

A meeting of the **CABINET** will be held in **CABINET ROOM, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON** on **THURSDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2003** at **11:30 AM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

**Contact
(01480)**

APOLOGIES

1. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 6)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd October 2003.

**Miss C Harris
388234**

2. A14 THRAPSTON TO BRAMPTON - GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTIONS (Pages 7 - 12)

In the light of the petition submitted to full Council on 24th September 2003, to consider a report by the Director of Operational Services regarding the deferment of junction improvements on the A14 Road from Thrapston to Brampton.

**Mrs E Wilson
388301**

3. CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE ERNULF COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND ST. NEOTS LEISURE CENTRE SITE, EYNESBURY, ST.NEOTS (Pages 13 - 16)

To consider a report by the Head of Community Services regarding proposals by Ernulf Community School to develop a Performing Arts College on the site.

**P Jones
388202**

4. PROPOSED CHANGES TO PPG3 POLICY GUIDANCE FOR HOUSING (Pages 17 - 34)

To consider a joint report by the Heads of Planning and of Housing Services on the Government's proposals to change the National Planning Guidance for Housing.

**M Bingham
388431**

**F Mastrandrea
388208**

5. PROGRESS ON THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH STRUCTURE PLAN 2003, REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR THE EAST OF ENGLAND (RPG14 AND ASSOCIATED STUDIES) (Pages 35 - 40)

To consider a report by the Head of Planning Services on progress of Regional Planning Guidance for the East of England and Associated Studies.

**R Probyn
388430**

6. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: SELF ASSESSMENT (Pages 41 - 74)

To consider a report by the Head of Policy containing the draft self-

**I Leatherbarrow
388005**

assessment for the District Council's forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

7. QUARTERLY SUMMARY OF DEBTS WRITTEN-OFF (Pages 75 - 76)

To note a summary by the Head of Revenue Services of debts written-off during the quarter ended 30th September 2003.

Ms J Barber
388105

8. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

To resolve:-

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business being transacted contains exempt information relating to terms proposed for the supply of goods and services and/or a particular applicant for financial assistance provided by the Authority.

9. FUNDING FOR TEMPORARY HOUSING INITIATIVE (Pages 77 - 80)

To consider a joint report by the Heads of Housing Services and of Financial Services seeking approval of capital funding to the Nene Housing Society to support an initiative to provide temporary housing to minimise use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

Mr F Mastrandrea
388208

J Collen
388220

10. CAR PARKING STRATEGY - CONSULTATION DRAFT (Pages 81 - 100)

To consider a report by the Head of Environment and Transport on the car parking strategy and consultation arrangements.

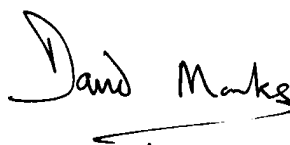
R Preston
388340

11. RECYCLING COLLECTIONS (Pages 101 - 106)

To consider a report by the Director of Operational Services on the future of the unified Green Box dry recycling collection service.

R Ward
388635

Dated this 16 day of October 2003



Chief Executive

Please contact Mrs H Taylor, Democratic Services Officer, Tel No. 01480 388008 if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by Cabinet.

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Cabinet Room, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon on Thursday, 2nd October 2003

PRESENT: Councillor D P Holley - Chairman

Councillors I C Bates, Mrs J Chandler,
R L Clarke, Mrs K P Gregory, N J Guyatt,
T V Rogers and L M Simpson.

79. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 11th September 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

80. COMMUNITY SAFETY REVIEW

By way of a report by the Head of Environment and Transport (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet were acquainted with the findings of a review, undertaken in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998, of arrangements for the delivery of community safety by the District Council and a draft Strategy formulated to underpin the Council's key role in that respect.

Having recognised the success of the work which had been undertaken by the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the findings and recommendations of the Community Safety Review be noted;
- (b) that the draft programme for the Community Safety Workshop, as appended to the report be noted;
- (c) that the draft Community Safety Strategy for Huntingdonshire be approved and the Director of Operational Services authorised, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for the Environment, to make any necessary changes to the text of the draft Strategy which might be occasioned by the outcomes of the workshop referred to in the preceding resolution; and
- (d) that the draft improvement plan appended to the report now submitted be approved.

81. POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICERS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

(Councillor L M Simpson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following item of business and left the meeting for the duration of the discussion and voting thereon).

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Environment and Transport (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the role, funding and deployment of eighteen new Police Community Support Officers in Huntingdonshire.

With regard to the draft memorandum of understanding annexed to the report, which had been drawn up by Cambridgeshire Constabulary, concerns were expressed in respect of those sections relating to the allocation, deployment and operational use of Officers and the circumstances in which it might become necessary to review insignia and badging linking officers to their areas of deployment and funding. In that respect it was suggested that further negotiations would be required with the constabulary before the memorandum was completed by the Chief Executive on behalf of the Council.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the content of the report now submitted be noted; and
- (b) that the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Councillor for the Environment be authorised to sign the Memorandum of Understanding between Cambridgeshire Constabulary and the District Council in relation to the funding, training, badging, deployment and operational management of Police Community Support Officers in Huntingdonshire.

82. A VISION FOR RAMSEY AND THE WAY FORWARD

The Cabinet considered a joint report by the Heads of Planning Services and of Policy (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding progress achieved in the "vision project" for Ramsey and the surrounding villages and the development of a Ramsey Area Partnership. Having considered the content of the report and in noting a remark by the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy with regard to the need to include all villages to the east of the A1 road in the vision, specifically Conington, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the current position with regard to the development of the Ramsey Area Partnership be noted;
- (b) that the proposed structure and its relationship with the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership be endorsed;

- (c) that the submission of a bid for Countryside Agency funding be supported; and
- (d) that Councillor N J Guyatt be appointed as the District Council's representative on the Ramsey Area Partnership Board

83. SEPTIC TANK AND NIGHT SOIL EMPTYING SERVICE

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding a proposal to withdraw the Council's involvement in the delivery of a septic tank emptying service by a private contractor and a budget correction to reflect the continuing obligation of the Council to deliver a night soil collection service.

Having considered the information contained in the report, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that notice be given to discontinue with effect from 31st December 2003 the Council's involvement in a septic tank emptying service and to re-direct customers to private sector companies;
- (b) that the service delivery arrangements for the Council's night soil collection be reviewed in Autumn 2004; and
- (c) that the associated budget adjustment, in accordance with paragraph 3.5 of the report now submitted, be undertaken in conjunction with the forthcoming review of the Medium Term Plan.

**84. DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE:
HUNTINGDONSHIRE LANDSCAPE AND TOWNSCAPE
ASSESSMENT AND HUNTINGDONSHIRE DESIGN GUIDE**

With the aid of a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet received a draft Landscape and Townscape Assessment and a draft Design Guide aimed at improving the quality and distinctiveness of Huntingdonshire's environment.

RESOLVED

that the draft Landscape and Townscape Assessment and the draft Design Guide be approved as draft Supplementary Planning Guidance for the purpose of public consultation.

85. THE OFFORD CLUNY CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT

Further to Minute No. 03/30 and by way of report by the Planning Policy Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Members were acquainted with the outcomes of the consultation exercise undertaken on the draft Conservation Area Character

Statement for Offord Cluny.

RESOLVED

that the Conservation Area Character Statement for Offord Cluny be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

86. HUNTINGDONSHIRE FLOOD FORUM - OPERATING PRINCIPLES

Further to Minute No. 02/173, consideration was given to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a draft protocol for a Huntingdonshire Flood Forum to be convened annually.

Having noted the main aims and objectives of the Forum and arrangements for its first meeting on the 12th November 2003, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the Huntingdonshire Flood Forum Protocol appended to the report now submitted be noted;
- (b) that Councillor I C Bates be appointed Chairman of the Forum; and
- (c) that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) be invited to appoint the District Council's representative to attend the Forum.

87. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the terms of a contract for the supply of a service.

88. KENT ROAD ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit a second report by the Head of Environment and Transport as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 in view of the receipt of additional information which revised information and recommendations contained in the report appended to the agenda).

The Cabinet considered reports by the Head of Environment and Transport (copies of which are appended as an Annex to the Minute Book) in respect of tenders received for an environmental improvement scheme at Kent Road, Oxmoor, Huntingdon.

Having expressed their concerns in relation to the difference between the lowest tender and the provision made in the budget for the scheme, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that, subject to such reductions in the specification as may be negotiated and agreed by the Director of Operational Services, the contract for Kent Road Environmental Improvements be awarded to J Breheny; and
- (b) that approval be given to a supplementary capital estimate of £243,000 to meet the net additional cost of the scheme.

Chairman

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CABINET

23RD OCTOBER 2003

A14 THRAPSTON TO BRAMPTON – GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTIONS (Report by Director of Operational Services)

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the current position of the Highway Agency regarding the junction improvements on the A14 from Thrapston to Brampton.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 In September 1998, the Highways Agency announced the preferred scheme for the Thrapston to Brampton Grade Separation of Junctions. In 2000, the Highways Agency discussed with the County Council and the District Council the programme for the implementation of the scheme including proposed Orders, public exhibitions and the timing for the commencement of works which were planned for 2001. During 2001 work continued by the Highways Agency on the grade separation orders and on 27 February 2002 the Highways Agency published the Draft Orders for consultation. This was to end on 3 May 2002. A letter received on 12 March 2002 confirmed that subject to no objections to the Draft Orders the grade separated scheme would begin construction in 2003/04.
- 2.2 There was no further correspondence with the Highways Agency with the District Council. A letter dated 21 July 2003 to the Chairman of Cambridgeshire County Council (but not copied to the District Council) was the first indication that the scheme had been put on hold. The reason given is that new government evaluation criteria has resulted in a reduction in its priority.
- 2.3 A letter has never been received by the District Council on this matter, but Jonathan Djanogly MP has copied the District Council into a letter received from the Highways Agency explaining why the scheme has been put on hold. This is attached as Annex A.

3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 The Highways Agency has concluded in looking at the scheme against the new government criteria (which relate to the Government's five objectives for transport, environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration) that because of the relatively low number of accidents at the A14 sites, this scheme 'struggles to compete with others where there is a higher accident record and/or a lower cost solution in prospect'. As a consequence of this, the Highways Agency believe that the £25.4million price tag for the 4 grade separated full connection junctions and over-bridges at another 3 is difficult to justify. The Agency is currently investigating what other sources of funding may be used to progress the A14

improvements and/or whether there are any less costly alternatives which could be justified in the intervening period. This could be linked to the evaluation work indicated in the London-South Midlands Multi-Modal Study.

