

Public Document Pack

19 July 2007

Dear Councillor

A meeting of the Council Meeting will be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Newcastle Road, Chester-le-Street, Co Durham, DH3 3UT on Thursday, 26th July, 2007 at 6.00 pm

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roy Templeman', written over a light grey rectangular background.

R TEMPLEMAN

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Apologies for Absence
2. To Confirm the Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 1 - 16)
3. Public Speaking
4. To receive declarations of interest from Members
5. Report from the Leader of the Council
6. Reports from Portfolio Holders
 - a) Resources and Value for Money
 - b) Regeneration and Strategic Planning
 - c) Community engagement and Partnerships
 - d) Neighbourhood Services
 - e) Health and Well-Being

7. Questions to Leader and Executive Members
8. Anti Poverty Strategy (Pages 17 - 44)
Report of the Director of Resources and the Revenues and Benefits Manager
9. Homelessness Strategy (Pages 45 - 96)
Report of the Head of Regeneration
10. Joint Allocations and Lettings Policy (Pages 97 - 118)
Report of the Acting Director of Community Services
11. Corporate Communications Strategy (Pages 119 - 158)
Report of the Customer Relationship Manager
12. Correspondence
13. Conferences
14. Common Seal

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF CHESTER-LE-STREET

Minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council of Chester-le-Street held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Chester-le-Street on Thursday 28 June 2007 at 6.00pm

PRESENT:

Councillor A Humes (Chairman)

Councillors:

G Armstrong	M May
S Barr	P H May
JW Barrett	PB Nathan
L E W Brown	K Potts
R Court	M Potts
G K Davidson	JM Proud
L Ebbatson	J Shiell
P Ellis	T Smith
M J Gollan	D Thompson
S Greatwich	A Turner
R Harrison	F Wilkinson
DM Holding	SCL Westrip
CJ Jukes	A Willis

Officers: R Templeman (Chief Executive), L Chambers (Director of Resources), T Galloway (Director of Development Services), I Forster (Assistant Chief Executive), A Swinney (Head of Organisational Development), C Potter (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), J McConnell (Chief Internal Auditor), P Stephens (Acting Director of Community Services), A Aynsley (Acting Housing Services Manager), G Clark (ICT Manager), C Harvey (Human Resources and Policy Manager), I Herberon (Accountancy Manager) J Elder (Finance and Risk Manager), C Duane-Latham (Accounting Technician), J Bradley (Assistant Solicitor) and C Turnbull (Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance were J Dafter (Audit Manager) and 3 members of the public.

20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors M Sekowski, AK Holden, JM Proud, W Laverick, SA Henig and D Robson.

21 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 31 MAY 2007.

The minutes of the proceedings at the meeting of the District Council held on 31 May 2007, copies of which had previously been circulated were submitted.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1. That ‘not’ be deleted from the last line of the penultimate paragraph on page 15 of the minutes.

2. That the second paragraph on page 22 of the minutes be amended to read;
‘Councillor Proud stated that she had not used her manifesto to mud sling for political gain and confirmed that within her manifesto she had stated that she was proud to be part of this Council and that this was something she had said in honesty.’

3. That subject to the above amendments the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.”

The Chairman proceeded to sign the minutes.

22 PUBLIC SPEAKING

No requests had been received from members of the public to speak at the meeting in accordance with the Council’s agreed policy.

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest from Members

24 REPORT FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader of the Council reported:

Key Decisions

Land to the front of 13 Esk Avenue, Great Lumley

“That the land be declared surplus to the Council’s requirements and be disposed of for the requested purposes, subject to the applicant being responsible for all the Council’s costs associated with the disposal of land in accordance with the Council adopted Land Disposal Policy and procedures.”

Land adjacent to 34 Walden Close, Ouston

“That the land is not declared surplus to the Council’s requirements and is not disposed of for the purposes requested.”

Land to the rear of 52 Holly Crescent, Sacriston

- “1 That the area indicated on the plan attached to the report is not declared surplus to the Council’s requirements and that the request to purchase the land be refused.
- 2 That the applicant be allowed to purchase the land immediately to the rear of 52 Holly Crescent, subject to the applicant being responsible for all the Council’s costs associated with the disposal of land in accordance with the Council adopted Land Disposal Policy and procedures and subject to consultation with neighbours.”

Recent Floods

The Leader reminded of the need to be aware of the adaptive and mitigating measures necessary to deal with climate change. She said that local government had a key role to play as the rains on the previous Saturday demonstrated, people turn to the Council for help and support. Local authorities are responsible for the seemingly small things like sandbags and gully cleaning; to energy efficiency; to large scale procurement. She advised the Council had signed up to the Nottingham Declaration, and as a member of the Regional Task Group on climate change, ways in which local authorities can protect and enhance the social, economic and environmental future of the north east, were being examined.

The Leader thanked the staff who responded to the calls at the weekend, with particular reference to Careline, housing services and environmental services staff and the Chief Officers who co-ordinated the response.

Corporate Performance Assessment

The Leader advised that on 12 June 2007 the Audit Commission published the result of the CPA re-assessment that saw the Council move to a ‘Good’ classification – the most radically improved Council in the country.

As a way of celebrating this achievement Councillor M May had suggested to the Leader the holding of an Open Day. The Leader advised this had been considered for a number of years and as the Council will be engaged in various activities during Local Democracy Week in October an Open Day could be a part.

The Leader added that visitors were always welcome at the Civic Centre and the previous week a School Council held it’s meeting in the Council Chamber.

Local Government Review

The Leader stated that much of the Council’s future would be determined by the outcome of consultations on Local Government Review and all Members will have received a copy of the District Councils’ response to the proposal for a single county-wide unitary Council.

The Leader reported the turnout for the Referendum was good and 76% of the respondents voted against the County Council proposal and she advised that District Leaders and Chief Executives had met with a Local Government Minister and Civil Servants to raise concerns at the dubious financial case and proposals regarding community involvement and engagement. The expected decision date was the end of July although changes in the Cabinet may have an affect on this.

Change in Prime Minister

The Leader said that Tony Blair's leadership had seen enormous changes including a lower than the national average unemployment rate in Chester-le-Street; investment in housing stock both public and private had risen year on year; and educational performance across all schools was better than ever.

The Leader said she felt sure that people of all political persuasions would agree that, as Tony Blair said in his valedictory speech to the House of Commons, 'politics may on occasion be the scene of low skulduggery – more often it is the pursuit of noble causes.

The plans of the new Prime Minister, for the public sector and local government were awaited with interest.

Cestria Community Housing

The Leader congratulated Ian Broughton on being appointed Chief Executive of Cestria Community Housing and Paul Stephens on being appointed as Director of Housing and Community. The transfer was expected to be completed by the end of 2007 and until then the current arrangements would continue to operate.

In conclusion, the Leader said she looked forward to seeing the Council work in partnership with a strong RSL to the benefit of the whole District.

25 REPORTS FROM PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

a. Resources and Value for Money

There was no report from Councillor SA Henig.

b. Regeneration and Strategic Planning

Councillor CJ Jukes reported as follows:

In relation to completion of an Area Development Framework for Sacriston, production of the framework document was almost complete to enable further sustainable regeneration of Sacriston.

Pelton Fell regeneration work continued and a further meeting of the Partnership Board would be held in July 2007.

Regeneration work in Grange Villa continued particularly in building social capital and consulting the local community on land issues.

In the Town Centre, despite recent bad weather, market stalls take up remained strong and a programme of events and activities in the Civic Heart was in preparation.

Councillor Jukes advised that total spend on regeneration of the town centre in the previous four years had been £4,938,631, made up of MILE House £1,453,255, Streetscaping £1,087,242, Civic Heart £888,095, Cilvert Strengthening £660,164 and Market Redesign £284,602.

The main sources of funding were, ONE Single Programme Grant £2,514,838, District Council £2,098,604, and Developers' Contributions £165,700, with all funding coming from capital funding sources not out of Council Tax revenue expenditure, Grant funding arrangements meant that had work not commenced by the end of the last financial year, the near 60% of external funding financing Town Centre Regeneration would have been lost.

Councillor Jukes advised it was worth reflecting that regenerating the Town Centre had attracted literally thousands of pounds of advertising for Chester-le-Street and that every £1 of money invested by the Council attracted £30 from external sources. In addition, the total level of investment in the District from external sources in the previous few years was over £130M which reflected the desirability of Chester-le-Street as a place to live, to work and to operate enterprises from.

In relation to the Town Centre Masterplanning exercise, Councillor Jukes advised that with other Executive Members and Officers, he met the Consultants and further work was on-going.

On the Local Development Framework, Councillor Jukes advised he would be ensuring that LDF milestones were met and that there was a robust framework in areas such as regeneration, strategic planning, housing strategy and land use.

With regard to Leisure Options, Councillor Jukes advised that he and Councillors Barr and Westrip would be joining the Steering Group as Leisure Options Phase Two compliments other work within community and the Council.

In conclusion, Councillor Jukes advised of the following strategic meetings since the last Council Meeting:

- With Officers in relation to the Council's response to the Regional Economic Strategy
- With Members and Officers from the County Durham Districts and the County Council in respect of the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy

- The Local Strategic Partnership's Chairs Group in his capacity as Chair of the Economic and Regeneration Policy Group

c. Community Engagement and Partnership

Councillor S Barr reported on the following:

Community Engagement Strategy

Important steps in the review of the Community Engagement Strategy would commence the following month with the setting up of two Working Groups.

One group will be within the Council and include all key Service Teams. The other will include all of our key partners through the Local Strategic Partnership.

A key aim is to ensure that an updated strategy can effectively underpin the delivery of Neighbourhood Management, community led regeneration and health & well-being.

The Council Strategy review is due by March 2008.

Member Development

Work was underway to develop a new strategy for Member Development, taking into account the issues connected with the White Paper and new role of the Front Line Councillor. The strategy will focus upon two areas; development and to support Members. Once a draft strategy is available, the Members Steering Group will be reconvened.

Next round of Member Support Assessments

Provisionally arranged to take place on 5th and 14th September.

Member's Role Descriptions

Role descriptions were available for the various roles held by elected Members and were available on disc and hard copy.

360 Degree Appraisal for Elected Members

The Council was awarded £10,000 for 360 degree appraisal for elected Members through the Improvement Partnership. The process would commence with a pilot with Executive Members.

Training Plan 2007

A copy of the training plan for Members had been circulated

IT

IT will play a bigger role in making the Council more accessible as technology and capacity evolves with improvements in websites for the LSP and the IT team was working on a range of projects aimed to improve efficiency and help our residents:

- Document Management Systems for Planning
- On-line benefits calculator with Revenues & Benefits
- Anti Social Behaviour system for Community safety
- Land & Property Management with Regeneration Team
- Working on Document Management for the whole of the Council and looking at best practice with other Councils
- Also, the two PC's in the Members room were being replaced

Democratic Services

Councillor Barr assured Members that democracy was alive and well in Chester-le-Street due to the initiative of Colin Turnbull and the Democratic Services Team. He was delighted to be present when children from Chester-le-Street CE Junior School visited the Council Chamber the previous Friday to hold their School Council Meeting.

The School children really enjoyed themselves and the red lights were flashing on and off - it was like Blackpool illuminations.

Councillor Barr issued a word of warning to Members...When a Council Officer congratulated the children for their excellent participation, he said it was the best debate he had seen in the Council Chamber in more than 20 years.

d. Neighbourhood Services

Councillor SCL Westrip reported as follows:

Leisure Services

Leisure Centre Quest Assessment

The Leisure Centre had applied for a Quest accreditation which was a leisure industry specific quality standard based on a requirement for quality services and continual improvement. An action plan had been produced and staff were working through all the key actions identified.

Selby Cottage Childcare Centre

The improved outdoor area and facilities were almost complete. The work enlivened the whole area and provided superb play and learning opportunities for the children.

Game On Football

Councillor Westrip advised that this project looked to engage young people in football as a way of motivating them to look after their healthy and inspire them to change their lives for the better by taking a positive route.

Tennis

The three tennis courts at Riverside had been fully refurbished following a £51,000 grant from Barclay's who also confirmed a £20,000 revenue funding grant to support the development of tennis on the site. Councillor Westrip made specific reference to Councillor Smith's involvement in obtaining the funding.

Spinning

The Leisure Centre had introduced spinning (Static Cycling) as an activity and it that had proved an enormous success.

Test Match

The England v West Indies test match took place from 15 to 19 June at the Riverside and despite the very poor weather for the first two days, it had been a great success with an estimated 50,000 spectators attending over the 5 days. Council staff managed the car parking pressures on site very well and worked effectively with the Police and County Cricket Club.

Veterans Day

Councillor R Harrison had been a major driving force behind the event and Councillor Westrip thanked him for his endeavours.

Environmental Health

Smokefree

Councillor Westrip advised that on 1 July 2007 England would go smoke free. A series of three drop-in days had been held for local businesses.

Gambling Act 2005

Approximately 13 applications were expected for various licences with a further 200 permits for amusement with prizes expected.

Contaminated Land

Officers had been working closely with an Environmental Consultancy to develop the service and an Action Plan was in place.

Empty Properties

Councillor Westrip advised that the District had in excess of 130 private sector dwellings that had been vacant for over six months. A survey of the properties and questionnaire to the owners was planned prior to development of a strategy.

Food Safety

The Food Safety Team hosted a National Food Safety Week event on 11 June focused on improving food hygiene awareness. A level 2 Food Hygiene qualification 'Food Safety in Catering' had been launched and the Council was the only authority in Durham running such a course.

Nottingham Declaration

Councillor Westrip advised that the Council was to sign the Nottingham Declaration on climate control and a detailed report would be submitted to Council in due course.

Area Based Approach Insulation Scheme

The Council was taking the lead on an area based approach to insulation and affordable warmth to reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty. Between 8-11,000 homes within the District would potentially benefit

Calendar

The Environmental Health Team were to issue a calendar to every property in the District advising of the services they provide. This would help with BVPI performances and address the outcomes in this area highlighted from earlier audit reports.

Planning and Building Control

Planning White Paper

The White Paper was published in May and contains major implications for development control, streamlining the process for major infrastructure projects and other appeals, altering the kind of householder development that requires planning permission as well as minor alterations to business premises and micro generation equipment. Planning fees are to rise for larger developments to reflect the real cost of processing a planning application.

Planning Committee

Councillor Westrip advised that the Planning Committee had agreed a revised 'Have Your Say' leaflet speaking procedure to provide a clearer understanding for the public on speaking at meetings of the Committee.

Planning Delivery Grant

Councillor Westrip was delighted to announce that the Council had been awarded £40,000.00 Planning Delivery Grant based on its development control performance and the number of applications it deals with, and a further award was expected in July.

Environmental Services

Good News Stories

Councillor Westrip made reference to the following matters:

- Thanks to Environmental Services for their management of the potential flood situation in partnership with other agencies
- Despite the wettest June on record, the grass cutting service had been delivered on time with no complaints
- Work had commenced on a Baby and Children Memorial Garden at Ropery Lane Cemetery
- Restructure of Environmental Services was completed to compliment the neighbourhood management process
- Involvement of Environmental Services in training initiatives
- Transfer of Grounds Maintenance at Riverside to Environmental Services

CPA Result

Councillor Westrip made reference to the CPA result and advised that as a Councillor and member of the Executive he was proud of his part in the process. He praised the Leader and the Chief executive for their outstanding leadership.

e. Health and Wellbeing

Councillor M Potts advised having met with the Directors and Services Team Managers within the area of her portfolio and would be reporting to future Council Meetings.

26 QUESTIONS TO LEADER AND EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

a. Councillor P Nathan submitted a written question to Councillor CJ Jukes in the following terms:

‘Could Councillor Jukes please give a full breakdown of the cost of the Civic Centre Regeneration scheme and its main components as well as the amount contributed directly by Chester-le-Street District Council and the specific amounts contributed by other agencies including the Arts Council, One North East and any other agencies or funding bodies which may have contributed funds directly or indirectly towards this regeneration project.’

Councillor Jukes responded to the question by quoting again the details of costs and grants as referred to in his report:

Main components of spend:

MILE House	£1,453,255
Streetscaping	£1,087,242
Civic Heart	£888,095
Culvert Strengthening	£660,164
Market Redesign	£284,602

Main sources of funding:

ONE Single Programme	£2,514,838
District Council	£2,098,604
Developers' Contribution	£165,700

b. Councillor PH May asked Councillor Barr about the lack of administrative and secretarial support for Members.

Councillor Barr advised the matter would be discussed at the next meeting of the Member Steering group.

c. Councillor PH May asked Councillor Westrip whether there were specific areas targeted for the initiative on insulation.

Councillor Westrip advised that the aim was to reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty.

d. Councillor M May asked questions on the following matters related to the recent Test Match at Riverside:

- i. Inadequacy of car parks, can they be enlarged
- ii. Who decides on the level of fees for parking
- iii. Why was the children's play area close on the Sunday

The Director of Development Services responded on behalf of Councillor Westrip as follows:

- i. Because of the bad weather the overflow car parks on the spots fields were not usable.
- ii. The car park fees are agreed by Council
- iii. The main reason for closure of the play area was because of the volume of traffic in the vicinity, it was a safety issue.

e. Councillor Nathan enquired about the transparency of funding and quoted information available on the Council's web site.

Councillor Jukes advised that the Arts Council backed the scheme which enabled ONE funding to be obtained.

Councillor Ebbatson advised that the Arts Council provided funding of £25,000 to commission design of the artwork.

27 CHESTER-LE-STREET CORPORATE PLAN

A report was submitted from the Assistant Chief Executive requesting consideration of the general principles and content of the Council's Corporate Plan 2007/2010, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Assistant Chief Executive spoke in detail to the report.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor SCL Westrip, that the recommendations in the report be agreed.

The Council RESOLVED:

"1. That the general principles and content of the Plan as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 to the report, be agreed.

2. That delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Chief Executive to make final changes and amendments to the Plan in order to publish the Plan by 30 June 2007."

28 HOME WORKING POLICY

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Organisational Development seeking approval to a Home Working Policy and Procedure, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Head of Organisational Development reported on the outcome of the Home Working Pilot which involved four employees and two Members.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor S Barr, that the recommendation in the report be agreed.

The Council RESOLVED:

" That the Home Working Policy and Procedure, as appended to the report, be approved subject to the proposals outlined in the report."

Councillor TH Harland left the meeting at 7.25pm

29 MANAGING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Organisational Development on proposed revisions to the policies on Handling Restructures and Redundancy and to introduce new policies in relation to Retirement and Redeployment, copies of which had previously been circulated.

Councillor D Holding proposed, seconded by Councillor C Jukes, that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“ That the following Policies and Procedures, as appended to the report, be approved:

- i. Policy and Procedure for Managing Organisational Restructures.
- ii. Redundancy Policy and Procedure
- iii. Retirement Policy and Procedure
- iv. Redeployment Policy and Procedure.”

30 REPLACEMENT PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

A report was submitted from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advising of the need to appoint a replacement Parish Council representative on the Council’s Standard Committee.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that the vacancy had arisen as a result of the decision of Mrs Gill Stephenson not to stand for re-election as a Parish Councillor for Great Lumley Parish Council. All eleven Parish Councils had been invite to submit nominations and three had been received.

The Council RESOLVED:

“1 That the Chairman of the Council be authorised to draw lots in order to choose between the nominated and eligible persons.

2. That the person so drawn first be appointed to serve as a Parish Council Representative on the Council’s Standards Committee until 31 March 2009.”

The Chairman of the Council selected one of the envelopes containing the names of the nominated persons.

“3. That Councillor Ian Clarkson from Urpeth Parish Council be so appointed.”

31 REPRESENTATION ON WALDRIDGE VILLAGE HALL TRUST

Consideration was given to a report from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services on the need to nominate a Member to serve as a Trustee of the Waldrige Village Hall Association.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that paragraph 4.6.2 in the report should be deleted.

The Council RESOLVED:

- “1. That Councillor SCL Westrip be nominated to serve as a Trustee of the Waldrige Village Hall Association.
2. That the Officer issue a briefing note on the insurance cover for a Trustee and on the role and responsibilities of a Trustee.”

32 ANNUAL REPORT OF CHIEF INTERNAL AUDITOR

Consideration was given to the Annual Report of the Chief Internal Auditor containing her opinion on the effectiveness of the control environment for the 2006/07 financial year.

The Chief Internal Auditor spoke in detail to the report and advised that her unqualified opinion was that internal control was sound.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed, seconded by Councillor C Jukes, that the recommendation in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the contents of the Annual Report of the Chief Internal Auditor be noted and received.”

33 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR 2006/07

Consideration was given to a report from the Director of Resources seeking approval of the Statement of Accounts for 2006/07, copies of which had previously been circulated.

The Director of Resources spoke in detail to the report and advised that the Statement was scrutinised by the Audit Committee the previous week.

Councillor G Armstrong, Chairman of the Audit Committee, advised that at the Audit Committee on 22 June 2007 Members raised issues on the Statement of Accounts in relation to Revenue Outturn; Housing Revenue Account; Capital Programme; Recovery of Outstanding Debts and Reserves and Balances. Issues were raised during the meeting on Recovery of Debts and Variance on Legal and Democratic Services Outturn that could not be resolved at the time but for which Members had subsequently received answers to. With regard to the Statement of Internal Control, issues were raised in relation to the following matters:

- New guidance on corporate governance with the requirement for a Governance Statement from 2008
- Progress on business continuity
- Arrangements for securing value for money
- Procurement Strategy
- Asset Management

- Financial Management and progress in respect of scores on Key Lines of Enquiry.

Councillor Armstrong gave an assurance that the Audit Committee undertook a thorough review and scrutiny of both the Statement of Accounts and the Statement of Internal Control and recommended the Council to approve both documents.

Councillor L Ebbatson proposed and Councillor GK Davidson seconded that the recommendations in the report be approved.

The Council RESOLVED;

“1,. That the Statement of Accounts for 2006/07 be approved, subject to audit.

2. That Capital Financing for 2006/07 be determined as detailed in the report.

3. That delegated authority be granted to the Director of Resources, in consultation with the Lead Member for Resources and Value for Money, to make any amendments to the Statement that are not material.

4. That the Statement of Internal Control be approved, subject to audit.”

34 Common Seal

The Council RESOLVED:

“That the action of the Officer in affixing the Common Seal of the Council to the following documents be confirmed:

Lease in duplicate relating to 4 Moorfoot Avenue, Chester-le-Street
 Contract in relation to land at Stella Gill to David Kevin Potter
 Transfer in relation to land at Stella Gill
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 12 Elm Avenue, Pelton Lane Ends
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 18 Riding Hill, Great Lumley
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 20 The Gardens, Chester-le-Street
 Lease induplicate relating to Unit 20 Stella Gill Industrial Estate
 Temporary Road Closure Order in respect of Sacriston Carnival 16 June 2007
 Section 106 Agreement in duplicate relating to land at Drum Industrial Estate
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 26 Eighth Avenue, Chester-le-Street
 Transfer in duplicate relating to 14 Conyers Gardens, South Pelaw”

The meeting terminated at 8.00pm

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Chester-le-Street District Council

Report to:	Council
Date of Meeting:	26 July 2007
Report from:	Director of Resources Revenues and Benefits Manager
Title of Report:	Anti Poverty Strategy
Agenda Item Number:	8

1. Purpose and Summary

- 1.1 The Corporate Anti-Poverty Strategy and action plan has been produced by the Corporate Anti-Poverty Working Group and Council is requested to consider the Strategy which will then be subject to consultation with partners and other stakeholders.

2. Consultation

- 2.1 Corporate Management Team has been consulted on the Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Corporate Anti-Poverty Working Group has been fully engaged in the production of the Strategy and the Action Plan. The Strategy has been considered by the Executive. If Council approves the Strategy, it will then be subject to consultation with partners and stakeholders.

3. Corporate Plan and Priorities

- 3.1 The development of a corporate anti-poverty strategy contributes to several of the Council's corporate priorities: customer excellence; working in partnership to deliver the community strategy and regenerating the district. In addition, it makes a direct contribution to the achievement of the sustainable community strategy.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Implications and Value for Money Statement

Weighting to each of the four value for money criteria:

Cost	5%
User Focus/ Community Engagement	45%
Quality	25%
Achievement of priority outcomes	25%

Achievements Expected:

Cost:

The development of the anti poverty strategy will have a cost in terms of staff time.

There will be costs of printing the strategy document which will be met from existing budgets.

In general, the costs of delivering the agreed actions will be met from existing service budgets. Where the actions require a review of existing policies, such as the discretionary rate relief policy, the financial implications will be identified before any changes are considered.

It is not possible to make any cost comparisons at this stage.

User Focus / Community Engagement

The aim of the anti-poverty strategy is to deliver actions to reduce poverty in the district.

The aim is to achieve real outcomes in terms of measurable improvements in the quality of life for our residents.

We will measure the success of the strategy through improvements in quality of life indicators, customer satisfaction levels and benefits take up.

Quality

We aim to deliver an anti-poverty strategy that delivers real, measurable outcomes.

We need to lead this work, but we need to involve others, we cannot progress this in isolation.

Achievement of Priority Outcomes

Although the development of an anti-poverty strategy is not a specified Community Strategy or Corporate Plan priority, it makes a direct contribution to both the Achievement of the Sustainable Community Strategy and several of our corporate priorities.

The work will make a direct contribution to customer excellence where there is an agreed action to develop a take up strategy to maximise benefits. The antipoverty strategy also makes an indirect contribution to regenerating the district and working in partnership to achieve the community strategy.

4.2 Legal

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

4.3 Personnel

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

4.4 Other Services

There will be implications for other services in delivering the anti-poverty strategy.

4.5 Diversity

The anti-poverty strategy aims to address the needs of disadvantaged people in the District. A diversity impact assessment has been carried out on the draft anti-poverty strategy.

4.6 Risk

Without a comprehensive anti-poverty strategy, there is a risk that the Council will not take a joined up approach to addressing poverty within the District.

4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no crime and disorder implications

4.8 Data Quality

Every care has been taken in the development of this report to ensure that the information and data used in its preparation and the appendices attached are accurate, timely, consistent and comprehensive. The council's Data Quality Policy has been complied with in producing this report.

4.9 Other Implications

There are no other implications arising from the contents of the report.

5. Background ,Position Statement and Option Appraisal

5.1 The draft Anti-Poverty Strategy is detailed in the appendix to the report.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Council is requested to consider and approve the Corporate Anti-Poverty Strategy which is attached as an appendix to this report.

7. Background Papers/ Documents referred to

7.1 Notes of the Corporate Anti Poverty Working Group.

7.2 Risk Assessment

AUTHOR NAME	Linda Chambers
DESIGNATION	Director of Resources
DATE OF REPORT	11 July 2007
VERSION NUMBER	1.0

CONTACT

LindaChambers@chester-le-street.gov.uk

Telephone 0191 387 2300

KEY CHART 5 - REPORT WRITING RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

The Department / Service or / Project;		Resources Directorate		Risk Score	Rating
Report Title/ Business Objective/ or Proposal		Anti Poverty Strategy		18-36	High
Completed by:		Linda Chambers	Date completed: 11/7/2007	9-16	Medium
Number		KEY OPPORTUNITIES		1-8	Low
1	Opportunity to take a joined up approach to addressing poverty within the district.			Working in partnership to achieve the Community Strategy; Customer Excellence and Regenerating the District.	
Number		KEY THREATS		RISK CONTROL MEASURES	
		Assessment of Risk [As it is now]		Assessment of Residual Risk [With control measures implemented]	
		Likelihood (Probability)	Impact (Severity)	Risk Score	Residual Risk Score
		[L]	[I]	[L x I]	
1	(Use drop-down list) Failure to engage other agencies in progressing the action plan	3	5	15	5
2					
3					
4					

5																			
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Chester-le-Street
District Council

Chester-le-Street District Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy



OneTeam
Working together to fulfill the needs of our communities

ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

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2. AIMS OF THE CORPORATE ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

Vision

‘To ensure that the whole of the District benefits from wealth creation and to work with our partners, stakeholders and other organisations to provide a staircase out of poverty’

Objectives

1. To address health inequalities within the District, specifically those associated with smoking, obesity, binge drinking and drug dependency
2. To ensure we maximise income from benefits and entitlement to discounts and exemptions for people within the District
3. To work with partners to promote opportunities for training and education and help, lead and support people through the transition period into work reducing their dependency on benefits
4. To work with partners to help start and sustain businesses and promote economic growth within the District
5. To ensure that less affluent or disadvantaged people are not excluded from initiatives to address crime and disorder
6. To work with partners to promote culture and leisure activities and ensure that those people on low income are not excluded from participating
7. To work with partners to ensure people have access to housing that is of a decent standard and affordable

Supporting the Corporate Vision and Corporate priorities

The overarching vision of the Council is

‘Working together to fulfil the needs of our communities’

In supporting this, the Corporate Anti-Poverty strategy will directly contribute towards corporate priorities: -

Priority 1 Customer Excellence

Maximising entitlement to welfare benefits for existing customers, encouraging new customers onto benefit and maximising entitlement to local taxation discounts and reliefs will improve the quality of life for residents living within the Chester-le-Street District.

