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**DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY, LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT AND REFRESHING CORPORATE PLANNING**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Leader**  
**Responsible Director – Lorraine O’Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. This report summarises the planned approach to developing a new Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement for Darlington. Alongside this development the Council will be refreshing its approach to service and corporate planning, the medium term financial plan and to organisational development.

**Summary**

2. The Council has for the last five years been a key stakeholder in both the Community Strategy and Darlington Partnership. Whilst the Community Strategy has served the borough well, the recent White Paper<sup>1</sup> and previous consultation papers<sup>2</sup> are powerful drivers in the Council’s approach to community planning. Darlington Partnership is required to take an increasingly responsible, strategic role in delivering genuinely sustainable communities. The approach taken to developing a truly sustainable Community Strategy will be tested in the forthcoming Comprehensive Performance Assessment Corporate Assessment in March 2008 and in future Comprehensive Area Assessments.
3. The Council is already under a duty to prepare a Sustainable Community Strategy, which sets out the strategic vision for the area. The White Paper requires local authorities, in consultation with local partners, to prepare a delivery plan for this strategy – a Local Area Agreement.
4. The White Paper advocates a stronger role for local authorities as leaders and place-shapers. It places authorities and their communities at the heart of strengthened local decision-making. Successful development and implementation of the Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Area Agreement and other products outlined in this report will contribute significantly to this agenda.

**Information and Analysis**

5. This section of the report considers the following issues:
  - (a) the key products involved in this project;
  - (b) the proposed approach;
  - (c) a summary of the major work streams to be undertaken.

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<sup>1</sup> *Strong and prosperous communities* – The Local Government White Paper (26th October 2006)

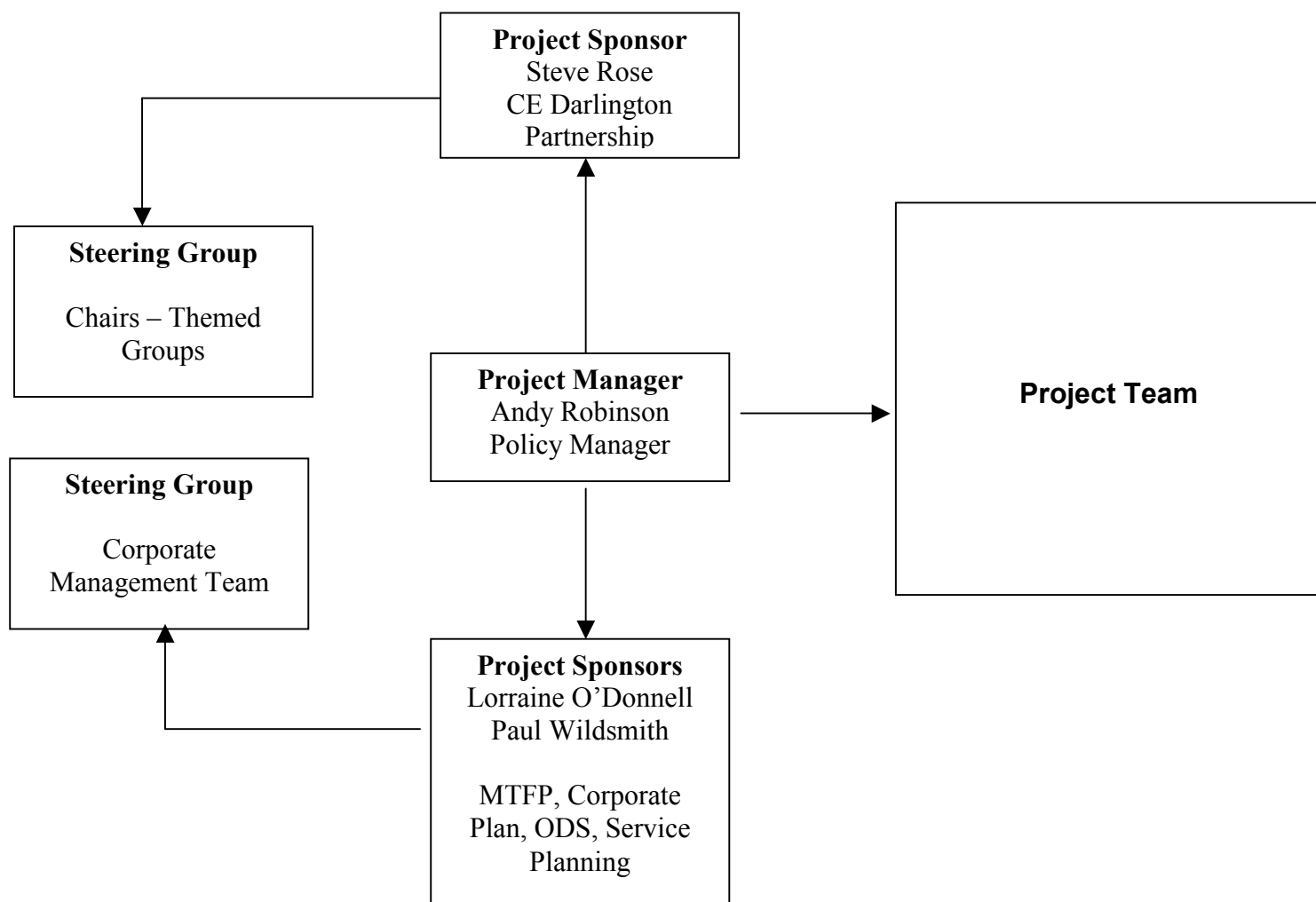
<sup>2</sup> *Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future*, Consultation paper (Dec 2005)