- 3.2 It is very disappointing to note that at this late stage of the process, when local expectations have been raised, that the Highways Agency should now reconsider their position on the scheme. Members will know that a petition was presented to Full Council on 24 September from local people asking the District Council to do everything it could to persuade the Highways Agency to implement the scheme. A letter has also been received from Easton Parish Council asking for support.
- 3.3 The District Council can lobby both the Highways Agency and the Government to seek to have the scheme reinstated. The County and District in Cambridgeshire have agreed, through the Transportation Lead Members Meeting, to express concerns in a co-ordinated approach and to seek discussions with the Highway Agency. A letter has now been sent by the County Council on our behalf and this is attached as Annex B.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 That Cabinet authorise the Director of Operational Services in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning Strategy to lobby the Highways Agency, Go-East and the Department for Transport, in co-ordination with other relevant local authorities, to reinstate the scheme.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- ❖ Highway Agency Letter to Jonathan Djanogly dated 16 September 2003
- ❖ Letter from Highway Agency to District Council dated 26 February 2002
- ❖ Draft Orders for the A14 Thrapston to Brampton Improvements

Contact Officer: Mrs E Wilson, Director of Operational Services
☎ 01480 388301

CABINET

23 OCTOBER 2003

**CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE ERNULF COMMUNITY SCHOOL AND
ST NEOTS LEISURE CENTRE SITE, EYNESBURY, ST NEOTS
(Report by Head of Community Services)**

1 SUMMARY

This report appraises Cabinet of proposals from Ernulf Community School (the School) for capital development associated with its bid for Performing Arts College status. It further explores how this development might be integrated with the Council's aspirations for developments within St Neots Leisure Centre.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The School applied to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for Performing Arts College (PAC) status in March this year. Its initial application was unsuccessful, partly due to failing to raise the necessary £50,000 of non statutory sponsorship, but it received positive feedback from the DfES and encouragement to reapply. In addition, the School has received local support for its proposals including the other Secondary Schools in the District; the St Neots Town Council; the Regional College; the MP; and the Arts Council for England.
- 2.2 The School has now raised the £50,000 sponsorship and is to reapply for PAC status this month. If successful (the outcome will be known by February 2004), the School will benefit from additional funding of £600,000 from the DfES, £100,000 of which is committed to the development of a "Youth and Community Performing Arts Centre". This £100,000 is in addition to around £400,000 already allocated to the project by the School and the County Council. The Performing Arts Centre would be the main facility within which the School would develop its ethos of excellence in the field, but would also be available for use by the local community similar to the existing Leisure Centre on the site, and thus a significant infrastructure improvement to the existing and growing community within St Neots.
- 2.3 The School has recognised that its expertise is in the field of education and that the Council has expertise in operating and managing community facilities in the form of its Leisure Centres, including the Burgess Hall. Consequently, the School would like to explore with the Council the feasibility of the Council managing on behalf of the School the Performing Arts Centre for the wider community.

3 IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 At first sight, there is a clear rationale for any community cultural services on the Ernulf site being managed by the Council through its Leisure Centres service. The basic rationale focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of co-ordinating and rationalising similar and complementary services within a single management framework. There are also practical benefits in recognising that many of the features of the Leisure Centre will be required from a Performing Arts Centre. These include for example, reception, bars and catering, crèche facilities, and changing accommodation. Consequently, it is possible that capital development of the Leisure Centre and that of the Performing Arts Centre could be facilitated by recognising the incremental need for these facilities rather than each Centre's individual need, thus realising additional efficiencies.
- 3.2 Before any agreement is reached between the School and the Council, there are many areas which require further exploration. These include:
- the possibility of developing a single reception point for all cultural services (currently, there are two Leisure Centre receptions);
 - an evaluation of the degree to which similar services can be developed and shared between the Leisure Centre and a Performing Arts Centre;
 - the impact upon the Priory Centre; and
 - the conflict between re-evaluating the Leisure Centre's capital programme (worth around £650,000 over the next five years) and the need to make immediate improvements to the Leisure Centre as driven by existing customer demand.
- 3.3 At this stage, approval is sought from Cabinet to open further discussions with the School so that a more detailed report might be brought to a future meeting.

4 CONCLUSION

There is a strong possibility that Ernulf School will benefit from further major investment in Performing Arts facilities over the next two years. There is an opportunity for the local community to share in that benefit. There is considerable local support for the proposal. The benefit might be further enhanced by a shared approach between the School and the Council in managing the new facilities.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 That Cabinet supports formally the bid of Ernulf Community School for Performing Arts College status.
- 5.2 That Cabinet authorises Officers to explore further the opportunities that may arise from a shared approach to managing and developing community cultural services on the site.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*Ernulf Community School – Our Rationale for Performing Arts College Status.
Ernulf - A Specialist Arts College For St Neots.
Held in the Community Services Office.*

Contact Officer: Peter Jones
Head of Community Services
☎ 01480 388202

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CABINET

23 OCTOBER 2003

**PROPOSED CHANGES TO PPG3 - HOUSING
(Report by Heads of Planning and Housing Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report informs Cabinet of changes which the Government intends to make to national planning guidance for housing, and recommends a response on behalf of the Council.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Government's planning policies are set out in a series of Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs), which are revised from time to time. PPG3 (Housing) is one of the most influential, as it plays a significant role in determining the locations and types of housing that may be built. PPGs are strong 'material considerations' that local planning authorities and others are expected to take into account when preparing plan policies and considering individual planning applications.

- 2.2 The Government is proposing two sets of changes to the current version of PPG3 (which was issued in March 2000). The first set of changes updates national guidance on securing an appropriate mix of housing through the planning system (including affordable properties). The second concerns the use of allocated employment land for housing. Comments on the proposed changes have been invited, to be received by 31 October.

- 2.3 The proposed changes are set out in two consultation papers, each of which includes a questionnaire. Copies of both questionnaires, indicating the proposed responses of the Council, are attached at Appendix B (housing mix/affordability) and Appendix C (use of employment land for housing).

- 2.4 Because the questionnaires address a number of detailed points, Appendix A summarises the key implications of the proposed changes for this Council, and explains the rationale behind the recommended responses. It is proposed that this summary be submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister alongside the questionnaires, as a means of highlighting the Council's key concerns.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the comments set out in Appendices A, B and C of this report as the Council's response to the Government's proposed changes to PPG3.

Background Papers:

DETR (2000) PPG3: Housing.

ODPM (2003) Influencing the Size, Type and Affordability of Housing
(consultation paper)

ODPM (2003) Supporting the Delivery of New Housing (consultation paper)

HDC (2003) 2002 Housing Needs Survey

HDC (2003) SPG: Market Housing Mix (consultation draft)

CONTACT OFFICERS - enquiries about this report to Michael Bingham,
Planning Policy Team Leader (01480 388431) or Frank Mastrandrea, Policy &
Enabling Officer in Housing Services (01480 388208).

APPENDIX A SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES AND RESPONSES

Influencing the Size, Type and Affordability of Housing

This is the first of the two consultation papers. The key issues that it raises can be summarised as follows:

A *Role of the planning system*

A1 This set of changes to PPG3 is advanced on the basis that “The planning system has an important role in creating communities with a better mix of housing – in terms of size, type and affordability – than is currently available”. Whilst planning undoubtedly has a role to play in addressing these matters, it should be emphasised to the Government that the quantity of affordable housing that can be secured through the planning process cannot meet the level of identified need in high-demand areas such as Huntingdonshire. This is because of the scale of need relative to the overall level of house building, the difficulty of securing affordable units on small sites, the time required to negotiate planning agreements, and the limited public funds available to build affordable units.

B *Greater role for regional/sub-regional analysis*

B1 The consultation paper suggests that assessments of housing need should be co-ordinated regionally (to ensure consistency of approach) and, in many areas, be carried out at the sub-regional level (recognising that housing market areas cross local authority boundaries). This general principle can be supported, and indeed sub-regional analysis is already being conducted within the Cambridge sub-region.

C *Reduction in site size thresholds for affordable housing*

C1 It is Government policy that affordable housing should not be sought on sites below a certain minimum size, unless justified by local circumstances. The proposed changes reduce this minimum size from 1ha / 25 dwellings to 0.5ha / 15 dwellings, and drop a previous expectation that thresholds lower than this would have to reflect “exceptional local constraints”. These changes are welcome moves that should help to increase supply.

D *Definition of affordable housing*

D1 The Government proposes that ‘affordable housing’ should be defined in terms of the relationship between local income levels and house prices (and take into account the needs of particular groups such as ‘key workers’). This is logical in principle, but will require detailed information which is updated frequently. The proposed practice guide (see below) should include model formulae for this approach.

D2 The consultation reiterates the Government’s view that affordable housing should not be defined in terms of tenure (such as social rented), although it includes the caveat that this might be allowed where it would “address an identified housing need that otherwise

would not be met by other types of affordable housing". In Huntingdonshire, as in many other areas, the type of property required by the vast majority of those in need of affordable housing is social rented. In this respect the guidance should be worded more positively so that tenure is recognised as a valid aspect of affordability; some tenures are more 'affordable' than others, so tenure must be relevant to the definition of affordable housing.

- D3 Making reference to particular groups (particularly key workers) when defining affordable housing will help in targeting particular needs, and is an approach that is now being pursued in the Cambridge sub-region; a survey of key worker housing needs has just been completed, and will assist in drawing up appropriate policies and mechanisms.

E *Allocation of rural sites specifically for affordable housing*

- E1 A key change proposed is that authorities be allowed to allocate sites specifically for affordable housing, in rural areas where land would not otherwise be released. In effect this expands the current 'rural exceptions' policy (whereby *ad hoc* planning applications of this nature may be entertained) by enabling such land to be identified in local plans.

- E2 This idea is welcome in principle, but may be difficult to put into practice; once land has been identified in this way, landowners may hold on to the 'hope value' that their land might in future secure permission for market rather than affordable properties. This aspiration could inhibit the delivery of affordable homes on these sites. In principle such 'exceptions sites' should also be open to allocation on the edge of towns, although in such locations the hope value that land could eventually be developed for market properties is likely to be much greater (due to the way in which planning policies focus development on urban areas).

F *Market housing mix*

- F1 The consultation paper reiterates previous guidance that authorities should plan to meet the housing needs of the whole community, including an appropriate mix of dwelling sizes. It makes clear that "authorities should reject developments that conflict with the objective of widening housing choice". This is to be welcomed; Members will be aware that securing an improved mix of market properties is a key issue in Huntingdonshire, as reflected in the draft supplementary planning guidance on Market Housing Mix.

G *Proposed practice guide*

- G1 The Government proposes to issue a 'practice guide' in due course to accompany the revised PPG. This guide will contain practical advice on policies and mechanisms for securing affordable housing and an appropriate housing mix. Again, this idea is welcome in principle, although the consultation paper contains no more than a suggested contents list. The Government should be urged to consult extensively on the contents of the guide since this is an opportunity to introduce fundamental changes to the effectiveness of delivery mechanisms.

H ***Other issues***

- H1 The proposed changes to PPG3 and the intended practice guide provide an opportunity for various other issues surrounding the delivery of affordable housing to be addressed. The opportunity has been taken at the end of the questionnaire to flag these matters. They include: the need for improved guidance on section 106 procedures and the way in which targets for affordable housing are arrived at; the need for specialist ‘accreditation’ of housing needs surveys; the need for local authorities to be able to work with a select list of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs); and the need to give RSLs greater freedom to undertake commercial development in support of their core affordable housing work.

Supporting the delivery of new housing

This, the second of the two consultation papers, is concerned with a single issue:

I **Use of allocated employment land for housing**

- I 1 The Government proposes to change PPG3 so that housing development may be permitted on land allocated for employment purposes unless a convincing case for its retention can be made. Retaining the land for employment use may be justified where the site would not accord with national or strategic policies for locating housing, or where there is a realistic prospect that the allocation will be taken up for employment.
- I 2 This proposal appears to be driven by a concern that some authorities are holding on to outdated allocations that have no prospect of being developed for employment, and which would be better used for housing. Whilst this may be true in some parts of the country, there is concern that in areas of high demand for housing, such as Huntingdonshire, the change will make it difficult to bring allocated employment sites forward (due to the increased ‘hope value’ for housing that will now be attached to such sites). In other words, this policy change could worsen the very problem that it seeks to address – the non-implementation of employment allocations. It also threatens to weaken the ‘plan-led’ approach to development that is now supposed to prevail.
- I 3 Whilst it is right that the appropriate use of unimplemented employment sites is reviewed from time to time, this should be in the context of local plan reviews when the needs of the area, and the comparative merits of different sites for particular uses, can be assessed fully.

