



## *Leading Edge*

# **Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan 2005/2006**

## **An inclusive approach**

We wish to develop our future Corporate and Best Value Performance Plans, and approach to Best Value generally, in consultation with partners, residents and service users. We welcome your views and any comments you wish to make on this Plan.

If English is not your first language and you would like more information about this document, or if you require information in large print, Braille or on tape please contact the Policy Unit on 388016

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## **Contact details**

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[www.darlington.gov.uk](http://www.darlington.gov.uk)

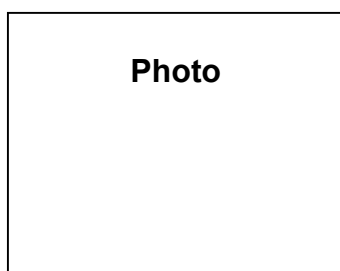
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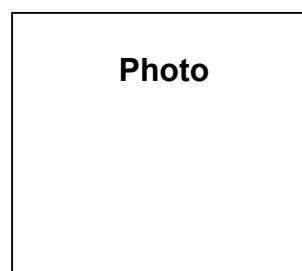
## Foreword

Welcome to our third combined Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan. It aims to present, in an easy to use format, a means of assessing the Council's overall performance and sets out a clear summary of our future direction and priorities.

Details are presented of our performance across all services during 2004/2005 so that you can see what we have achieved. This plan includes further targets to show how we intend to improve those services in future. We have linked these to our priorities as we seek to improve the quality of life in Darlington. We also include comparative information so you can judge how well we are performing compared to other councils.



Councillor John Williams  
Leader of the Council



Ada Burns  
Chief Executive

## Statement of responsibility

Darlington Borough Council is responsible for the preparation of this Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan, the information and assessments set out within it, and the assumptions and estimates on which they are based. The Council is also responsible for setting in place appropriate performance management and internal control systems from which the information and assumptions in the plan have been derived. The Council is satisfied that the information and assessments included in this plan are in all material respects accurate and complete and the plan is realistic and achievable.

## Contents

	PART ONE	Page
<b>Section 1</b>	<b>VISION AND AIMS</b>	
	Shared vision and aims	
	Strategic priorities	
	Relationship to other plans	
<b>Section 2</b>	<b>LEADING EDGE</b>	
	Purpose of this plan	
	The Darlington approach	
	A context of change	
	Community consultation	
	Performance management	
	Efficiency gains and value for money	
	Best Value review programme	
	PART TWO	
<b>Section 3</b>	<b>COUNCIL PERFORMANCE AND PLANS FOR IMPROVEMENT</b>	
	Summary	
	External Assessments	
	Performance information for each of our themes:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the local economy</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting inclusive communities</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising educational achievement</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulating leisure activities</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting community safety</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving health and well-being</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing the local environment</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing an effective transport system</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing our capacity to improve</li> </ul>	

	PART THREE	Page
<b>Section 4</b>	<b>RESOURCES</b>	
	Financial summary	
	- Medium term financial plan	
	- Revenue budget/ spending	
	- Capital programme	
	- Procurement practices	
	Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees	
	Departmental structure	
	PART FOUR	
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Best Value and Local Performance Indicators	
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Best Value Performance Indicators with a 10% or more variance	
<b>Appendix 3</b>	National Quality of Life Indicators	
<b>Appendix 4</b>	Local Public Service Agreement targets	
<b>Appendix 5</b>	Glossary of abbreviations and key phrases	
<b>Index of PIs</b>	Page references for performance indicators in Appendix 1	