## The key products involved

6. This project identifies the key plans that need to be produced prior to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 so that implementation can begin from 1st April 2008. The successful development and implementation of these plans is critical to the continued development of the authority. Key products are:
  - (a) **A Sustainable Community Strategy** – this is the vision for what Darlington will look like in the future. The Strategy needs to be suitably forward looking to inform the long term, up to 2030 for example, but also needs to deliver improvements over the short term as well. We know that we need to work differently in the future, and indeed this has already started. A long term, sustainable vision will be set in Darlington, meeting the diverse needs of Darlington’s existing residents, improving their quality of life and safeguarding the prospects of future generations. It will build upon the good foundations laid by the current Community Strategy and will be developed along similar lines, ensuring maximum participation and engagement;
  - (b) **Local Area Agreement** - a three-year 'contract' between Darlington (represented by the local authority and other partners through Darlington Partnership) and central Government to deliver particular priorities as set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy. Local Area Agreements have a key role in place-shaping – giving the Council and the Partnership more autonomy and influence to shape local plans and reconfigure services in response to community needs and aspirations. Darlington will need to identify up to 53 improvement targets for inclusion from a national indicator set of 200. There will also be a need to remain focused on delivering the current Local Area Agreement, due to end in March 2009;
  - (c) **Refreshed service planning arrangements** – service planning arrangements underpin the Corporate Plan and our contribution to the wider Community Strategy. The corporate approach to service planning has been in operation for five years and whilst it has been successful, it is appropriate to assess its effectiveness and develop arrangements further;
  - (d) **Corporate Plan** – the plan which demonstrates the Council’s top priorities and contribution to the wider Community Strategy themes. This needs to be consulted on and completed prior to the next financial year;
  - (e) **Medium Term Financial Plan** –The Council operates a medium term approach to its financial planning, renewing the plan at budget time when it approves budget and council tax levels for the following year. We need to ensure that financial and corporate planning is truly integrated, drafting medium term financial plan priorities from those emanating from the Sustainable Community Strategy themes, Local Area Agreement priorities and service plans. It is proposed to produce a single Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan for the first time this year;
  - (f) **Organisational Development Strategy** – Work is continuing on developing the five strands of the new Organisational Development Strategy, Leading Edge, which may include reviewing corporate objectives, drafting the overarching strategy and continuing to engage with members and officers.