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Influencing the size, type and affordability of housing

Questions on which we should like your views

Name: Frank Mastrandrea
Organisation: Huntingdonshire District Council
Address: Pathfinder House, St.Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN
E-mail address: Frank.Mastrandrea@huntsdc.gov.uk
Telephone No: 01480 388208

	Yes	Some reservations (please give details)	No
Q1. We propose a greater role for regional and sub-regional planning, in recognition that housing markets do not respect local authority boundaries. Do you agree?	Yes. This has already been recognised in the Cambridge area, with the results of the first Sub-Regional Housing Needs Assessment due out soon.	Potentially more complicated process to ensure consensus of more numerous interested parties. Sufficient flexibility should be built in to allow Local Authorities to agree some local priorities.	
Q1 comment:			
Q2. We propose a reduction in the site size threshold (in most areas) above which affordable housing can be sought, subject to the affordable housing provision not making development unviable. Do you agree with the proposal?	Yes. This should help to increase the supply of affordable housing. Removal of the wording in Circular 6/98 requiring "exceptional local circumstances" to justify thresholds lower than these minimum levels is welcome.		
Q2 comment:			
Q3. We propose that affordable housing should be defined in local plans in terms of the relationship between local income levels and house prices or rents for different types and sizes of housing, and in terms of housing for identified groups such as key workers, and be based on an up-to-date assessment of housing needs.			
Q3a. Do you agree with the proposal that affordable housing	Yes. Existing guidance (Circular 6/98) already	Current guidance is too vague leading to disagreement with	

<p>should be defined in local plans in terms of the relationship between local income levels and house prices or rents for different types and sizes of housing?</p>	<p>recommends this.</p>	<p>developers and debates at Local Plan inquiries. Government should consider more detailed guidance on how these issues should be addressed (including model formulae), to be included in the proposed practice guide. It must also ensure that data on income levels is available for the required areas and updated frequently.</p>	
<p>Q3b. Do you agree with the proposal that affordable housing should be defined in local plans in terms of housing for identified groups such as key workers?</p>	<p>Yes. PPG3 paragraph 13 currently advises that local authorities should identify housing need for specific groups.</p>	<p>Level of need for specific groups could vary over the plan period.</p>	
<p>Q3c. Should key workers be defined in local plans in terms of: i. their income; ii their job; or iii an alternative? And if so please explain.</p>	<p>The forthcoming Cambridge Sub-Regional Key Worker Study defines key workers as: ‘public sector workers who are employed by the public sector and will be involved in the safety and comfort of the community. Eligible workers will be employed in sectors experiencing recruitment and retention problems in the Cambridge Sub-Region and be unable to afford similar accommodation in the open market. There will also be reference to travel to work distances’</p>		
<p>Q3 comment:</p>			
<p>Q4. We propose that affordable housing should not normally be defined by reference to tenure. The exception would be where this would address an identified housing need</p>			<p>No. Certain tenures are more affordable than others, and in many high demand areas are the form of housing sought by the overwhelming majority of those in housing need. Hence</p>

that otherwise would not be met by other types of affordable housing. Do you agree with the proposal?			tenure must be relevant to the definition of affordable housing. The PPG should be worded more positively in this respect, to enable local authorities to deal with their priority needs.
Q4 comment:			
Q5. We propose that local planning authorities should work with developers to ensure planning objectives reflect the development potential of sites and that the affordable housing provision sought should not make development unviable. Do you agree?	Agree (as currently required by 6/98) that local authorities should work with developers to ensure developments are viable.	Would benefit from more detailed guidance on how this should be achieved, in the proposed practice guide. Some developers are reluctant to provide the data required. Assessing viability also requires that local authorities develop expertise (or have access to advice on) the economics of land development. Guidance should make clear that factors other than affordable housing could affect viability.	
Q5 comment:			
Q.6 We propose in paragraph 9 a number of considerations that are relevant to whether the affordable housing provision sought would make development unviable. Should the list of considerations include:			
Q6a. The costs of bringing sites to the market, including the implications of competing land uses?			No. Whilst the costs of site development are relevant, the implications of competing land uses should not be accorded significant weight, for two reasons: (a) the prospect of competing uses should not be allowed to subvert proper planning principles, especially where sites have been agreed and allocated for specific purposes via the local plan process; (b)

			other (non-housing) land uses should make a contribution to affordable housing requirements where those developments add to housing demand.
Q6b. Making realistic assumptions on levels of public subsidy available for affordable housing?			No. Where grant is not available affordable housing without recourse to grant should be provided.
Q6c. The need for proposed development to be attractive to the lenders of private finance?			No. This is an issue that could too readily be used as an excuse for not providing affordable housing, especially as hard evidence may be commercially privileged.
Q6d. Avoiding prescription of tenure?			No. See Q4, and Q6b
Q6e. Other considerations? If so please explain.			
Q6 comment:			
Q7. We propose in paragraph 13 a limited number of circumstances where the presumption that affordable housing should form part of the proposed development of the site could be set aside. Should the list include where:			
Q7a. The affordable housing is more effectively secured by bringing existing housing back into active use?		Whilst this may be an applicable circumstance, the preference should always be for on-site delivery. Where off-site substitution is agreed adequate safeguards will be needed to ensure that affordable housing requirements are genuinely being addressed.	
Q7b. Management of the affordable housing on site cannot be secured effectively?		Whilst this may be an applicable circumstance, the preference should always be for on-site delivery. Developers	

		should be required to produce clear evidence of why management arrangements would preclude on-site provision. Where off-site substitution is agreed adequate safeguards will be needed to ensure that affordable housing requirements are genuinely being addressed.	
Q7c. Providing the affordable housing elsewhere in the plan area is more likely to widen housing choice and encourage better social mix?		Whilst this may be an applicable circumstance, the preference should always be for on-site delivery. Where off-site substitution is agreed adequate safeguards will be needed to ensure that affordable housing requirements are genuinely being addressed.	
Q7d. Other circumstances? If so please explain.			
Q7 comment:			
Q8. We propose that local planning authorities should plan to meet the housing requirements of the whole community by planning for a mix of housing types and sizes that reflects up-to-date assessments. Do you agree?	Yes. We are already pursuing this through draft SPG, linked to policies in the Local Plan. We welcome the statement that “authorities should reject developments that conflict with the objective of widening housing choice”.	As yet there are few examples of good practice in the form of guidance, and we have encountered a high level of resistance from developers. Planning Inspectors are, potentially, insufficiently knowledgeable of market housing issues. These are matters that need to be addressed fully in the proposed practice guide.	
Q8 comment:			
Q9. We propose that affordable housing provision in rural areas could be supported by allocating sites solely for affordable housing, on land within or adjoining	Yes. Welcome in principle; could potentially increase the volume of affordable housing that is secured.	Practical difficulties could arise in ensuring that landowners release the site at subsidised cost. Many may hold on to sites identified in this manner in the hope of	

existing villages, which would not otherwise be released for housing and where this would contribute to the attainment of mixed communities. Do you agree?		securing permission eventually for market housing (on some or all of the site).	
Q9 comment:			
Q10. The proposal that local planning authorities should be able to allocate sites for 100% affordable housing is limited to rural areas and to land, within or adjoining existing villages, which would not otherwise be released for housing. Should this provision be more widely available, and if so in what circumstances?	Yes. In principle this ability should be extended to towns and larger villages (above the 3,000 population level often used as a 'cut-off' when considering rurality). Such larger settlements can have a considerable need for affordable housing, and allocations specifically for this purpose could be made at the edge of some settlements, on land that would not otherwise be released.	It is acknowledged that the larger the settlement, the more difficult this approach becomes (as larger settlements are the places where market development is concentrated, so the release of land for housing, even on the settlement edge, becomes less 'exceptional').	
Q10 comment:			
Q11. Will the proposed change enable the provision of more affordable housing in your area? If so, can you say why?	Overall the proposed changes to PPG3 will assist in delivering affordable housing, in particular through enabling lower site size thresholds to be used.	Despite the proposed changes, the quantity of affordable housing that can be secured through the planning process cannot meet the level of identified need in high-demand areas such as Huntingdonshire. This is because of the scale of need relative to the overall level of house building, the difficulty of securing affordable units on small sites, the time required to negotiate planning agreements, and the limited public funds available to build affordable units.	
Q11 comment:			
Q12. The proposed change requires greater attention to assessment and evaluation of impact than the current policy.	Practice Guidance is welcomed. However, at this stage there is no substantive detail other than suggestions of the	We consider it imperative that a high degree of consultation should take place on a draft of the practice	

We will produce practice guidance to help - with the overall intention of simplifying and speeding up the process. Read together, will the proposed change and practice guidance achieve this?	topics it will cover.	guide to ensure significant improvements in current delivery mechanisms.	
Q12 comment:			
Q13. In the light of Question 12, can this be achieved within the current resources of your organisation?			Whilst our authority has staff skilled in working with developers and RSLs, a key skills gap (which is likely to exist in many other authorities) is the ability to assess and negotiate site viability issues. This difficulty is exacerbated by the commercially sensitive nature of such information.
Q13 comment:			
Q14. Is the proposed change likely to be advantageous to small businesses?			No obvious benefit to small businesses.
Q14 comment:			
Q15. Do you consider the proposed scope of the practice guide (at Annex B) covers all the topics it needs to? If not what is missing, and why?			Cambs. Structure Plan contemplates seeking contributions from commercial development. Advice on best practice in this regard is required.
Q15 comment:			
Q16. Does the proposed scope of the practice guide include topics, which don't need to be covered? If so which, and why?			No
Q16 comment:			
Other comment:			

Please see additional sheet attached.

Other issues

The proposed changes to PPG3 and the intended practice guide provide an opportunity for various other issues surrounding the delivery of affordable housing to be addressed, although they do not feature in the consultation document. Issues of key concern to this council include:

The need for improved guidance on section 106 procedures

There is often criticism of local authorities slowing down the process as a result of protracted section 106 negotiations. We have sought to mitigate against this by using standard 106 clauses but too often developers will not accept them, frequently as a result of decisions made when either being unaware or ignoring local authority policies. Detailed guidance on standard 106 agreements would be of benefit, perhaps in the forthcoming Circular on planning obligations (or accompanying best practice material).

The way in which targets for affordable housing are arrived at

In areas of high demand, housing needs surveys invariably point to levels of need that are way beyond that which can reasonably be provided. As a consequence the process of determining what percentage of new housing should be 'affordable' leads to reliance on custom and practice rather than anything more scientific. National guidance on how this should be determined should be provided in the proposed practice guide.

The need for specialist 'accreditation' of housing needs surveys

Planning Inspectors tend to have a lack of understanding of housing needs issues, which can lead to confusion at local plan inquiries and inconsistent recommendations. A better approach would be a separate process of accrediting local authority housing needs surveys to confirm whether they meet the Government guidance which is now published. This should be structured such that it has some weight when considered at Planning Inquiries. Accreditation could be undertaken by Inspectors or others trained specifically in affordable housing issues.

The need for local authorities to be able to work with a select list of RSLs

It should be acceptable for local authorities to have a select list of developing RSLs. There are good reasons why local authorities seek to maintain approved lists, as it allows them to ensure adequate management of the completed units and ensures that links to grant funding through the Housing Corporation can more readily be maintained. Lack of clarity on this issue can lead to site 'touting' by developers in an effort to seek better financial returns, often leading to increased cost to either the RSL or the public purse.

The need for adequate regulation if housing grants are provided direct to commercial developers

RSLs are heavily regulated and, by their very nature, committed to affordable housing. There is arguably a case for allowing only RSLs to provide affordable housing that meets identified local needs. If current ODPM/Housing Corporation plans to provide grants direct to commercial developers proceed, similar rigorous control mechanisms should apply.

The need for greater freedom for RSLs

In general securing affordable housing now relies upon sites being brought forward by commercial developers (and affordable units being secured as a proportion of that development). RSLs can rarely purchase land for affordable housing in their own right due to the costs involved. This stifles delivery since much depends on the market in terms of when sites for affordable housing become available. Allowing RSLs to provide market housing (as a means of cross-subsidy) would help with this provided that the right balance is struck between commercial activities and their core affordable housing role.