Priority 2 Working in Partnership to deliver the Community Strategy

This is described in more detail below in Supporting the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Priority 4 Regenerating the District.

Specific actions have been identified within the Regeneration strategy, which will be linked into the Anti-Poverty action plan.

Priority 5 Neighbourhood Management

The roll out of Neighbourhood Management will reduce crime within Chester-le-Street District making it a safer place to live.

Priority 6 New Ways of Working in Leisure

Encouraging the residents of Chester-le-Street to lead a healthier lifestyle and have access to leisure as well as advice on health and fitness.

Supporting the Sustainable Community Strategy

The vision of the Sustainable Community Strategy is:-

“By 2016 the District of Chester-le-Street will be a place where people choose to live, to learn, to work and to visit. There will be inclusive, safe and healthy communities in our towns and villages built on a strong, sustainable economic base with excellent communication networks. The District Council will be a place where everyone is working together for a sustainable future.”

In supporting this vision the Corporate Anti-Poverty Strategy will directly contribute towards five Sustainable Community Strategy priority areas:-

- Promote sustainable communities through better quality and access to housing in neighbourhoods across the District Council
- Make the District a safe place to live, work and visit; to further reduce crime and disorder and to increase public reassurance
- Maximise and promote lifelong learning opportunities as a contribution to the economic, social and environmental well being of our communities
- Improve the health and well being of communities across the District; tackle health inequalities; and improve access to and quality of health and social care services
- Champion the development and promotion of culture, leisure, sport and the arts in contributing to the well being of residents and local communities

Local Area Agreement

One of the key aspirations of the Local Area Agreement is:-

Chester-le-Street Corporate Anti-Poverty Strategy
Version 1 (Draft) May 2007

“Narrowing the deprivation gap”

In supporting this aspiration the Corporate Anti-Poverty Strategy will directly contribute towards several of the outcomes set out in the Local Area Agreement: -

- Protecting children and young people from homelessness and failing tenancies
- Protecting young people from crime and anti-social behaviour
- Improving attainment levels and reducing the gaps between different groups
- Increasing levels of participation in learning opportunities
- Reducing the effects of poverty
- Supporting employers to tackle worklessness
- Increasing entrepreneurial activity
- Improving skills to meet current and future business needs
- Increasing the supply of business space to meet current and future business needs
- Meeting the economic needs of the most disadvantaged areas
- Improving health in disadvantaged areas
- Improving access for vulnerable people to services, leisure and social activities
- Reducing crime, the harm caused by illegal drugs and to reassure the public, reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour
- Improving quality of life in disadvantaged areas
- Ensuring housing is of a decent standard and is affordable and accessible

Regeneration Strategy

The Council's Regeneration Strategy includes a specific action point to develop an Anti-Poverty Strategy and therefore supports the development of this Corporate Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Working in Partnership

Chester-le-street District Council recognises that this Corporate Anti-Poverty Strategy is for the whole District and to achieve the objectives and deliver the action plan we are committed to working with our partners and stakeholders.

3. OVERVIEW

Poverty

Poverty is a complex problem with many causes and is experienced by different people in different ways.

Just fewer than one in four people in the United Kingdom, or nearly 13 million people, live in poverty, according to the most recent statistics. This includes nearly one in three children or almost 4 million people.

Poverty is measured below 60 per cent of contemporary median net disposable income. This is the 'poverty line'; it is not the same as a comprehensive definition of poverty, which includes many other dimensions. ¹

In December 2006, the New Policy Institute produced its ninth annual report of indicators of poverty and social exclusion providing a comprehensive analysis of trends over time and differences between groups. The main findings are summarised below:

- Poverty among children: the Government has improved child poverty but has fallen short of its target of taking one million children out of poverty. Half the children in poverty are in families already doing paid work; this means that the proposition that work is the route out of poverty does not apply for many people. The underlying problem is low pay: a low paid couple can only avoid poverty if both are working.
- Poverty among adults: there has been a significant fall in poverty among pensioners but poverty amongst work age adults has not been reduced.
- Inequalities in income and pay: three quarters of the extra income created over the last decade has gone to richer households. While gender pay inequality has fallen, especially at the bottom, higher earnings have grown proportionately faster than the average.
- Health inequalities: health inequalities by social class seem to be more resistant to change than other forms of inequality.
- Minimum educational standards: one quarter of 19 year olds fails to reach a minimum educational standard. Progress has been made in the numbers reaching headline standards at 11 and 16.
- Exclusion by institutions: exclusion has fallen substantially in a number of areas, from bank accounts to central heating, where the Government has taken action.

¹ The current measurement of income poverty:-

A household is defined as being in income poverty ('poverty' for short) if its income is less than 60% of the contemporary Great Britain median household income. In 2004/05, the latest year for which data is available, this was worth £100 per week for a single adult with no dependent children; £183 per

week for a couple with no dependent children; £186 for a lone parent with two dependent children and £286 per week for a couple with two dependent children.

These sums are measured after deducting income tax, council tax and housing costs (including rents, mortgage interest, buildings insurance and water charges). The money left over is therefore what the household has available to spend on everything else it needs from food and heating to travel and entertainment

District Profile

Chester-le-Street District is a small district in the north of County Durham. With an area of 28 square miles, it is the smallest District in the county.

At 53,695, Chester-le-Street's population has risen by 3.4% since 1991 whereas the North East has seen a 2.8% fall. 16% of the population is over 65 and 24% is below the age of 19. 99% of the population is white; the largest minority ethnic group is Chinese, at 0.3% of the total population.

The rate of economically active people is about 76.3%. In recent years, local unemployment figures have fallen from 9.7% (above the national average) to 3.9%.

However, the Index of Multiple Deprivation rankings of 2004 show that the District has pockets of deprivation, mainly in the outlying villages.

The characteristics of a number of settlements show that they have social and economic issues. The table below gives a breakdown of settlements within Chester-le-Street against some key indicators.

Settlement Characteristics

Settlement	Population	Percentage of all Unemployed	Percentage of all Economic Active Rate**	Households Without a Car	Percentage of People Without Qualifications
Bournmoor	2,010	3.7	75.2	24.3	24
Chester-le-Street Town Centre	23,946	3.1	77.4	26.4	22
Chester Moor	240	11.6	66.5	26.9	32.6
Edmondsley	472	4.2	69.7	39.3	38.9
Fencehouses	1,492	1.7	80.8	19.9	21.4
Grange Villa	874	5.1	67.5	35.1	37.6
Great Lumley	3,549	2.9	76.2	18.9	23.3
Ouston	2,977	1.9	77.9	16.1	21.5
Pelton	3,293	5.0	73.5	31.4	26.6
Pelton Fell	1,561	4.3	63.8	40.1	36.9
Plawsworth	234	9.5	60.8	7.1	28.9
Sacrison	5,077	4.5	75	32.6	30.6
Urpeth	2,295	2.4	86.4	5.7	13.7
West Pelton	744	6.0	68.9	31.3	34.2
Chester-le-Street District	53,695	3.9	76.3	26.6	31.6
County Durham	493,500	3.74*	70.15	31.4	36

* Note unemployment figures in table KS09a of Census 2001 Key Statistics for Local Authorities derive different unemployment rates than from the 2001 Census summary sheets for Chester-le-Street District obtained from the Durham County Council website. The figure from table KS09a is 3.13% for Chester-le-Street District compared to 3.9 in the District summary sheets.

** This is the proportion of the population of economic active age rather than the whole population.

Important Facts

The following facts relate directly to the Chester-le-Street District: -

- The overall health of residents in Chester-le-Street District is better than some areas of the North East region but worse than the national average.
- Mortality rates from circulatory disease and cancer are higher than national rates but lower than regionally
- The 2001 Census shows that 21.5% of the population of Chester-le-Street has a limiting life long illness, compared with 22.7% in the North East
- 11.6% of people's health is described as 'not good' in Chester-le-Street, compared with 12% in the region as a whole
- During 2001 - 2003 there were just fewer than 37 conceptions for 15 to 17 year olds per 1,000 population in Chester-le-Street. This is lower than the North East and National average figures
- The levels of smoking is higher than the national average and the percentage of adults who binge drink is significantly higher than for the average in England
- Poverty, unemployment, housing conditions, educational underachievement, lifestyles and access to services are all key factors contributing to health conditions
- Because of the range of underlying causes of poor health, solutions must be found in a range of agencies working together to promote better physical, emotional and psychological health
- The largest sector of employment in Chester-le-Street is distribution, hotels and restaurants at just under 32%. This is followed by public administration, education and health at 28%
- Small and medium sized enterprises characterise the District economy; in 2004 there were 555 enterprises in the District employing up to 4 people. Many businesses fail to make it past their fifth birthday, with just over half failing after four years
- There are low rates of business start up. The VAT registration rate, a guide to business start ups, was 19.6 in 2004, below the England rate of 39.3 per 10,000 adult population
- The District's excellent location, facilities and communication links present opportunities for the expansion of business and service sectors, the development of employment initiatives and the creation of new jobs
- There were over 600 claimants of Jobseekers' Allowance in December 2005, and the Incapacity Benefit rate in the District is 10%, in line with regional figures; this represents some 3,700 people

- In the District there are currently 5100 people claiming Council Tax Benefit, 2840 claiming Housing Benefit with Chester-le-Street Council as their landlord and 555 claiming Rent Allowance with Housing Association, Charity or private sector landlords
- 13.8% of people of working age have no formal qualifications and a quarter of adults in Chester-le-Street have poor literacy and numeracy
- The area is characterised by residents commuting outside the District for work and 70% of those economically active do so
- Overall crime rates in the district are low and generally falling but the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour is a major concern for residents
- Although schools are generally of a good standard and GCSE attainment is above County, Regional and National averages, 13.8% of people of working age have no formal qualifications and a quarter of adults in Chester-le-Street have poor literacy and numeracy. There are 150 young people (aged 14 - 19) in the District not in education, training or employment

Area profile data will be used to target actions aimed at reducing poverty and addressing specific need.

4. WHAT WE DO NOW

We already do an enormous amount of work towards reducing poverty in Chester-le-Street including we: -

- signpost people to other organisations and agencies for advice help and support in numerous areas.
- offer a Careline support service for residents in the District
- offer furniture packages, decorating vouchers and low cost contents insurance allowing tenants the best possible start into their property
- work in partnerships with the voluntary sector and our customers to agree payment plans
- offer tenancy support to avoid evictions and homelessness as well as helping people to find accommodation
- carry out Housing Needs Surveys to inform us that housing meets people's needs in type, affordability and location
- have dedicated Officers that address anti social behaviour issues and support tenants suffering from domestic violence
- provide access to an interpretation service/language line and offer home visits as well as customer care packs including magnifying glasses
- help to build and develop key and life skills with people including financial management, allowing individuals to become independent and able to manage their lives successfully
- have provision for affordable leisure and the 'One Card' scheme awards discounts for people in receipt of benefits, senior citizens and students
- facilitate community leisure programmes including footsteps to fitness within the 'walks' programme and the FISCH project (Family Initiative Supporting Children's Health) linked to local schools
- have a unique new pricing structure aimed at encouraging people aged 18 to 24 to use leisure facilities.
- offer free swimming for children under 18 in school holidays leading towards healthier lifestyles
- have a GP referral programme specifically to rehabilitate people after major injuries, illness or health related issues enabling them to carry on with regular day to day activities.
- have designed and built high quality and modern play areas and ball courts giving the opportunity for play in a safe environment at no cost

- offer a high quality childcare service with provision for emergency and long term placements from social services, work place redemption vouchers, utilising child tax credit scheme, a limited number of free government sessions for 3 and 4 year olds as well as discounts offered for older children attending all week.
- promote and facilitate events for people with disabilities such as “It’s a Knock Out” event
- provide advice to residents on smoking cessation, food hygiene and food safety
- have a comprehensive affordable warmth strategy
- allow a 3 month rent free period to new businesses in industrial premises
- offer online and telephone payments and online access to benefit and council tax accounts reducing the time and cost of people visiting the civic centre
- have revenues and benefits take up strategies which are designed to maximise the income of residents in Chester-le-Street
- provide funding for the local Citizens Advice Bureau in Chester-le-Street and work in partnership with them on many initiatives

5. ACTION PLAN

A detailed, SMART action plan with assigned officer responsibilities has been developed by the Anti-Poverty Working Group and is attached in Appendix 1.

6. MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

The Corporate Anti-Poverty strategy and action plan will be monitored on a monthly basis by the Anti-Poverty working group. As it is a corporate initiative a progress report will be presented to Programme Management Board on a quarterly basis outlining performance towards the action plan.

Progress will be included in the quarterly corporate performance management report, which is considered, by the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny panels. It is also proposed that Partnership and Efficiencies Overview and Scrutiny panel review the overall progress on the Anti-Poverty strategy and action plan on a six monthly basis.

How will we measure our success?

Quality of Life Indicator 7

The percentage of residents who think that vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate change to property or vehicles; people using or dealing drugs and people being rowdy or drunk in a public place is a very big or fairly big problem

Quality of Life Indicator 11

The percentage of working age population that is in employment.

Quality of Life Indicator 13

The total number of VAT registered business in the area at the end of the year; the percentage change in the number of VAT registered businesses

Quality of Life Indicator 19

The proportion of young people aged 16 to 24 in full time education or employment

Quality of Life Indicator 20

The proportion of working age population qualified to a NVQ level 2 or equivalent and NVQ level 4 or equivalent

Quality of Life Indicator 31

Age standardised mortality rates a) cancers; b) circulatory diseases; c) respiratory diseases

Quality of Life Indicator 35

Teenage pregnancy, conceptions under 18 per 1,000 females aged 15 to 17

Quality of Life Indicator 37

Affordable dwellings as a percentage of all new housing completions

Quality of Life Indicator 39

The percentage of residents who think that people sleeping rough in the streets or in other public places is a big or fairly big problem in their local area

Quality of Life Indicator 40

The percentage of housing that is unfit. Decent homes standard BVPI (proportion of council houses that meet the decent homes standard)

Local Indicator

Reduce overall mortality rate from heart disease and cancer and reduce the gap between the least deprived and most deprived 20% of super output areas

Local Indicator

Reduce the gap for life expectancy between the least deprived and most deprived 20% of super output areas

Local Indicator

The percentage increase in the number of people, who participated in culture, leisure, sports and art activities in Chester-le-Street

Local Indicator

Reduction in the number of young people aged 14 to 19 not in education employment or training in the District

Local Indicator

Reduction in the skills for life need within the adult population of the District, from 25% to 15% between 2006 and 2016

7. Equalities and Diversity

Chester-le-Street District Council is committed to promoting equality and valuing diversity in both service delivery and employment. Care has been taken in drafting this strategy and the underpinning procedures and action plans ensure that the Council does not unjustifiably discriminate against any minority group and a Diversity Impact Assessment has been carried out.

Every effort will be made to ensure that the needs of individual customers are met in relation to the implementation of this strategy. The strategy will be made available in different languages, or translated with the assistance of an interpreter and it will be available as read-speak. All customers will be encouraged to seek assistance from an independent third party.

The strategy will be monitored to ensure that customers are afforded equality of service.

Appendix 1 Anti-Poverty Action Plan 2007- 2009

No	Objective	Link to Anti-Poverty Objective	Action	By who	When	Outcome
1	To ensure the continuation of a pricing strategy that allows access to leisure and sporting opportunities at an affordable price	6	This will be carried out by comparing prices with other local authorities using local networks and contacts, consultation through leisure services surveys with specific questions on pricing, and affordability, and looking to start to use the Association for Public Service Excellence network for national statistics on pricing	CL	31.03.08	People on low incomes are able to access Leisure Services, encouraging healthier lifestyles to address health inequalities
2	Informing the community of activities and services available within leisure services, showing discounts available to users and non users	5, 6	There will be approximately 12,000 leaflets printed, 4,000 will be distributed to schools, 7000 distributed by Revenues and Benefits team, and the remainder will be distributed to other general locations. The leaflet will give a discount on leisure cards of £0.50 when presented at the leisure centre.	CL	30.09.07	Disadvantaged or less affluent people take up leisure activities as well as advice on health and fitness, health and well being is improved, helping to address health inequalities and protects young people from crime and anti social behaviour.
3	To provide free swimming to children and young people (under 18) in the school holidays in partnership with the Children's fund.	6	The resources are currently in place from the 2006/2007 pilot scheme for administration of the project. Funding has been granted from the children's fund for a further year to resource extra staffing during the busy periods	CL	31.03.08	Children and young people participate in swimming to improve health and well being
4	Introduce a new pilot intervention program to tackle child hood obesity.	1	The objectives for the program have been set by a pre-existing pack and staff will be trained prior to the pilot scheme on how to use and deliver the pack. Funding is in place from the PCT to support the scheme and the leisure centre will host 1 session per week for 9 weeks; other sessions will take place within the Durham area at one of the dry based activity sites. The program is free of charge will be attended by at least one parent and the child. The program will involve 2 sessions per week, with each session consisting of 1 hour of nutritional information then followed by 1 hour of exercise	CL	30.09.07	Parents and children understand the importance of exercise and nutrition helping to address childhood obesity

5	To maximize direct debits and e-payments and ensure customers have correct entitlement to discounts, and reliefs	2	Develop and implement a Revenues take up strategy to maximise direct debits, E-Services and ensure customers have correct entitlement to discounts, reliefs and exemptions	JH	31.03.08	Maximising people on low incomes' eligibility for discount increases their disposable income, reducing the effects of poverty and improving their quality of life
6	To maximise entitlement to benefit	2	Develop and implement a Benefits take up strategy to tackle disadvantaged customers through active support and proactive intervention	JH	31.03.08	Increasing benefit payments to disadvantaged and less affluent people reduces the effects of poverty and improves their quality of life.
7	Introduce a new Discretionary Rate Relief Policy	4	Review the Council's current discretionary rate relief policy identifying options and recommend changes where appropriate	JH	30.09.07	The economic benefits of discretionary rate relief help contribute towards the aims of the anti-Poverty strategy and vision of the council
8	Review corporate debt management policy	2,4	Review the corporate debt management policy and jointly work with other departments to manage debt effectively for customers	JH	31.12.07	Customers owing multiple debts to the council will only pay one affordable debt allowing more money for them to live on
9	To promote and support the ability of small and medium sized enterprise to engage with the council for potential procurement opportunities	4	Adopt and implement the small and medium size enterprise concordat	MW	30.09.07	Increase opportunities available for small and medium sized enterprises in Chester-le-Street to access opportunities to provide goods and services to the Council, contributing to the economic growth in the District
10	To raise awareness in the local community of health issues and health related services that are available	1	To develop and deliver activities, events and services aimed at promoting good health and reducing health inequalities	EG	31.03.08	An increase in understanding of health issues leading to a reduction in health inequalities in the community
11	To ensure that the local community has access to help and support for health related issues	1	To develop a health support project in which members of the community can access a support worker for health related problems	EG	31.12.07	Improvement in health amongst individuals accessing the project

12	To provide tenancy support to Drug and alcohol misusers	1	To set up the new Shared priorities project so that drug and alcohol users can access support to find accommodation or to overcome problems, which are affecting their tenancy. This can include financial management, getting back into education and employment and addressing their drug use	EG	01.09.07	Reduction in homelessness, eviction and reports of anti social behaviour in substance misuse client group
13	Provide opportunities for young people living in the District which will improve their quality of life	1	To develop the youth development programme to provide free of charge activities, specialist health services, and educational and health promotion sessions/events	EG	31.12.07	Increased engagement with young people and a reduction in antisocial behaviour in local community. Raised awareness of health issues and an improvement in the health and quality of life of young people accessing the project.
14	Promote the services of debt advice agencies.	2	Amend format of quarterly rent statements sent to all tenants to include details of services provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau.	KG	31.10.07	Increasing the knowledge of tenants needing independent advice and help in managing their finances
15	Increase financial inclusion by ensuring tenants who qualify for welfare/housing benefit are claiming.	3	Cestria Community Housing' to either employ an in-house adviser to give benefit advice to tenants or the existing staff to be trained to give advice to tenants.	KG	07.01.08	Increasing benefit payments to disadvantaged and less affluent people reduces the effects of poverty and improves their quality of life.
16	Set up links for partnership working between 'Cestria Community Housing' and the Council to drive housing benefit take-up and financial inclusion.	2	Protocol and SLA to be set up including named contact officers for queries/assistance between the organisations following Stock Transfer. Both organisations to commit to joint working initiative for housing benefit take up.	KG/ AS	07.01.08	Increasing benefit payments to disadvantaged and less affluent people reduces the effects of poverty and improves their quality of life.
17	To maximise the take up of grants under the COSY scheme by appropriate groups.	2	Further publicise the COSY scheme. 23 000 Environmental Health calendars will be distributed in the District in Summer 2007 featuring a COSY advert. Registrar to hand out COSY applications when births are registered.	LH	30.09.07	Reduce levels of fuel poverty in the District.
18	Increase the targeting of Discretionary repairs Assistance (DRA)	2	Seek Council approval of and implement a review of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy to increase the weighting given to those in financial need.	LH	30.09.07	Reduce the numbers of vulnerable people living in non-decent homes in the District.

19	Reduce exposure to second hand tobacco smoke	1	Implement and monitor compliance with Smoke free legislation introduced as the Health Act 2006	LH	01.07.07 ongoing	Improvements to the health of workers, residents and visitors to the District
20	Protect children and vulnerable adults from the harmful effects of gambling	1	Implement and monitor the premises licensing regime introduced under the Gambling Act 2005	LH	30.09.07	Reduced levels of gambling addiction.
21	Develop a business forum	4	Consult on, develop and launch a local business forum	LH	30.09.07	Improved communication with local traders facilitating growth and business sustainability.
22	To ensure that people with limiting life-long illnesses and disabilities are not excluded from the services provided by the Council and its partners.	1,2,3,5,6,7	To work with other agencies – including the voluntary sector – to target the needs of people with disabilities and long term illnesses. To involve other organisations in developing take up campaigns and other promotions.	Corporate Anti-Poverty Working Group	31.03.08	People who are disadvantaged due to disabilities and limiting life long illnesses are able to access services to improve their quality of life.
23	Regeneration of Pelton Fell	3,4,5	New build of private and social housing, the clearance of unpopular homes Environmental improvements, the provision of a Community Resource Centre in the village Tackle community safety and economic regeneration	MW	March 2009	Completion of the regeneration of Pelton Fell, making the village a more attractive and sustainable community
24	Regeneration of Sacriston	3,4	An Area Development Framework for the village developed	MW & Sacriston Steering Group	July 2007	A clear vision for the future of regeneration in Sacriston in order to make the village a more attractive and sustainable community
25	Regeneration of Grange Villa in line with the Area Development Framework for the village	3,4	Implement the Area Development Framework	CLSDC & Grange Villa Project Management Group	March 2009	Regeneration work completed, making the village a more attractive and sustainable community

26	Maximise regeneration of the District and contribution to the Decent Homes Standard with partnering RSLs	7	To work with existing and future RSLs to identify protocols, Service Level Agreements, and partnership agreements as appropriate	CLSDC & Cestria Housing.	August 2007	The contribution of RSLs in the District towards a housing strategy for the District that will promote choice, decency and quality in the District's housing stock
27	More affordable homes within the District	7	To promote further affordable homes nominations agreements in new private sector developments within the District	CLSDC & Private Developers.	Ongoing	More affordable homes that will enable people from a wider range of backgrounds to access new housing in the District
28	Improve the Community facilities within the District	6	To review the community facilities available within the District, particularly focuses on the regeneration corridors, Draw up a detailed action plan to address any identified gaps	CLSDC & Chester-le-Street Council for Voluntary Service	31.12.07	Improved community facilities that will better meet the needs of local communities in the District
29	Address the economic and enterprise aspects of regeneration	3,4	Develop with partners, an action plan to address the economic and enterprise aspects of regeneration within the regeneration corridors	Economic Regeneration Policy Group	October 2007	An action plan developed that will enable the District to be a more attractive place for businesses, especially new business start-ups
30	Reduce Crime and Disorder within the District.	5,	To work with partners in delivery of the crime and disorder reduction strategy Establish a specific community safety initiative in regeneration corridors according to locally identified issues	Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership	March 2008	Reduction in crime and disorder figures, and the fear of crime
31	Develop Homeless Strategy	7	Develop a homeless strategy	CLSDC	July 2007	A reduction in homelessness and the causes of homelessness
32	To develop a better understanding of all of the issues facing local communities, with proposals	All	Neighbourhood Profiling developed	CLSDC	July 2007	A clearer understanding of issues facing neighbourhoods in the District in order to inform policy development that will address these needs
33	Involve Community and Voluntary Sector in regeneration	3, 5, 6	To work with the community and voluntary sector to understand their current and potential contribution to regeneration objectives and the creation of sustainable communities, with an audit and action plan	CLSDC & Chester-le-Street Council for Voluntary Service	December 2007	More involvement from Voluntary Sector

35	Feasibility Study of work skills	3	To work with partners to research the future skills needs of employers within and with an impact on the District, compared to the availability of skills within the District	CLSDC	December 2007.	Understanding of the future skills needs of employers in the District, and an action plan to meet those needs through public sector policy intervention
36	Use Mile house to its full potential	3	To work with partners to maximise the impact of MILE House.	CLSDC & Chester-le-Street & City of Durham Enterprise Agency	Ongoing	Increased learning and enterprise in the District, through the use of MILE House.
37	Explore how the delivery of the Regeneration Strategy can encourage and facilitate wider participation in learning opportunities.	3	To work with the District Learning Partnership in examining how the delivery of the Regeneration Strategy can encourage and facilitate wider participation in learning opportunities.	CLSDC & District Learning Partnership	Ongoing	Wider learning opportunities developed and facilitated
38	To support the expansion of Drum and Stella Gill industrial estates, in line with market interest	3, 4		CLSDC & Private	Ongoing	Increased employment opportunities
39	To identify the need for future provision of employment sites, as part of the LDF process	3		CLSDC	Timetable developed April 2007	Future increased employment opportunities

Key to responsible people

CL	Chris Lonsdale	Acting Leisure Centre Manager
JH	Jayne Henderson	Revenues & Benefits Manager
MW	Martin Walker	Head of Regeneration
EG	Emma Golightly	Community Development and Health Worker
KS	Kirk Groundwater	Income Management Team Leader
AS	Alison Styring	Benefits Team Leader
LH	Liam Howley	Acting Environmental Health Team Leader



Chester-le-Street District Council

Report to:	Full Council
Date of Meeting:	26 th July 2007
Report from:	Head of Regeneration
Title of Report:	Homelessness Strategy
Agenda Item Number:	9

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Homelessness Strategy.

Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 gave local Authorities the power to carry out a Homeless Review and to publish a Strategy on their findings. It was required for Local Authorities to publish a Strategy by 31 July 2003. Section 1(4) requires housing authorities to publish a new Strategy based on the results of a further review within 5 years.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Among the parties consulted on this proposal have been:

- Stakeholders at the Housing Strategy Group
- Corporate Management Team
- Executive Committee

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The implementation of the Homelessness Strategy would make a contribution in particular to:

- Priority1, Customer excellence, providing an excellent Housing Options Service accessible by all the community.

- Priority 2, Working in Partnership to deliver the Community Strategy, engaging young people in the development of services in Chester-le-street for Young People threatened with Homelessness and to develop services for victims of Domestic abuse
- Priority 4, Regenerating the District, working with partners and customers to regenerate services amongst the diverse community who may be threatened with Homelessness.

4. IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications and Value for Money Statement

4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Value for Money has been a key consideration in the development of the Strategy. The Housing Strategy Steering Group will work with the Housing Options Manager to oversee the Strategy and progress on the key actions.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys are obtained from all service users to identify any areas of the service that can be improved on. In addition, an Annual Service user Focus Day is held to get customer feedback on the current service.

Prevention work is a key issue in the Housing Options Service. The team are currently promoting the service in all areas and offering training to all agencies. It is hoped that as a result of this clients will contact the service earlier enough to prevent the Homelessness and therefore reduce the risk of going through the full Homelessness process.

4.2 Legal

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However it is a legal requirement in line with the Homeless Act 2002 to have a published Homelessness Strategy.

4.3 Personnel

There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

4.4 Risk

The risks associated with not producing a Homelessness Strategy would be:

- Not complying with the Statutory Duty of the Homelessness Act 2002
- Failure to provide the Council with a planned process for the Housing Options Team
- The deliver of the Housing Options Service would decline therefore not providing and Excellent Housing Options Service that meets the needs of the Community.

A key risk in implementation of the Homelessness Strategy will be that of managing the increase in numbers that the service has dealt with recently. However, while this is impossible to control, it can be influenced through a strategic response that involves a continued significant investment in support and prevention work.

Implementation of the Strategy will be managed and monitored by the strategic housing team in the first instance, with involvement from the Programme Management Board, and the Regeneration & Housing OSP.

4.5 Diversity

This Strategy is critically important to the council in terms of equality and diversity. This strategy aims at preventing homelessness amongst all diverse groups or households, ensuring the service we provide meets the needs of the wider community.

4.6 Data Quality

Every care has been taken in the development of this Strategy to ensure that the information and data used in its preparation are accurate, timely and comprehensive. The council's Data Quality Policy has been complied with in producing this report.

5. BACKGROUND, POSITION STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL

- 5.1 Section 1(1) of the Homelessness Act 2002 gave local Authorities the power to carry out a Homeless Review and to publish a Strategy on their findings. It was required for Local Authorities to publish a Strategy by 31 July 2003. Section 1(4) requires housing authorities to publish a new Strategy based on the results of a further review within 5 years.

Chester-le- Street published the first strategy on time and have subsequently reviewed this and have produced the proposed Strategy

- 5.2 The Strategy identifies a number of issues that are key to the future development of the Housing Options Service.

Chester-le-Street District Council has identified four key objectives that will support and deliver our vision:

- Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness in the district
- Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation
- Improving Support Services for Homeless Households
- Implementing Service Improvements

The Strategy seeks to:

- Identifying the groups at risk from homelessness in Chester-le-Street
- Identifying the current and likely future levels of homelessness and its causes.
- Mapping the supply of homelessness provision in the District.
- Identifying gaps in provision then work with partners to develop services and increase provision

Chester-le-Street District Council will review and update the Strategy in the future by:

- Working with partners (both internal and external) to oversee the implementation of the strategy, ensure that it is reflected within: relevant local plans and strategies and to influence commissioning decisions about services designed for or received by homeless people.
- Review available resource and ensure it is designated to the most appropriate service area
- Review our progress against the Housing Options Team Plan and report the findings to the Homelessness Steering Group, Programme Management Board, Regeneration & Housing OSP, and to the quarterly performance clinics.
- Undertake a review of the strategy during 2009, and produce our next Homelessness Strategy by the end of 2009.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Council are recommended to approve the revised Homelessness Strategy.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO

7.1 Homelessness Strategy

AUTHOR NAME	Lynn Hall
DESIGNATION	
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VERSION NUMBER	1
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Chester-le-Street
District Council

Homelessness Strategy



Working together to fulfil the needs of our communities

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide a summary of:

- What the Homelessness Strategy is
- The purpose of the Strategy
- Why Chester-le-Street District Council has produced the Strategy.

Chester-le-Street's vision for this strategy is:

“Working together, to fulfil the needs of our communities, by reducing and preventing homelessness, and offering support to those in need”

Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 places statutory duties on local housing authorities to provide assistance to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Authorities must consider all applications from people seeking accommodation or assistance in obtaining accommodation. A main homelessness duty is owed where the authority is satisfied that the applicant is:

- Eligible for assistance.
- Unintentionally homeless.
- Falls within a priority need group. The priority needs groups are specified within the legislation.

Priority need groups include:

- Households with dependent children or a pregnant woman.
- People who are considered vulnerable e.g. mental illness or physical disability.

The priority need categories were extended by Order in July 2002 to include, additionally:

- Applicants aged 16 or 17.
- Applicants aged 18 to 20 who were previously in care.
- Applicants vulnerable as a result of time spent in care, in custody, or in HM Forces.
- Applicants vulnerable as a result of having to flee their home because of violence or the threat of violence.

An overview of homelessness legislation can be found at the beginning of the Homelessness Code of Guidance which is available on the internet at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1501614>

Social Services are placed under a duty to “give such assistance as the local housing authority reasonably requires” in carrying out a homelessness review and drawing up the strategy. Social Services are also required to take the homelessness strategy into consideration when exercising of its functions in the District.

Homelessness strategies must include plans for:

- The prevention of homelessness and repeat homelessness.
- Ensuring there is sufficient accommodation available for people who are, or who may become homeless.
- Ensuring there is satisfactory support for people who are, or who may become homeless or who need support to prevent them from becoming homeless again.

The development of the 2006 Homelessness Strategy is in line with the national legal and policy framework.

The Chester-le-Street Homelessness Strategy is linked to the following Council documents and other strategic plans:

- Community Plan 2006
- Corporate Plan 2006
- Housing Strategy 2005
- HRA Business Plan 2006
- Supporting People Strategy 2005
- Local Area Agreement
- Regeneration Strategy
- Community Safety Strategy

Recognised Good Practice

Chester-le-Street District Council works closely with a number of agencies who provide guidance notes on the development of local homelessness strategies. A 'fit for purpose' homelessness strategy should include the following:

- A vision.
- Overall objectives.
- Arrangements for partnership working.
- User consultation plan(s).
- Specific objectives for each area covered by the strategy.
- Improving prevention.
- Improving existing provision.
- Increasing the supply of temporary accommodation.
- Reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Accessing permanent accommodation.
- Making use of private sector housing.
- Plans for securing resources.
- An action plan.
- Arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

The Homelessness Act 2002 required Councils to carry out a review of homelessness and homelessness services in their area, and to then formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on this review. The Council complied with this part of the 2002 Act by producing its first Homeless Strategy in July 2003. The 2002 Act also requires local authorities to formally review their homelessness strategies at least every 5 years. The current review, 4 years after the first, also complies with the provisions of the 2002 Act.

The review must assess:

- Current and likely future levels of homelessness.
- The activities undertaken to prevent homelessness, secure accommodation for homeless people and provide support to homeless people.
- The resources available.

The strategy must also show how Chester-le-Street, Social Services and partner agencies will work together to:

- Prevent homelessness.
- Secure sufficient accommodation for people who are or may become homeless.
- Secure the satisfactory provision of support services (advice, information and assistance) for homeless and potentially homeless people.

The Strategy seeks to:

- Identify the groups at risk from homelessness in Chester-le-Street
- Identify the current and likely future levels of homelessness and its causes.
- Map the supply of homelessness provision in the District.
- Identify gaps in provision then work with partners to develop services and increase provision.

The Strategy has been developed using quantitative and qualitative data provided by agencies and service users. Focus groups and consultation meetings have all been utilised to elicit information on which to build the review.

Whilst the Council has statutory responsibilities to deal with homelessness, it cannot solve the challenges and problems of homelessness alone, nor can it deliver all of the services that are needed to give support, assistance and advice to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. It is therefore essential that we have strong and established partnerships that are effective with both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The development of this Strategy has been overseen by a multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group. A list of the members of this steering group are listed below, together with the aims and how these aims will be met by the group are detailed below:

Chester-le-Street District Council - Community Services Directorate

- Housing Options Team
- Community Safety Team
- Housing Management Team
- Housing Strategy Manager
- Income Management Team
- Research Officer

Partner Agencies

- Homeless Action Partnership
- SHELTER
- Centre Point
- Durham Constabulary
- Probation Service
- Youth Offending Team
- Welfare Rights Service
- North Durham NHS Trust
- Drugs Services
- Supporting People
- Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordination Unit
- Mental Health Team
- Teenage Health Project
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Connexions Service
- Domestic Violence Initiative
- Sure Start
- Housing Associations
- Chester-le-Street Landlords Association

The aims of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group are to:

- Oversee the development and implementation of the Homelessness Strategy.
- Ensure that homelessness is reflected in all relevant local plans and strategies.
- Influence commissioning decisions about services designed for or received by homeless people.

To meet these aims the Group will:

- Monitor and assist with the progress and delivery of the Housing Options Team Plan.
- Develop partnership arrangements within the group to strengthen the homelessness service for particular service users.
- Share good practice and existing models.
- Receive details of new services with service implications for homeless people.
- Comment on plans, strategies and initiatives that impact on homeless people.
- Report service development and improvements to the relevant committees within the Council.

Agency Consultation

A Focus Group of agencies was established to receive feedback on the basic structure of the Strategy and issues related to homelessness in the District. The Group have met twice and a draft Strategy has been reviewed by both the Homeless Action Partnership and the Housing and Environment Theme Group which form part of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Service User Consultation

The views of homeless and potentially homeless applicants have been used to help develop the strategy and service users must be facilitated to engage with the planning and delivery processes. Service user consultation exercises have been carried out in two stages:

Firstly all Council tenants received a copy of a Tenants Satisfaction questionnaire during December 2005. Those that had been homeless in the previous 12 months and had been provided with Council accommodation were requested to provide information about how good the homelessness service was.

A Focus Group was also established for those households who had presented themselves as homeless in the last 12 months but where no finding of homelessness was made. They were asked to provide feedback to the Service of their experience of accessing the homelessness services in the District.

Chapter 2 – Strategic Context

The purpose of this Section of the Strategy is to set the Homelessness Strategy in both a national, regional and local context.

In order to inform and develop the Homelessness Strategy, we have reflected upon and considered the local and national context, respective strategies, policies and data analysis. This evidence base is summarised below, with more detailed information set out in Appendix 1

National Context:

With the publication of 'More than a Roof' - a report into tackling homelessness, the Government formally recognised that homelessness is a complex issue involving many factors, affecting a wide variety of groups and not confined to street sleeping and homeless families in bed and breakfast hotels.

The Government's determination to address the issue is indicated by the creation of the Homelessness Directorate within the Social Exclusion Unit at the [Department of Communities and Local Government](#). The work of the directorate is informed by 8 key objectives:

- Strengthening help to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Developing more strategic approaches to tackling homelessness.
- Encouraging new responses to tackling homelessness.
- Reducing the use of bed and breakfast hotels for families with children.
- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation.
- Tackling domestic violence as a root cause of homelessness.
- Sustaining the two-thirds reduction in rough sleeping.
- Ensuring the opportunity of a decent home for all.

The report noted that statutory homelessness was set to rise over time and that structural factors such as the housing supply, location and affordability of housing are exacerbated by 'personal and social factors' such as mental health and domestic violence.

For some people the causes of homelessness can be clear cut, such as giving up an existing tenancy or a relationship breakdown. For others, the reasons will be more complex, and for these people, homelessness is not just a housing problem. Some homeless people have other difficulties and support needs, such as physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, unemployment, histories of offending and chaotic lifestyles.

People leaving prison are often vulnerable and homeless, this group is therefore at a high risk of re-offending, a risk which can be reduced by the provision of settled housing and support. People who are vulnerable as a result of spending time in prison are now considered a priority need group under the Homelessness Act 2002.

Nationally, ex – service personnel are over represented amongst the street homeless population: as many as 30% of people sleeping on the streets may have been in the armed forces at one time (Shelter 2002).

Young people (especially 16 and 17 year olds) who have to leave the family home have difficulty obtaining tenancies in their own names. They also frequently require ‘life skills’ training if they are to maintain a tenancy and not slip into arrears or behaviour patterns that may result in eviction and therefore prejudice their future chances of securing accommodation.

Young people leaving care are now catered for under the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and will have accommodation provided by Social Services but the Social Service department will first have to secure that accommodation either in the public or private sector. As will be seen later, Chester-le-Street has a significant number of young people who are either homeless or having difficulty with their housing situation.

Many people are forced to leave their homes because of violence or the threat of violence – this could be ‘domestic’ violence perpetrated by a partner or other family member or other forms of violence from someone outside the home. People may become homeless as a result of racial tension and consequent (threatened or actual) violence. Domestic violence is a key issue for Chester-le-Street to address.

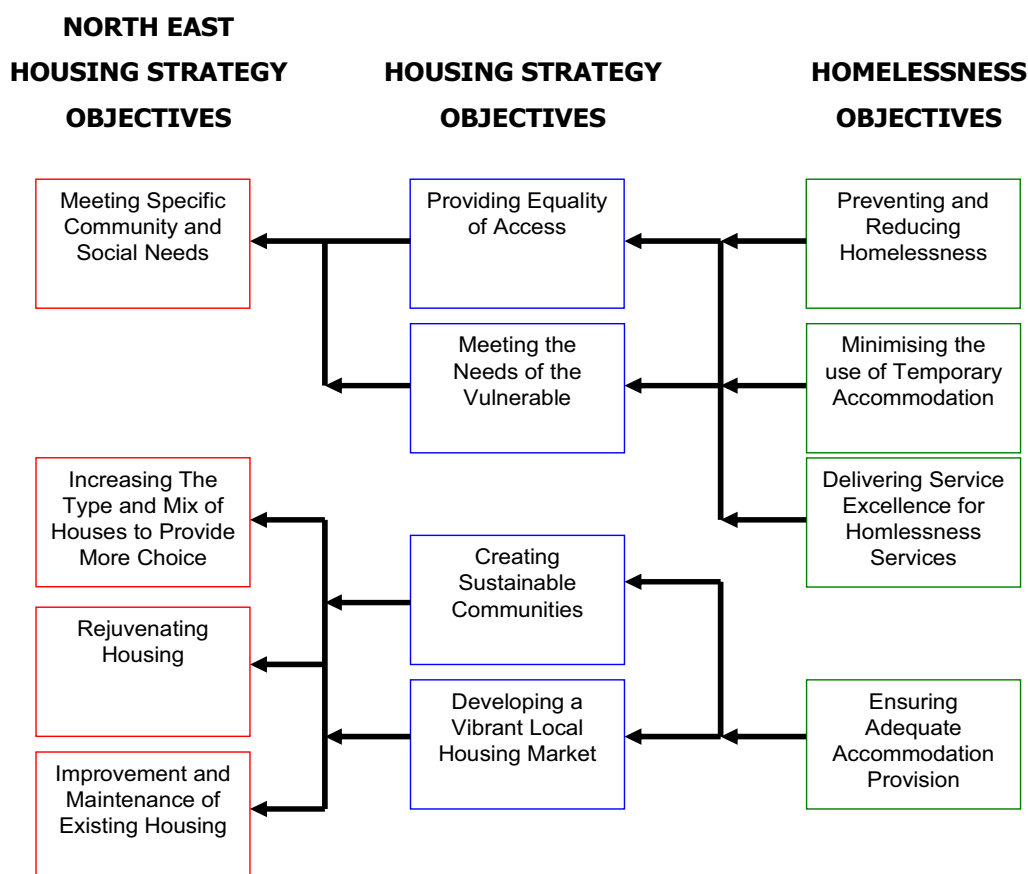
A central plank of this approach is the development of a homelessness strategy that draws together all the information and enables effective partnership working at the same time as contributing to other strategies and plans that address related issues such in health, community safety and economic regeneration.

Regional Context

North East Regional Housing Strategy

Chester-le-Street’s Homelessness Strategy is informed by and supports the priorities set out in the North East Regional Housing Strategy as set out in Diagram 2.1 below.

Diagram 2.1 Strategic Linkages



Local Context:

The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's Corporate Objectives as follows:

- Customer Excellence.
- Working in Partnership to achieve the Community Strategy.
- Meeting the Decent Homes Standard.
- Regenerating the District.
- Neighbourhood Management.
- New Ways of Working in Leisure.
- Maximising Efficiencies.

Values

- An authority that is customer focused, that understands the needs of communities and values resident and business engagement.
- An authority that is value-added based, where services are focussed on outcomes and where success is measure by the impact on the quality of life of local people.
- An authority that learns from experience and the experience of others and is open to external challenge and operates comfortably in a mixed economy.
- A council that acts as 'One Team' where staff and elected Members work together and have a clear understanding of their role and the contribution they make to service and corporate priorities.
- A culture of performance management where service plans are closely aligned to the Community Strategy and where staff development and training is prioritised.
- A Council that is accessible to everyone with a commitment to equality whilst recognising diversity.
- A Council that is active both regionally and nationally.

Chester-le-Street District Council has identified five key objectives that will support and deliver our vision:

- **Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness in the district**
Reduce homelessness by preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place, and by preventing repeat homelessness.
- **Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation**
Ensure that there is appropriate accommodation available to meet the needs of homeless people.
- **Improving Support Services for Homeless Households**
Ensure that there is appropriate support to meet the needs of homeless people.
- **Implementing Service Improvements**
Ensure the provision of excellent, customer focused homelessness and advice services.
- **Raise Homeless Policy issues with Central Government**
Work with partners to bring policy issues to the attention of central government bodies

Location

Chester-le-Street is a District located in the North of County Durham sharing its boundaries with the conurbations of Gateshead and Sunderland, historic Durham City and rural Derwentside. It covers 68 square kilometres in size and has a population of 53,300, giving it a population density of 784 people per square kilometre. The population within Chester-le-Street has risen by 3.4% since the 1991 Census compared to the North East average of a 2.8% fall. The District Council is still the largest single employer in the District with a workforce of some 560 people and a gross expenditure of £36.4 million. The main town in the District is the market town of Chester-le-Street, which is surrounded by former mining villages and rural settlements.

In order to provide a framework within which individual actions can be developed to support the vision the Council has set out a set of strategic objectives and values as follows:

- Demographics
- Local Economy
- Deprivation
- Educational Attainment
- Teenage Conceptions
- Standardised Mortality Rates
- Limiting Long Term Illness
- Crime and Disorder
- Housing

Chapter 3 - Homelessness in Chester-le-Street

The purpose of this Section is to highlight the nature and scale of homelessness within the Chester-le-Street District.

All of the information enclosed below has been sourced from the yearly returns which have been submitted by Chester-le-Street Council to the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Trends in Homeless Presentations

During 2005/06 there were 586 households who presented themselves to the Housing Options Team claiming that they were either currently homeless or could become potentially homeless in the near future (see diagram 3.1 below).

This figure has rose in 2006/07 to 737, seeing an increase in presentation of 26%.

Diagram 3.1 - Trends in Homelessness

Year	Homeless Presentations	% Increase in Presentations	Homeless Applications	% Increase in Applications	Accepted as Homeless	% Increase/decrease in Acceptances
2003/2004	N/A	N/A	239	N/A	122	N/A
2004/2006	N/A	N/A	231	-3.00%	103	-16%
2005/2006	586	N/A	273	28%	81	-22%
2006/2007	737	26%	322	18%	82	0%

In 2005/06 only 50% of these households who made an initial presentation eventually went on to make a formal Homeless Application. The successful reduction can be attributed to the improvement in the provision of information and advice given either directly by the Service or through partner agencies.

Whilst the number of households who were presented as homeless has increased in recent years, the proportion of households found to be actually unintentionally homeless and in priority need has also fallen quite markedly. This is thought to be due to a number of factors which include:

- A more thorough training of staff within the Housing Options Team leading to more consistent decisions.
- The impact of homeless prevention work by the Housing Options Team which is resulting in genuine homeless cases being resolved before the household faces a homeless crisis.

Diagram 3.2 below is a breakdown of the reasons for presentation to the Housing Options Team during 2006/07

Diagram 3.2 Reasons for Presentations

Reason for Homelessness	Total
Parents no longer willing or able to accommodate	201
Loss of rented accommodation due to termination	134
Non-violent relationship breakdown	113
Other relatives or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	98
Violent relationship	62
Other	52
Mortgage arrears	40
Rent arrears	18
Harassment	14
Person from Institution or armed forces	5
Grand Total	737

The increase in presentations can be attributable to a number of reasons to include:

- Increased awareness about the availability of homeless services in the District.
- An open door approach by the Council, which encourages households to seek help and advice at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Increased cross-agency working leading to an increase in inter-agency referrals.
- Increased publicity about the Council's prevention role.
- Loss of Council rented accommodation through the Right to Buy process within the District over recent years. Over 50% of all Council houses have been lost since the Right to Buy was introduced (See diagram 3.3)
- The limited provision of other social rented housing in the District
- A significant increases in house prices in recent years which are preventing low income households accessing the local housing market.
- Significant demolition of Council owned property as part of wider regeneration plans.
- Policy changes at national level through the introduction of the Homelessness Act 2002 which has widened the definition of homelessness.
- Increasing levels of relationship/family breakdown
- Increasing numbers of single person households, which increases the pressure on the availability of local housing supply.
- An increasing population base.

Diagram 3.3 – Losses in Council Housing Stock since 1980

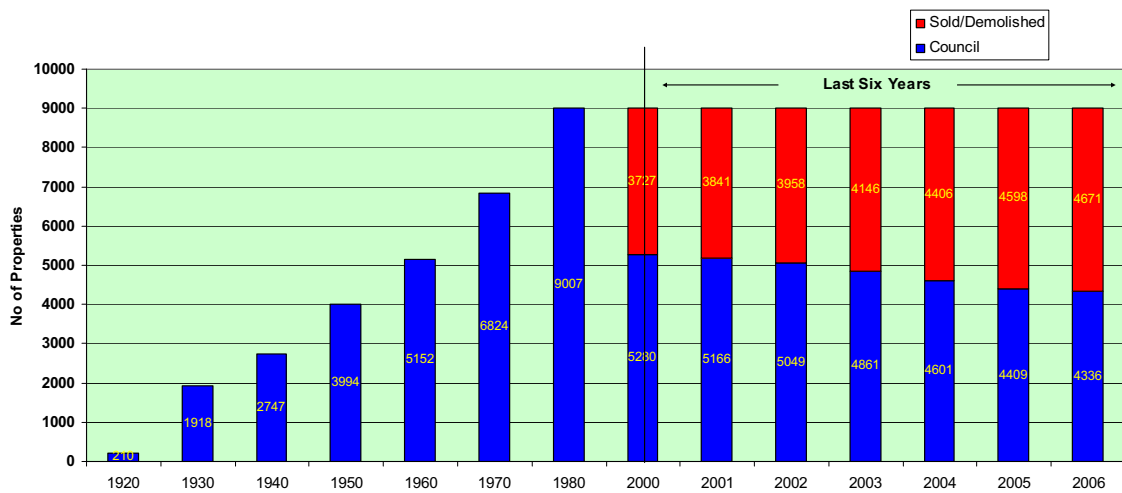


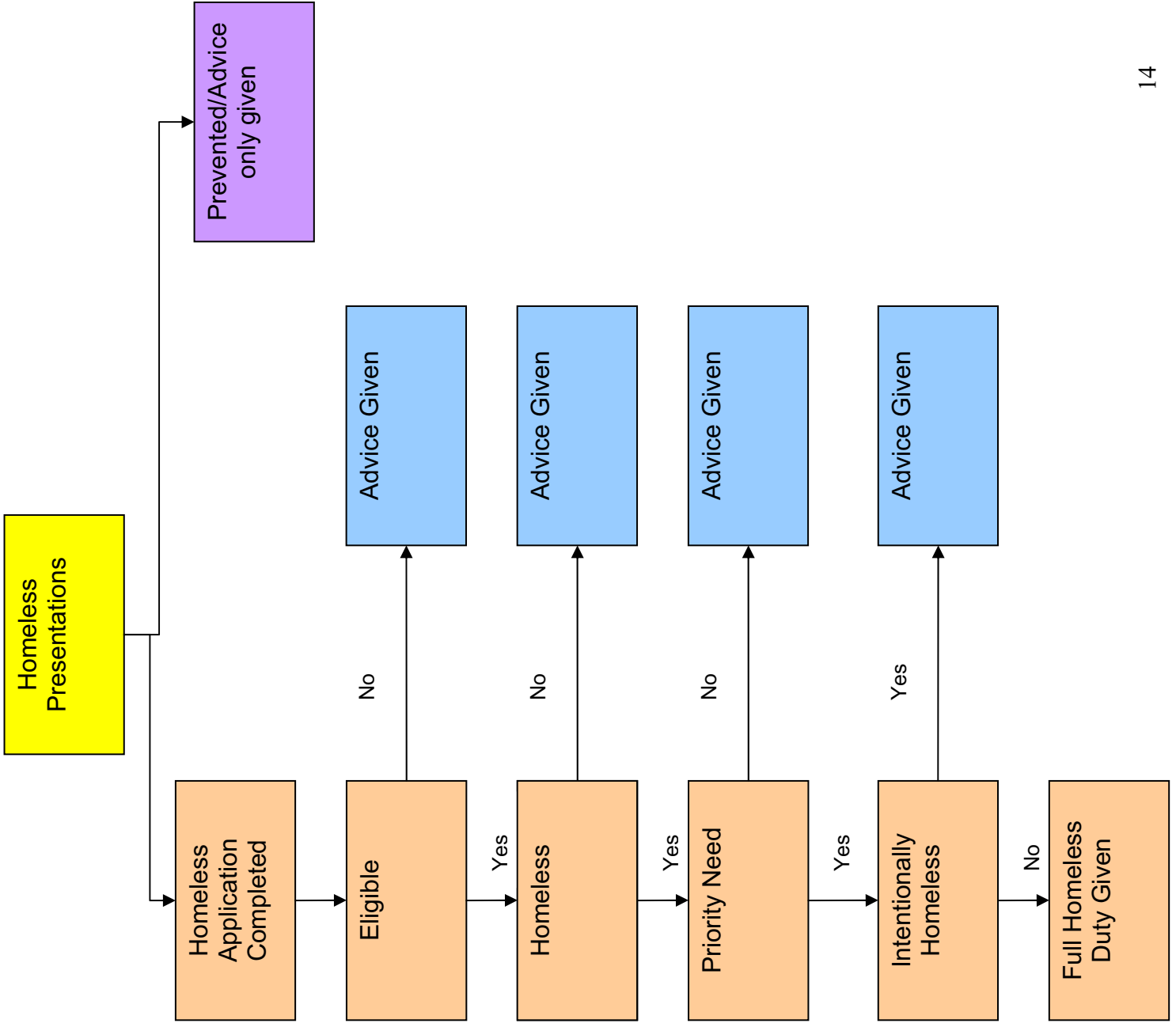
Diagram 3.4 below shows the process of all presentations to the Housing Options Team.

All applications where decisions are other than “accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need” will be given advice tailored to their needs. This will also apply to households that contact for advice only.

The following list is typical of the advice given:

- Advice on their Housing Options i.e. Council Waiting List, other RSLs and Private rented through either Private landlord Accreditation Officer or private adverts.
- Debt Advice.
- Reasons Homeless Prevention officers could assist i.e. liaise with Landlord to suspend any eviction notice.
- Mediation Service.
- Lists of other Housing Providers in Chester-le-Street and surrounding Districts.
- Referral to support agencies.