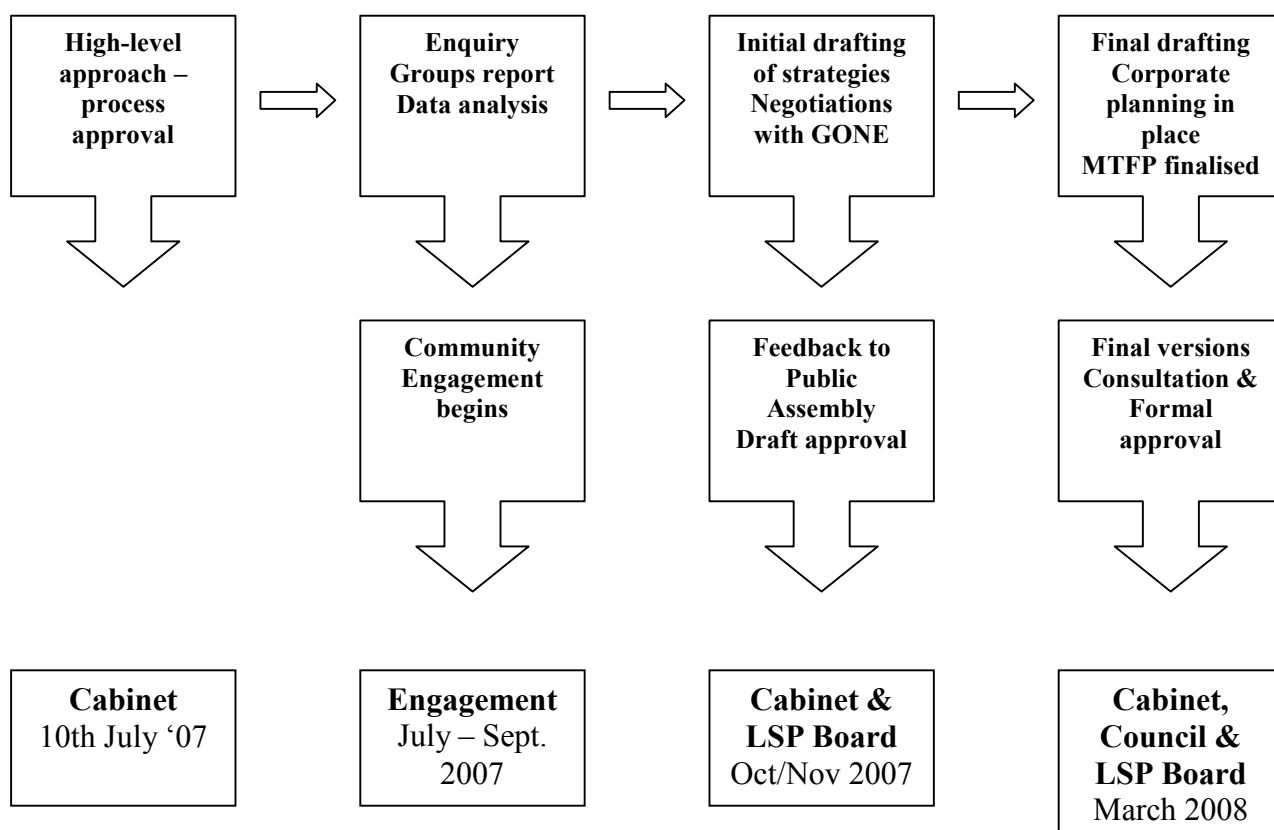
## The proposed approach

7. Each project is interdependent, hence the need to develop all six strands of this project together and not in isolation. For example, the Local Area Agreement cannot be delivered without the Sustainable Community Strategy; without effective service planning there will be little evidence base for the Corporate Plan, etc. Whilst the authority has not previously attempted to develop so many key strategies at one time, it is possible to carry out this work although it will necessitate a joined up approach whereby resource is secured from various departments throughout the year, and project managed from a single point with robust project management in place. It is important to note that whilst all this development work is ongoing, there is a need for continued focus on delivery of our existing Community Strategy Action Plan, Local Area Agreement, service plans, etc.
  
8. Whilst it is proposed that the products are managed as one project by a single project manager, Darlington Partnership is effectively responsible for delivering a Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement and therefore the Chief Executive of the Partnership will oversee those two key products via the role of project sponsor. The remaining products are focused more on the authority and as such will be sponsored by the Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services jointly. To facilitate the project, a team has been set up consisting of representatives from partnering organisations as well as the Council. In summary, roles and reporting arrangements are as follows:



## A summary of the major work streams to be undertaken

9. Detailed action planning has been developed for this project, and is available from the Policy Unit on request. This will include appropriate involvement from relevant Scrutiny Committees. A summary of the key tasks identified for the six products is appended in **Appendix 1**. A high level summary of the approach to be taken in terms of key milestones is as follows:



## Outcome of Consultation

10. Discussion with a range of stakeholders in recent months has informed the production of the action planning needed to deliver this project. Furthermore, engagement and consultation is a key element of all the products to be delivered. The ongoing Enquiry Groups are engaging widely with key stakeholders, whilst the engagement plan being developed will be the key focus of the Connecting with Communities Unit. The outline timeline has been agreed by Darlington Partnership.