Supporting the delivery of new housing

Questions on which we should like your views

Name: Michael Bingham
Organisation: Huntingdonshire District Council
Address: Pathfinder House, St.Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN
E-mail address: Michael.Bingham@huntsdc.gov.uk
Telephone No: 01480 388431

	Yes	Some reservations (please give details)	No
Q1. Will the proposed change improve the delivery of new housing in your area?			The change is unlikely to improve housing delivery in this area, as most allocated employment sites are either needed for that purpose (demonstrated by an employment land study) or in locations that are unsustainable for housing. Paradoxically, the change could frustrate housing delivery on sites allocated for residential development (by undermining the 'planned' approach to land release and thereby increasing uncertainty about land availability and the appropriate order of land releases against the tests in PPG3).
Q1 comment:			
Q2. The proposed new paragraph 42a sets out a series of considerations for local planning authorities in their determination of planning applications for proposals described in the paragraph. Do you agree that local planning authorities in determining such planning applications should consider whether:			

<p>Q2a. The proposal fails to reflect the policies in PPG3, particularly those relating to a site's suitability for development and the presumption that previously developed sites (or buildings for re-use or conversion) should be developed before greenfield sites?</p>	<p>Yes</p>		
<p>Q2b. The housing development would undermine the planning for housing strategy set out in RPG or the development plan where this is up-to-date, in particular if it would lead to over-provision of new housing where this will exacerbate, or lead to, low demand?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The words 'in particular' (relating to low demand areas) are unhelpful, as there are many other planning strategy considerations that may militate against housing on allocated employment sites; use of 'in particular' could lessen the importance attached to these other matters. Suggest using 'including' instead.</p>	
<p>Q2c. There is a realistic prospect of the allocation being taken up for its stated use in the plan period or that its development for housing would undermine regional and local strategies for economic development and regeneration?</p>	<p>Yes</p>		
<p>Q2 comment:</p>			
<p>Q3. Is the proposed change likely to be advantageous to small businesses?</p>			<p>No; these are no obvious benefits for this sector. Contrary to the expectations of the partial regulatory impact assessment, the change is unlikely to bring forward significant amounts of land for mixed-use development including premises for small businesses; in high demand areas such as this, it is more likely that sites will be used purely for housing.</p>

Q3 comment:			
Q4. Local authorities will need to carry out and keep up-to-date assessments of the need for land to be allocated for employment uses (and for particular types) over the plan period and a review of the suitability of particular sites. They are already expected to do this. The Partial RIA sets out circumstances where additional costs may be incurred. Are these circumstances likely to arise frequently?	Yes. We already undertake such reviews, but pressures to release land at the development control stage may create demands or needs for more frequent updates so that those pressures can be faced. This will inevitably place additional burdens on local authorities at a time when budgets and labour are already severely over-stretched.		
Q4 comment:			
Other comment:			

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CABINET

23RD OCTOBER 2003

**PROGRESS ON THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH
STRUCTURE PLAN 2003, REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR THE
EAST OF ENGLAND (RPG14) AND ASSOCIATED STUDIES
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update members on the progress with and the future timetable for the publication of Regional Guidance and to appraise Members of the results of the Stansted /M11 Corridor Development Options Study currently out for consultation. To inform Members of the notice by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to adopt the Structure Plan on 21st October 2003.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The period of consultation following the publication of proposed modifications to the Structure plan has now ended and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have issued a final version for adoption. The modifications were the subject of a report to the Cabinet on the 5th July 2003. In that report a nil response to the Structure Plan Authorities (SPAs) was proposed. No changes have been made to the policies that were highlighted in the July report. The plan extends to 2016 although it recognises the strategic pattern of growth adopted will give capacity in the sub area for growth beyond that period.

- 2.2 Various strategies and studies have been carried out in the East of England over the last two years concerning multi modal studies (MMSs) and strategies for growth and regeneration areas. They will inform the forthcoming RPG 14 that includes the whole of the Eastern Region and extends the plan period to 2021 and will replace the Structure Plan under new proposals currently going through Parliament The following studies have been completed:

- Cambridge Sub-region study (2001);
- Cambridge-Huntingdon MMS (mid 2001);
- Norwich-Great Yarmouth study (late 2001);
- London-Stansted-Cambridge study (July 2002);
- Milton Keynes-South Midlands study (September 2002);
- London Orbital MMS (ORBIT) (October 2002);
- London-Ipswich MMS (LOIS) (December 2002);
- London-South Midlands MMS (February 2003);
- Norwich-Peterborough MMS (April 2003);
- Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft study (April 2003); and
- Harlow Options Study (August 2003).

- Stansted-M11 Corridor Development Options study;

2.3 Work is continuing on the following studies/areas of work:

- Thames Gateway; and
- Peterborough and the Fens.

2.4 The implications that arise from the deliberations of the SERAS study and the future Airports White Paper may also impact upon regional strategy but the RPG14 will not be held up to await the publication of the White Paper.

2.5 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) Communities Plan is proposing an additional 200000 homes being delivered in the growth areas of Milton Keynes, Ashford, Thames Gateway, Stansted and London. That which is to be accommodated in the London Stansted Cambridge corridor is of greatest relevance to Huntingdonshire.

2.6 Members have already considered comments on the RPG 14 options consultation launched in September 2002 at their meeting on 5th December 2002. Members expressed a desire to ensure that growth is located closer to London or in London itself and this could partly be achieved by a fundamental review of the green belt around London. They supported the investment in the Thames Gateway and also supported a spatial strategy that was linked to regeneration e.g. growth of Stansted linked to the regeneration of Harlow.

2.7 The consultation document also considered how the spatial strategy was to be implemented. It suggested dividing the region into sub areas (similar to the Cambridge sub area) that would share a common vision and work across administrative boundaries to achieve it. The Members view was that the suggestion of a Peterborough and Fens sub area did not make administrative sense. Peterborough looks as much to Lincolnshire and the East Midlands as it does to the rest of Cambridgeshire and the Fens area is unique and some of which does not relate to Peterborough

3. EMERGING REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE PROGRAMME

3.1 The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) is responsible for the preparation of regional planning guidance. As part of the submission of this guidance a number of processes will take place between October and February 2004 when EERA approves the final draft for the Regional Planning Panel (RPP) to submit to the Secretary of State. They are as follows:-

- RPP will consider first draft in October and a second draft including district housing numbers in November.
- County workshops will be held in November and December before the final draft is considered by RPP in January 2004.

3.2 The Government Office is responsible for progressing the draft RPG to adoption as follows:-

- They will publish the draft RPG14 in March 2004 and there will be 12 week period of consultation.

- A public examination chaired by Corrine Swain with policy issues will take place in October.
- Proposed changes are due in early 2005 with the final adoption mid 2005.

4. THE STANSTED/M11 DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS STUDY

- 4.1 The study area is based on the Stansted/M11 corridor including parts of Essex, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire (South Cambs and Cambridge City). The study looks into the development options for the sub-region for the period of RPG14. Like the Harlow study, it will inform possible development options in the M11 corridor and spatial strategy for the area within RPG14, recognising that the possible growth of Stansted Airport is a key driver. It will enable a view to be formed of the possible contribution to the Deputy Prime Minister's Communities Plan growth aspirations in the M11 corridor. It also looks at longer term potential for growth which may be raised in the Airports White Paper (which would require a subsequent review of RPG14). Its aim, apart from estimating the amount of growth resulting from the growth in passengers at the airport, is to recommend a spatial development strategy to accommodate all growth that is anticipated to occur in the area.
- 4.2 The study now published recognises that the Stansted influence will decline with distance and the impact on commuting patterns if growth was dispersed beyond a certain distance. They therefore defined a core area based on an approximate 30 minute drive time from the Airport (this includes some of South Cambridgeshire but not Cambridge City) and the study concentrated on the distribution of future growth within this core area.
- 4.3 Capacity, transportation and environmental constraints were examined to develop different patterns of future development. The potential impacts of these patterns were then compared using ten sustainability tests to measure the overall impact in arriving at a preferred strategy.
- 4.4 The preferred strategy is based on development around the junction of the A120 and M11. Further growth in Harlow, Bishops Stortford and growth in existing settlements along the A120 at Gt. Dunmow and Braintree are envisaged together with new a settlement close to Stansted. It recognises a supportive role for major settlements like Cambridge outside of the core area.

5. THE MILTON KEYNES STUDY

- 5.1 The results of this study, after further work ensuring that its growth recommendations are appropriate and deliverable, indicated that the main growth should be directed towards the Bedford and Luton/ Dunstable area and the Milton Keynes, Northampton, and the Corby /Kettering/Wellingborough areas and is unlikely to affect Huntingdonshire.
- 5.2 The studies were required to provide an early input to RPG14 (and to alterations to RPG8 for the East Midlands, and a partial review of RPG9 within the South East Region). They will enable a view to be formed of the possible contribution to RPG14 and to the Deputy Prime Minister's Communities Plan growth aspirations in the Milton Keynes/South Midlands area.

6. THE PETERBOROUGH AND FENS SUB AREA

- 6.1 The possibility of Peterborough providing a sub-regional focus was raised in the RPG14 Options Consultation Document and is now being investigated further. Consultants were appointed in July and are due to complete the draft final report in October.

7. EMERGING RPG CONTENT

- 7.1 Taking account of studies referred to above the work in progress was reported to the Regional Planning Panel on the 17th October. This took the form of draft chapters of the Regional Plan. Whilst the emerging policies would appear to support the stance of this Authority the timing of its publication has not allowed scrutiny of all its contents. These will be reported verbally at Cabinet.

8. CONCLUSION

- a. The various studies described above will feed into the RPG and influence the final settlement pattern. It is pleasing to note that both the Milton Keynes study and the Stansted study are directing growth away from Cambridgeshire.
- b. The Cambridgeshire Structure Plan provides opportunities for growth post 2016 in the new settlement and Cambourne that will help in accommodating the Communities Plan growth envisaged and help in keeping pressure away from Huntingdonshire.
- c. Delivery of growth across administrative boundaries is possible where there is common interests as in the Cambridge sub area. In advance of convincing evidence from the current study it is not felt that common interest exists in a Peterborough sub area which includes most of the Fens.

9. RECOMMENDATION

9.1 That Members

1. Support the findings of the two studies and their influence in directing the RPG
2. Note the adoption of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003
3. Note the programme for delivering RPG14
4. Reserve their position with regard to the advantage of a Peterborough and Fens sub area for delivering growth in the region.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The above mentioned plans and studies.

Contact Officer: Richard Probyn
Tel: 01480 388430

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CABINET

23RD OCTOBER 2003

**COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT : SELF-ASSESSMENT
(Report by the Head of Policy)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with background information on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process, and specifically to provide an opportunity to comment on a very early draft of a Self-Assessment — the starting point for the overall assessment process.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 CPA was introduced by the Government following the White Paper "*Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services*". As the "cornerstone" of the Government's proposals for changes in the performance management framework for local government, the CPA framework and process have been developed to help Councils deliver better services to local communities, to remove restrictions and requirements on planning, spending and decision-making for high performing authorities and to establish targeted support, capacity building and (if necessary) intervention measures for those which require them.

3. THE SELF-ASSESSMENT APPROACH

- 3.1 The methodology for undertaking the CPA recognises that the Council has a key role to play in shaping the assessment which ultimately will be made by the Audit Commission. The self-assessment is the starting point for that process.
- 3.2 This approach seeks to —
- ◆ encourage the Council to identify areas where it performs well and those in need of improvement, based on robust and objective evidence;
 - ◆ gives the Council an opportunity to demonstrate self-awareness, an ability to assess strengths and weaknesses and to prioritise areas for improvement; and
 - ◆ provides an opportunity for a realistic, evidence-based appraisal of actual progress in improving services.
- 3.3 The attached document is the first draft of a self-assessment and represents an Officer view of the Council's performance in delivering improvements. It will need to be developed and refined over the ensuing months so that it is reflective of a broad range of views – Members, partners, other stakeholders, etc. Specifically, the Peer Challenge in early November will make a significant contribution to the final self-assessment document.

