Its purpose is to enable the public to describe the character of each particular area of the town, stating its peculiarities, strengths, weaknesses and capacity for change in a manner capable of informing urban design policy and guiding development control.

¹⁵ The bricks and mortar solutions of housing strategies are developed within the council via the environment group including planning, transport, parks and landscapes and their many partnerships. These are brought together with people and community solutions developed in the social and community group together with leisure, recreation and public protection and their partnerships, by the corporate policy and planning team. These are the result of, and are subject to, outward consultation and involvement and feed into the community planning process through the Local Strategic Partnership and its thematic partnerships. These are matched against regional housing and local plan priorities and the corporate asset and capital monitoring strategies. Regular capital, performance and scheme standard reviews are undertaken to monitor progress, benchmark and profile options for change.

¹⁶ Cheltenham has taken an area based approach to regeneration including housing investment and improvement, on a demonstrable 'worst first' basis:

Phase 1

- Hesters Way/St Marks
- Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors
- Lower High Street (Neighbourhood Renewal Area)

Phase 2

- Community regeneration at Springbank and Arle Farm

Phase 3

- Civic Pride, including the town centre, North Place, St Peters and St Pauls
(see ward deprivation indicators in the HIP and Homelessness documents).

An historic anomaly, created by the early dormitory needs of the Government Communication Head Quarters (GCHQ), was a heavy concentration of flats in general, and one bed flats in particular, in the Hesters Way and St Marks wards of the town. Tenancy changes over the years led to a badly imbalanced community with a large concentration of people with support needs and substance abuse problems creating an undesirable area. A phased programme of partnership demolition and rebuild of traditional houses with gardens has substantially redressed this imbalance. Involvement of support need groups – young care leavers, single young parents and others – in the rebuild programme from which they benefit has created a more inclusive society. Integrated healthy living and community health care with the Primary Care Trust (PCT), Lifelong learning with Gloscat, local schools and the Hesters Way Neighbourhood Project, working with the police, safer estates initiative and the Crime and Disorder Act (CADA) partnership has put the heart back into Hesters Way which is becoming a more desirable part of Cheltenham in which to invest. GOSW have recently sought information from the authority to showcase Hester's Way as an example of best practice in neighbourhood regeneration.

¹⁷ Integrated building skills training to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) with local builders, co-ordinated by the European-funded Young Builders' Trust is also helping to replenish Cheltenham's depleted building skills base.

¹⁸ Link to chart p11 Housing Investment Foundation Document 2003/05

¹⁹ In respect of the private housing sector, we declared a neighbourhood renewal area in 1996, covering about 600 dwellings in the St. Paul's area around the lower High Street. Over the last seven years, nearly 200 owner occupied homes have been included in group repair schemes and many streets have benefited from environmental works to improve property boundaries, pavements, street lighting and road surfacing. The main streets in the area are now covered by CCTV cameras and partner RSL's have provided a considerable number of new affordable homes, including some for special needs clients. Eyesore sites have been the subject of compulsory purchase action and redevelopment, helping to provide a significant improvement in the appearance of the area. New community facilities have been provided, such as a neighbourhood resource centre, which is now the base for the local home improvement agency. Private sector investment has followed this lead, with grant assistance helping to reduce the rate of property vacancy.

²⁰ Link to page 3 Community Plan

²¹ The council subjects its actions and initiatives to a series of reality checks –

- Annual Housing Conference – 100+ users and stakeholders from across the housing market
- Housing Investment Partnership annual review
- County-wide annual review of supported housing strategies and homelessness strategy
- Bi-monthly partnership meetings of Housing Investment Partnership, Supported Housing Partnership, Youth Housing

Forum, Supporting People Core Group, Regeneration Partnerships, Housing Forum

- Housing Inspectorate Report
- Best Value Reviews

²² The introduction and development of the Supporting People initiative within the county saw a dramatic increase in the provision of housing related support services across the county.