## Legal Implications

11. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

12. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. The Sustainable Community Strategy will be drafted in recognition of those requirements and will be complementary to meeting the general duty. The Strategy will be drafted in consultation with the Safer Communities Co-ordinator and relevant actions included as appropriate.

### **Recommendations**

13. Council are requested to:
  - (a) endorse the approach and timeline for the development of a new Sustainable Community Strategy;
  - (b) endorse the changes to corporate planning that will produce a combined Corporate and Medium Term Financial Plan.

### **Reasons**

14. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :
  - (a) To ensure compliance with government guidance
  - (b) To ensure that our planning arrangements are leading edge.

**Lorraine O'Donnell**  
**Assistant Chief Executive**

### **Background Papers**

Local Government White Paper '*Strong and Prosperous Communities*' (Oct 2006)  
*Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their future*, Consultation paper (Dec 2005).

Andy Robinson - Ext. 2014

## Appendix 1

<b>Product</b>	<b>Apr – Jun 2007</b>	<b>Jul – Sep 2007</b>	<b>Oct – Dec 2007</b>	<b>Jan – Mar 2008</b>
<b>Sustainable Community Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enquiry Groups meet</li> <li>• Project planning developed</li> <li>• Working group set up</li> <li>• Data analysis carried out</li> <li>• Engagement plan developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse data</li> <li>• Draft output from Enquiry Groups</li> <li>• Distil emerging issues</li> <li>• Engage public</li> <li>• Effective internal communications</li> <li>• Raise publicity</li> <li>• Formal reporting from Enquiry Groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce draft based upon quarter 2 engagement, etc</li> <li>• Agree draft for consultation</li> <li>• Consult on draft</li> <li>• Internally communicate</li> <li>• Raise awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyse engagement</li> <li>• Final drafting</li> <li>• LAA linkages</li> <li>• Formal adoption, approval from Council</li> <li>• Internal comms and publicity</li> <li>• Assembly</li> </ul>
<b>Local Area Agreement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project planning</li> <li>• Research good practice</li> <li>• Evaluate current LAA</li> <li>• Engage partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produce draft indicator set</li> <li>• Identify gap analysis from emerging themes</li> <li>• Liaise with Government Office</li> <li>• Identify funding streams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft the Local Area Agreement</li> <li>• Negotiate target setting with GONE</li> <li>• LAA financial implications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final drafting</li> <li>• Approval from Council</li> <li>• Governance arrangements</li> <li>• Internal comms and publicity</li> <li>• Assembly</li> </ul>
<b>Service planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete 07/08 plans</li> <li>• Work on horizontal linkages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project plan for 2008/09</li> <li>• Corporate planning away day</li> <li>• Departmental away days</li> <li>• Update 2007/08 plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft service plans</li> <li>• Link priorities to MTFP</li> <li>• Identify resources necessary</li> <li>• Risks assessment completed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service plans drafted</li> <li>• Target setting completed</li> <li>• Plans reflect MTFP</li> <li>• Plans approved</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop engagement programme</li> <li>• Analyse data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpret Community Strategy consultation</li> <li>• Analyse data collection</li> <li>• Roll out engagement process</li> <li>• Undertake Residents' Survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Half year performance review update</li> </ul>	
<b>Medium Term Financial plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research good practice</li> <li>• Formulate project plan for MTFP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulate initial MTFP proposals and initial forecasts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft MTFP,</li> <li>• Priorities from service plans</li> <li>• LAA priorities</li> <li>• SCS themes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finalise MTFP</li> <li>• Formal adoption</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational Development Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete causal mapping</li> <li>• Identify main requirements of strands</li> <li>• Develop communications plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake review of corporate objectives</li> <li>• Adopt Leading Edge</li> <li>• Ongoing consultation with Members &amp; officers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft plan</li> <li>• Agree draft and finalise with Cabinet/CMT</li> <li>• Formal adoption</li> </ul>