3.4 The self-assessment comprises five sections —

- ◆ setting the scene — the general context in which the Council operates, the key challenges and opportunities it faces;
- ◆ corporate assessment — an opportunity to describe progress in the planning and delivery of key priorities to improve services for local people;
- ◆ self-scoring summary — where the Council scores itself against ten corporate assessment themes and summarises key strengths and weaknesses (further on the assessment framework follows in paragraph 3.5 post);
- ◆ diagnostic assessments — a brief statement of how the Council performs in “balancing housing markets” and with regard to “public space”; and
- ◆ an improvement plan — a high-level summary action plan describing the actions the Council is going to take over the next three years around its key priorities.

3.5 The assessment framework will comprise —

- ◆ a single annual judgement covering core service performance;
- ◆ the scoring and weighting of the ten corporate assessment themes as follows:-
 1. (ambition
(prioritisation
(focus
 2. (capacity
(performance management
 3. (achievement of quality
(achievement of improvement
 4. (investment
(learning
(future plans;
- ◆ an annual classification related to points scoring as follows:-
 - excellent
 - good
 - fair
 - weak
 - poor.

4. TIMETABLE

While a detailed timetable for the exercise will be presented to the meeting, Members should note the following key stages in the process:-

23rd October	draft self-assessment to Cabinet
10th November	Peer Review (3 days)
December	review self-assessments following Peer Review, including SOLACE "reality check"
23rd January 2004	revised draft self-assessment to Cabinet
February (no later than 13th)	submission of self-assessment and supporting documentation to Audit Commission
29th March	CPA Inspection starts
March/June	Report and publication
June onwards	Improvement Plan

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Council's self-assessment of its performance will be an important part of the CPA exercise and the views of Members of the Panels will be important in ensuring that the assessment is both realistic and robust.

Background Papers

Self-Assessment Guidance for District Councils (April 2003) produced by the Audit Commission

Contact Officer: Ian Leatherbarrow, Head of Policy
☎ (01480) 388005
email: Ian.Leatherbarrow@huntsdc.gov.uk

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COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT : SELF-ASSESSMENT

Introduction (1 page)

By

**Councillor Derek Holley, Leader of the Council and
David Monks Chief Executive**

“one of those pretty, clean, unstenched, unconfined places that tend to lengthen life and make it happy”.

The William Corbett of 1822 might not recognise some aspects of modern Huntingdonshire, but we are proud of an area where we have maintained an enviable quality of life in the face of tremendous growth.

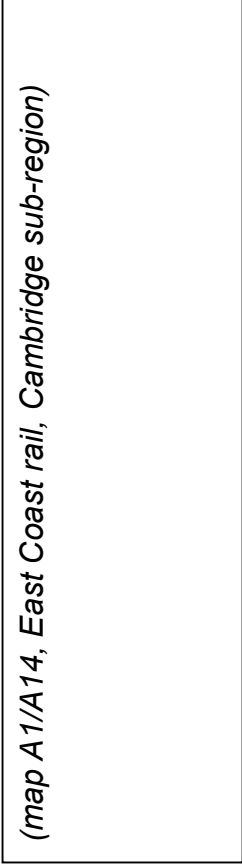
Setting the Scene [4 sides]

The Growth of Huntingdonshire

Since it was established in 1974, the main priority and focus of the District Council has been to manage the pressures associated with the rapid and extensive growth in Huntingdonshire and, particularly, the tensions between new housing and commercial development and residents' increasing expectation and demand for facilities and services while protecting and enhancing the natural and built environments and maintaining a good quality of life for local people.

1974 **2001**

- Population
- Households
- Businesses
- Jobs
- Other growth indicators



Huntingdonshire has grown because of a variety of factors — its proximity to regional and national centres, particularly Cambridge and London, excellent road and rail networks, an adaptable and flexible workforce and its capacity to develop.

Despite significant physical change, Huntingdonshire remains a predominantly rural area comprising a variety of communities focused on four market towns. Growth has been concentrated within the part of the district in the Cambridge Sub-Region, encompassing the market towns of Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots. In comparison the historic town of Ramsey and its surrounding area has experienced relative decline due to poor infrastructure and therefore limited growth.

Outside the market towns are a number of larger village settlements such as Brampton, Buckden, Fenstanton, Kimbolton, Little Paxton, Sawtry, Somersham, Warboys and Yaxley, which provide local facilities and services.

The area to the west of the A1 is sparsely populated with numerous small settlements, with limited services and poor public transport.

Huntingdonshire Now

Generally Huntingdonshire is an area of economic prosperity where the majority of local people enjoy a good quality of life in a high quality built and natural environment. However, the Council recognises that this general picture cannot be applied to all individuals and communities. Extensive research and consultation at both strategic and operational levels have highlighted a number of “hot spots” where some communities are experiencing significantly higher levels of relative deprivation.

Sparsity and isolation characterise many rural areas, which often lack a range of services and facilities. They are still predominantly based on agriculture and are characterised by lower wages due to seasonal work and lower skills and educational attainment. Such rural communities can often sit next to or even within more prosperous settlements where local residents are commuting to higher paid work within or outside the district.

Transportation along the main travel corridors is good – with the exception of the A14 trunk road at peak times. Travel around the market towns and on local roads is reasonable, although congestion, particularly at peak times, has been highlighted as a growing concern of local residents. Public transport throughout the district is generally accepted to be poor. The level of crime is low and most people feel safe in Huntingdonshire. However, for some communities crime is high and has a detrimental impact on daily life. For others the fear of crime – or antisocial behaviour/disorder – is a disproportionate cause for concern. Many people have highlighted the affordability of housing as a particular issue to them and their families, which is supported by the Council’s own research which shows an extensive need for an improvement in the amount of affordable and socially rented housing in the district. However, local people have also expressed strong concerns at the environmental impact of new housing and new development.

Increased incidence and risks of flooding, particularly along the river Gt Ouse valley and flood plains,

Challenges based on our consultation with local people and analysis in the development of a community strategy

The following key challenges are —

- ◆ transport and access; particularly rural transport and the A14
- ◆ crime;
- ◆ education and learning;
- ◆ environment;
- ◆ the impact of major developments, such as the redevelopment of Alconbury Airfield;
- ◆ affordable housing;
- ◆ town centre improvements;
- ◆ more recreational facilities and services.

Political and Managerial Leadership and Organisation

Political Management	
Political Composition	36
Conservative	14
Liberal Democrat	3
Independent	3
Total	53

The Council introduced a new Leader and Cabinet political structure in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 in May 2002, having undertaken a trial of the arrangements for the preceding two years which provided Members and Officers with valuable experience. The transition to the new system, which was implemented with the help of exercises facilitated by the IdeA, was seamless. An initial review in spring 2003 produced some minor changes and further reviews will be undertaken annually.

The present structure comprises a single party Cabinet of 8 Members, chaired by the Leader, which meets on a three weekly cycle. Cabinet Members are appointed by the Council and the constitution authorises the Leader to establish and vary portfolios of responsibility to Cabinet Members.

Two Overview and Scrutiny Panels, each of 12 Members, have been established and meet monthly. The Vice Chairman of one of the Panels is a member of the political opposition. Meetings are held regularly between Panel Chairman and Vice Chairmen to co-ordinate activities, share experiences and help develop the scrutiny role. Task and finish groups are established by the Panels to examine particular issues and to participate in Best Value Reviews.

Call-in has been used sparingly but judiciously by the Panels, with three Cabinet decisions having been subject to call-in over the past 16 months. Detailed studies are undertaken by the Panels in their policy formulation role, with previous reports and recommendations on subjects such as rural post offices, flooding, fly posting and drugs having been accepted by the Cabinet. These have involved public consultation, site visits and discussions with interested parties and organisations.

Areas of development:

- Using alternative venues
- Web based engagement
- Review sessions
- Dedicated support

Two panels, Development Control and Licensing and Protection, deal with regulatory matters. The latter Panel's terms of reference include those environmental protection issues where the Act provided a choice of executive or non-executive responsibility.

An Employment Panel is responsible for issues relating to the terms and conditions of Council employees.

The Standards Committee is politically balanced with 7 District Councillors, 2 representatives of town and parish councils and 3 independent persons. While the Committee is chaired by a member of the majority political party, any panels convened to deal with matters referred by an Ethical Standards Officers will be chaired by an independent member.

The role of the Council is developing as the main forum for political debate under the new structure. A procedure to enable petitions to be presented by members of the public has been introduced, together with oral questions to Cabinet Members and Panel Chairmen. The Council has also experimented in holding meetings at alternative venues.

Management Structure

The Chief Executive and three Corporate Directors form a Management Team, which meets weekly to consider corporate and strategic issues. A team of Heads of Service, representing 13 divisions, meet six-weekly with the three Corporate Directors to consider matters around corporate strategy and service improvement. To complement the strategic management structure there are a range of standing and ad hoc task and finish groups to deal with a variety of issues and to ensure coordination and common purpose.

Partnership

The Council has a well-developed approach to partnership in order to build capacity and achieve more for local residents. We have been at the forefront of the establishment of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership, which has published the first Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire.

Performance

This section will be based on —

- ◆ three year comparison of BVPIs (where practical)) report to be submitted to COMT on 7th October 2003
- ◆ current performance in “high risk” BVPIs)
- ◆ results of customer satisfaction survey (December 2003)

Audit Commission profile expected December 2003.

Quality of Life survey and Quality of Life Indicators

Other achievements against targets

Corporate Self Assessment [4 to 16 pages]

What the Council is trying to achieve

The Council has robust and realistic long term plans for improving the quality of life based on evidence and understanding of the needs within the district, which have been reviewed following the development of the community strategy. *[Evidence...]*

The Council's Corporate Plan, Huntingdonshire 2000 plus, adopted in 1999, set out our long-term vision and goals for the district. The strategy has been regularly reviewed and updated to reflect public consultation and research, initially associated with the development of a Community Plan/Local Agenda 21 and latterly following publication of the first Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire. Throughout this process the council has remained focussed on three enduring ambitions –

- ◆ to maintain and improve the quality of life of local people
- ◆ to provide excellent services which meet local needs, and
- ◆ to develop and lead our communities.

To bridge the gap between its long-term vision and day-to-day operation and provide a means of prioritising service activity and funding of service improvements the Council set a range of Medium Term Objectives. These reflect our emphasis on improving the quality of life and community leadership. The range of MTO's reflected both the council's desire and capacity to make progress in a wide range of areas. The MTO have now been refined into a limited number of priority areas, each with dedicated outcomes and high level actions. They support the objectives in the community and corporate strategies and address specific areas for which the council is responsible.

- ◆ access to services, jobs and facilities
- ◆ green, attractive, safe and active communities
- ◆ a healthy population
- ◆ decent housing
- ◆ jobs for local people
- ◆ enhanced built and natural environment
- ◆ leading and developing our communities.

Building Capacity Through Partnership

The Council has recognised that in addition to our own efforts we will be able to achieve more for our residents if we work with others and in partnership. Examples of innovative partnership include the joint waste partnership, 4 town centre initiatives, and a mature crime and disorder partnership. More recently the Council has led on the establishment of the Huntingdonshire (local) Strategic Partnership which is built on the foundations of existing partnership with the clear remit to provide a focus and framework for future joint working and meet gaps in service provision and avoid duplication and overlap. The HSP has developed rapidly with the support of the Council and has taken part in a national pilot to develop a

performance management framework for LSPs. Working closely with the Government office for the Eastern Region and the ODPM's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit the partnership carried out an evaluation of its development and organisation and the outcomes achieved from the activities of its Community Safety Group. As well as contributing to the learning from the pilot the exercise produced an action plan for the future development of the partnership.

The first year of the strategic partnership has been concentrated on developing the first Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire which was adopted by the Council and partners in September 2003. The Strategy continues the focus of improving and maintaining our quality of life and focuses on three ambitions for our district –

- ◆ Continued Economic Success
- ◆ Opportunities for All
- ◆ Protecting and enhancing our environment.