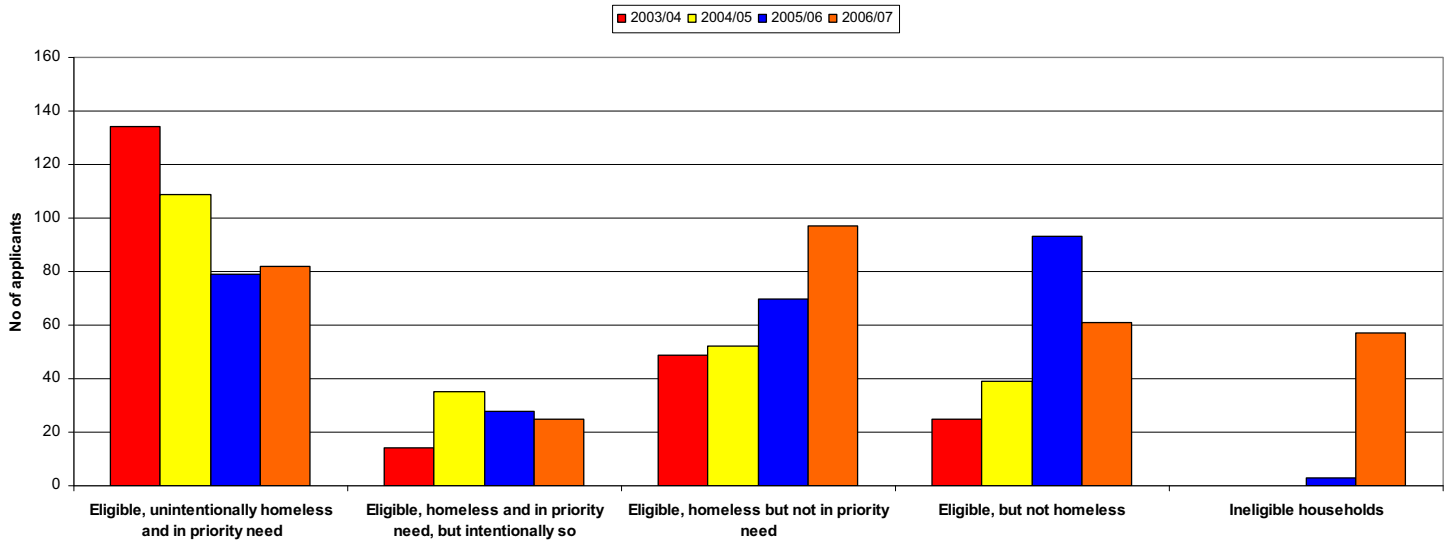
Diagram 3.4- Homelessness Flowchart



Homeless Decision Trends

The number of homeless applications found “eligible but not homeless” have increased whilst “eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need” have reduced. Early intervention by homeless staff has been the key driver to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place. (see diagram 3.5 below)

Diagram 3.5 - Homeless Decisions Trends



Age Profile of Homelessness Applicants

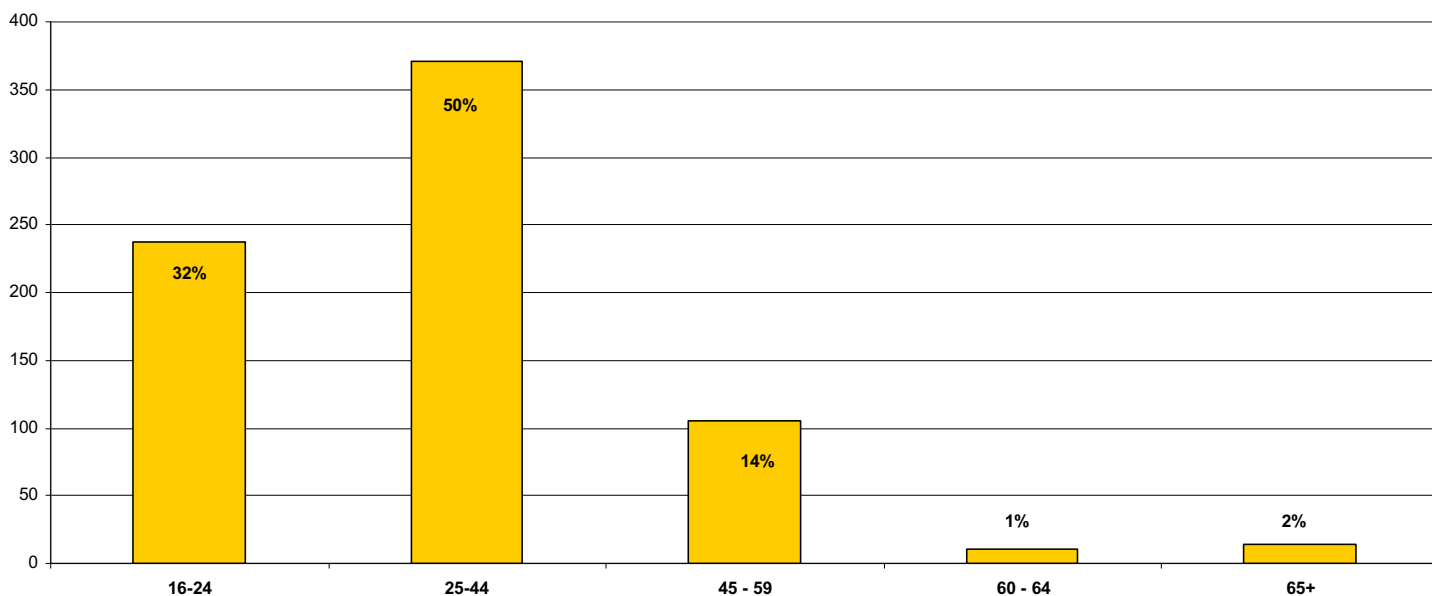
Surprisingly homelessness is not confined to the younger households i.e. those under 24 years of age. Households in the 25-44 age band are the most successful at accessing homeless services; this is thought to be because they have young children as part of the family group. Although there are comparatively few elderly households presenting as homeless they are also the least successful age group at accessing homelessness services.

Diagram 3.6 - Age Profile of Homeless Households 2006/2007

Age Band	Presenting Households	%	Homeless Applications	%	Successful Applicant	%
16-24	237	32	138	43	35	42
25-44	371	50	145	45	40	49
45 – 59	105	14	26	8	6	7
60 – 64	10	2	13	4	1	1
65+	14	2	0	0	0	0
Total Applicants	737	100	322	100	82	100

The main age group who seek advice and assistance are the 25-44 year olds followed by the 16-24 year olds. 45–59 year olds are the most successful at moving onto the homeless application stage but it would appear that they have a very low rate of success compared with the other two age groups. This is thought to be because of the younger age group being more vulnerable.

Diagram 3.7 – Age Profile of Homeless Applicants

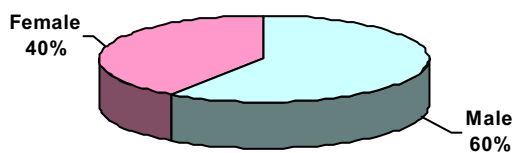


Gender of Applicants

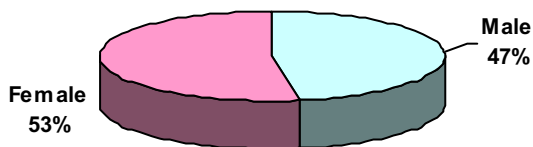
Over the last two years the number of females approaching the housing options team have increased. 237 females approached the council in 2005/06 seeking homeless advice and assistance as opposed to 387 in 2006/07. During the same period the number of males approaching the service for advice and assistance has reduced from 349 to 350 applicants.

Diagram 3.8 – Gender Profile

2005/06



2006/07



Priority Need Profile

All homeless households are assessed in line with the legislation and based around priority need; the breakdown is shown in diagram 3.9.

Diagram 3.9 – Priority Needs Profile

Priority Need Category	2004/05	%	2005/06	%	2006/07	%
Households With Dependent Children	69	63	49	61	53	65
16/17 Year Old Applicant	10	9	11	14	5	6
Household Contains Pregnant Female	5	5	8	10	12	15
Household Member Suffering From a Mental Illness	4	4	4	4	0	0
Household Member With a Physical Disability	2	2	3	4	2	2
Fleeing Violence	6	5	2	2	1	1
Other Social Reasons	7	6	3	4	4	5
Care Leavers	1	1	1	1	2	2
Emergency at Home	3	3	0	0	0	0
Household Contains Elderly Person	2	2	0	0	3	4
Ex Forces	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ex Offender	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicants	109	100	81	100	82	100

As diagram 3.9 illustrates the majority of applicants accepted as being unintentionally homeless and in priority need are “households with dependant children”. However this has been declining and there has been an increase of 16/17 year olds and pregnant women presenting themselves to the Council.

Reasons for Homelessness

“Parental Exclusion” is the biggest factor in homelessness cases for Chester-le-Street; accounting for almost one-third of all reasons given by homeless households. With violence or the threat of violence is the next largest factor. (See diagram 3.10)

Diagram 3.10 - Reasons for Homeless Households

Reason for Homelessness	2004/05	%	2005/06	%	2006/07	%
Asked to Leave by Parents	22	20	24	30	22	27
Violence/Threats of Violence	23	21	22	27	7	8
Relationship Breakdown	19	17	9	11	13	15
Loss of Private Accommodation	21	19	11	14	15	18
Rent Arrears	4	4	6	7	2	3
Harassment	5	5	4	5	2	3
Asked to leave by friends/relatives	2	2	3	4	11	13
Mortgage Arrears	1	1	1	1	4	5
In Care/Institution	7	6	0	0	1	2
Other	5	5	1	1	5	6
Asylum Seekers	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Applicants	109	100	81	100	82	100

Homelessness and Ethnicity

Chester-le-Street District Council is committed to constantly improving services and ensuring that all sections of the community have equal access to them. We are also committed to eliminating all forms of discriminatory practice in respect of all social factors such as age, disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, nationality, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. Diagram 3.11 below shows the breakdown of Ethnic Groups who have completed a Homeless Application with the Housing Options Team.

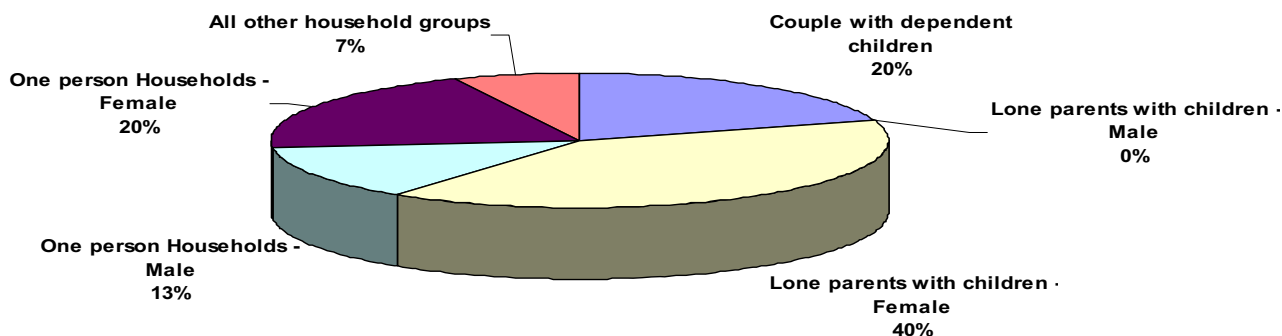
Diagram 3.11 – Ethnicity profile

Ethnic Grouping	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
White	221	235	272	320
African/Caribbean	0	0	1	1
Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi	0	0	0	0
Other Ethnic	1	0	0	1
Ethnic Origin Unknown	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	222	235	273	322

Presentations by Household Type

Lone female parents with children make up over one-half of all homeless households (see diagram 3.12 below).

Diagram 3.12

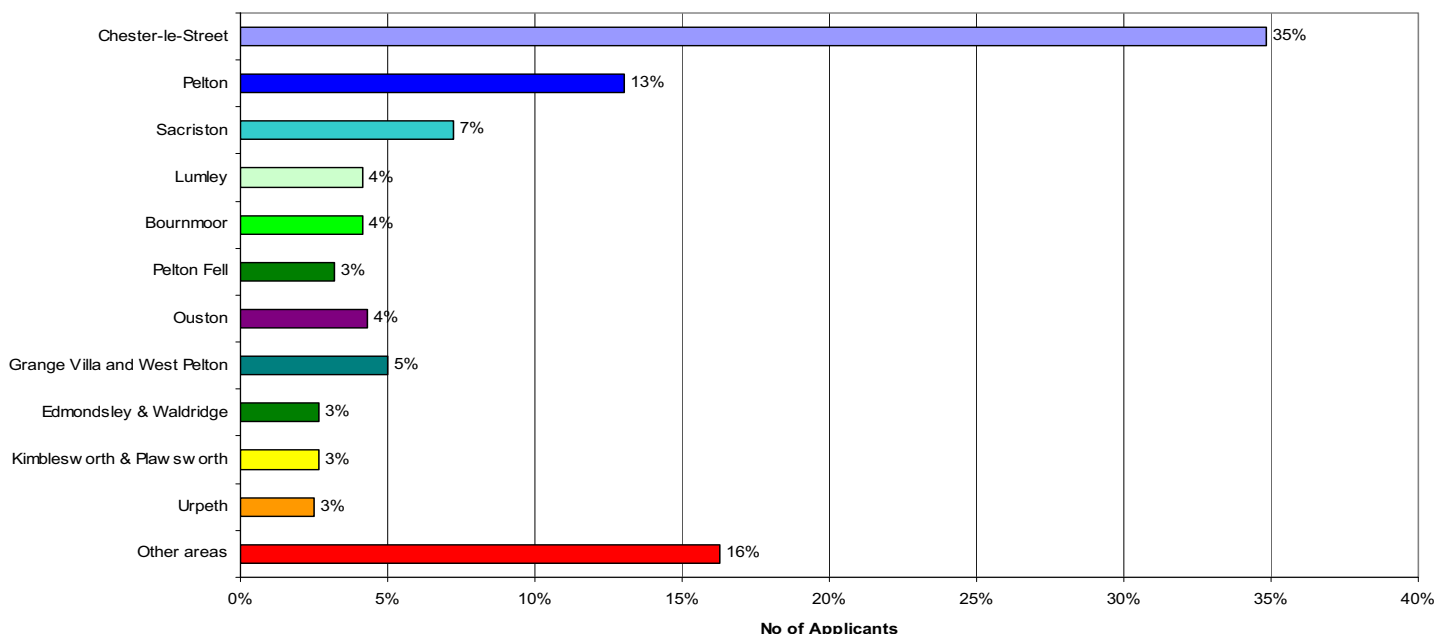


Presentation by Area

As indicated earlier there were 737 presentations during 2006/07. 603 of these households were living within the Chester-le-Street District with a further 134 households approaching the Council from outside of the area. Areas with larger resident populations such as Chester-le-Street, Pelton and Sacriston make up the majority of homeless presentations. The Service receives fewer potentially homeless enquiries from outlying villages in the District.

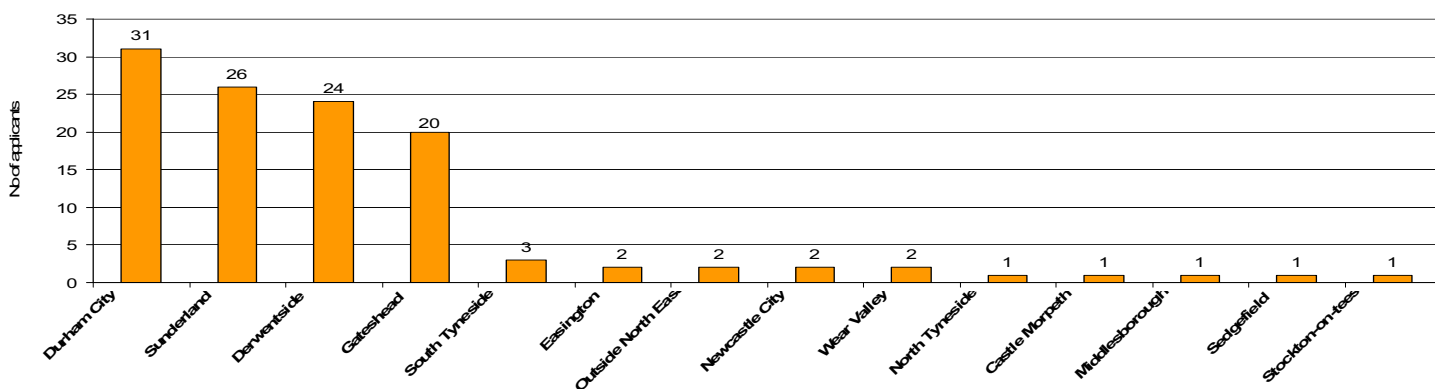
Promotional work has taken place in the areas with posters and leaflets being displayed in various location i.e. Doctors surgeries, advice and drop in centres, post offices etc. In addition, home visits or visits in a convenient location are offered to applicants who have expressed a difficulty in attending an appointment at the Civic Centre.

Diagram 3.13 – Presentations within the Chester-le-Street area



18% of all presentations who applied for advice and support from the Housing Options Team came from outside the District or from an institution such as prison. A number of these applicants who applied were referred by the Council to the area where their local connection was under the “local connection” rule. The Gateshead area produced the biggest number of applicants (mainly from Birtley) but Derwentside (Stanley and Consett) and Durham were also significant.

Diagram 3.14 Presentations outside of the District -



Rough Sleeping

The Council conducted a rough sleeper count in 2004 and found that 5 people were sleeping rough.

According to DCLG Guidance “Where estimates remain low (less than 10 rough sleepers), Local Authorities do not have to undertake a formal rough sleeper count. However it is good practice to have a count every 3-5 years and a count should be undertaken where authorities have estimated more than 10 rough sleepers”.

The Housing Options Team liaise with local stakeholders to ensure that advice is given to any person identified as Sleeping Rough. Visits would be made to the location and discussion with the rough sleeper on options available to them.

Gypsies and Travellers

Section 225 of the Housing Act 2004 has placed a duty on Local Housing Authorities to carry out an accommodation needs assessment of gypsies and travellers.

The Guidance states “Every local housing authority must, when undertaking a review of housing needs in their district under section 8 of the Housing Act 1985(c.68), carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers residing in or resorting to their district”

County Durham Districts Councils have in partnership appointed a consultant to carry out an Assessment of the Accommodation Needs of Gypsy and Travellers. A draft of this report has been published in July 2007 and considerations are not being given to the recommendations.

Domestic Violence

Diagram 3.15 is an illustration from the police on the number of complaints of domestic violence every year.

Diagram 3.15 - Domestic Violence Complaints Profile

Period	Number of Incidents	Number of Repeat Victims	% Repeat Victims
Apr-04	67	19	28
May-04	42	17	41
Jun-04	65	16	25
Jul-04	65	22	34
Aug-04	55	10	18
Sep-04	56	15	27
Oct-04	47	14	30
Nov-04	42	12	29
Dec-04	63	18	29
Jan-05	64	18	28
Feb-05	59	16	27
Mar-05	40	12	30
Total	665	189	28

Very few of the individuals who lodge a complaint with the Police ever make a formal presentation as a homeless household. Through funding from the CDPR a Domestic Violence Coordinator has been employed to developed services for Durham and Chester-le-Street.

Temporary Accommodation

The Council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation to households who are believed to be in priority need until such time as the assessment is complete and the Council can make a definite decision as to whether the household are homeless or not; the homeless applicants would either stay in their present address, stay in bed and breakfast accommodation or be provided with specialist supported accommodation, for example, if the household was fleeing domestic violence. During 2005/2006 a total of 34 households were provided with accommodation in this way as follows:

- All 34 households were placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- No households were placed in hostel accommodation.
- There were no households referred to the women's refuge.

Chapter 4 - Priorities and Actions

Objectives

The purpose of this section is to set out what the priorities for the Council are to deliver improved homelessness services over the next 3 years.

Chester-le-Street Council's vision is:

“Working together to fulfil the needs of our communities”

We want this Homelessness Strategy to contribute to the vision by achieving the following outcomes:

Priority 1 - Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness in the district

Effective prevention will enable a person to remain in their current home, where appropriate. This prevention will allow for a planned move into suitable alternative accommodation. Housing authorities should take steps to prevent homelessness wherever possible, offering a wide range of advice and assistance for those in housing need. Early intervention to prevent homelessness is to the benefit of any person in housing need and can be considered in 3 stages:

- **Early Identification – targeting resources to those groups that are known to be in need and working with partnering agencies to ensure the services and protocols are in place**
- **Pre-Crisis Intervention – have services in place to prevent homelessness even if it only delays homelessness to allow a planned move to alternative accommodation**
- **Preventing repeat homelessness – ensuring correct support services are in place to ensure tenancy sustainment.**

Action Points:

Action Point 1 Home Visits on Parental Exclusion: Home Visits will be completed where appropriate for all presentations to the Housing Options Team who face homelessness through family exclusion. It will be preferable for both the parent and child to be present. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 2 Mediation Service for 16/25 year olds: Continued use of the County Wide Mediation service supplied by NHC Support2Talk will be used for 16-25 year olds. These are independent mediators and will be used both to try and prevent Homelessness and to build on family relations to support a young person in a tenancy. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 3 Mediation Service for all Households: Explore use of a Mediation Service for all households by March 2008. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 4 Joint Protocol for 16/17 year olds: The County Wide Joint Protocol will be used for all 16 and 17 year olds who present as Homelessness to any agency. This involves a panel meetings being held to draw up a long term plan for the young person with the voluntary sector (SHAID) being involved to act as an advocate. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 5 Early notification from other departments/agencies of potentially homeless households: Have protocols in place with all other relevant council departments and other partnering agencies to refer any potential homeless cases by March 2008. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 6 Early notification from Private Landlords: Agreements in place with Private Landlords on Councils' Accreditation Scheme of issues with tenants that may result in legal action being taken. Early intervention by the Housing Options Team will help to reduce costs for the Landlord and also ensure the tenant has the support and advice they require to conduct a satisfactory tenancy. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 7 Provide Support to vulnerable Households to prevent repeat Homelessness: Ensure all households are offered the correct support in their tenancy to ensure that the tenancy is conducted satisfactorily. This support will range from limited in-house support to referrals to support agencies. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 8 Liaise with Landlords to provide advice/assistance to tenants facing eviction: Agreements in place with all Private, RSL and Council Landlords to refer any households threatened with re-possession or eviction procedures. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 9 Peer Education: Develop and progress a Peer Education Group of 16-25 year olds will assist the Housing Options Team is assessing current and future services for young people in Chester-le-Street. In addition the group will run awareness raising sessions on Homelessness with schools and agencies to improve the knowledge and awareness of the service. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 10 Services for Victims of Domestic Abuse: Work with the Chester-le-street and Durham Domestic Violence Coordinator to develop services within the district for households fleeing Domestic Abuse. This will provide the household with the support and advice they require to assist them to leave the domestic situation and the support they require to assist rebuilding their life. This initiative will also attract funding for the initiative from charitable organisations. *Lead: Housing Options Manager and Domestic Violence Coordinator*

Action Point 11 Partnership working with mortgage lenders and courts to provide advice and assistance to households facing re-possession: Have protocols in place with mortgage lenders and costs for the early warning of households facing re-possession through non-payments of their mortgage. This will enable the Housing Options Team to ensure the household has received the correct advice and support or referrals to other agency to try and assist them in their mortgage payments. In addition if the re-possession cannot be stopped it will allow the Housing Options Team to work with the Household to secure alternative accommodation before they are actually homeless. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Priority 2 - Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation

The availability of a settled, affordable home is vital part of tackling homelessness and creating sustainable communities. Work needs to be done with all Housing providers to ensure our customers have access to suitable affordable accommodation. It is now a government requirement to half the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010. Although Chester-le-Street has met this target we must ensure services are in place to continue to provide settled accommodation. We must ensure that there is appropriate accommodation available to meet the needs of homeless people.

Action Points:

Action Point 12 Nomination Agreements with RSLs: Nomination agreements in place and monitored with all RSLs in the area to ensure the correct number of nomination requests are received. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 13 Bond Scheme: The Bond Scheme is delivered in line with the Private Landlord Accreditation scheme. CLS guarantees the Bond to the Landlord in the event of damage or rent arrears to the property and also allows homeless households to access private accommodation who would otherwise be unable to do so because of the bond. *Lead: Housing Options Manager and Private Landlord Accreditation Officer*

Action Point 14 Private Landlord Accreditation Scheme: Publicise the Private Landlord Accreditation scheme to encourage more Landlords onto the scheme. Develop referral protocol between the Private Landlord Accreditation Officer and the Housing Options Team. *Lead: Housing Options Manager and Private Landlord Accreditation Officer*

Action Point 15 Referrals to Supported Accommodation for 16-25 year olds where supported living is the best option: Not every 16-25 year old who presents as Homeless is suitable to be housed directly into a tenancy therefore each case must be assessed and is necessarily referred to a supported housing scheme. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 16 Work with partners to developed supported living scheme Chester-le-Street District area: Continued work with Sunderland YMCA Foyer to develop a supported living scheme in Chester-le-Street for 16-25 year olds. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Priority 3 - Improving Support Services for homeless households

For some people, the causes of homelessness are complex and homelessness cannot be resolved by just providing accommodation. People may have mental health or substance misuse problems and in many cases chaotic lifestyles. Service must be in place to respond to the needs of these people in both the short and long term.

Action Points:

Action Point 17 Provide support for vulnerable Households via internal resources: Assess each homeless household and ensure that the correct support is given. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 18 Refer to support agencies as required for the individual: For those households with more complex needs refer to appropriate support agencies. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 19 Establish Service Level Agreements with Support Agencies to extend and monitor the support available: Ensure service levels agreements are in place with all support agencies to ensure Chester-le-Street receives the best possible service for its service users by March 2008. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 20 Establish a Homeless Hostel: Explore the possibility of specialist Homeless Hostel to use as temporary Accommodation in place of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 21 Establish a protocol for joint working with the Community Mental Health Team:

Liaise with the community mental health team to ensure protocols are in place so that people with mental health needs can access housing. In addition to ensure support services are in place for those with mental health needs whilst in accommodation.

Priority 4 - Implementing service improvements

The Chester-le-Streets Corporate plan sets out ways to improving the services for our customers by improving customer care while providing new ways to access our services. This strategy will link to this by ensuring the provision of excellent, customer focused homelessness and advice services.

Action Points:

Action Point 22 Continue to work with the Homeless Focus Group to improve the Housing

Options Service: Work with the focus group on service delivery and planned work. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 23 Hold Annual Homelessness Focus Day: Invite service users to attend a Focus day get feed back from them on the service they received and what can be done to improve the service.

Lead: Housing Options Manager

Action Point 24 Work with and hold Homeless Strategy Steering Group meetings quarterly:

Meet quarterly with the Homeless Strategy Steering Group to monitor and review the Strategy. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 25 Review Homeless Policy: Review existing Homeless Policy and make a summary version available by March 2008. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Action Point 26 Promotion of Housing Options Service: Continued promotion of the Housing Options Service including training for Council staff and partnering agencies. *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Priority 5 - Raise Homeless Policy issues with Central Government

We will work with partners to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of homelessness by conducting research, examining policies and offering practical solutions. The result of this work will be fed into Central government to feed future policies.

Action Point 27 Work with partners to bring policy issues to the attention of central government bodies *Lead: Housing Options Manager*

Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy in the Future

The purpose of this Section is to set out how the Council will review and update the Strategy in the future. Chester-le-Street District Council will:

- Work with partners within the Homelessness Steering Group to oversee the implementation of the strategy, ensure that it is reflected within: relevant local plans and strategies and to influence commissioning decisions about services designed for or received by homeless people.
- Review available resource and ensure it is designated to the most appropriate service area.
- Review our progress against the Housing Option Team Plan and report the findings to the Homelessness Steering Group and to the Plan Clinics.
- Undertake a review of the strategy during 2009, and produce our next Homelessness Strategy by the end of 2009.
- Report 6 monthly to Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Chapter 5 - Performance Management

Partnership Working

The purpose of this Section is to explain Partnership Structures in Chester-le-Street relevant to the delivery of the Council's Homelessness Strategy.