The Scale of the Supporting People in Gloucestershire

- Supporting People Programme Grant award for 2003/4 was £28.087 million based on Platinum Cut
- The programme provides support to approximately 12,000 vulnerable adults
- The sector employs c. 1800 staff
- 12 separate commissioners are involved in the decision making process
- Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) contracts with 137 providers through 188 contracts to provide 372 separate services
- GCC pays on average £2.3 m every 28 days in the payment run
- GCC manages 9,000 individual service user accounts
- GCC as the ALA employs 10.7 f.t.e to manage the programme and has an administration budget of £413,000 in 2003/4

Services Within Cheltenham

- Accommodation Based Services – 721 bed spaces
- Cost - £203,302
- Floating Support – 483 places
- Cost - £175,881
- County-wide there is also 209 floating support places
- Cost - £795,608

²³ Cheltenham uses a variety of fora and methods to monitor progress in this area, including:–

- Citizens panel
- Resident and tenant satisfaction surveys
- Annual stakeholder reviews of the community, corporate, and service delivery plans
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews
- Housing needs and stock conditions surveys and updates
- Regional, county structure, housing Corporation and local plan reviews
- Supporting people rolling reviews
- Capital programme and corporate asset management reviews
- Best value performance indicators (BVPI's) and improvement plans
- Benchmarking – Exeter Club and Housemark
- County Strategy Officers Group
- Neighbourhood Monitoring Panels and Area Committees
- Special Needs Housing Fora
- Local regeneration partnerships: Hesters Way; Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors; and Lower High Street
- Cheltenham Regeneration Partnership – sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership
- Joint Commissioning Partnership of RSLs – CHIP

²⁴ Examples of a learning culture include:

- Corporate restructure of the housing function to bring it into mainstream sustainable urban and community development.
- Rebalancing of affordable housing development in favour of low cost/key worker home ownership and shared equity - particularly in areas which already have a high level of social renting
- Greater emphasis on the provision of affordable housing through the planning system and planned lower threshold through the adoption of new supplementary planning guidance
- Re-balancing of resources to help maintain support for the affordable housing programme - particularly the Cheltenham

and Tewkesbury Housing Partnership - following the abolition of LASHG

- Move away large 'renovation grants' to smaller scale support for more private householders with essential health and safety related works, move-on assistance for disabled householders, security measures and greater support for energy efficiency
- Closer co-operation with partners, including health and social services around the development of the county affordable warmth strategy and through the county-wide 'Warm and Well' project which is led by us and has been acknowledged as a national example of best practice (DEFRA 'Dying to be Warm' roadshow and 'GO South East' guide for local HECA support)
- More pro-active private rented sector enforcement, with our local registration scheme for higher risk houses in multiple occupation (which reflects our statutory duty to inspect) - now considering potential for local licensing scheme to address student accommodation concerns when national mandatory licensing is introduced
- Targeting of long term vacant property and in particular, high profile empty buildings which are having an adverse impact on their neighbourhoods – compulsory purchase action has been used as a last resort in a number of cases
- Re-alignment of short term priority in favour of town centre quality smaller units/higher density developments for rented, leased and shared equity starter homes in order to help counter spiralling local house prices.
- Added value to regeneration schemes and decent homes development through tenure diversification, the use of local labour on building projects and community engagement and participation
- Increasing Cheltenham's pool of building skills by linking local labour schemes to local college NVQ building skills courses
- Off-site construction methods being piloted with the Sochi Court redevelopment
- Supply chain partnering and greening the supply chain
- Designing out crime in liaison with Police Architect Liaison Officer (PALO)
- Using community development, travel to work patterns and migration profiles to transcend artificial political boundaries when developing sustainable communities, i.e. Gloucester Housing Market Package, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Housing Partnership, County-wide Supporting People Commissioning Partnership, County-wide housing needs survey in 2004
- In past years, the monitoring of residential land availability has led to a change in policy and might do so again - for instance if the rate of brownfield development were proving inadequate to meet the structure plan housing requirement and/or the provision of an adequate level of affordable housing
- The monitoring of employment land has led to the council seeking to change its policy through the local plan review as a result of findings, which will have some impact on the housing market
- Integrated living, rather than isolated schemes, for people with support needs, i.e. pilot pathways for care leavers, full mobility for National Star Centre graduates, integrated living for young single parents, lifetime homes.