To support the achievements of outcomes identified in the community and corporate strategies we undertake extensive consultation and effective research, which also supports democratic representation and decision- making. In conjunction with the other councils in Cambridgeshire we have produced a joint consultation framework to provide innovative and consolidated market research. Consultant and engagement has helped us to establish a clear understanding of minority and majority communities and relative deprivation across the district.

We have received and effective external communications, recently enhanced internal communications and the Council leads on delivering a communications plan for the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership which concentrates on highlighting and building ownership of priorities.

Historically the Council adopted a broad approach to improvements in services, community leadership and the quality of life in life with the aim of balancing improvements across the district, geographically and within and among communities of interest. As a result of the Council's excellent financial position resources have been available to allocate to a range of priorities. Consequently the Council needs to develop processes to make explicit decision about what activities are not priorities and to reallocate resources

How we are delivering our priorities for improvement?

The Council has made significant investment through the medium term financial plan in new priority areas.

The quality and capacity of employees supported by extensive training and development programmes which are linked through our appraisal system to personal and professional development needs. The appraisal system supports the formational of individual training and development plans.

The Council has effective Member and Democratic Structures and clarity about roles which is supported by mutual respect and understanding between employees and Members. This is complemented by a well-defined and understood ethical framework.

The Standards Committee was established in 2000 and the Council has adopted the Model Code of Conduct. District Council members have been given training on the Code and members of the Standards Committee have attended external seminars and the annual conference organised by the Standards Board. In 2002 and 2003 a series of training workshops were organised for Parish Councils, in partnership with CALC. Recently, the Council has adopted a Member's Planning Code of Practice and Protocols on Member/Employee Relations and for Community Leadership by Members.

Table to show extent of training internally and externally

Good examples of leveraging in external funding to support priority areas based on good intelligence and understanding of local needs.

The Council's established service planning process allows the translation of corporate objectives through service plans and, through our performance appraisal system, into key performance areas for individuals. Directors monitor the achievement of targets relating to objectives within individual service plans. Members and senior management are involved in monitoring a range of performance data, currently centred on national performance indicators and improvement plans following service Best Value reviews which will soon be expanded into a comprehensive performance management system which links corporate objectives to service activity and offers the potential for the allocation of resources is underway. A risk management strategy has been adopted to embed risk management into service planning and delivery. The Council has a record of sound financial management.

What improvements have we achieved (or not)?

Maintaining and improving the quality of life for local people and communities is a key objective for the Council. Our priorities are focused on the main determinants of the quality of life —

- ◆ access to jobs, services and facilities;
- ◆ clean, green, safe and active communities;
- ◆ decent housing;
- ◆ jobs for local people;
- ◆ a healthy population; and
- ◆ strong and active communities.

The Council recognises that these determinants are linked and complementary.

In all these areas the Council can demonstrate improvements to services which contribute to improving the quality of life of local residents.

Access —

Our “Customer First” programme is designed to provide co-ordinated and complementary approaches to providing excellent access to services for local residents. We have facilitated the provision of a range of community transport in rural areas and to local market towns. The Council has achieved “beacon” status for social inclusion through ICT by providing opportunities for learning skills development and communications in rural locations. We provide mobile and out-reach services into many of our communities.

Clean, green, safe and active —

In the field of community safety, the Council’s investment in community police support officers, closed circuit television, street lighting, secure car parks, and an effective problem-solving approach to antisocial behaviour are influenced in public perceptions about crime and fear of crimes generally.

Extensions to the dry recycling provision and the recent trial (9,000 homes) of a two-weekly garden waste service are evidence of a concerted effort to address increasing demand and costs for waste collection and will produce significant benefits in reducing household waste. Investment in resources to deal with fly-tipping, and street cleaning is helping to make the area a cleaner, brighter place and is closely linked with community safety initiatives to prevent environmental decline.

In terms of public space, high design standards and a range of town centre and other environmental improvements are improving the quality of the built environment and are complemented by a range of town and countryside parks and play provision.

The massive growth in population over the last 20 years, has been matched by high quality physical environment and has many opportunities in terms of facilities. In the 1980s and 1990s, the saw its role as providing physical facilities such as built leisure facilities, formal parks, playing fields and a range of local parish based facilities. In this provision the Council used a number of delivery mechanisms ranging from grant aid and technical support for towns, parishes and community groups, through to major capital investment, where the Council adopted an innovative approach to partnership providing leisure centres as dual use with the local secondary schools in each of the major settlements

Decent housing —

The Council supports registered social landlords to build affordable homes – currently around 90 per annum – and has instigated a number of initiatives including

Support for the local economy —

To meet our objective of maintaining a buoyant, balanced and sustainable local economy, the Council has undertaken an extensive programme of regeneration and renewal (the town centre vision projects), environmental improvements, and town centre and area transport strategies. Focussed activity to encourage jobs for local people includes business support and advice, inward investment schemes and other business support initiatives identified in regular and detailed consultation and engagement with the local business community.

Assessing Population

To contribute to improving the health of local people, we joint-fund posts in conjunction with the Primary Care Trust to develop a strong public health ethos. A network of five leisure centres, together with out-reach sports development and a well-developed GP referral scheme help to encourage active lifestyles. We maintain close links with environmental health functions and public health functions of our National Health Service partners.

Community Leadership Development

To support, develop and strengthen our communities, the Council has a range of initiatives including advice and information schemes, participation and engagement projects (particularly with young people), inclusion and equality programmes, support for local facilities such as village and community halls.

What we have learned and what we are going to do next

❖ **learning**
❖ **future Plans**

Good self-awareness about organisational development needs. Track record of learning in comparison to other authorities, best and good practice. Development of leadership and management styles to develop organisational culture, which encourages staff to test ideas and development solutions that benefits service users.

Robust and effective policy framework.

High quality and suitable statutory plans, which are evidence based.

Good engagement with partners and other stakeholders.

Plans to ensure future capacity.

Re-assessment of current and future objectives and priorities, to be supported by a comprehensive performance management system.

Recognition of diverse needs. Robust and effective policy framework.

High quality and suitable statutory plans, which are evidence based.

Good engagement with partners and other stakeholders.

Plans to ensure future capacity.

Re-assessment of current and future objectives and priorities, to be supported by a comprehensive performance management system.

Recognition of diverse needs.

Development areas, engagement with staff, partners, stakeholders and the community

Self Scoring Summary

Theme	Score	Key Strengths	Key development areas
Ambition	3 / 4	<p>Key role in the development of the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership & the community strategy.</p> <p>Robust and realistic long term plans for improving the quality of life based on evidence and understanding of the needs within the district, which have been reviewed following the development of the community strategy.</p> <p>Engagement and consultation with stakeholders and communities.</p> <p>Effective management of the Council Customer First programme to ensure excellence in service provision.</p> <p>A developing community leadership role.</p>	<p>Improving the visibility of Leadership and a shared understanding of ambitions.</p> <p>Community cohesiveness and sustainability is under developed.</p>
Prioritisation	2 / 3	<p>Extensive consultation and effective research to support democratic representation and decision-making.</p> <p>Clear understanding of minority and majority communities and relative deprivation across the district.</p> <p>Well-defined process to allocate funding for service improvements which contribute to medium term objectives and longer term vision.</p> <p>Well received and effective external communications, recently enhanced internal communications and the Council leads on delivering a communications plan for the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership which concentrates on highlighting and building ownership of priorities.</p>	<p>Historically the Council adopted a broad approach to improvements in services, community leadership and the quality of life in life with the aim of balancing improvements across the district, geographically and within and among communities of interest.</p> <p>As a result of the Councils excellent financial position resources have been available to allocate to target priorities areas. Consequently the Council needs to develop the processes make explicit decision about what activities are not priorities and to reallocate resources.</p>
Focus	3	<p>Has maintained focus on a number of priority areas – transportation, the local economy, community safety, the environment, health, housing and leisure – and has made significant investment year on year in these areas.</p> <p>Good balance between national and local priorities</p> <p>Consistency</p>	

Capacity	3 /4	<p>Quality and capacity of Members, Management and Staff supported by extensive training and development programmes linked through appraisal system through personal and professional development needs.</p> <p>Significant investment through the medium term financial plan in new staff in priority areas.</p> <p>Effective Member and Democratic Structures and clarity about roles supported by mutual respect and understanding between employees and Members. A high level of financial capacity and ambitious programme to use reserves to promote improvements in service and community leadership.</p> <p>Well-defined and understood ethical framework. Innovative approach to service delivery including strong partnership working. Good examples of leveraging in external funding to support priority areas based on good intelligence and understanding of local needs.</p>	Need to improve identification of individual Member development needs. Service provision in conjunction with Parish Councils.
Performance Management	2 /3	<p>The Council's established service planning process allows the translation of corporate objectives through service plans and, through our performance appraisal system, into key performance areas for individuals. Directorates monitor the achievement of targets relating to objectives within individual service plans. Members and senior management are involved in monitoring a range of performance data, principally centred on national performance indicators and improvement plans following service reviews.</p> <p>The introduction of a comprehensive performance management system which links corporate objectives to service activity and offers the potential for the allocation of resources is underway. A risk management strategy is in place and a robust system to embed risk</p>	

			management into service planning and delivery is being implemented. The Council has a record of sound financial management.	
Achievement in quality of service	3		Standards of service delivery compares well to other Councils. Performance indicators and local targets compare well with national standards. External assessment provides evidence of high standards (beacon status, Pathfinder Status, Two-Star BVR, Government Office Assessment of Statutory Plans). Current level of stakeholder satisfaction is high.	Improvement in BVPIs for high-risk areas to achieve best quartile/national targets.
Achievement of improvement	3		Services have sustained improvement. Significant changes in services to produce a substantial improvement (customer first, green waste/recycling).	
Investment	4		Medium Term (5 years) financial plan. To secure and allocate resources for investment. Appropriate use of external funding. Well-developed investment in support services to support service delivery.	Further refinement of MTP to link to strategic objectives and priorities.
Learning	3		Good self-awareness about organisational development needs. Track record of learning in comparison to other authorities, best and good practice.	Element of leadership and management styles to develop organisational culture, which encourages staff to test ideas and development solutions that benefits service users.
Future Plans	4		Robust and effective policy framework. High quality and suitable statutory plans, which are evidence based. Good engagement with partners and other stakeholders. Plans to ensure future capacity. Re-assessment of current and future objectives and priorities, to be supported by a comprehensive performance management system. Recognition of diverse needs.	Development areas, engagement with staff, partners, stakeholders and the community.

How well do we understand our housing market and from this have we developed the right proposals to balance it?

Housing is at the forefront of our activities. The Council's ambition is to facilitate sustainable and balanced communities within the District. Huntingdonshire has a buoyant private housing market, both rented and owner-occupied. This sector already caters for the middle to high earning households with the exception of those seeking one or two bedroom properties. However it does not cater for middle to low income households, benefit dependant households, and households entering the housing market for the first time. The only option for these groups is social rented housing, of which there is a shortage.

The key features of the housing market in Huntingdonshire that determine the priorities for the Council in balancing the housing market are:

- a shortage of affordable housing - we need between 2,700 and 4,000 extra affordable homes by 2006
- a shortage of the right size of housing – the majority of households require 1-2 bed properties
- increasing homelessness – increased from 241 2000/1 to 304 2001/2
- a relatively small proportion of private sector homes unfit or in need of major repair – 3,600, 5.5% of total stock, in need of major repair and 274 unfit
- sub-regional rather than a local housing market.

