

## **COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT : SELF-ASSESSMENT**

**Introduction (1 page)**

**By**

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“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			<i>(map A1/A14, East Coast rail, Cambridge sub-region)</i>
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

Conservative	36
Liberal Democrat	14
Independent	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>

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	Review sessions
Web based engagement	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.

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.

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.

<b>Table to show extent of training internally and externally</b>
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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 &amp; 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.

## *Balanced Housing Market [4/5? sides]*

### **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.