Partnership Structures

Whilst the Council has statutory responsibilities to deal with homelessness, it cannot solve the challenges and problems of homelessness alone, nor can it deliver all of the services that are needed to give support, assistance and advice to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. It is therefore essential that we have strong and established partnerships that are effective with both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

The Council has developed its homelessness service in consultation with partner agencies through the Homeless Action Partnership as illustrated in diagram 5.1. In addition the Strategy will be seen to influence other Strategies and Plans within Chester-le-Street District Council as illustrated in diagram 5.2.

Detailed below are the main partners we will work with to enable appropriate support is provided to homeless households.

The Housing Options team undertakes vulnerability assessments for all homeless households in order to identify the appropriate support package that is required. Households can then be sign posted or referred to the appropriate support organisation:

- Social Services
- Primary Care Trust
- Shelter
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- National Childrens Homes Mediation Service
- Other Council Departments
- Home Improvement Agency
- Supported Housing/ Floating Support Providers: Norcare, DISC (Developing Initiatives Supporting Communities), DART (Disc Accommodation Resource Team), YMCA Foyer, Stonham
- Centrepoint
- Private Landlords
- Registered Social Landlords: Durham Aged Mineworkers, Home Housing, Johnnie Johnson, Three Rivers Housing, Nomad, Places for People, Accent, Two Castles
- Probation
- Domestic Violence Refuge
- Community Mental Health Team
- Drug Action Team
- Sure-Start
- Domestic Violence Practitioners Group
- Teenage Pregnancy Board
- Connexions

Diagram 5.1 Partnership Framework in County Durham

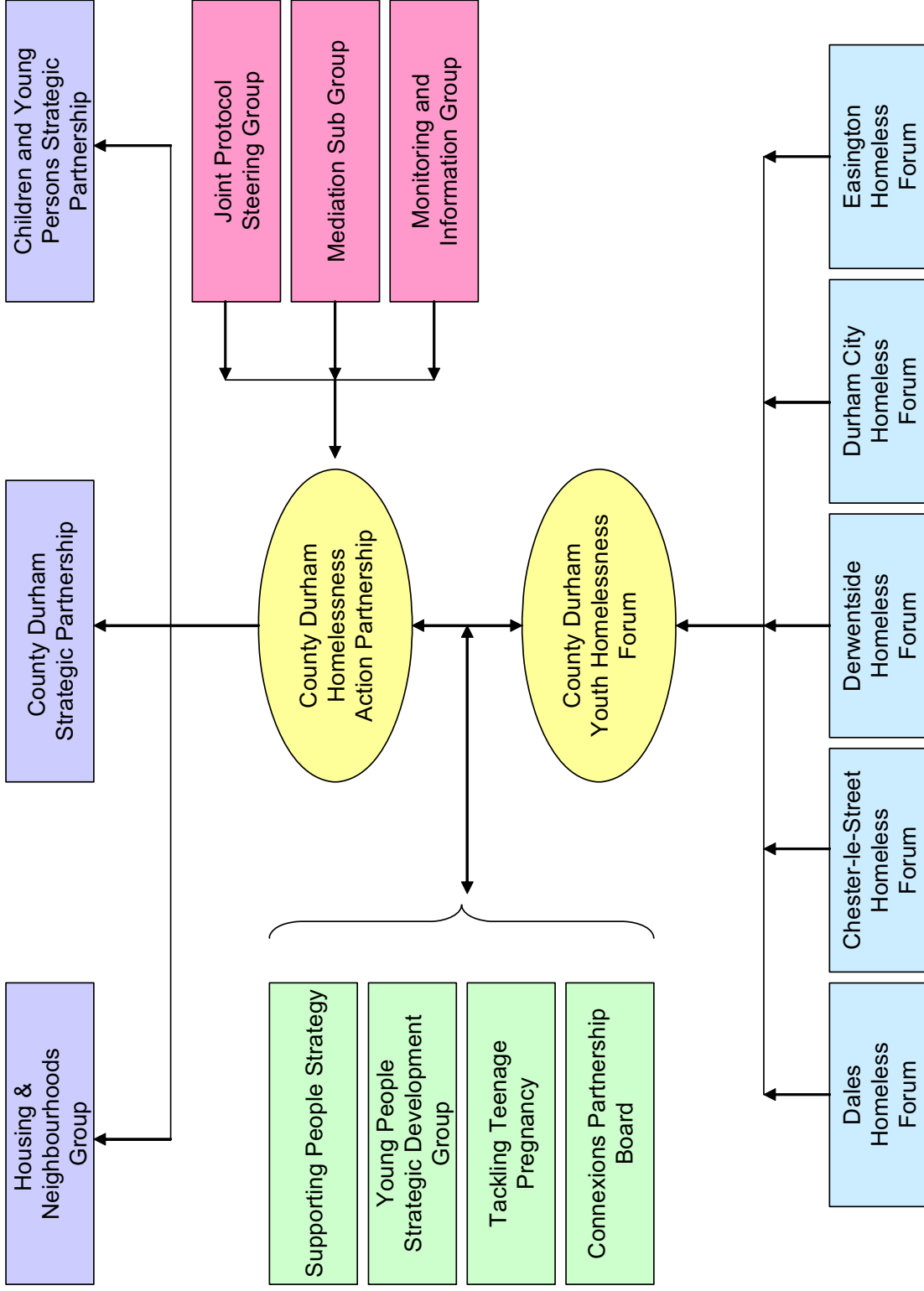
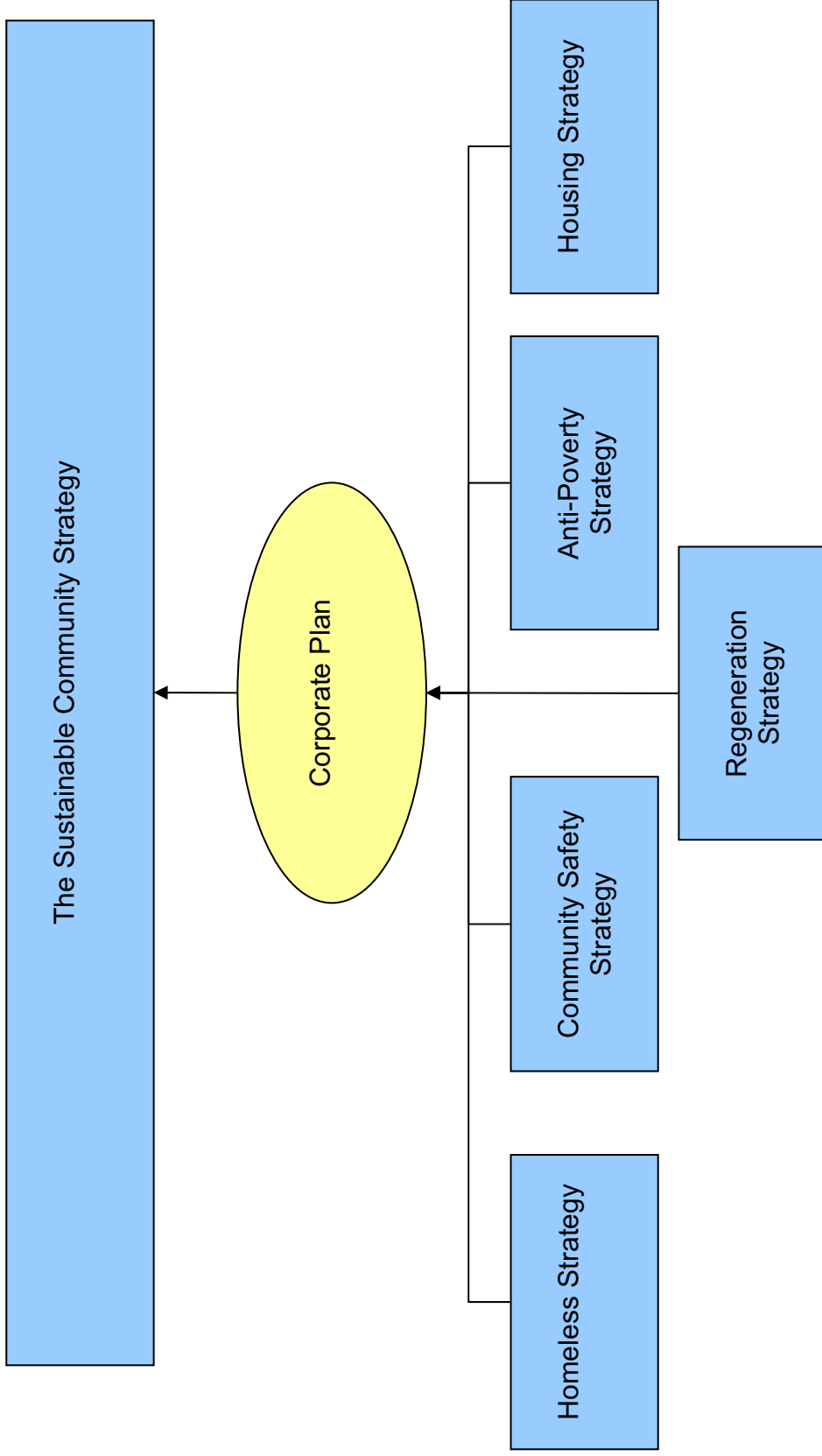


Diagram 5.2 Partnership Framework in Chester-le-Street District Council



Working with Service Users

Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2005

The results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2005 show that of the 98 households who had used the homelessness service nearly one-half of them considered the staff to have been helpful (47%) but almost one-third of tenants who had used the service considered the staff to have been unhelpful (30%).

Staff were considered to have been most helpful during office hours (53%), although 35% said the time of day made no difference.

Almost two thirds of respondents said their circumstances had been handled sensitively (59%) but almost one third (32%) said their circumstances had not been handled sensitively.

Homeless Service User Focus Day

A Service User Focus Day was held to receive feedback from those users who had previously accessed the homelessness service. The focus group comprised of users who had obtained Council accommodation via the homelessness service and those who had not.

Feedback from the Service User Focus Day is detailed below:

- Would like the Housing Options Team to offer a rental agency type service.
- Interview Rooms should be made more comfortable.
- The main reception in the Civic Centre should be improved to offer more privacy.
- Would like the Housing Options Team to avoid the use of the phrase “homeless investigation” as it implies criminality.
- Would like advice packs or booklets to be available in the Civic Centre.
- Sometimes policies conflict between agencies which cause confusion.
- Would like more staff to be employed so that they can spend more time explaining the options.
- Would like there to be less red tape.
- Want services to be delivered consistently.
- Managers often move the goals posts after discussing the case with the case officer.
- Would like more choice of accommodation.
- Would like more support services.
- Would like a feedback box to be provided in reception.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

A Satisfaction Survey is sent out to every contact to the Housing Options Team (see diagram 5.3). In addition, a second survey is forwarded to every client that completes a homeless application form (see diagram 5.4). This feedback is used to assist the development of the service and realise the strengths and weaknesses in the service delivery.

The feedback is detailed below:

Diagram 5.3
Initial Assessment Satisfaction Surveys

Initial Assessment Application							
	Jun 2006	Jul 2006	Aug 2006	Sep 2006	Oct 2006	Nov 2006	Total
RECEPTION STAFF							
Were the reception staff courteous and polite	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Was your case handled sensitively	100%	87%	83%	100%	100%	0%	94%
Was it explained that the Housing Options Team operate an appointment system	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Were you given an appointment that was convenient and suitable to you	100%	87%	100%	100%	100%	0%	97%
HOUSING OPTIONS STAFF							
Did the member of staff give their name	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Was the interview carried out in a private interview room	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%
Were you given time to explain your situation/circumstances	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Were your circumstances handled sensitively	100%	93%	83%	100%	100%	0%	95%
Was your housing options explained	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	0%	99%
Was the next stage in the process clearly explained to you	100%	93%	83%	100%	100%	0%	95%
Were you given an Information pack	100%	87%	100%	100%	100%	0%	97%

Diagram 5.4
Homeless Application Satisfaction Surveys

Homeless Application							
	Jun 2006	Jul 2006	Aug 2006	Sep 2006	Oct 2006	Nov 2006	Total
RECEPTION STAFF							
Courteous and polite	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	96%
handled sensitively	70%	100%	100%	100%	75%	0%	89%
HOUSING OPTIONS STAFF							
Staff give name	90%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	98%
Private interview room	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%
Situation circumstances	90%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	98%
circumstances sensitive	70%	100%	100%	100%	75%	0%	89%
explain housing options	70%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	94%
next stage explained	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	96%
DECISION TIME							
decision time	60%	100%	100%	100%	75%	0%	87%
writing decision	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0%	100%
clear and understandable	100%	100%	100%	100%	75%	0%	95%

This Section describes the performance of the Housing Options Team in delivering services to homeless applicants.

The performance of the Housing Options Team is made in the following ways:

Best Value Performance Indicators

A range of Best Value Performance Indicators are measured and reported annually to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The performance of the Council can be compared with every other council in the country.

Ref	Description	Current Target	Performance 2005/06
BVPI 183 (a)	The average length of stay in bed and breakfast accommodation by households containing pregnant women or dependent children	3 weeks	0.79 weeks
BVPI 183 (b)	The average length of stay in hostels by households containing pregnant women or dependent children	3 Weeks	0
BVPI 202	The count of rough sleepers	0-10	4
BVPI 203	The percentage change in the number of families placed in temporary accommodation.	-9%	-48.68%
BVPI 213	Number of households where prevention prevented homelessness	0.8	2
BVPI 214	Percentage of homeless households who are presenting as homeless for a second time within the last 2 years	0	0
BVPI 225	Domestic Violence Service rating (Maximum score 10)	100%	36.4%

Local Performance Indicators

The Service sets Local Performance Indicators which are not always easy to compare with other providers but they do provide useful information about local service performance.

Ref	Description	Target	Performance 2005/06
HSLPH01	Average length of time taken to assess a Homeless Application	23 days	23.57 days

Service Statistics (New for 2006/07)

The Service records a number of service statistics. These are used to assess the volume of work being undertaken by the Housing Options Team.

Ref	Description	Target	Performance 2005/06 (until 30/9)
HSST23	% of applicants in immediate homelessness interviewed the same day	100%	100%
HSST24	% of routine appointments carried out within 10 working days	100%	100%
HSST25	%of applications assessed within 33 days	100%	100%
HSST 26	%of applicants notified in writing within 3 days	100%	97%
HSST 27	% of review decisions made within 8 weeks	100%	96%

Resources

The purpose of this Section is to identify the resources available to the Council to support homelessness activity in the District.

Revenue Resources

Year	Budget	Percentage Increase (Year on Year)	Percentage Increase (Since 2003 baseline)	Homeless Presentations	Cost Per Presentation
2003/2004	£76,910			469	£163.99
2004/2005	£85,380	11.01%	11.01%	597	£143.02
2005/2006	£108,610	27.21%	41.22%	586	£185.34
2006/2007	£125,290	15.36%	62.90%	586	£213.81

NOTE: The figures in red font in the above table are predictions

Priority Needs Funding

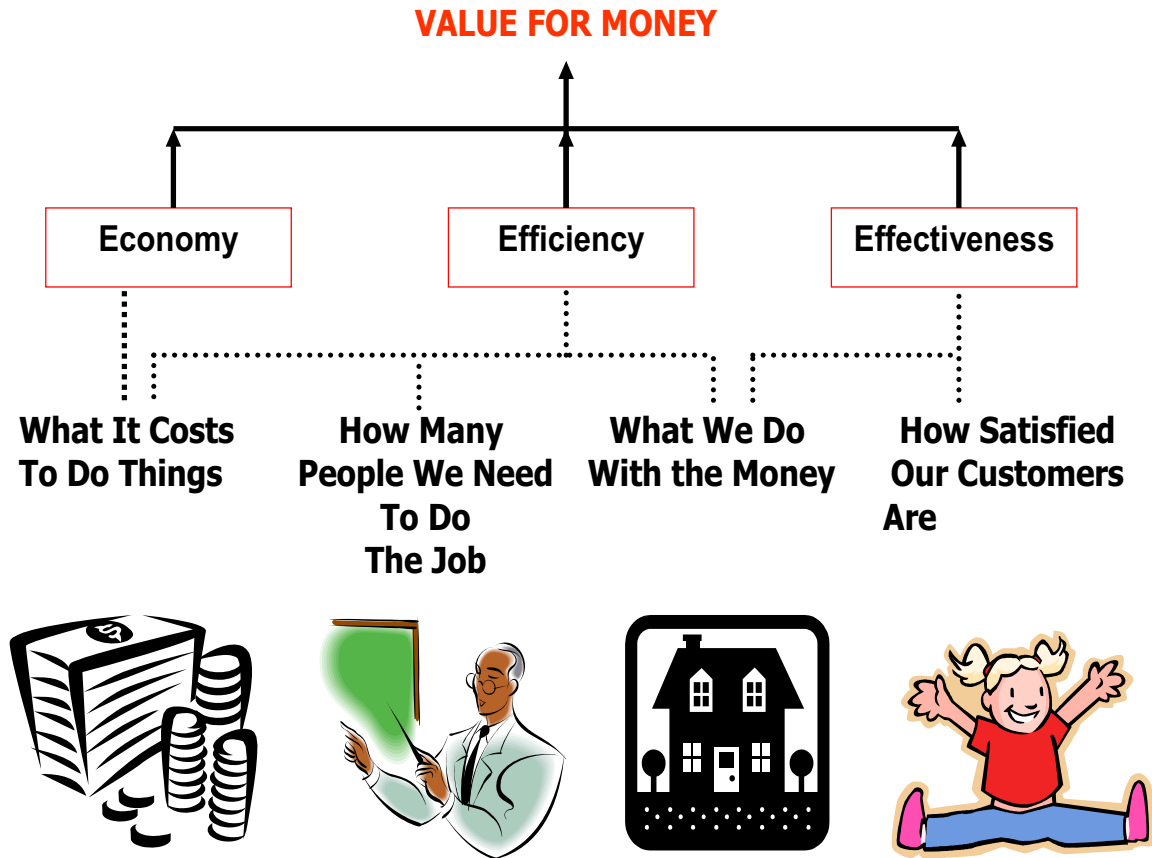
The Council secured £20,000 Priority Needs Funding in 2004/2005. This has increased to £35,000 for 2006 to 2008.

Value for Money Assessment

The Council assesses value for money by measuring the:

- Economy (what services cost).
- Efficiency (what is produced by the service).
- Effectiveness (what customer impact services have).

Diagram 5.5 Value for Money Framework



The Council rates its Homelessness Service as offering good value for money for service users for the following reasons:

Economy

Year	Chester-le-Street	Best Performers	Average Performers	Poor Performers
2001	£0.25	£2.10	£1.40	£0.60
2002	£0.60	£2.50	£1.45	£0.60
2003	£1.40	£3.10	£1.50	£0.90
2004	£1.30	£3.60	£1.75	£1.10

Efficiency

The Housing Options Team provides a customer focused Housing Options Service, giving advice and assistance to all service users relating to housing need. Furthermore referrals to specialist agencies will also be used where appropriate depending on the needs of the service user. These agencies are:

- Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) for Debt Advice.
- Outreach Services for Domestic Abuse.
- Floating Support Services for vulnerable Households.
- Department of Working Pensions (DWP) for income advice.

Services within the Team are now being developed to prevent Homelessness from occurring in the first place therefore:

- Reducing numbers of presentations from service users when they are actually homeless.
- Reducing the need for the use of temporary accommodation.
- Reducing the need to use Bed and Breakfast Accommodation.

Promotion and advertising of the service is also encouraging service users to contact the Housing Options Team early to help to prevent Homelessness occurring.

Relationship building and training with other council departments and agencies is also encouraging early referrals of potentially homeless applicants.

Effectiveness

This service provides all residents in the Chester-le-Street with a free impartial Housing Advice Service. This service is available all year round, with an emergency out-of-hours service for those in immediate housing need.

In addition, the Housing Options Team will ensure each service user has the correct support services involved and be referred to specialist agencies if not.

Prevention of Homelessness or repeat Homelessness is now a key priority. Service users are encouraged to contact the Housing Options Team as early as possible to increase the possibility of the Homelessness being prevented and therefore reducing the need to complete a full homeless assessment.

The Council has made a number of changes in the last 12 months that have improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the Services it delivers and these are detailed in Appendix 2.

Gershon Efficiency Savings

The Council estimates that it has:

- Reduced Housing Benefit expenditure by £600,000 in 2004/2005 by using local authority accommodation to provide temporary housing rather than use bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Saved the General Fund an estimated £100,000 through the non use of bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Saved £80,000 through more efficient working - a combination of:
 - Higher case load is being achieved with the same staffing resource.
 - Mediation and other prevention services have reduced homeless acceptances by 50%.
- Used 2 modern apprentices rather than full time administrative support saving £20,000.

Appendix One: Local Context

Demographics

Chester-le-Street has a population of 53,300. The population of the District is estimated to increase by 13.51% to 2011 and by 16.7% to 2021. If population estimates are correct then there will be 62,200 people living in Chester-le-Street in 2021. The increasing population base is expected to place significant burdens on demands for services during the next 15 years.

42% of all households in the District are married couple households against 36.8% in the North East region. 6.1% of households are lone parent households with dependent children.

Diagram 1 Population Profile

Age Group	Males	Females	Persons	Percent
Under 5	1,400	1,500	2,800	5.25%
5 to 14	3,400	3,300	6,700	12.57%
15 to 19	1,600	1,600	3,100	5.82%
20 to 24	1,300	1,200	2,500	4.69%
25 to 44	7,500	8,000	15,600	29.27%
45 to 64	7,100	7,200	14,300	26.83%
65 and over	3,700	4,800	8,400	15.76%
Total	25,800	27,400	53,300	100.00%

Local Economy

The local economy is characterized by very low and falling levels of unemployment (1.6%) as indicated in diagram 2 below:

Diagram 2 Employment Profile

Annual Labour Force Survey	Chester-le-Street (%)	North East (%)	Great Britain (%)
Economic Activity Rate	78.6	73.5	78.3
Economic Inactivity Rate	21.4	26.5	21.7
Employment Rate	74.3	68.6	74.2
Unemployment Rate	Not available	6.7	5.2
Claimant Count	1.6	3.1	2.4

The majority of the working population are employed in hotels, distribution and restaurants or in public administration. These sectors account for 60.6% of all working people in the District. 65.8% of all economically active adults have a level of education of at least NVQ Level 2.

Diagram 3 Employment Profile

Sector	Chester-le-Street (%)	North East (%)	England (%)
Agriculture & fishing	0.3	0.5	0.8
Energy & water	0.1	1	0.6
Manufacturing	8.1	15.9	13.4
Construction	7.5	5.4	4.4
Distribution, hotels & restaurants	35.5	22.8	24.8
Transport & communications	6.2	5.4	6.2
Banking, finance & insurance	7.6	13.3	20.3
Public administration, education & health	25.1	30.4	24.3

Deprivation

Chester-le-Street contains pockets of high levels of deprivation within an otherwise un-deprived area. The key deprivation characteristics of the District area as follows:

- 17.6% of all super output areas within the District are in the most deprived 20% in England.
- 2.9% of super output areas are within the most deprived 10% in England.
- Chester-le-Street is ranked 123rd out of 354 Districts in England in deprivation terms.
- The areas of the District suffering deprivation score most highly on the “income deprivation affecting children” and “income deprivation affecting older people”.

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is rising in the District with 44.6% of all 16 year olds now achieving 5 passes at GCSE, although educational attainment levels still lag behind the regional and national position.

Teenage Conceptions

Teenage conceptions in Chester-le-Street are low with 37 conceptions per 1,000 of the population aged between 15 and 17 years of age. This compares to 49.7 for County Durham, 51.2 for the North East and 42 for the whole the England.

Standardised Mortality Rates

Standardised mortality rates for the area at:

- 111.6 for circulatory deaths per 100,000 population, and
- 138.2 For cancer deaths per 100,000 population.

All are well above the national and regional average mortality rates for these conditions.

Limiting Long Term Illness

The District has comparatively few households with problems of limiting long term illness. Life expectancy for males and females is 76 years and 79.8 years respectively. This is well above the average for the North East as a whole but below national figures.

Diagram 4 Limiting Long Term Illness Profile

Factor	Chester-le-Street (%)	North East (%)
Limiting Long-term illness	21.5	22.7
General health 'not good'	11.6	12.0
Providing unpaid care	11.5	11.0
Providing unpaid care >50hrs per week	2.6	2.7

Crime and Disorder

Recorded crime levels in Chester-le-Street are low against a basket of national indicators. Domestic burglaries are therefore almost half that of the regional and national total. A similar pattern emerges with vehicle crime.

Housing

The 2001 Census estimates that there are a total of 22,851 dwellings in the District. The local housing market is dominated by owner occupied properties.

Diagram 5
Tenure Profile

Tenure	Numbers	Percent
Owner Occupied	16,420	71.86%
Shared Ownership	80	0.35%
Council/RSL Rented	5,258	23.01%
Private Rented	817	3.58%
Other	276	1.21%
Total	22,851	100.00%

The District contains a good balance between the various house types.

Diagram 6 House Type Profile

House Type	Numbers	Percent
Detached	4295	18.80%
Semi Detached	9194	40.24%
Terraced	7921	34.66%
Flats	1441	6.30%
Total	22851	100.00%

Local Strategic Partnership

The Local District Partnership developed its first Community Strategy in 2004 setting out a 10 year vision for Chester-le-Street:

“by 2014 the District of Chester-le-Street will be a place where people choose to live, to learn, to work and to visit. There will be inclusive, safe and healthy communities in our towns and villages built on a strong, sustainable economic base with excellent community networks. The District Council will be a place where everyone is working together for a sustainable future.

The Strategy and related priorities have all been reviewed and updated during 2006. There are now 10 priorities. 2 of the priorities have specific relevance to homelessness:

Priority 4

Provide sustainable communities through better quality access to and greater choice and improved efficiency in housing in neighbourhoods across the district.

The following specific objectives have been identified to support this priority:

- Reduce the proportion of households in temporary accommodation by 50% by 2010.
- Secure a score of 100% of the Sanctuary BVPI.
- Develop services for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.
- Complete the development of 50 affordable homes for sale in Sacriston.

Priority 7

Improve the health and well being of communities across the District; tackle health inequalities; and improve access to and quality of health and social care services.

The following specific objectives have been identified to support this priority:

- Reduce the number of homelessness presentations.
- Reduce homelessness through prevention activity.

Chester-le-Street Corporate Plan

The Council produced its first Corporate Plan in 2005 and has updated and refreshed the Plan in 2006.

The Plan sets 7 priorities for the Council. This Homelessness Strategy links to 5 of the 7 Corporate Priorities as follows:

- **Customer Excellence**

The Council is committed in this homelessness strategy to the development of service excellence for homelessness services within the District.

- **Working in Partnership to achieve the Community Strategy**

The Council is developing its homelessness services in partnership with other agencies through the Homeless Action Partnership.

- **Meeting the Decent Homes Standard**

The renovation of both council and private sector homes to the Decent Homes Standard will help reduce homelessness and provide potential homeless households with maximum choice of accommodation.

- **Regenerating the District**

The housing-led regeneration schemes that the Council is delivering will result in significant additions to the supply of affordable housing units for both rent and sale.

- **Maximising Efficiencies**

The Homelessness Service has made significant contributions to developing innovative and efficient ways of working.

Equalities and Diversity

The Council is committed to embedding diversity in all its activities, policy planning and service delivery arrangements. The Council's vision is to:

- Create a sense of belonging for all communities within the District.
- Recognise that different peoples backgrounds are appreciated, celebrated and valued.
- Recognise that people from different backgrounds have the same life opportunities.
- Recognise that strong and positive relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds.