The research we have undertaken to provide us with this clear understanding of our housing market includes:

- District Housing Needs Survey (HNS) 2003 - which is also updated continuously through the Housing Register, provides information on major areas of need in the housing market and the extent to which it is changing year on year
- “Reading the Housing Market” 2003 - the Council's annual research of the private sector
- Cambridge sub-region housing needs survey 2003 – provides additional cross boundary information on housing needs across 7 other authority areas and its impact on this District
- Cambridge sub-region key worker housing need survey 2003
- 100% district stock condition survey
- homelessness review

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

Our Housing Strategy acts as an umbrella for other key strategies, such as Black and Minority Ethnic Housing, Homelessness, Private Sector and Supporting People and links into the Community Strategy. The information from our Stock Condition survey is used to focus our priorities and assists us in targeting resources effectively. The Housing Strategy also reflects Local Plan policies and by close working between planning and housing services we ensure that the Supplementary Planning Guidance for Affordable Housing is updated to meet changing needs and government priorities.

Our strategies and plans are developed in response to national and regional requirements and the particular needs of the area, as identified through our monitoring and research work. The process for formulating these strategies/plans, key intents of the Council are to co-operate with partners where possible, to secure effective co-ordination between policies and initiatives, and to engage with relevant stakeholders throughout the process.

On a sub-regional level, Huntingdonshire is working closely with GO-East, the Housing Corporation, the County Council and 7 other local authorities on:

- the sub-regional Housing Strategy, and planning issues
- sub-regional studies eg housing needs and separate key-worker research,
- checking progress with national and sub-regional priorities.

On a local level, by way of an example, the District works closely with RSLs - most recently with:

- housing strategy development
- homelessness strategy development (a multi-agency review)
- an under-occupation survey
- decent homes.

The consistency of plans and strategies on a Council-wide basis is undertaken by extensive inter-departmental consultation at officer and Member level eg

- Policy Division (who co-ordinate all Council consultation and research activity)
- Corporate Strategy Advisory Group (CSAG) – a senior officers group representing all Council disciplines, set up to co-ordinate and integrate Council strategies and initiatives
- Chief Officers' Management Team (the Council's senior management structure), which scrutinises strategies, policies and reports
- Scrutiny Panel (for elected member scrutiny), and/or to
- Cabinet and Council for consideration and adoption.

The District's Local Strategic Partnership and its thematic sub-groups are a means of sharing strategy evolution and making complementary policies and actions. The District is also committed to Community Stakeholder Involvement. Two recent examples are:

- Oxmoor - a planning for real exercise
- Community Strategy key issues - consultation across the district

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

The ethos of corporate working is embedded in our range of officer/member working groups such as CSAG. Market research continues to confirm the need for affordable housing in all parts of the district and our dynamic housing programme has ensured a mix of both urban and rural provision, supporting our corporate policy on sustaining local communities. Planning Policy is also being used to remedy an imbalance in the provision of 4 and 5 bedroom housing when the greatest need is for 1 and 2 bedroom units, Supplementary Planning Guidance, when adopted, will address this issue. Housing and Planning policies and strategies aim to facilitate a range of housing types and tenures throughout the area at market and sub market level. Our Local Plan gives clear guidance about affordable housing requirements and complements the Housing Strategy. Our overall housing target in the Local Plan meets the requirements of the County Structure Plan where the land supply target is derived from regional targets.

The Housing Strategy Action Plan is aligned with the Community Strategy, our Corporate Action Plan and Service Plans. Housing Performance Management information is monitored through the corporate system; quarterly information is reviewed by Chief Officers' Management Team, Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet with monthly monitoring by the Head of Housing. Our Housing Strategy has been rated as 'well above average' since the 2000-2003 submission and also achieved 'fit for purpose' and 'well above average' for the 2003-2006 submission.

Regular monitoring and research of the private sector, published in Reading the Housing Market 2003 and the Private Sector Housing Strategy, is integral to our Housing Strategy. Our framework for distributing grants is underpinned by our Social Inclusion Policy and targets the most vulnerable people by providing adaptations and tackling disrepair. As a result of the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO) the Council is offering new options for the private sector and making more effective use of resources. We have an active Private Landlord Forum with positive cross agency working with landlords and letting agents. Although there are few long-term empty properties in the district, the Council has an empty homes strategy, which is regularly updated and reviewed. Home Energy Conservation work features strongly in the Housing Strategy and also in the annual fuel poverty report.

What actions and outcomes have we achieved to help balance the housing market?

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

We have adopted a robust and proactive approach to channelling resources and assets to support our ambition to facilitate sustainable and balanced communities within the district. We received a 'good' rating from Go-East for our Capital Strategy, and Asset Management Plan. Since the transfer of our housing stock in March 2000 we have spent a total of £15 million on providing new affordable homes. We also secured £1.4 million of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) for Oxmoor and have just received £3.3 million funding under the government's Sustainable Communities Plan.

We received funding from East of England Development Agency and The Greater Cambridge Partnership to undertake the sub-region Housing Needs Survey and a Good Practice and Innovation Grant from the Housing Corporation to undertake our sub-region key worker survey, the results of both of surveys will further inform our corporate approach of working towards facilitating sustainable and balanced communities in the district.

We operate a special needs housing register to ensure we meet the needs of people not met by general needs housing, such as people with learning disabilities, mental health issues, physical disabilities, and people who need additional tenancy support.

Examples of the joined up approach to working between Planning, Legal services and Housing services are the Development Plan Advisory Group and the Section 106 group. Members have an early input into planning for housing and there are regular briefings with the executive member for Housing, and for strategic planning. Housing development updates are circulated to members every quarter. Examples of our partnership working with external agencies includes:

- Huntingdonshire's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) via a health, housing and social care thematic sub-group which is embedded in the community strategy;
- active participation in cross boundary working, in particular, the Cambridge sub-region on housing, planning and transport;
- participation in Cambridge sub-region initiatives and intelligence gathering e.g. sub-region housing strategy, key worker housing study, sub-region housing needs survey, affordable housing delivery plan, etc.

The Council's housing strategy and related sub-strategies have evolved through corporate working and multi-agency participation. Delivery of actions is by a variety of in-house services and external partnerships. There is regular monitoring of performance against strategies at all levels of the Council.

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

Land values in the district are such that RSLs are unable to compete with private developers. Therefore, the provision of social housing is dependent on planning gain, via s106, from other developments. The number of eligible sites which would result in planning gain is determined by the

Structure/Local Plan process. The resultant affordable housing to be delivered (social rented housing is one of the categories of affordable housing) in the period to 2006 will be insufficient. It would require a (justifiable) planning gain of 83% on each eligible (allocated and windfall) site to address the amount of affordable housing required. We are unable to set planning gain at 80%. Developers would not consider it financially viable to develop houses in the District in comparison with elsewhere, the volume of social housing delivered would require a public subsidy greater than is achievable, and that the mix would not lend itself to a sustainable community. To address this issue the council will be seeking 40% affordable housing gain compared to the current 29%, as justified in our 2003 HNS.

Allocations in the local plan for housing follow a clear sequential approach, set out in a recently adopted local plan alteration. The Council has an Urban Capacity Study (UCS), which promotes the efficient use of urban sites for housing, which is about to be updated. Urban design frameworks are produced for key areas of change to help ensure the coordinated release of land. Development briefs are provided for specific sites.

The District is pursuing a number of actions and initiatives with regard to balancing the local housing market - these include:

- progressing towards a greater understanding of key worker and BME housing issues in the District and sub-region;
- refining planning policies by:
 - adoption/enforcement of the SPG for housing mix;
 - increasing the amount of rural exception sites by working in partnership with Parish Councils to identify need;
 - completing the coverage of design briefs for allocated sites;
 - continuation of public involvement in the design of their localities by eg planning for real exercises
- regular liaison meetings with our preferred housing partners
- provision of very sheltered housing with intermediate care beds to facilitate discharge from hospital
- continue to develop supported housing and floating support schemes
- the provision and development of key worker housing
- providing low cost shared ownership schemes

Action to prevent market decline continues to be undertaken; some examples include:

- continuation of the landlord and letting agents' forums;
- the continuation of grant funding for:
 - DFGs;
 - discretionary grants;
 - conservation area grants;
- continuing to increase the provision of good quality temporary accommodation for homeless households;
- continuing to bring unfit properties back to fitness;

- continuing to bring empty properties back into beneficial use; and
- continuation of energy efficiency works etc.

How well do we monitor our progress and impact in helping to balance the market and how effectively do we feed this into future plans and strategies?

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

Housing supply and demand is monitored to establish any imbalance and to inform relevant strategies, policies and targets to balance the housing market. The Council also accesses Cambridgeshire's monitoring of the supply of housing, against Structure Plan targets for the District, and accesses data on the nature of the supply and the existing or proposed mix of housing. This is supplemented by our own annual site surveys to ascertain/confirm units delivered in the previous year. The success of this policy is fairly easy to monitor. In future years, should the housing need dictate, the guidance could be varied to keep the market in balance with the required mix. Officers and Members of the Development Control Panel survey new sites upon completion. These surveys are used to assess the quality of the built environment, as a means of gaining feedback on past decisions, and as a 'reality check' on the adequacy of the Council's design guide for developers.

Our regular research and monitoring of the private housing market together with the data from the stock condition survey has informed the development of our Repair Assistance Policy (Regulatory Reform Order) which targets discretionary grants at the most vulnerable in the district, as well as our empty property, private sector housing and homelessness strategies. This research has also enabled the development of landlord grants to bring empty properties back into use. We monitor homelessness statistics and together with the recent review of homelessness have used this to inform the homelessness strategy and action plan. The data from the 2003 district HNS, sub-region HNS and key worker survey is regularly updated by the analysis of the housing and special needs housing registers. We undertake regular customer surveys across all our services, these surveys as well as complaint monitoring are vital tools used to inform and improve our services.

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

By examining the breakdown of the existing housing mix in the District, together with the trend of supply by developers, it has been established that there is a severe shortage of one and two bedroom properties. Market trend/supply analysis indicates that developers are not responding to this identified need, and would be unlikely to do so, without council intervention. The Council has responded by drafting supplementary planning guidance that determines the mix to be built on future sites.

In response to feedback from our customers we have appointed a homeless liaison officer to provide support and assistance for people living in temporary accommodation, the success of this post has resulted in a second officer being appointed. We have a rolling programme of educational talks to schools about homelessness and housing related issues. Our joint working with all Cambridgeshire authorities on homelessness has produced a protocol between the five authorities and Social Services to provide a service to intentionally homeless households.

We Chair the Eastern LSVT housing group (14 authorities), which shares, develops and promotes good practice. We are leading on a benchmarking performance indicator initiative, which will enable comparison across all functions of the housing service and will link up with the south east LSVT

group to enable comparison with 42 LSVT authorities in the south and eastern region. We are active members of the County Strategic Housing Group, which promotes, informs and develops good practice across the County.

We were the lead authority on producing the Cambridge sub-region housing strategy and a member of the sub-region affordable housing group, which has commissioned a sub-region key worker, and separate HNS survey and an affordable housing delivery plan. To be expanded

Public Space[4 sides]

How well do we contribute to the management of the physical environment?

The District Council recognised the environment as a key priority and has adopted a strategic approach to environmental issues so that it can deliver the quality of life expected by the residents of Huntingdonshire. The importance of the environment to local people has been confirmed by extensive consultation. In 2000, the Council published 'Shaping the Future', (a Local Agenda 21), which identified detailed actions to deliver sustainability, including many of the national quality of life indicators.

This work will culminate in Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership's emerging Community Strategy. An Environment Thematic Group will co-ordinate delivery of the relevant strands of the strategy. It will add value to the Council's delivery of the following:

- (a) a range of policies, including the current Local Plan and formal Alteration, the emerging Local Development Framework, SPGs, and Village Statements;
- (b) the quality of development will be informed by extensively researched and innovative Design Guides soon to be published by the Council;
- (c) research, such as that on landscape quality and housing needs;
- (d) initiatives such as the Vision Statement for the Market Towns, the Oxmoor Action Plan, development of new open spaces and Home Energy Efficiency Schemes; and
- (e) funding of required infrastructure either directly or through Section 106 Agreements.

