

# Briefing Notes

Briefing note to:

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This note contains information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet but where no decisions from Members are needed. It does **NOT** form part of the agenda.

If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the Officers indicated.

## Registered Social Landlords in Cheltenham

Registered Social Landlords (usually referred to as housing associations) are not-for-profit organisations which build and manage affordable, social housing. They are registered, under the provisions of Part 1 of the Housing Act 1996, with the Housing Corporation ([www.housingcorp.gov.uk](http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk)), the body which funds and regulates them on behalf of central government. RSL services, like those of local authorities, are subject to inspection and report by the Audit Commission ([www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk))

For the last fifteen years, the Council has worked in partnership with a number of Registered Social Landlords (RSL), providing land and capital funding to enable the provision of new affordable housing. In recent years, the supply of Council land available for such schemes has been almost exhausted and the principal source of new affordable provision is now on private housing developments, through Section 106 planning agreements. The principal vehicle for the delivery of such affordable homes is the Cheltenham & Tewkesbury Housing Market Partnership, approved by Cabinet in July 2005.

Over half the stock of some 1,700 rented homes in Cheltenham are owned and managed by just three RSLs, Gloucestershire Housing Association, Bromford Housing Group and Guinness Trust. However, almost twenty other RSLs provide the remaining rented homes, supported housing and shared ownership dwellings within the borough. A list of contact details for the Council's principal RSL partners and the names of other RSLs with housing stock in the borough is attached to this briefing note.

Since 1997 the Council has operated a joint housing needs register with its principal RSL partners, from which prospective tenants and shared ownership purchasers for RSL dwellings are selected. The six Gloucestershire districts and their RSL partners are working together on proposals for a system of Choice Based Lettings, to be implemented by the government target date of 2010. It is hoped that this system will also be able to bring private letting agencies on board to include private sector rented dwellings, thereby providing clients with a single access point to the widest possible choice of housing options.

## Residents' Charter

The Housing Corporation has published a Residents' Charter, which sets out what RSLs must do to comply with the Housing Corporation's "Regulatory Code" and additional standards which are considered to be good practice. The Residents' Charter covers a number of service areas including:

**Housing tenancies** – Tenants must be given a copy of their tenancy agreement, which sets out the responsibilities of both landlord and tenant. The agreement should include conditions concerning noise, nuisance and other anti-social behaviour and the RSL must put strategies in place to tackle anti-social behaviour.

**Rents and service charges** – Rent levels must be set within the context of the government's rent policy for social housing (which also applies to the rents set by the Council for its own homes, managed by Cheltenham Borough Homes). Any service charges must be levied and explained in accordance with legal requirements and the RSL must supply information on the means by which they can be challenged.

**Repairs and maintenance** – properties must be repaired and maintained so as to meet minimum legal requirements and higher Housing Corporation standards where relevant. The RSL should have arrangements for dealing with emergency, urgent and routine repairs and should also provide information concerning long term maintenance programmes. Although the Council usually works in partnership with RSLs, it is able to and has, on occasions, taken enforcement action to require an RSL to undertake works to tenanted or vacant properties which do not satisfy minimum legal requirements (this work is undertaken by Housing Standards Officers from the Neighbourhood Regeneration division). RSLs are required, by the Department for Communities & Local Government (previously the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) and the Housing Corporation to implement programmes to ensure that all their rented homes will meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010.

**Tenant consultation** – RSLs must have arrangements to seek the views of their residents and respond to those views. Residents must be allowed to play a part in the RSL's decision making and given opportunities to play a part in how services are run and standards are set.

**Complaints procedure** – RSLs are required to have a formal complaints procedure and if a complainant is still dissatisfied with the response to a formal complaint then they may be able to make use of the independent Housing Ombudsman Service ([www.ihos.org.uk](http://www.ihos.org.uk)).

Contact officer: Roger Sparks  
Title: Housing Enabling Officer  
Tel No: 01242 264191  
Email address: [Roger.sparks@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:Roger.sparks@cheltenham.gov.uk)