The Council's Equalities and Diversity Strategy contains the following guiding principles:

- Promotion of attitude change.
- Celebration of diversity.
- Encourage faith communities to work together.
- Promote tolerance and understanding.
- Review all policies and procedures.

This strategy also contains commitments to the provision of accommodation and support for travellers who reside or visit the District. The Council manages a gypsy site for travellers who are residing in or visiting the district. The Council will treat travellers as potential homeless households and will provide accessible services to meet their specific needs.

Supporting People

The Supporting People Commissioning Body has developed its 5 Year Supporting People Strategy, which the Council formally endorsed in March 2005. The Supporting People Strategy is being developed on the back of a detailed needs assessment of each client group.

The District currently receives Supporting People funding to help support a total of 94 units of accommodation linked to supporting or the prevention of homelessness as illustrated in Diagram 7 below.

Diagram 7 Supported Accommodation Profile

Client Group	Accommodation Based Units	Floating Support
Homelessness	63	15
Learning Disabilities	3	10
Ex-Offenders	3	0
Total	69	25

Appendix Two: Gershon Efficiency Savings

In the last 12 months the Council has implemented a number of changes to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Homelessness Service that it delivers, as set out below:

- The Council has increased the proportion of staff engaged in prevention work.
- Equal numbers of staff are engaged in prevention and case work.
- The Council has secured increased funding from the Priority Needs Fund - £70,000 over 2 years.
- The Council has retrained its staff in the last 12 months to maintain high standards of service delivery.
- The Council has introduced home visits to improve service standards.
- The Council will be using credit referencing to improve the speed at which cases can be processed.
- A County-wide mediation service has been launched in the last 12 months.
- A Rent Deposit Scheme has been launched in the last 12 months to improve choice for homeless households.
- An Action Plan has been developed to improve performance on the Sanctuary BVPI.
- There is outreach support in place to help tackle threatened homelessness rent arrears and anti social behaviour.
- The Council has increased funding to the CAB to help provide case work advice and support.
- All Rent Arrears letters issued by the Council contain the CAB contact details.
- An Accredited Landlords Scheme has been established.
- An Approved Lettings Scheme is up and running.
- Up to 10 tenancies can be support through an external agency funded by Supporting People (DART).
- There is floating support in place to support 4 ex offenders.
- The Council has signed the HARP Protocol.
- There has been training for staff and elected members of the HARP Protocol.

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Chester-le-Street
District Council

Report to:	Council Meeting
Date of Meeting:	26 th July 2007
Report from:	Acting Director of Community Services
Title of Report:	Joint Allocations and Lettings Policy
Agenda Item Number:	10

1. Purpose and Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for the Council to consider the Joint Allocations and Lettings Policy between Cestria Community Housing Association, and Chester-le-Street District Council.
- 1.2 The policy which members are being asked to consider is based on the current allocations and lettings policy used by the Council. However in order to comply with the regulatory requirements of the Housing Corporation some changes have been made and these are highlighted in the attached policy. Officers have also taken the opportunity to make other minor changes based on recent challenges to other organisations allocations and lettings policies.
- 1.3 This policy will come into force once the transfer of the Council's properties to Cestria Community Housing Association is completed.
- 1.4 Once approved by Council this policy will need to be approved by the Shadow Board of Cestria Community Housing Association.
- 1.5 Members are recommended to agree to:
 1. Approve the Joint Allocations and Lettings Policy.
 2. Request that the policy is presented to the Shadow Board of Cestria Community Housing Association for approval.

2. Consultation

- 2.1 The Legal team acting on behalf of the Council in the transfer negotiations has been consulted on the content of this joint policy. Also the Head of Regeneration, Housing Strategy Manager, Acting Director of Community Services, Head of Housing, Policy and Performance Officer, Housing Team Leaders and Officers have been engaged in the process of consultation and their combined views have been incorporated in the policy changes.

3. Corporate Plan and Priorities

- 3.1 The joint allocations and lettings policy links closely with Priority 3, Meeting the Decent Homes Standard, as one of its aims is to assist with the creation of sustainable communities where people want to live and work.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Implications and Value for Money Statement

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

4.2 Legal

The existing allocations and lettings policy used by the Council complies with the Homelessness Act 2002. In order for the policy to be used by Housing Associations it must also comply with Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1996 which refers to the control of payments and benefits to officers and employees of a Housing Association.

4.3 Personnel

There are no direct personnel implications as a result of this report.

4.4 Other Services

There are no implications for other services.

4.5 Diversity

This joint policy complies with the Council's and Cestria Community Housing Association's commitment to equality and diversity in that it does not discriminate from any minority group and allows open access to the Housing Register.

4.6 Risk

The risks associated with not approving this policy are that both the Council and Cestria Community Housing Association will not be able to operate a transparent housing scheme that meets both legal and equitable requirements.

4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no known implications for Crime and Disorder.

4.8 Data Quality

Every care has been taken in the development of this report to ensure that the information and data used in its preparation and the appendices attached are accurate, timely, consistent and comprehensive. The Council's Data Quality Policy has been complied with in producing this report.

4.9 Other Implications

There are no other known implications as a result of this report.

5. Background, Position Statement and Option Appraisal

5.1 The current allocations and lettings policy used by the Council was approved by the Executive in October 2005, and Council in December 2005. The policy was reviewed by the Regeneration and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November 2006.

5.2 The changes to the policy are necessary in order to meet the regulatory framework of the Housing Corporation.

5.3 In order for Cestria Community Housing Association to meet its registration criteria it must have in place an approved joint allocations and lettings policy by September 2007. The Shadow Board of Cestria Community Housing Association will need to approve this policy once it has been approved by Council.

5.4 The table below identifies where the main changes to the policy have been made. The changes have been highlighted in bold font in the attached policy.

Paragraph number	Section of wording
1.2	Joint Housing Register
2.1.6	Choice based and Local Lettings
3.5.6	Starter (Assured Shorthold) Tenancies
3.6.7	Members of the Association's Board
3.8.1	Previous tenancy enforcement action
3.8.2	Current Cestria tenants.....
3.8.3	An individual or family.....
3.8.4	An individual or family.....
3.15	The offer of accommodation.....

6. Monitoring

- 6.1 The monitoring of the attached policy will be done via a Service Level Agreement between Cestria Community Housing Association and the Council which has yet to be agreed.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that Council:

7.1.1 Approve the Joint Allocations and Lettings Policy.

7.1.2 Request that the Joint Allocations and Lettings Policy be presented to the Shadow Board of Cestria Community Housing Association for approval.

8. Background Papers/Documents Referred to:

Council's Allocations and Lettings Policy.

The Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance

Paul Stephens
Acting Director of Community Services
12th July 2007
VERS 1.0

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Chester-le-Street
District Council



JOINT ALLOCATIONS & LETTINGS POLICY

DRAFT

Joint Allocations and Lettings Policy

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Appendices (to be added as available)

Appendix A: Joint Housing Register Service Level Agreement and Nomination Agreements

Appendix B: Schedule 1, Housing Act 1996 (Rehousing Employees and members of the Board)

Appendix C: Housing Register (Priority) Scheme

1 Definitions

For the purpose of this policy and accompanying procedures, the following definitions shall apply:

- 1.1 Nominations Agreement: An Agreement between Chester-le-Street District Council and a Registered Social Landlord setting out the means by which the local authority will 'nominate' individual applicants for vacant properties from its housing register. The Agreement will set out the percentage of vacancies in the association's stock to which nominations may be made in any year, together with guidelines on the balance between lettings to homeless, waiting list and transfer applicants.
- 1.2 **Joint Housing Register (JHR):** This Allocation and Letting policy and associated priority scheme are jointly agreed by Chester-le-Street District Council and Cestria Community Housing Association for the allocation of properties owned by Cestria Community Housing Association. It allows a single point of access for applicants to Cestria properties and other Registered Social Landlord accommodation in the district through nomination agreements and is administrated by Cestria Community Housing on behalf of the Council.

2 Commitments

- 2.1 Cestria Community Housing Association and Chester-le-Street District Council are committed to:
 1. meeting housing needs by providing affordable high quality homes for rent.
 2. allocating accommodation to those in greatest housing need.
 3. supporting vulnerable tenants and creating stable and balanced communities.
 4. working together to fulfil Chester-le-Street District Council's statutory duties towards homeless people and those in priority housing need.
 5. working together and with other partners to implement nomination agreements and ensure appropriate allocations and support arrangements.
 6. working together **to establish choice-based and local lettings policies in the district.**
 7. making effective use of the Association's housing stock.
 8. allocating properties in accordance with the Association's equality and diversity policies.
 9. providing clear and understandable information to applicants on:
 - their responsibilities as a tenant
 - the process of applying for accommodation
 - the priority scheme used by the Joint Allocation Register
 - our standards of service .
 10. complying with all statutory and regulatory requirements.

3 Key points of policy

- 3.1 The Director of Housing and Communities is responsible for the implementation of the Joint Allocations & Lettings Policy within Cestria Community Housing Association.
- 3.2 Lettings are made in line with the Joint Housing register scheme, nominations agreements and any associated s.106 (Town & Country Planning Act 1990) agreements.
- 3.3 The Association will support Chester-le-Street District Council to fulfill their statutory duties to homeless households and in meeting targets to reduce the number of families being temporarily housed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.
- 3.4 The Joint Housing Register Scheme agreement and local authority nominations agreements are set out in Appendix A

Sustainable communities

- 3.5 In order to increase the sustainability of individual tenancies and of communities, the Association will:
 1. consult residents and Chester-le-Street District Council over the possible introduction of 'local lettings policies'.
 2. let properties sensitively, taking into account the nature of the household being allocated the property and the needs of immediate neighbours and the surrounding community.
 3. identify new tenants who may be vulnerable and have support needs, and ensure that advice and support is accessible from the Association and other agencies.
 4. operate an open housing register and move towards allocation through a Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
 5. seek to maintain a balance between the proportion of lettings made to homeless applicants, to those on the Housing Register and to tenants already living in its properties who need a transfer.
 6. ***give Starter (assured shorthold) Tenancies to all new tenants, that is those who are not assured tenants with Cestria immediately before the new allocation.***
 7. offer joint tenancies to joint applicants wherever possible and provide an explanation where this is refused.

Rehousing Priorities

- 3.6 When allocating vacant properties, the Association will give appropriate priority to the following groups through the housing priority scheme (Appendix C): (in alphabetical order)
 1. Asylum seekers – the Association will consider rehousing Asylum Seekers who have received a positive status determination by the Home Office in an appropriate location and with relevant support.
 2. Categories of household which are specified in the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 as requiring reasonable preference.

3. Homeless – the Association will assist Chester-le-Street District Council discharge its obligations to homeless households under the relevant legislation where such households can be rehoused in accordance with this Joint Allocations and Lettings Policy.
4. Households not qualifying for succession of tenancy upon the death of the tenant. Priority will be given to a new tenancy at the same or other more suitable property in accordance with the Association's Succession Policy.
5. Major works – tenants who need to move permanently or temporarily because their home is undergoing extensive repairs, modernisation or demolition.
6. Management transfers – tenants who need to move urgently (for example in serious cases of racial harassment or domestic violence), with the approval of the Tenancy Services Manager or Head of Housing Services.
- 7. *Members of the Association's Board and the Association's employees or any of their relatives may only be housed in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 1 of the Housing Act 1996 (see Appendix B).***
8. Transfers – current Cestria tenants who require alternative accommodation will be assessed under the same priority (points) scheme as applicants who are not Cestria tenants.

Eligibility of applicants

3.7 The following will not be eligible to join the housing scheme under this Allocations and Lettings Policy:

1. Applicants under the age of 16
2. Applicants who fail nationality or immigration criteria
3. Applicants who are guilty of unacceptable behaviour serious enough for a court to have granted a possession order had the applicant been a tenant of the Association at the time of the behaviour

Allocation restrictions

3.8 Certain applicants will not normally be offered a tenancy with the Association:

1. Where an individual within the household has committed an action so that if they had been a tenant of Cestria at the time of the action, this would have been a breach of tenancy conditions e.g. anti-social behaviour or racial harassment, serious enough for legal action to be taken. ***Previous tenancy enforcement action for anti-social behaviour will not be taken into account if it occurred two years or more prior to the date of application and the tenant's household has conducted a tenancy satisfactorily in the intervening period.*** Otherwise, evidence must be provided by the applicant to demonstrate a permanent change in the perpetrator's behaviour.

2. An applicant with outstanding debts owed to Cestria or other social or private landlord unless appropriate arrangements for the repayment of the debt have been maintained for an acceptable period. ***Current Cestria tenants will not normally be offered alternative accommodation where they have any housing related debt except for rehousing in emergencies.***
3. ***An individual or family which have support needs which mean that they would not be able to meet the conditions of their tenancy without additional support, if such support cannot be guaranteed at the new address (usually in the case of applicants with mental health problems, learning disabilities or drug/alcohol dependency).***
4. ***An individual or family who, in the opinion of the Association, would be likely to cause a serious housing management problem if they were rehoused in a certain property. This would be likely to relate only to particular vacancies and would not preclude the offer of accommodation elsewhere. The Association will apply risk assessments in deciding the rehousing of ex-offenders and other applicants which pose a risk to their household, neighbours or wider community.***
5. An applicant under the age of 18 year old unless a mutually agreed support package is available. The Association will apply **an Under 18s** policy which details our approach to minors.
6. Applicants who, in our view, unreasonably refuse three offers of accommodation in a twelve month period will have their application deferred from active consideration for one year from the last refusal.

The Allocation Process

- 3.9 We will undertake investigations as necessary and defer applicants if there is evidence to suggest that one or more of the above restrictions applies. Such a deferral will be time limited, supported by appropriate evidence and notified to the applicant. Applicants are able to appeal against such decisions.
- 3.10 The applicant's identity and housing circumstances will be confirmed by a home visit (where practicable) otherwise by other personal contact with the applicant.
- 3.11 We will undertake a risk assessment of applicants at the point at which they are being considered for an offer of accommodation if information indicates that there are issues that may affect the viability of the tenancy and balance of the community should the applicant be housed in the property being offered.
- 3.12 Once an offer of accommodation has been made, an officer will accompany the applicant to view the property to ensure that all relevant information is made available and to answer any queries before the new tenancy starts.
- 3.13 We will cancel an application when the applicant has been suitably rehoused by Cestria or other social landlord.
- 3.14 Statutorily homeless applicants will be given one reasonable offer before their additional preference will be lost.

- 3.15 ***The offer of accommodation to the following applicants should be authorised by the Director of Housing and Communities in accordance with Schedule 1, Housing Act 1996 (Appendix B):***
1. ***Employees of Cestria Community Housing Association***
 2. ***Board Members of Cestria Community Housing Association***
 3. ***The following relatives of an employee or board member of the association; spouse, parent, child, sibling, aunt, uncle, cousin, nephew, niece, grandparent or grandchild***

Review of applications

- 3.16 Registered applications will be reviewed annually and applications where the applicant has not confirmed that they wish to remain registered will be cancelled.

False Information

- 3.17 If it is found that false or misleading information has been given in order to secure accommodation, the application may be cancelled. If the applicant has already been housed and it is later found that false information was given, this may lead to prosecution and eviction.

Appeals process

- 3.18 Applicants who feel that they have been treated unfairly and not in accordance with this policy may appeal in writing or in person to Cestria Community Housing Association, where a senior officer may review applications on the following:
1. assessment of application as ineligible to register for housing.
 2. failure on our part to respond to requests to correct inaccurate information.
 3. exclusion from an offer of accommodation through the risk assessment process.
 4. deferment from active consideration of an offer of accommodation on any reason in paragraph 3.8.
 5. cancellation of an application due to an annual review or other reason.

- 3.19 If the applicant is unsatisfied with the outcome of both reviews, a complaint may be made under the Association's Customer Care and Complaints Policy.

Equal Opportunities/Diversity

- 3.20 The Association is committed to providing equality of opportunity to all applicants regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnic or racial origin, religion or political views. If any applicant needs assistance in completing or understanding the application process or forms, advice and assistance will be made available.
- 3.21 Ethnic monitoring of all lettings and applications is carried out in compliance with the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code.

Access to Information

- 3.22 Access to personal information will be in accordance with current Data Protection legislation.

4 Monitoring and Review

- 4.1 Cestria Community Housing Association Board will receive quarterly reports which will include service performance, ethnic monitoring on applications and letting, Schedule 1 allocations and management lettings.
- 4.2 The Association will participate fully in the Housing Corporation's Continuous Recording (CORE) system for monitoring the characteristics of all RSL lettings.
- 4.3 Regular performance reports will be provided to Chester-le-Street District Council in accordance with Service Level Agreements on the operation of nomination and the Joint Housing Register agreements.
- 4.6 This policy will be reviewed by the Board and Council at least every two years.

Approval by the Board

Date for Review

DRAFT

Appendix A - Joint Housing Register Service Level Agreement and RSL Nomination Agreements

(To be added)

Appendix B - Extract of Schedule 1, Housing Act 1996

Part 1 – Control of payments to members &c

Payments and benefits to officers and employees, &c.

2. - (1) A registered social landlord which is an industrial and provident society or a company registered under the Companies Act 1985 shall not make a payment or grant a benefit to-
 - (a) an officer or employee of the society or company,
 - (b) a person who at any time within the preceding twelve months has been a person within paragraph (a),
 - (c) a close relative of a person within paragraph (a) or (b), or
 - (d) a business trading for profit of which a person falling within paragraph (a), (b) or (c) is a principal proprietor or in the management of which such a person is directly concerned, except as permitted by this paragraph.

- (2) The following are permitted-
 - (a) payments made or benefits granted to an officer or employee of the society or company under his contract of employment with the society or company;
 - (b) the payment of remuneration or expenses to an officer of the society or company who does not have a contract of employment with the society or company;
 - (c) any such payment as may be made in accordance with paragraph 1(2) (interest payable in accordance with the rules and certain sums payable by a fully mutual housing association to a person who has ceased to be a member);
 - (d) the grant or renewal of a tenancy by a co-operative housing association;
 - (e) where a tenancy of a house has been granted to, or to a close relative of, a person who later became an officer or employee, the grant to that tenant of a new tenancy whether of the same or another house;
 - (f) payments made or benefits granted in accordance with any determination made by the Corporation.

Appendix C – Housing Register (Priority) Scheme

Allocation Scheme – A Points Based System

The Chester-le-Street District Council and Cestria Community Housing Association will use a points-based scheme to measure housing need and allocate accommodation. In assessing re-housing need we will give reasonable preference to those applicants who fall into one or more of the following categories:

- ❖ People who are homeless, this includes those who have no priority need and those who are intentionally homeless.
- ❖ People who are occupying unsanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions.
- ❖ People who need to move on medical or welfare grounds.
- ❖ People who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship, (to themselves or others).
- ❖ Workers *in the area* requiring accommodation.

We will ensure through the operation of our points-based scheme that accommodation will be allocated to those applicants in greatest housing need.

Reconciling Choice and Need

We will promote choice within our lettings policy in the following ways:

Area of Choice	Each applicant will be able to express a preference for areas they wish to consider living in. The more restrictive the choice the harder it may be to satisfy the applicants' requirements, in other words the longer they may have to wait for a property.
Property Type	Applicants will be able to express preferences for the type and size of property they wish to consider. However we will normally allocate properties under the following matching policy.

In order to make the best use of our properties we would normally allocate properties in accordance with the following guidelines:

Property Type	Allocation Guidelines
1 Bedroom Property	Single People or households requiring only one bedroom
2 Bedroom Property	Single People, Couples or Households with children or with children who do not live with them but regularly visit them (evidence based).
3 Bedroom Property	Households with 2 or more children, or households with just 1 child if there is a good management reason, or parent(s) with 2 or more children who do not live with them but regularly visit them (evidence based), or households with 3 or more adults.
4 plus Bedrooms	Households with 3 or more children or households with fewer children if there is a good management reason, or parent(s) with 3 or more children who do not live with them but regularly visit them (evidence based), or households with 4 or more adults.

(A pregnant person is considered to have a minimum of 1 child).

In low demand areas we may use discretion to vary these guidelines.
As a guideline

- All designated elderly persons accommodation will be allocated to applicants over 60 years of age or to applicants with a disability.
- Any property which has had major adaptations will be allocated where possible to applicants that require this type of property.
- Some of our properties are designated for older applicants and age restrictions may be applied.
- If there are no applicants to match to the property the age restriction will be reduced but preference given to those aged over 45.

Managing low demand properties

When a property has been continually refused (at least 5 times) or where there are no applicants on the Housing Register indicating they have a preference for properties of that type or in that particular geographical location, the Head of Housing is entitled to advertise the property to any suitable applicant.

Applicants will be required to complete an Application for Accommodation Form and priority will be allocated in the following ways, in priority order:

- ❖ Those who meet the reasonable preference criteria.
- ❖ The date of the application.

Sheltered housing

It is a condition of all tenancies in sheltered housing schemes that tenants agree to take the Care Line and Warden Service. Separate charges are made for these services on top of the rent.

Medical Requirements

Applicants who have a medical need will be asked to complete a Medical Form, which will be passed to their GP. The applicants and any members of the applicants household can complete a Medical Form.

Applicants will only be offered additional priority if their medical condition significantly affects their need for accommodation for example, an elderly person with arthritis in the knee may need adapted or ground floor accommodation.

Applicants with general medical conditions will not normally be eligible to be awarded ***medical*** points.

Local Connection

We will give additional points to applicants who can demonstrate a local connection with the local area.

When allocating properties, preference will be given to those applicants already living in the District or with a family connection within the District.

A person leaving HM Forces will receive local connection points if the applicant or spouse has family living in the Chester-le-Street District, or either the applicant, their spouse or partner lived in the District immediately prior to enlistment for a period of time exceeding 12 months. Those applicants serving in the forces can apply for local connection points up to 12 months prior to the discharge date.

If the discharge date is longer than 12 months the local connection points will not be applied. Official confirmation of the discharge date will be requested and would normally be provided by the MoD on their form 1166. Family in this section is defined as parents or adult children of the applicant.

In all cases, the applicant should be advised that their application will be registered but that an offer cannot be made until a certificate of cessation of entitlement to occupy service quarters is issued. These are usually issued up to six months in advance by the Ministry of Defence.

Hardship Grounds

We will give additional points to applicants who need to move to a different locality in order to:

- ❖ Receive or provide care.
- ❖ Access specialised medical treatment.
- ❖ Take up offers of employment.
- ❖ Take up training opportunities.
- ❖ Take up education opportunities.
- ❖ In receipt of means tested benefits.

Additional Preference

We will provide additional preference to the following applicants:

- ❖ Victims of domestic violence.
- ❖ Victims of racial harassment amounting to violence or threats of violence.
- ❖ Same sex couples who are victims of harassment amounting to violence or threats of violence.
- ❖ Witnesses of crime, or victims of crime who would be at risk of intimidation amounting to violence or threats of violence if they remained in their current accommodation.
- ❖ Tenants of ***Cestria Community Housing*** who are under-occupying their current home.

Owner Occupiers

Applicant's financial circumstances will be taken into account in assessing the preference they may receive through this Allocation Scheme.

Where an applicant is considered to be in a position to provide their own accommodation they may be offered the opportunity of a shared ownership option available through partnership working with a Registered Social Landlord or referred to the approved landlord scheme if available.

Owner occupiers who are adequately housed or with the resources to secure accommodation locally, would normally not attract any preference under this Scheme.

Management Discretion

So far as is possible the points-based scheme will be used to allocate accommodation. However there may be special circumstances where the only way housing need can be fully taken into account is the use of Management Discretion.

The following circumstances may be taken into account in the interests of fairness:

Non-Dependent Where a non-dependent is living in with a person over 60 years of age who needs to move into more suitable accommodation but is prevented from doing so because of the presence of the non-dependent. In this situation the non-dependent, may be given a priority to assist them with independent accommodation suitable for their needs. To qualify for this priority the non-dependent must have lived with the tenant at the address in question for at least 12 months and proof of the residency will be required.

Tenancy Termination Where a tenancy is held by two tenants and one tenant terminates the tenancy. The remaining occupant may apply to Cestria to have a tenancy granted to them in the property that they occupy.

Major Works Cestria tenants who need to move on a temporary basis to enable major works to be carried out to their home, where in the opinion of a property services manager, the tenant cannot reasonably be expected to remain in their home whilst building operations take place.

Succession Tenants have rights of succession enshrined in law, that is to say, the right to pass the tenancy of the property on to a wife or child following the death of the original tenant. Succession is outside the scope of this Allocation Scheme.

However some household members living with a tenant who dies may not have succession rights. In those circumstances the following factors will be taken into account in deciding whether to allow household members to remain in the property:

- ❖ Whether the Council has a duty to provide accommodation under Part VI of the Housing Act 1996.
- ❖ The person has made an application for accommodation.
- ❖ The person has or would if an application for accommodation has been made sufficient points to allow an allocation to be made.

- ❖ The person has lived at the address as his or her principal home for at least 12 months.
- ❖ The person has been providing care for the deceased tenant.
- ❖ The person intends to care or look after the dependents of the deceased tenant.

Supported Housing Applicants currently occupying supported housing or special needs accommodation who are assessed as being ready to move on into more independent housing.

Emergency Households whose homes are damaged by flood, fire or other disaster may be provided with temporary accommodation until such time as their accommodation is brought back into use.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the Association's Board will receive an Annual Statement as to how the Service has exercised its management discretion under this Scheme.

Summary of Priority Points

Points will be awarded based on the information given on an application but no property will be offered until a home visit is undertaken to verify the applicant's housing circumstances.

Criteria	Points Awarded
Date of Application	
For every 12 months on the register	1 Point
Shared Accommodation	
Single Person Sharing Accommodation	5 Points
Couple Sharing Accommodation	10 Points
Household with child(ren) Sharing Accommodation	20 Points
Shortages of Bedrooms	
Households or carers sharing bedrooms with children	10 Points
Children of mixed sex (over 11 years) sharing bedrooms	10 Points
Parent or carer sharing bedroom with child	10 Points
Lack of Facilities	
No inside wc	10 Points
No kitchen or kitchen facilities in the same room as sleeping area	10 Points
No fixed bath or shower	10 Points
No hot water	10 Points
No heating	10 Points
Sharing facilities in a B&B or other shared establishment eg hostel etc	20 Points
Condition of Property	
Dwellings which are Unfit to Live In	25 Points
Dwellings in Poor Repair	10 Points
Personal Circumstances	

Family member over 60	5 Points
Leaving institutional background	15 Points
Discharge from Armed Forces	15 Points
Receipt of means tested benefits	5 Points
Medical/Social	
Physical or Mental Disability (Low)	5 Points
Physical or Mental Disability (Med)	10 Points
Physical or Mental Disability (High)	20 Points
Social Reasons for Requiring a Move	10 Points
Homelessness	
Unintentionally Homeless With Priority Need	50 Points
Unintentionally Homeless With No Priority Need	10 Points
Priority Need but Intentionally Homeless	5 Points
Welfare Grounds	
Children Act 1989 referral	25 Points
Community Care Act 1990 Referral	25 Points
Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 Referral	25 Points
Occupational Therapist Referral	25 Points
Additional Preference	
Victims of Domestic Violence	25 Points
Victims of Racial Harassment	25 Points
Same Sex Couples Who Are Victims of harassment	25 Points
Witnesses or Victims of Crime of Crime	25 Points
Hardship Grounds	
Require move to receive or provide care	10 Points
Require move to access specialised medical treatment	10 Points
Require move to access employment opportunities	10 Points
Require move to access training opportunities	10 Points
Require move to access educational opportunities	10 Points
Accommodation Based	
Living in Non-Secure Tenancy For Less Than 12 Months	10 Points
Living in Non-Secure Tenancy For Between 12 and 24 Months	15 Points
Living in Non-Secure Tenancy For Over 24 Months	20 Points
Current Accommodation Unadapted to Meet Need	20 Points
Property Underoccupied (1 Bedroom) (Cestria Tenant Only)	10 Points
Property Underoccupied (More Than 1 Bedroom) (Cestria Tenant Only)	20 Points
Elderly Person Living in Upstairs Flat Without Lift	20 Points
Children in Flats Above Ground Floor	5 Points
Local Connection	
Living in the District	10 Points
Not Living in the District But Family Connection With Chester-le-Street	5 Points

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Chester-le-Street
District Council

Report to: Council

Date of Meeting: 26th July 2007

Report from: Craig Etherington - Customer Relationship Manager

Title of Report: Corporate Communications Strategy

Agenda Item Number: **11**

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for Council to adopt the proposed Corporate Communication Strategy 2007 – 2010 attached at appendix 1.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 The Corporate Management Team, ICT Manager, other Service Team Managers, Executive Portfolio Holder and key partners and stakeholders have been consulted during the development of the proposed Corporate Communication Strategy 2007 – 2010.