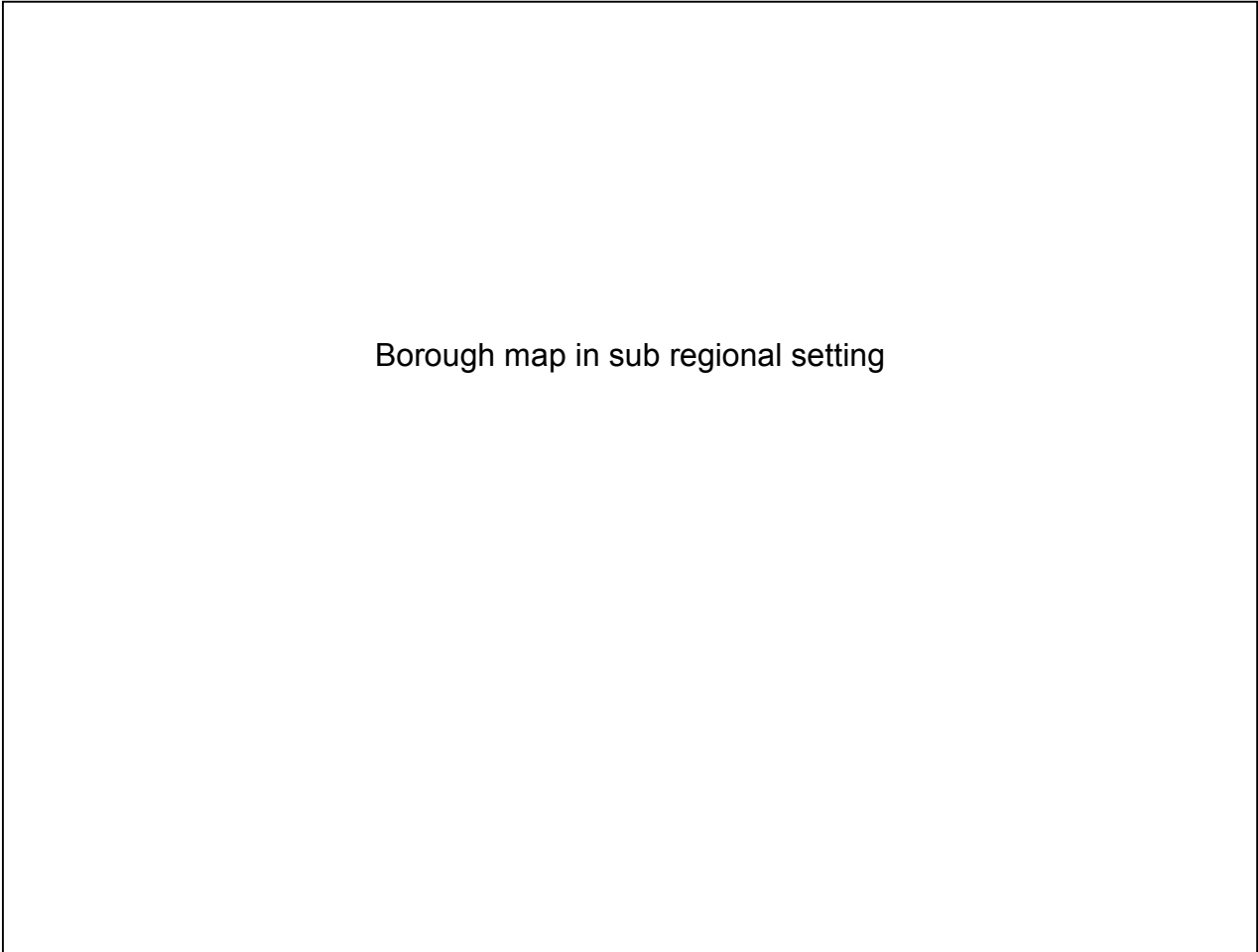
### **A Borough profile**

Darlington is one of five boroughs (the others being Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool) that together make up the Tees Valley. Sitting astride main north-south, and east-west transport corridors, Darlington acts as a gateway to the sub-region, and to the North East region as a whole.

Darlington Borough is a compact area of some 19,000 hectares, comprising the town of Darlington and a number of surrounding villages. Developed land is concentrated in a relatively small urban area with almost 85% of the Borough remaining as countryside. The Borough currently has a population of just under 100,000 people in 43,000 households. The compact size and geography of the area has become one of its key strengths, lending itself to a focused administration and productive partnership arrangements.

Darlington Borough Council was formed as a unitary local authority in 1997 having formerly been a district within County Durham. The Council has 53 elected members, representing 20 urban and 4 rural wards: current representation is 35 Labour, 16 Conservative and 2 Liberal Democrat. The council has benefited from political stability in recent years that has enabled strong community leadership to develop. The Council is Labour controlled with a majority of 35 out of the 53 councillors, operating an effective leader and cabinet model of governance. The executive of nine cabinet members is balanced with five scrutiny committees. The Council's current revenue budget is £112 million, and a capital programme of £24 million in the current year. The Council provides the full range of local government services employing just over 4,700 staff working in four departments. The Council is an 'Excellent' rated authority under CPA.