The Council, both through its own Capital Programme and in its partnership working, seeks to maintain and enhance both the public realm and the built environment. This activity takes full account of accessibility, safety and sustainability and is informed by public consultation and secures community support. Examples include:

- substantial environmental improvements to the centres of market towns;
- improving the street scene and building out crime and disorder at Kent Road, Oxmoor; and
- an annual programme of small-scale environmental improvements in villages in partnership with parish councils.
- grants to owners for the restoration and repair of historic buildings.

The Medium Term Plan demonstrated the Council's wholehearted commitment to addressing environmental concerns and securing progress towards its strategic objectives. A new corporate performance management system will ensure that the delivery of its services also are aligned with those objectives ensuring that its policy framework continues to be up-to-date and that the development industry is supported through the use of design and development guides to provide the highest quality built environment.

How well do we keep the area clean?

(a) Waste:

Recognising the strategic nature of waste collection and disposal, the District Council is an active member of the Cambridge and Peterborough Joint Waste Management Partnership. The partnership brings together Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridgeshire District/City Councils who have together, following extensive public consultation, developed a long term strategy to deliver waste minimisation and progressively increasing recycling targets up to the year 2022.

To meet those commitments, the council has significantly increased the range and scope of its recycling and waste minimisation activities, making long-term financial commitments to this through its medium Term Financial Plan currently to 2008. This commitment is enabling:-

- Expansion of kerbside recycling collections to all premises
- Widening of the range of materials collected and recycled.
- Development of bi weekly collection of garden waste.
- Change to bi weekly domestic collections
- Further increases to the number of recycling 'bring sites (currently over 100)
- Continued development of existing waste awareness & education programmes with local schools and colleges

In early 2000, the District Council undertook a Best Value Review on the Waste Management Services including a review of the Operations Division, which delivers these services. The service was given a 2 star rating. The improvement Plan, developed from the BVR has been fully implemented.

(b) Cleansing:

The Council operates both planned and responsive cleansing arrangements that aim to provide a uniform service level across the district. Major financial investment has been made in resources (both people and equipment) over the past 5 years to address problem areas and raise performance standards.

Performance has been measured using the TBG cleanliness index for many years with the cleanliness index showing progressive improvement as a result of the investment. Current index figures show that on average, 95 +% of streets within the district are continually maintained at EPA acceptable standards.

New free services for illegal sign / flyposting removal and graffiti removal have been established as a result of service reviews by the Councils Scrutiny Panels. A chewing gum removal programme is in place and working with community partners on the Oxmoor, protocols with locally agreed cleansing targets, monitored by the partners are in place and working. A wide-ranging package of support is made available to Parishes and Community groups to assist them with both one off cleaning campaigns and ongoing cleansing activity.

In response to a rapidly changing local socio economic environment where the use of public spaces / business / recreational facilities is moving to a 24/7 requirement, a review of all cleansing arrangements is currently underway to develop operational systems to ensure standards are maintained across an extended day / week.

How we work with partners to improve community safety?

Huntingdonshire is a relatively safe place to live and work. Research shows, however, that there are certain 'hotspots' within the area where a large percentage of crime is concentrated. It also shows that people do, generally, feel safe in their homes and going about their daily lives. The Community Safety Strategy focuses on the twin objectives of reducing and reassuring our community. This is recognised in the developing Community Strategy published by the Local Strategic Partnership and to whom the Community Safety Partnership is accountable.

The Council (with partners where appropriate) has undertaken a number of research and information gathering projects including, through the Community Strategy, Quality of Life research, the Crime & Disorder Audit and Quarterly Crime Statistics, to be able to accurately understand the type, level and location of crime and the concerns of residents in the District to target our resources in the right places, at the right time.

The Council has been a key partner in the Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership since its formation in 1998 and has since then actively contributed to the Partnership both in terms of staff resources and a financial commitment. An early indication of the Council's support was the introduction in the 1990s of a wide scale CCTV system which covers all the market towns in the District and which is run by the Council at some £500K p.a, and which has enabled the public car parks to win Secure by Design Awards. The CCTV monitoring system also integrates out of hours services and emergency planning.

The Partnership delivers its Strategy working at the County, District and Local level with a wide range of agencies, organisations and local community groups. The County and District partnerships have set the strategic agenda in terms of identifying the key reductions required in crime and disorder as well as the need to develop active guardianship and citizenship to increase reassurance. The local Task Groups deliver individual projects at the local level aimed at particular issues.

The Council acts as 'banker' to the Partnership funding (Community Against Drugs, Safer Communities, Partnership Development and Pooled Funding) and the Council's Community Safety Officer co-ordinates the evaluation of schemes supported by this funding. It also co-ordinates the CSP work with other partnerships to maximise direct impact in terms of service delivery (eg. Huntingdon Town Centre Management Initiative) and the Council successfully bid for funding from Go-East for a 'safer retailing' scheme to act as a pilot for the 5 towns.

The Council provides both staff and money at the County, District and Local level and is the key support agency across the whole Partnership. Examples of improvements achieved to-date range at the local level from visual audits, distraction burglary initiatives, support for detached youth work, Pubwatch and Shopwatch, to strategic support for Countywide initiatives such as, Domestic Violence Co-ordinator, Open Out Scheme for reporting hate crime and support for a Persistent Offenders Programme. From 2003 the Council has committed £300,000 per annum to finance Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) for Huntingdonshire and with some additional Home Office funding this will mean 18 new PCSOs for Huntingdonshire from September 2003.

In the early summer of 2003, the Council reviewed its Section 17 obligations to mainstream community safety. This demonstrates the Council's commitment to actively pursue community safety and a programme of mainstreaming events and activities is programmed. The Partnership also reviewed its current position and established a much more tightly focused set of objectives. This was done because it was recognised that there needed to be a focus on a few key issues such as burglary and car crime as well as Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).

The Council sees it has a key role to play in working with communities to address an increasing concern around ASB and this will become a focus for its work in the future. The Council is developing a problem solving approach to ASB in recognising that it needs a “whole Council” approach to address the myriad of reasons why ASB should be on the increase. It believes that the use of problem solving will help to find innovative solutions to individual problems and to be able to spread the successful solutions throughout the District.

How do we contribute to activities to engage children and young people?

The District Council provides a range of services and facilities that impact directly or indirectly on young people through direct provision; partnership working and grant aid.

In recent years the District Council has recognised the value of consulting young people, initially in relation to services and facilities directly targeted at them such as leisure activities and latterly in relation to services and issues that indirectly impact on young people eg Licensing, housing, complaints procedures.

In 2002 the Council approved the appointment of a Policy Officer – Young People’s Active Involvement to drive forward the young people agenda within HDC.

The post has a specific brief to

- Raise awareness of the value of young people’s active involvement across the Council
- Identify and address organisational change that needs to take place in order to facilitate greater involvement by young people
- Support officers and elected members who want to involve young people in their work/planning
- Initiate projects with young people
- Work with partner organisations to develop a cohesive approach to young people’s active involvement across the district

A number of specific projects have already taken place including a Peer Research project that identified young people’s thoughts and needs on arts provision; a Big Brother style consultation that gave young people an opportunity to comment on key issues in the Community Strategy and the development of a young people’s website, a joint project with local Youth Service, with a substantial consultation element.

Information from consultations has been fed into the decision making process; in two of the above examples young people have had the opportunity to report their findings directly to decision makers and there is a facility on the website to provide feedback and progress reports on all consultations involving young people.

The District Council’s short- term action plan identifies actions to develop work with young people on all fronts including

- Raising awareness/supporting staff and elected members
- Supporting the Citizenship curriculum in formal and informal settings
- Exploring ways to reach and involve all young people, including those who do not ordinarily participate
- Working with specific departments/services to identify issues and support in relation to organisational change

The District Council has long recognised the integral part to be played by leisure, open space and the public realm in promoting the social well being of its community including young people. In its service delivery and partnership working, the Council aims to provide choices for young people so they can experience a range of life opportunities and develop their sense of citizenship. . This approach has provided the Council with close links to other service providers, who themselves are delivering services to young people across an age range from pre-school to late teens.

This change which has developed rapidly over the last few years means the Council is positively engaged with young people, identifying the issues and working to find solutions which address these issues through both direct action and outreach provision. Examples of the new and innovative solutions include providing an exciting range of marketing and publicity material for services aimed exclusively at young people; involving young people in the design and modification of Activity Parks and play facilities; working with primary schools in disadvantaged areas to promote environmental care; supporting the voluntary sector to provide a range of diversionary activities; providing specialist advice and grant aiding parishes to provide meeting places, playing fields and play facilities; and supporting outreach cultural and environmental activities.

Action Planning Summary [1 side]

High Level summary action plan which describes what we are going to do over the next 3 years around our key priorities and the outcomes we are trying to achieve.

AGENDA ITEM NO

**COMT
CABINET**

**7 October 2003
23 October 2003**

**QUARTERLY SUMMARY OF DEBTS WRITTEN-OFF
(Report by the Head of Revenue Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Head of Revenue Services, or in her absence the Head of Financial Services is authorised to write-off debts with an individual value of up to £2,000, or of a greater amount after consultation with the Executive Councilor, having taken appropriate steps to satisfy herself that the debts are irrecoverable or cannot be recovered without incurring disproportionate costs. A summary detailing debts written-off shall be submitted to the cabinet quarterly.
- 1.2 The summary of debts written-off during the quarter ended 30 September 2003 and during the financial year, is shown below with the comparative amount for the same period last year shown in brackets.
- 1.3 Whilst these amounts have been written-off in this period of the current year, much of the original debt would have been raised in previous financial years as the table at 4 demonstrates.

2. WRITE-OFFS UP TO £2,000

Approved by the Head of Revenue Services

Type of Debt	In Quarter		Financial Year Total at end of Quarter		
	No. of Cases	Amount £	No. of Cases	Amount £	Previous Year (£)
Council Tax	95	1,549.73	290	9,104.89	(129,714.97)
NNDR	12	4,981.06	23	8,973.62	(11,843.00)
Sundry Debtors	71	13,383.76	120	22,805.71	(32,903.17)
Excess Charges	79	3,115.00	292	11,545.00	(4,300.00)

- 2.1 Council Tax write-offs in the first quarter of the previous year (2002/3) were higher than usual. Those for the current year have so far been lower than usual due to revised tracing procedures being introduced.

3. WRITE-OFFS OVER £2,000

Agreed by the Executive Councilor

Approved by the Head of Revenue Services

Type of Debt	In Quarter		Financial Year Total at end of Quarter		
	No. of Cases	Amount £	Current Year No. of Cases	Current Year Amount £	Previous Year (£)
NNDR	0	0.00	1	2,550.97	(35,155.32)
Sundry Debtors	1	2,345.38	1	2,345.38	(10,560.90)

- 3.1 In this quarter the one Sundry Debtor write-off case, valued at over £2,000, was written-off because the debtors' whereabouts could not be established.

4. DATE ANALYSIS

Year	Council Tax (£)	NNDR (£)	Sundry Debtors (£)	Excess Charges (£)
Pre 95/96	0.00	0.00	433.85	0.00
1995/96	0.00	0.00	1,639.12	0.00
1996/97	0.00	0.00	5,511.04	0.00
1997/98	110.56	0.00	1,638.12	0.00
1998/99	202.80	0.00	3,349.85	0.00
1999/00	930.10	1.60	2,641.21	0.00
2000/01	1,275.10	1,100.39	3,188.03	0.00
2001/02	1,701.91	4,913.00	2,584.89	210.00
2002/03	1,139.98	4,601.55	3,243.91	8,315.00
2003/04	3,744.44	908.05	921.07	3,020.00
Totals	9,104.89	11,524.59	25,151.09	11,545.00

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Cabinet members are asked to note the content of this report

Contact Officer: Julia Barber, Head of Revenue Services ☎ [01480] 388105

Agenda Item 9

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Agenda Item 11

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