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The strategy underpins the delivery of all of the Council's priorities. It is directly linked to other corporate documents such as the Corporate Plan 2007-2010, the Sustainable Community Strategy 2006-2016, the Customer Excellence Strategy, the Equalities Scheme Action Plan and the Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy. In particular, both the council's Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy, and the District Partnerships agreed strategy recognises the importance of communications in improving community engagement:

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial and Value for Money

Adopting a more corporate approach (operational and across service teams) to external communications will support our corporate objectives as it relates to our Corporate Plan. Quite often, corporate literature is the only tangible element in the Council's portfolio of services. Individual service teams will incorporate a more integrated approach to marketing their services to ensure greater consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in council communications. It is envisaged that by adopting a more joined up approach to the production of print based information, and with greater use of e-based communications systems, improved efficiencies will be identified.

4.2 Legal

There are no specific legal issues associated to this report.

4.3 Personnel

There are no specific personnel issues associated with this report.

4.4 Other Services

The day-to-day implementation of this strategy will be driven by the Communications/PR function within the Customer Relations Team. However, the corporate responsibility for communications cannot simply be reduced to a single service within the organisation.

Directors and Service Team Managers, in conjunction with elected members, will take particular responsibility for ensuring the successful implementation of this strategy within their areas of responsibility. Implicit to this, they should also establish channels of communication for employees to express their views on council issues, whether it's related to personal, operational, or strategic issues.

Similarly, Service Team Managers should work closely with the Communications/PR Officer to improve existing modes of communications within the Council. The responsibility for communicating clearly should also be delegated appropriately to team leaders and supervisors. Guidance on seeking publicity has been published on the Council's corporate Intranet, along with a Media Forward Plan.

4.5 Diversity

The Council is committed to ensuring that citizens and other stakeholders are given full and equal access to the services we deliver. This strategy will provide further opportunities for us to engage and communicate more effectively with customers from BME communities and will be linked directly to the Equalities and Diversity Working Group.

4.6 Risk Implications

Effective communication is vital to the success and failure of many of the Council's initiatives. Managing and protecting our reputation is essential if we are to continue to progress as a successful Council. The strategy and associated actions will ensure, through effective communication and marketing that we protect our reputation.

4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no specific crime and disorder issues associated with this report.

4.8 Data Quality

Every care has been taken in the development of this report to ensure that the information and data used in its preparation and the appendices attached are accurate, timely, consistent and comprehensive. The council's Data Quality Policy has been complied with in producing this report.

4.9 Other Implications

While a key requirement in respect of corporate awareness is that the responsibility to communicate equates with the responsibilities associated with the seniority of the post-holder, every employee has a role to play in communicating within, and outside of the Council. Communications is inextricably linked to the Council's OneTeam ethos, and the importance lies in an assumed ambassador's role of all employees.

To ensure that such a culture exists within the Council, the Public relations team will promote widespread access to, and involvement in the monitoring and development of the strategy. Updates and progress reports will be presented to the Programme Management Board on a regular basis.

5. BACKGROUND, POSITION STATEMENT AND OPTION APPRAISAL

5.1 The Council's Corporate Communications Strategy was first published in June 2003. Since then, many of the actions have been completed, or otherwise, sustained continuously. The purpose of this document is to provide direction, with associated action plans, for the Council's marketing communications over the next three years.

5.2 The Strategy provides a current snapshot of progress made since it was first published in June 2003. The objective is to recognise and celebrate performance and improvement, and also to identify areas that can be improved upon. This then leads onto action plans to address such issues. The scope of the strategy is comprehensive with an emphasis on corporate responsibility for communications, especially communications within the Council.

5.3 The Strategy's vision is to facilitate effective two-way communications between the Council, its various internal / external customer groups and partners to promote mutual understanding in support of delivering service excellence. The key purpose of the vision is to improve the Council's reputation in accordance with its drive towards continuous improvement of services.

5.4 Within the broader vision, the Council communications (both internal and external) is moulded around 5 core messages – the Council:

- ...actively listens to, learns, and engages its communities and partners
- ...performs well, and, and continually strives to improve its services
- ...works hard to fulfill the quality of life, and aspirations of local people
- ...takes pride in its work, employees, and members
- ...makes improvements real and long-lasting

5.5 A number of actions and initiatives developed by the Council over the past 3 years have been to focus on developing systems for communication. This strategy will not only build on this success, but will also focus on the cultural aspects within the Council. It will act as a key driver to ensure that elected members and officers at all levels see the opportunities to communicate their success and achievements across a broad range of media and therefore continually enhance the growing reputation of the Council and its partners.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that the proposed Corporate Communications Strategy 2007 – 2010 is adopted.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS / DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO

- 7.1 Corporate Plan 2007 -2010,
- 7.2 Sustainable Community Strategy 2006-2016,
- 7.3 Customer Excellence Strategy,
- 7.4 Equalities Scheme Action Plan,
- 7.5 Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy.

Craig Etherington
Customer Relationship Manager



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Getting our Message Across

Corporate Communications Strategy 2007/2010



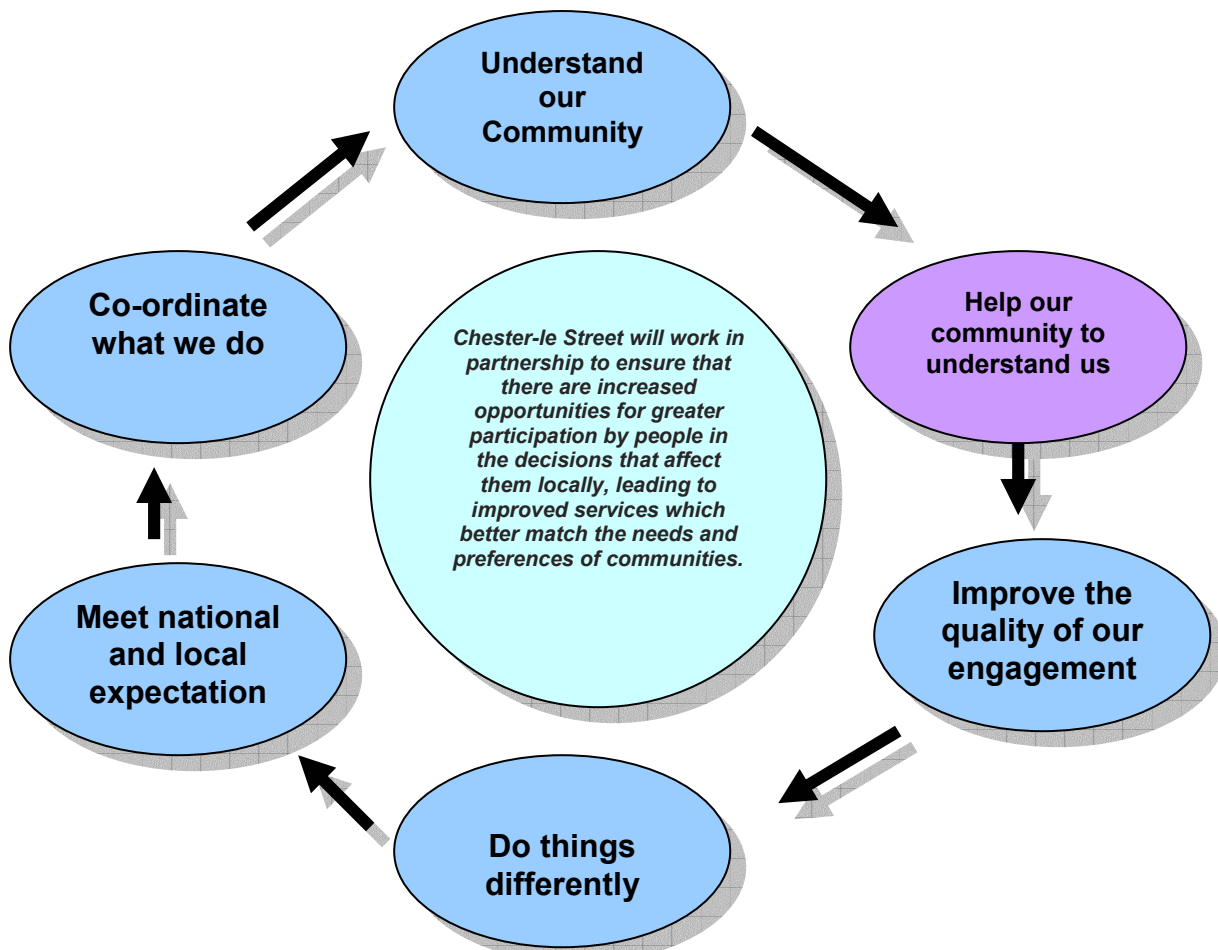
July 2007

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's Corporate Communications Strategy was first published in June 2003. Since then, many of the actions have been completed, or otherwise, sustained continuously. The purpose of this document is to provide direction, with associated action plans, for the Council's marketing communications over the next three years.
- 1.2 In the recent CPA report, the inspectors concluded that "*Chester-le-Street district council has made significant progress since its corporate assessment in 2003. It is now a 'good' council. The Council has progressed by improving its understanding of the needs of local people and focusing its efforts on meeting those needs. It has clear priorities which it uses to focus on what is important to the public. This includes economic and social regeneration, good neighbourhood management, better social housing and good leisure opportunities. In each of these activities, performance and customer satisfaction has improved since 2003. The Council is working to secure further improvement through partnership working and placing emphasis on good customer service and efficiency*".
- 1.3 As a '**GOOD**' council, we must ensure that our corporate communication culture and channels are constantly reviewed and updated. The strategy will be at the forefront of managing our reputation across all forms and boundaries and must be seen as a key driver if the Council is to reach its overall goal in **achieving excellence**.
- 1.4 The Strategy underpins the delivery of the Council's seven priorities (Annexe 1). It is directly linked to other corporate documents such as the Corporate Plan 2006-2009, the Sustainable Community Strategy 2006-2016, the Customer Excellence Strategy, the Equalities Scheme Action Plan and the Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy. In particular, both the council's Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy, and the District Partnerships agreed strategy recognises the importance of communications in improving community engagement:



This Strategy responds to the Council's action plan within its Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy which proposes:

- A review of the approach to our marketing against LGA guidance
 - The review of the Communications Strategy under the banner of 'Getting our Message across'
- 1.5 This Strategy is a corporate document that holds relevance at all levels within the organisation. The Customer Relations team's service plan, with its' associated action plans, already links strongly to the Corporate Plan, particularly priority 1, Customer Excellence.
- 1.6 The Strategy compares results from a comprehensive Employee Survey 2003 with those from the most recent Employee Survey, undertaken in December 2005. It also incorporates various indicators (monetary value of media coverage, readership surveys, financial information, benchmark information) to measure the effectiveness of Council communications over the three year period since the first Corporate Communications Strategy.
- 1.7 The Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2006/2007 makes reference to the Council's 3% year-on-year improvement in satisfaction levels as indicated in the Council's annual customer satisfaction surveys. This suggests an overall improvement in customer perceptions of the Council, and also therefore, a process of continuous improvement in how the Council communicates.
- 1.8 It is considered vital for the Council and its partners to improve its respective reputations. A clear link between how well a Council communicates and customer satisfaction is backed up by IDeA and LGA research¹, entitled 'Local Government Reputation'. This research was undertaken to understand why, despite an increase in public satisfaction with services, the public's perception of local government was not. The research identified the most important factors influencing customer perceptions (and satisfaction) as:
- perceived quality of services
 - perceived value for money
 - media coverage/mood
 - direct communications
 - district/county performance
 - a clean and safe environment
 - positive experiences of contact with staff

The MORI research that backed up this research, suggests that if a council commits to doing the following well, it will have a significant impact on its reputation and standing:

Communications core actions

- effective media management
- provide an A-Z guide to council services
- publish a regular council magazine/newspaper
- branding –effective and consistent linkage of council brand to community services
- good internal communications

¹ The LGA commissioned research with MORI to establish what actions Councils could take to improve their reputation.

Cleaner, safer greener core actions

- ensure a visible cleaning presence with a strong link to the council
- ensure no gaps or overlap in cleaning and maintenance contracts
- have one phone number for all streetscene problems
- know where your grot spots are and why
- set a 24 hour target for action on fly tipping and abandoned vehicles
- aim to have a Green Flag for at least one park
- educate and enforce to protect the environment

1.9 The Council can show some significant best practice against many of these key issues:

- it publishes a popular regular magazine
- its Inspirers have put forward proposals for an A-Z of services
- it has developed good internal communications
- environmental service vehicles and regeneration projects are 'One Team' branded
- it is to have a single telephone number for its neighbourhood management roll out
- it has established 'grot spot' locations using GIS
- It has a 24 hour target for removing abandoned vehicles
- it has a Green Flag for the Riverside
- it has an environmental education programme

1.10 There remains much to be done. It is evident that perceptions are influenced by various types of communications – ranging from the written word, to more visual types of communication.

1.11 This Strategy provides a current snapshot of progress made since it was first published in June 2003. The objective is to recognise and celebrate performance and improvement, and also to identify areas that can be improved upon. This then leads onto action plans to address such issues. The scope of this document is comprehensive with an emphasis on corporate responsibility for communications, especially communications within the council.

1.12 The vision for the Strategy is set out below. It sets out the key purpose of the strategy.

Vision

The Strategy's vision is to facilitate effective two-way communications between the council, its various internal / external customer groups and partners to promote mutual understanding in support of delivering service excellence.

The key purpose of the vision is to improve the Council's reputation in accordance with its drive towards continuous improvement of services.

1.13 Within the broader vision, the Council communications (both internal and external) is moulded around 5 core messages – the Council:

- ...actively listens to, learns, and engages its communities and partners
- ...performs well, and, and continually strives to improve its services
- ...works hard to fulfil the quality of life, and aspirations of local people
- ...takes pride in its work, employees, and members
- ...makes improvements real and long-lasting

2. Structure

- 2.1 The strategy is in two distinct parts. The Internal Communications part (section A) should be read as supportive of Organisational Development initiatives and the External Communications part (Section B) should be read as being supportive of the Council's agenda for continuous improvement, especially as documented in the Corporate Plan. To support the target-setting process, action plans with which to realise our vision for corporate communications are included in this strategy.
- 2.2 This document adheres to the principle of 'less is more' as key messages are often lost within an amorphous mass of information. It treats internal and external communications as separate functions. However there is an obvious intersection of the two since the ways we communicate internally are reflected to audiences outside the Council.
- 2.3 The strategy therefore:
- defines each communications function / method;
 - provides a snapshot of performance for each function defined;
 - sets communications objectives, linking these (where possible) with corporate objectives;
 - provides measures for evaluation;
 - includes realistic action plans for each function.

3 Responsibility for communications

- 3.1 The day-to-day implementation of this strategy will be driven by the Communications/PR function within the Customer Relations Team. However, the corporate responsibility for communications cannot simply be reduced to a single service within the organisation.

Political Leadership

The Council's political leadership has indicated that communications is a top priority by establishing a portfolio to address 'Resources and Value for Money'.

Members are expected to be excellent ambassadors for the Council, and assist in strengthening the messages it needs to communicate internally and externally. Portfolio holders in particular, have a responsibility to assist in publicising work within their respective remits.

At ward level, members need to communicate in line with the member's code of conduct, acting as ambassadors for the Council. This strategy can only be implemented successfully with the full co-operation of both the political and managerial functions of the Council.

Strategic Management

The Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team will be responsible for driving this communications strategy by actively, and demonstrably, applying its principles to all aspects of their work in strategic management.

They will communicate their decisions, and the strategic thinking behind them, clearly and expeditiously to Service Team managers in order that the cascade of essential information to employees at all levels can be instigated (as appropriate) in an accurate and timely manner.

Senior Management

Service Team Managers will take particular responsibility for ensuring the successful implementation of this strategy within their areas of responsibility. Implicit to this, they should also establish channels of communication for employees to express their views on council issues, whether it's related to personal, operational, or strategic issues.

Similarly, Service Team Managers should work closely with the Communications/PR Officer to improve existing modes of communications within the council. The responsibility for communicating clearly should also be delegated appropriately to team leaders and supervisors. Guidance on seeking publicity has been published on the Council's corporate Intranet, along with a Media Forward Plan.

Corporate awareness of communications

The bottom line in respect of the corporate awareness is that the responsibility to communicate equates with the responsibilities associated with the seniority level of the post-holder. Every employee has a role to play in communicating within, and outside of the Council. Communications is inextricably linked to the Council's OneTeam ethos, and the importance lies in an assumed ambassador's role of all employees.

The Council will ensure that it maintains a media forward plan on the corporate Intranet. Senior Officers, along with their teams, have a clear responsibility to identify potential media opportunities, especially where it can be related to the continuous improvement process and the Corporate Plan.

Part A. Internal Communications

4. Internal Communications

Context

- 4.1 Not only are employee perceptions relayed to the outside world, but they also have an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness with which services are delivered. Developing a strong culture committed to service excellence, and thus, continuous improvement, requires effective communication within the council.
- 4.2 These modes or tools for communications are discussed under the following sub-headings:
- Personal / face-to-face communications
 - Print-based materials
 - E-based communications

Current Snapshot

- 4.3 The authority currently has 455 (351 are full time / 104 are part time) employees, working in or from the Civic Centre or its seven satellite offices (Sacriston depot, Sacriston housing office, Bullion depot, Careline, the Riverside Complex, Chester-le-Street Leisure Centre and Selby Cottage). Since the last Strategy, all employees and members will now have access to ICT facilities in the Council, whereas previously, less than half of all council employees had access to a personal computer.
- 4.4 Each employee needs to be kept well informed about the council's role and objectives and have the opportunity to participate in its affairs by feeding back ideas and comments. A well informed and involved workforce has great potential for promoting public awareness and appreciation of the council. This also links strongly with the Council's work towards IIP accreditation.
- 4.5 Internal communications has improved significantly since the 2003 Employee Survey as evidenced by the latest published survey in 2005:
- 77% of respondents say that messages are well presented, up from 61% in 2003
 - 80% of respondents feel that messages are relevant to them, up from 73%
 - 78% of respondents felt that the information they received was understandable, up from 71%
 - 68% of respondents would speak well of the Council outside the organisation, up from 54%
- 4.6 Overall, 56% of respondents now feel that we are communicating well, by contrast, only 34% of respondents thought so when surveyed in 2003. This represents a significant improvement in internal communications, which is further underlined by the change in respondent feelings regarding elected Members. In 2003, only 27% felt that Members had a clear vision of where the council was going. In the most recent survey, 56% of respondents felt Members had a clear vision.

Key Objectives

4.7 Key overarching objectives for internal communications are:

- **Improve information flow throughout the council, and across service teams**
- **Generate the commitment of employees to the success of the council**
- **Enable the council better to meet the needs of its customers**
- **Increase understanding and knowledge of council's vision, and corporate objectives**
- **Supportive of employees during periods of organisational change**
- **Improve cross-cutting communications, especially with regard to satellite offices and between different grades of employees**

5 Personal / Face-to-face communications

5.1 Face-to-face communications facilitates the immediate two-way process where ideas are shared and information exchanged on a personal basis.

Current Snapshot

5.2 Significant improvements have been made when comparing responses between the 2003 and 2005 Employee Surveys:

- established **quarterly briefings** by the Chief Executive, Leader, and other Directors has led to respondents citing this method of being made aware of Council issues as the most important face-to-face communications method from 5% in 2003, up to 68% in 2005
- **team meetings** has also improved as a meaningful method for communicating with employees, up from 38% to 64%
- **Employee Forums'** as a way of face-to-face communications, has also improved slightly as a method for involving employees and sharing information on Council issues, up from 38% to 45%

5.3 During the time of the 2003 survey, the 'grapevine' was the most useful face-to-face mode for getting information about Council issues. Even though it can be functional, it often leads to mixed messages and misunderstandings. However, this mode of communicating now ties with team meetings as the second most important face-to-face interaction at 64%.

5.4 The successes in improving face-to-face communications can be attributed to a strong commitment to communications by a new managerial regime and political leadership to communications, coupled with the additional organisational development function to support the face-to-face element of internal communications.

- 5.5 The challenge over the next three years will be to sustain this improvement. The Organisational Development team has identified their own action plan, in consultation with employees, to address key issues of concern as highlighted by the most recent survey. These actions often relate to the different modes of communication, inclusive of strengthening face-to-face communications across the Council. We need to get consistent messages over to our staff and ensure that any changes are explained. We need to further develop the 'can do' culture, and ensure that staff feel that they are part of something big – an improving council which is going places.

Key Objectives

5.6 Key objectives and actions for face-to-face internal communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsibility	Resource and Risk	Performance Measure
Ensuring adequate information flows throughout organisation	Sustain Quarterly Chief Executive / Leader briefs, and extend to different locations. (In addition, topic specific briefing sessions.) Increase the quality and information flow throughout all levels of the organisation via team meetings	Continuous (minimum 4 per annum) Continuous (minimum 12 per annum)	Chief Executive / Leader / Head of Organisational Development Service Team Managers / Supervisors / Team Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing resources Lack of availability Continuity Employee input <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing resources Lack of availability Continuity / regularity Lack of commitment 	Employee Surveys; attendance figures; satisfaction figures from briefings Agendas and minutes; decision sheet, or notes from meetings; Employee Surveys; IIP accreditation
Facilitating greater involvement of Members and Chief Officers in face-to-face communications	Create opportunities for Members and Officers to participate in the Employee Forum, Corporate briefing sessions, satellite office / team visits by Members and Chief Officers as suggested in the HR team's Action Plan.	Continuous (format and schedules to be agreed)	Human Resources Team / Members / Chief Officers / Service Team Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing resources Lack of availability Continuity / regularity Buy in from teams / individual officers 	Employee Surveys; feedback evaluation sheets (HR); Manager's performance appraisal
Ensure greater employee engagement & representation in Employee Forum	Plan a recurrent campaign to promote each Employee Forum, particularly by providing feedback on key issues to all employees.	October 2007 - ongoing	Human Resources Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing resources Buy in from teams Failure to implement change 	Circulate agenda & minutes prior / after meetings to staff; publish on Intranet & in TeamTalk
Facilitate two way communications through-out the Council	Identify opportunities, in addition to the staff suggestion scheme, team meetings and briefing sessions for ensuring employees are fully engaged.	October 2007 - ongoing	Human Resources Team / Communications/PR Officer / Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing resources Failure to support / implementing change Failure of employees to interact 	Number of staff suggestions per quarter; evaluation sheets at corporate briefing sessions
Monitor progress of face-to-face communications	Assess progress primarily through the Staff Survey, and identify areas for improvement in face-to-face communications. HR team to produce action plan to address key staff concerns.	Sept 2007/8/9	Human Resources Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing resources (budget for staff survey) Failure to address issues of importance to employees 	Staff Survey, and subsequent action plan by HR

6 Print-based materials

- 6.1 Print-based materials primarily support face-to-face communications, inclusive of letters, memos, agendas & minutes of meetings, newsletters, posters and leaflets. This mode of communication can be employed variously to formalise communications, especially where it is targeted appropriately.

Current Snapshot:

- 6.2 Significant improvements were made since the previous Strategy:
- an 8-page, bi-monthly employee newsletter, *TeamTalk*, was established in November 2004. After e-mail at 77%, respondents indicated *TeamTalk* as the second most useful communications tool (74% of respondents) to make them aware of Council issues
 - the establishment of *Members' Update*, a monthly news sheet produced by, and for, elected Members in aid of the continuous improvement agenda
 - more proactive management of notice boards
- 6.3 Since it was identified as a gap in the previous Strategy, *TeamTalk* was established in November 2004. Since then, one readership survey was undertaken to assess the usefulness of this method of communications. 93% of respondents rated the magazine (overall) as either good or excellent, with a similar percentage of employees agreeing that it is well written and presented.
- 6.4 The challenge over the next three years would be to sustain the momentum of this publication's success (also ensuring that it reaches external offices). Staff ownership is encouraged by inviting all employees to contribute formal and informal news to this magazine. Contributors are given recognition by having their names / photograph with their article/s.
- 6.5 The establishment of *Members' Update* has provided a newsletter 'for and by members' to further support Member communications, with an emphasis on the improvement process. Issues around improvement are reported upon by inviting contributions from portfolio holders, as well as members at ward level. A rota-system works well to ensure the monthly publication of this newsletter prior to (or at) each full Council meeting.

Key Objectives

6.6 Key objectives and actions for print based internal communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsibility	Resource and Risk	Performance Measure
Support face-to-face information flows with printed materials	Publish bi-monthly newsletter <i>TeamTalk</i>	Continuous (minimum 6 per annum)	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources. • Limited capacity / expertise external supplier 	Documentary
	Sustain relevance of magazine by continuous evaluation through readership surveys	annually - continuous	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Failure to improve employee communications 	Documentary; feedback articles
	Involve employees as key contributors across the organisation	continuous	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Willingness of employees to contribute • Engagement with all service teams 	Invitations to contribute via e-mail and in publication
	Publish monthly Members' Update to communicate specifically progress re the improvement agenda	Continuous (12 editions per annum)	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Limited capacity / expertise • Members contributions 	Documentary
	Publish regular core briefs on the Intranet	Continuous	PA to Chief Executive / CMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Random nature 	Documentary
	Sustain proactive management of notice boards across the Council offices	continuous	Service Team Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Stakeholder conflict / inclusiveness 	Documentary + photographs
	Update various elements to make the induction pack user-friendly (in co-operation with the Head of Organisational Development)	September 2007	Human Resources Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Failure to retain new employees 	Documentary

7 E-based communications

- 7.1 E-based internal communications Include any communications and information circulated, or available, in electronic formats such as represented by e-mail, the Website, databases and public/network folders/Intranet.

Current Snapshot

- 7.2 Internal communication has been significantly boosted by the introduction of a corporate Intranet. This shared resource supports effective information management through-out the Council by providing a user-friendly interface where information is stored and updated. Coupled with this, the ICT team is, further to a staff suggestion, rolling out a project that would enable all employees and Members to have access to personal computers, in effect, access to e-mail, and the Intranet).
- 7.3 The importance of e-mail in supporting face-to-face and print-based communications is underlined by 77% of respondents (in the latest Employee Survey) indicating this as the most useful tool through which employees were made aware of Council issues. It should be noted that these findings only relate to those respondents that had access to a personal computer. It is hoped that a 100% access to a personal computer will greatly contribute to the two-way communications process in the Council.
- 7.4 Core briefs were introduced in 2005 to bridge the communications gap between CMT meetings and employees. Core briefs are circulated via e-mail to all employees that have access to this medium. However, only 51% of respondents in the most recent Employee Survey cited this mode of communications as providing them with information about Council issues. With greater access to this medium, and with a more frequent production of the briefs, communications within the Council could be greatly enhanced.
- 7.5 Certain service teams (Revenues and Benefits, Housing, and Leisure) publish their own newsletters on the Intranet / via e-mail. This indicates initiative by teams to communicate about their services, and can assist in enhancing better understanding between teams in the Council. Corporate communication standards are necessary to ensure consistent branding across all Council communications, especially where this is circulated externally. The usefulness of the Intranet can be further improved upon.

Key Objectives

7.6 Key objectives for E based internal communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource and Risk	Performance Measure
Provide 100% access to ICT equipment across the Council	ICT roll-out programme for ICT access across the Council, with support by Service Team Managers, and the ICT team	April 2007	ICT Manager / ICT Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Limited skills / expertise of manual workers 	All employees signed up to ICT user policies
Guidance for employees on good practice in communications	Draft corporate communication standards to facilitate improved communications, within, but also outside the Council	August 2007	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Capacity of PR team • Buy in from other teams 	Published on Intranet
Establish protocols for proper usage of ICT equipment to support face-to-face and print communications	Established through the ICT users policies which includes a basic guide to the uses of e-mail, inclusive of good practice when sending e-mails, out-of-office messages, response times to e-mail enquiries etc.	August 2007	ICT Manager / ICT Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Limited skills • Inefficient use of ICT infrastructure • Failure of employees to follow protocols 	Employees have to sign up to these policies prior to gaining access to e-mail / Intranet
Support the usefulness of the Intranet and e-mail as communication tools	Ongoing review of the content management system of the Intranet to ensure its usefulness as an information management / sharing tool. Inclusive of reducing the use of paper / printing / photocopying	Quarterly	Modernisation Project Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Inefficient / inappropriate use of ICT infrastructure • Buy in by all service teams • Attendance at modernisation project team meetings 	Documentary

Part B. External Communications

8. External Communications Context and Audiences

- 8.1 Some local authorities make the mistake of thinking of ‘the public’ as a homogeneous audience with which they need to communicate. Reality is that the council’s audiences are made up of a whole range of specific groups whose interests in and knowledge and expectations of the Council will vary tremendously. This Strategy takes that into account.
- 8.2 The Council needs to develop key messages for each of the objectives stated below. The emphasis is on groups that have specific needs as far as information is concerned, and how they access council services, and service-related information. Modes or tools for communications are discussed under the following sub-headings:
- Print-based materials
 - Media Management
 - Advertising
 - Community Relations
 - E-based communications
 - Corporate Branding and identity
 - Continuous service improvement

Current Snapshot

- 8.3 The Council’s commitment to communicate (and engage) with its various target audiences are demonstrated, especially, by the Corporate Plan, Community and Engagement Strategy, Sustainable Community Strategy, and Customer Excellence Strategy. These strategies contain aims to ensure that residents, service users and all other interested parties are well informed have their needs taken into account and, most importantly, have the opportunity to be involved in the planning, prioritising and monitoring of our services.
- 8.4 Successful consultation requires the appropriate transmission of information to explain how the Council has made use of (acted on) their views. The Council’s positive relationship with the media ensures that its various audiences are informed on decisions and actions taken by the Council in a timely and open manner. In addition, the council publishes a wide range of material (in both print and electronic formats) to inform residents and customers of the services we provide.
- 8.5 Adopting a more corporate approach (operational and across service teams) to external communications will support our corporate objectives as it relates to our Corporate Plan. Quite often, corporate literature is the only tangible element in the council’s portfolio of services. Individual service teams should incorporate a more integrated approach to marketing their services to ensure greater consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in council communications.

Key Objectives

8.6 Key overarching objectives for external communications are therefore:

- improve information flow between the council and its various external audiences to enhance mutual understanding
- improve communications and access to information with 'hard to reach' or 'hard to hear' groups
- increase positive perceptions of the council through communications
- safeguard the council's reputation with external stakeholders, especially as represented through the media

9. Print-based Communications

9.1 These relate to any council published document. This will be any public strategy or plan. Of key importance are the Council's flagship magazines such as District News, but also includes leaflets, letters, flyers and other service related materials e.g. fridge magnets and stickers.

Current Snapshot

9.2. In accord with good practice recommended by the LGA the council regularly produces a community magazine. The District News is produced four times a year and circulated to 24 000 households. Continuous improvements are being made to the design and content to ensure a consistent and credible source of information to benefit the district's entire community. Each issue sees 140 schools, community centres, parish councils etc. invited to contribute to the magazine's content. The Council has won a national award in 2002 for the way in which it has involved the local community.

9.4 A readership survey undertaken in July 2005, found that 84% of respondents rated this publication as 'excellent' or 'good', with 87% rating it as 'informative'. This was supported by the shelf-life of the magazine which indicated 66% of respondents keeping the magazine for longer than a week. Other district councils in the County have copied the survey used for District News to assess their respective publications. It is hoped that their results will be shared to identify common themes of importance to residents.

9.5 Issues which readers wanted more coverage of included the following: environmental issues / street cleansing / refuse collection; safety / crime prevention / anti-social behaviour; and leisure / arts news.

9.6 Each year, the Customer Relations team produces various printed materials for a variety of service teams, aimed at external audiences, ranging from leaflets and booklets, to more substantive documents like the 184 page Corporate Plan, the Sustainable Community Strategy, and the Regeneration Strategy. To improve the Council's print management, the team has established a detailed database capturing details of each request for design, proofreading and printing. Details on the database will identify opportunities for improvement, especially in relation to value for money.

Key Objectives

9.7 Key objectives for print-based external communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource and Risk	Performance Measure
Maintain and improve publication of District News as flagship council magazine in line with the LGA's Reputation Campaign, and by benchmarking exercises with other District Councils.	Maintain good relationships with internal and external contributors	Continuous (4 editions per annum)	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Limited capacity / expertise • External suppliers 	Documentary
	Assess relevance and identify areas for improvement relating to content through readership surveys	September 2007; December 2008	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Limited capacity • Creating unrealistic expectations • Respond to key actions within the survey findings 	Assess quality through readership surveys
Support the Equalities Scheme Action Plan	Promote equal access to Council documents / publications by providing alternative formats (different languages, signing, large print, audio & Braille) on request	continuous	Equalities & Diversity Working Group / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Failure to communicate equitably • Failure to comply with legislation 	Documentary; invoices; electronic database
	Investigate Council guide to council services for people with visual impairments	October 2007 (annual)	Communications / PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to increased expenditure for production of guide • Failure to communicate with hard to reach groups • Limited expertise / capacity 	Audio cassette; documentary
Improve print management in the Council (in accordance with value for money & consistent branding principles)	Set up corporate database within the Customer Relations team to list all details of print and design work requested by various service teams	November 2007 – maintain continuously	Graphic Design and Communications Assistant / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Failure to identify value for money solutions 	Documentary; electronic database
	Set up simplified procedures for print / design requests. Quantify the year-on-year costs of printing across the Council's service teams	September 2007 – continuous improvement / review	Graphic Design and Communications Assistant / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Failure to identify value for money solutions 	Database; procedures published on Intranet
Improve greater access to Council services by producing an A-Z in line with LGA's Reputation campaign objective	Produce an A-Z in the most appropriate format(s) to serve as a useful resource for all residents in the District.	October 2007	Communications/PR Officer / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on funding • Failure to comply with LGA Reputation Campaign undertaking 	A tangible booklet / fridge magnet with an A-Z listing of services and contact details

10 Media Management

- 10.1 Media Management is defined as any form of external agency that broadcasts or publishes information for public consumption. Includes mainly regional press (The Northern Echo / Chester-le-Street Advertiser, The Journal, Evening Chronicle and Sunderland Echo), and regional broadcasters (BBC Radio Newcastle, Sun FM, Metro FM, Durham FM, BBC Look North, Granada Media - Tyne Tees). Under certain circumstances, the national local government press and national press are circulated media releases.

Current Snapshot

- 10.2 Since the previous Strategy, the team:

- has significantly increased issuing media releases, from 58 in 2003/4 to 110 in 2005/6.
- was successful in having 458 articles published in regional newspapers during the 2005/6 financial year, worth close to £200,000 in advertising value equivalent
- maintained a very good ratio of positive versus negative coverage of 9.3 – 1.6

More effective media management since the previous Strategy is due to the following:

- introduction of a corporate media forward plan published on the Intranet
- increased willingness of members and officers to participate in media issues
- publication, on the Intranet, of guidance on seeking publicity
- closer involvement of the HR / Comms portfolio holder in media management

- 10.3 Top media issues over the last three years included housing, environmental-related, leisure services, regeneration, and revenues & benefits. The Dreamspace incident in July 2006 was successfully managed by the team to guard the Council's reputation within the region and nationally. However, it had an impact on the team's capacity to fully focus on other issues.

- 10.4 Currently, the team sets a target of issuing a minimum of 100 press releases per annum. Key themes to be represented, in line with the Council's improvement agenda, over the next three years include:

- "you said, we did" styled articles to demonstrate the Council's commitment to improvement through consulting & engaging meaningfully with its residents
- visible improvement initiatives, especially regarding regeneration and environmental issues
- promotion of e-services to encourage take-up of these channels
- council performance and improvement

- 10.5 During the last financial year, around 300 media enquiries have been answered successfully. Often overlooked, this is often where the media requires a response from the Council in relation to a negative issue. The team drafts appropriate responses, in consultation with relevant officers and members, to counteract potential negative media coverage.

- 10.6 A media clippings service is in operation to inform key members and officers of the Council's reputation in the regional media. The distribution list was recently reviewed with the Assistant Chief Executive and the Member portfolio holder for HR / Communications to ensure a fairer and more cost-effective distribution of these clippings. Service teams have access to these through their service heads, and two copies are circulated to the Members' Room.

Key Objectives

10.7 Key objectives for media management are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Manage the Council's reputation in the media	Issue at a minimum of 100 media releases per financial year. This, in combination with identifying media photo opportunities, interviews, articles etc.	Annual	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Limited capacity / expertise • Managing Council's reputation • Buy in from other teams / stakeholders 	Media Forward Plan; database of media releases
	Answer media enquiries as a priority, yet be honest and factual	continuous	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Managing Council's reputation • Co-operation from other teams / stakeholders 	Coverage in media – media clippings
	Encourage greater usage of media forward plan across the Council	continuous	Communications & PR Officer / Customer Relationship Manager / Chief Executive / Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Managing Council's reputation • Co-operation from Service heads 	Media Forward Plan; database of media releases. Coverage in media – media clippings
Media training for Members and Chief Officers	Implement media training day for Members and Chief Officers (possibly in conjunction with ANEC)	November 2007	Communications/PR Officer / Corporate Training Co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on financial support by ANEC • Inability to put forward appropriate spokespersons (damage to reputation) 	Documentary
Inform Members, Chief Officers and Service Team Managers of press coverage	Papers (regional) are scanned on a daily basis to provide a collated list of relevant clippings which is circulated on a weekly and bi-weekly basis.	continuous	Customer Relations Assistant / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing budget • Failure to share information internally 	Documentary
Inform Members and employees on media issues	Annual presentation to Members and employees on the Council's reputation in the media	October 2007/8/9	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing budget • Limited capacity / time 	Documentary; feedback sheets

11 Advertising

- 11.1 Advertising in the context of this Strategy can be defined as paid for editorial or advertising space, especially as it relates to statutory notices, tenders, and recruitment advertising in both the local and national press.

Current Snapshot

- 11.2 The use of advertising by the Council is generally limited to local newspapers, particularly the Chester-le-Street Advertiser (Northern Echo spin-off free paper) as it provides the greatest readership on a district-wide level, reaching 17,000 households.
- 11.3 Generally, statutory notices, especially where it concerns planning and building control, are placed in the Advertiser. During the 2005/6 financial year, a total of 37 statutory notices were published at a cost of £16, 508.
- 11.4 Recruitment advertising is placed variously in the local and national press, depending on the needs or skills detailed in the advertisement. During the 2005/6 financial year, recruitment advertisements were placed at a cost of £39,953. However, some of these costs were part-funded by partners.²
- 11.5 Advertising is currently co-ordinated by the team that liaises directly with the Council's corporate advertising agency (Pearsons), on behalf of service teams requesting advertisements or notices to be placed. Recruitment advertising is co-ordinated by the Human Resources team.
- 11.6 All advertising should be viewed as an opportunity to further promote the council, and what it stands for. Recruitment advertising in particular should include standard phrases and include our key messages to highlight our equal opportunities drive.
- 11.7 Within the council, there are often unrealistic expectations about placing an advertisement due to issues related to time scales, briefing and proofing processes. The process for requesting and approving advertisements could be improved.
- 11.8 Other standard adverts are placed in directories such as the BT directory; the Yellow Pages, and the Thompson's Directory. The average annual expenditure on these types of adverts is around £2,000.

² Note that this cost excludes larger campaigns for 9 Housing positions, Head of Planning & Environmental Health, and Head of Regeneration posts

Key Objectives

11.9 Key objectives for advertising are:

Objective		Action		Timescale		Performance Measure	
Improve the effectiveness and efficiency with which advertising requests are made and dealt with	Review step-by-step procedure for those wanting to request the placement of advertisements	Customer Relations Team / Human Resources Team	October 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Inefficient use of resources • Unrealistic expectations within teams 	Documentary; published on the Intranet		
	Review advertising arrangements for recruitment & public notices, inclusive of alternative methods for advertising planning notices	Purchasing Manager / Communications/PR Officer	July 2007 - continuously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Inefficient use of resources • Not achieving value for money 	Documentary		

12 Community Relations

- 12.1 Community relations in the context of this Strategy relates to any communication that aids and facilitates understanding between the Council and the local community. Community-based organisations (Residents' and Tenants' organisations and parish councils) are often overlooked in communications strategies.

Current Snapshot

- 12.2 There is an important need to ensure that local government issues are managed and communicated in a way that promotes awareness, understanding and involvement among the public and/or specific interest groups. The council and partnerships Community Engagement and Involvement Strategies aim to improve opportunities for engagement and a Working Group has been set up with partners to seek to achieve strategy vision.
- 12.3 These issues range from strategic (Sustainable Community Strategy; Pelton Fell regeneration project etc.), to operational issues (eg changes in refuse collection dates/times over public holidays). Poorly communicated operational information negatively impacts on the customer's experience, thus leading to dissatisfaction resulting in a high number of complaints. Providing the right information at the right time ensures that the Council stays on course towards achieving customer excellence as captured in the Corporate Plan.
- 12.4 Communicating through existing structures in local communities also has the potential to benefit the Council as these structures generally have more credibility (and legitimacy) than local government structures - in essence, the spirit of the recently published Local Government White Paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities.
- 12.5 The objectives and actions detailed below aim to support and strengthen both the Community Engagement & Involvement Strategy, the Sustainable Community Strategy, and the Corporate Plan objectives. The focus is on bridging the divide in 'mutual understanding' between the council and the various communities / interest groups it serves.

Key Objectives

12.6 Key objectives for community relations are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Establish better communication channels with community-based organisations	Establish database of community-based publications/editors (as a credible third party), and share information by circulating media releases. Can also be tapped as a source for consultation.	November 2007	Communities Partnerships Team / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Failure to effectively engage our communities • Misinformation 	Captured on electronic database
	Empower residents' and tenants' associations through the provision (donation) of obsolete personal computers in co-operation with the Communities / Partnership team and ICT service teams	continuous	ICT Team / Communities & Partnerships Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Inefficient use of resources • Maintenance of equipment • Training for tenants and residents groups 	Documentary
	Make better use of notice boards in community centres / halls & engage with parish councils – as part of the 'Community Hubs'	continuous	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Missed opportunity in communicating efficiently with communities 	Number of centres involved
	Publish YARN (Your Area Residents' News) twice a year on behalf of the District Partnership	April / October – 07/08/09	Communities & Partnerships Team / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing budget • Inefficient communications by District Partnership • Support of partners / tenants and residents groups 	Documentary
	Establish and publish regenerations news in conjunction with Head of regeneration.	October 2007 – March 2008	Head of Regeneration / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing budget • Inefficient communications by District Partnership • Support of partners / tenants and residents groups 	Documentary
	Publish the Town Centre newsletter on a quarterly basis in conjunction with the Town Centre Manager	Continuous (4 per annum)	Town Centre Manager / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing budget • Inefficient communications / engagement with business community 	Documentary

13 Communicating with/in partners/hips

- 13.1 A relationship where two or more organisations work together with trust, openness and honesty to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes they cannot achieve alone. This includes a wide range of organisations spanning the public, charitable and private sectors, as well as arrangements as part of the Local Area Agreement and the District Partnership – the Local Strategic Partnership.
- 13.2 The Partnership Strategy, adopted by the Council in 2006, considers the nature and purpose of partnerships, and details the Council's partnership arrangements. The Strategy is supported by a three year action plan.
- 13.3 An audit of Council partnerships, undertaken in February 2007, identified in excess of sixty such partnerships. Within the context of communications, two main issues arise where it concerns partnership working.
- 13.4 The first concerns the internal communications arrangements, in other words, how partners operationally communicate amongst themselves, which is often set out in the partnership protocol or terms of reference.
- 13.5 The second issue concerns communicating (externally) the successes in terms of outcomes. At the moment, the Council does not have an adequate approach to decide who takes the leading responsibility within a partnership for communicating its successes. Clearly, there is also a need to establish a protocol within partnership working to determine a co-ordinated approach to external communications.
- 13.6 Where it concerns communications, the Partnerships Strategy's action plan refers to the promotion of partnership working, especially where it can be related to specific outcomes resulting from such work, and how communities can become aware of how they can be engaged (where appropriate).

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Promote partnership outcomes, inclusive of LAA, and District Partnership work, with external and internal stakeholders.	Promote partnership outcomes via Council channels such as District News, the corporate website, TeamTalk, media releases.	Ongoing	Customer Relations Team / Service Teams / Assistant Chief Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Buy in from service teams • Failure to build on reputation 	Documentary evidence (articles in District News & TeamTalk; media coverage)
Communicate partnership working and successes in a timely and consistent manner	Establish a basic guidance document on a partnership approach to external communications	February 2008	Communities & Partnerships Team / Assistant Chief Executive / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Buy in from service teams & stakeholders • Failure to build on reputation 	Document published; consultation feedback

14 E-based external communications

- 14.1 For the purposes of this Strategy e-based external communications includes any communications and information circulated, or available, in electronic formats such as represented by e-mail, the Inter- and Intranet.

Current Snapshot

- 14.2 The Council has made significant improvements since the previous Strategy with the re-launch of the Council's greatly enhanced website, the launch of a corporate Intranet (see Internal Communications), as well as an updated ICT Security and Good Practice Policy to support these tools.
- 14.3 Most of the 'IEG' (Implementing Electronic Government) associated actions have now been fulfilled. The greatest challenges ahead relate to:
- the continuous review of information of content on the Council website, and more importantly,
 - to promote the uptake of electronic services such as e-billing and online payments
- 14.4 The shift in emphasis will be from publishing information to transacting with our customers. The Customer Relations team has embarked on a campaign to promote the range of online services, put in place by the ICT team, offered by the Council.
- 14.5 The latest version of the website is also more accessible to residents whose first language is not English, as well as for people with visual impairments (subscription to ReadSpeaker). Future reviews will be undertaken in view of customer feedback.
- 14.6 Apart from assistance with the continuous review of the website, the Customer Relations team also piloted the use of SMS technology as part of an integrated campaign to support the Council's benefit take-up and anti-fraud campaign.

Key Objectives

14.7 Key objectives for e based external communications are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Improve Council Website to benefit primarily residents in the district	Re-design homepage	continuous	ICT Team / Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing budget • Managing Council's reputation online • Lack of webmaster role • Failure for service teams to support and update information • Transformational Government agenda 	Online Survey; Home Page interface, general residents satisfaction
	Annually review the Council's web content and publishing guidelines (in consultation with the ICT team) to aid web co-ordinators in various service teams	November 2007 / 08 / 09	ICT Manager / Modernisation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Managing efficient / appropriate use of ICT infrastructure • Transformational Government agenda 	Documentary; published on Intranet
Improve and promote the uptake of online services	Assist / advise the ICT team in the ongoing improvement of content as managed by various service teams	continuous	Customer Relations Team / ICT Team / Modernisation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Buy-in from teams • Outdated information 	Up to date information, increased usage of web-site
	Promote the uptake of e-services through District News, Website, leaflets, posters and other promotional materials	continuous	Customer Relations Manager / ICT Manager / Modernisation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resources • Limited capacity / expertise • Limited public interest • Limited resources to have a real impact 	Documentary
	Promote the usage of e-mail / online services by Members	September 2007	Personnel & Communications Portfolio Holder / ICT Manager / Customer Relations Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Might incur expenditure on training and equipment • Limited capacity / expertise • Non-efficient use of Council's resources 	Documentary / uptake figures

15 Corporate branding and identity

- 15.1 Corporate branding can be described as the way in which the Council presents its services and information visually to external audiences. This relates to a consistent way of communicating to all our diverse audiences through visual and written communications.

Current Snapshot

- 15.2 At the beginning of 2006, the Council became one of the first Councils in the region to sign up to the Local Government Association's Reputation campaign. The aim of this campaign is to promote the Council and its services by focusing on making Council services more visible to the public (e.g. branding council vehicles with the 'OneTeam' logo, and having a more consistent approach to corporate branding as it relates to corporate publications).
- 15.3 One strand of this campaign is to improve branding of community-based services such as environmental services and regeneration projects. The way in which the Council brands itself poses room for improvement, and this will be addressed in the action plan.
- 15.4 Over the last year, the Equalities and Diversity Working Group has informed a draft set of Corporate Communication Standards to be published on the Council's Intranet by March 2007. Effectively, this is a set of guidelines that will, to a great extent, address issues such as communicating with diverse audiences, branding, media protocols, and guidance on Plain English (inclusive of a style guide).
- 15.5 The guidelines will set standards for service teams in marketing and branding terms to ensure that messages and visual representations of the Council are consistent with the 'OneTeam' ethos which was a result to indicate internally (and externally) the Council's commitment to continuous improvement. The guidelines reflect good practice from around the country, and it is hoped that this will strengthen the Council's approach to communicating internally, but especially, externally. It is intended to make this set of guidelines available on the Intranet by the time it is finalised.

Key Objectives

15.6. Key objectives and actions for corporate branding and identity are:

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Enhance uniformity of messages / visuals communicated by the council to external and internal audiences	Finalise and publish Corporate Communications Standards electronically, and enforce Council-wide compliance	October 2007	Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource • Limited capacity • Buy-in from service teams • Managing Council's reputation 	Intranet; documentary
	Ensure consistent branding across all community services, particularly: environmental, regeneration and leisure service teams in support of the LGA's Reputation campaign	September 2007 - ongoing	Customer Relations Team / Communications/PR Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing budget / resource, though certain times might incur expenditure • Managing the Council's reputation 	Photographs; documentary; electronic picture database
	Establish photographic library on Intranet as a corporate resource	November 2007	Graphic Design & Communications Assistant / Public Relations Assistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource, though expenditure might be incurred by expanding stock photographs • Limited capacity / expertise 	Published on the Intranet
	Advise and support service teams to brand vehicles, uniforms, signs, banners etc.	continuous	Customer Relations Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within existing resource, though expenditure might be incurred by service teams • Managing the Council's reputation 	Intranet / documentary / photo archive of branding initiatives

16 Continuous Service Improvement

- 16.1 The council's reputation will not improve unless it provides improved services which show better value for money. The LGA research shows the particular need to improve the visibility of Council services, especially those delivered at a neighbourhood level, the so called 'streetscene'. If services are better perceived However, all services need to continue to improve. If people feel that and see that services are good then this is perhaps the most effective communications tool we have at our disposal

Current Snapshot

- 16.2 The council embarked on an ambitious improvement programme following its 'poor' Comprehensive Performance assessment judgement in March 2004. The effort in terms of service improvement is evident:
- The council is making good progress overall according to the Audit commission and a re-inspection is due to take place in February 2006
 - The housing service has improved from 'Poor' to 'Fair'
 - The environmental Services has improved from 'Fair' to 'Good' with 'promising prospects of improvement'
 - Revenues and Benefits have completed a 255 point Improvement plan and is showing top quartile performance
 - The planning service is out performing similar services in the region
 - Selby Cottage received an 'Outstanding' OFSTED report
 - About 80% of our key performance indicators have improved
 - Customer satisfaction is improving as a result
- 16.3 The council needs to maintain this momentum and show improvement and value for money across all services. All staff need to become ambassadors for the organisation and indeed this message is regularly communicated to staff at employee briefings.

Key Objectives

16.4 Key objectives for Continuous Service Improvement are;

Objective	Action	Timescale	Responsible	Resource & Risk	Performance Measure
Ensure the council continues to focus on its improvement programme	Implement IRP2 Learn from the 2007 CPA inspection and develop a further improvement programme as a result	December 2007	Improvement & Performance Team	<p>Within existing resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited capacity Buy-in from service teams Managing Council's reputation 	<p>At least Fair CPA re-categorisation</p> <p>Improved future service inspection outcomes</p>
Ensure individual service plans include proposals for service improvement	Ensure corporate service planning template includes individual service improvement plans Monitor implementation of improvement plans through programme Management Board	December 2007 - March 2010	Improvement & Performance Team	<p>Within existing resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited capacity Buy-in from service teams 	Improved future service inspection outcomes
Develop an ambassador culture within the council	Provide awareness training for all staff around going the extra mile Reward achievement Challenge inappropriate behaviour	June - August 2008 Continuous Continuous	Improvement & Performance Team	<p>Within existing resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buy-in from service teams Managing Council's reputation 	Increase in customer satisfaction across

17 Monitoring and Reviewing the Implementation of the Strategy

- 17.1 Strategies rapidly become obsolete unless constantly reviewed as part of a permanent strategic management process. In addition things change and communities will require different things. The strategy may change as a result of engagement with our communities. This document is therefore a living document which will be reviewed on the basis of such change.
- 17.2 It is intended that the implementation of the Strategy will be initially monitored by the council's Project Management Board and will be led by the Assistant Chief Executive. This ought to continue until a more specific project board is developed as part of other Strategy proposals (Community Engagement and Involvement Working Group)
- 17.3 Reports on progress will be made to Corporate Management Team and the Executive through the Corporate Performance Reporting System. Such reports will also be made available to Scrutiny panels in due course. Where there is any slippage corrective action will be taken. Where there is a need to significantly review the plan this will be by council resolution. Minor changes to the plan will be the responsibility of the Project Management Board.
- 17.4 There are clearly resource issues associated with the implementation of the Strategy. It is anticipated that most of the action plan will be achieved by developing revised more effective practices and new ways of working. Where there are significant resource implications these will be identified and considered in the more detailed project plans that will be developed to achieve the Strategy action plans. A key risk to the delivery of the strategy is the availability of officer time to deliver the action plan. This will need to be managed within the organisation.
- 17.5 The Communications/PR Officer, the Graphic Design & Communications Assistant and Customer Relations Assistant take prime responsibility for many aspects related to the operational implementation of this strategy. However, at the outset of this document, it was noted that communications cannot simply be reduced to two people within the organisation. Responsibilities for implementation were emphasised earlier on.
- 17.6 Future strategy reviews will coincide with future comprehensive employee surveys (similar in design to the Employee Survey 2005) which will enable a valid measure for assessing progress. Other measures, inclusive of readership, online, and customer satisfaction surveys, will continue to be used as a method for monitoring and evaluation purposes. In addition, important outputs will be measured as set out in the Customer Relations team's service plan. Internal communications will be improved where gaps are identified in subsequent employee surveys, as is currently the case with the Organisational Development team's action plan to address employee concerns from the 2005 employee survey.

References / evidence

This strategy has been prepared by using:

- ***Audit Letter Chester-le-Street District Council 2005/6***
- ***The Corporate Plan Corporate Plan 2006-2009***
- ***The Sustainable Community Strategy 2006-2016***

- ***The Local Government White Paper – Strong and prosperous communities (2006)***
- ***Employee Surveys 2003 & 2005 Findings, PWR***
- ***District News Readership Survey 2005***
- ***TeamTalk Readership Survey 2006***
- ***Residents' Opinion Surveys 2003; 2004; 2005***
- ***Local Government Reputation LGA/IDeA 2006***

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