Darlington retains its market town character, with a wide catchment area, and functions as a sub-regional centre for employment, shopping and culture in South Durham and the Tees Valley. Darlington however presents an area of contrasts. Many residents and visitors enjoy a high quality of life that is valued. Our challenge is to retain and improve on this whilst addressing the very real inequalities in health, wealth and educational achievement that exist within the Borough and when compared with other areas of the country. The development of an integrated hierarchy of plans and strategies, including this Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan, is being used as an ongoing opportunity to bring about improvements in those areas of need whilst retaining and building on our strengths for the benefit of all.



Borough map in sub regional setting

## Comments and feedback

Copies of this document have been widely distributed, internally to all managers and individual teams, and externally to all those agencies playing a significant role in the Borough or currently working in partnership with the Council, covering organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Additional copies will be available for public reference at the Town Hall reception area, neighbourhood housing offices and libraries. A copy has been posted on our website.

We wish to develop our future Corporate and Best Value Performance Plans, and approach to Best Value generally, in consultation with partners, residents and service users. We welcome your views and any comments you wish to make on this Plan.

Please address any feedback or general enquiries to:

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## SECTION 1 – VISION AND AIMS

'Where quality comes to life' – A Community Strategy for the future of Darlington was adopted by the Council and Local Strategic Partnership in March 2003. The Council shares with its partners the vision adopted as part of that process.

### Our Vision for the future of Darlington

Together our community will expect and strive to achieve:

- **An area creating and sharing prosperity** – enhancing our economy and sharing the benefits with all our community.
- **A location for learning, achievement and leisure** – raising aspirations and attainment, promoting creativity and leisure.
- **A place for living safely and well** – reducing crime, making people feel safer and improving health.
- **A high quality environment with excellent communication links** – making the most of our heritage, market town appeal and location.

### Connecting Themed Aims

The Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan is structured into sections based on the four visionary goals and eight connecting themes of the Community Strategy as follows.

<b>Four Visionary Goals</b>			
An area creating and sharing prosperity	A location for learning, achievement and leisure	A place for living safely and well	A high quality environment with excellent communications
<b>Eight Connecting Themes</b>			
Improving the local economy	Raising educational achievement	Promoting community safety	Enhancing the local environment
Promoting inclusive communities	Stimulating leisure activities	Improving health and well-being	Developing an effective transport system

## The Eight Themed Aims of the Community Strategy

Theme	Aim
<b>Improving the local economy</b>	To develop a more enterprising, vibrant and diverse local economy that strengthens local businesses and enterprises and will attract investment, share prosperity and create better employment opportunities for local people
<b>Promoting inclusive communities</b>	To reduce social inequalities, renew disadvantaged neighbourhoods, protect the vulnerable and ensure equality of access for all members of the community to services and opportunities
<b>Raising educational achievement</b>	To ensure the highest quality opportunities exist in education, learning and training, improving school performance and raising aspirations and standards of achievement for all age groups
<b>Stimulating leisure activities</b>	To stimulate participation in cultural pursuits, promoting creativity and extending opportunities for people to experience high quality recreational and leisure activities
<b>Promoting community safety</b>	To reduce crime and disorder and enhance feelings of safety amongst local people
<b>Improving health and well-being</b>	To improve the health, well being and social care of local people, reduce inequalities and help people at all stages in their life to enjoy the best possible health
<b>Enhancing the local environment</b>	To create a more attractive environment that is safe, clean and tidy as well as a more healthy and diverse natural environment
<b>Developing an effective transport system</b>	To produce a safe and effective transport system that balances the needs of all users

We are committed to ensuring that everyone and every organisation recognises their ability to contribute to all the themes, in highlighting the ways that the themes are interrelated and interdependent.

## Strategic priorities

Whilst we intend to move forward in all areas our adopted shared priorities are:

1. ***Improving the local economy*** - in recognition of its importance to all other aspects of improving quality of life.
2. ***Raising educational achievement*** - to bring about the desired long-term investment and improvements for the area and life chances for individuals.
3. ***Promoting inclusive communities*** - ensuring everyone has the opportunity to live active lives, participating in and contributing positively to all aspects of the community.

We will target our efforts specifically on three important groups of residents:

**Children and young people,  
Older people, and;  
Those living in the most deprived wards.**

It is recognised that the life chances of young people, and options available to older people, are not however aligned to one particular theme but are linked to all. We need therefore to ensure that our activities are helping to deliver quality services to meet their needs and aspirations, which are cross-cutting across the full range of themes.

## Corporate Objectives

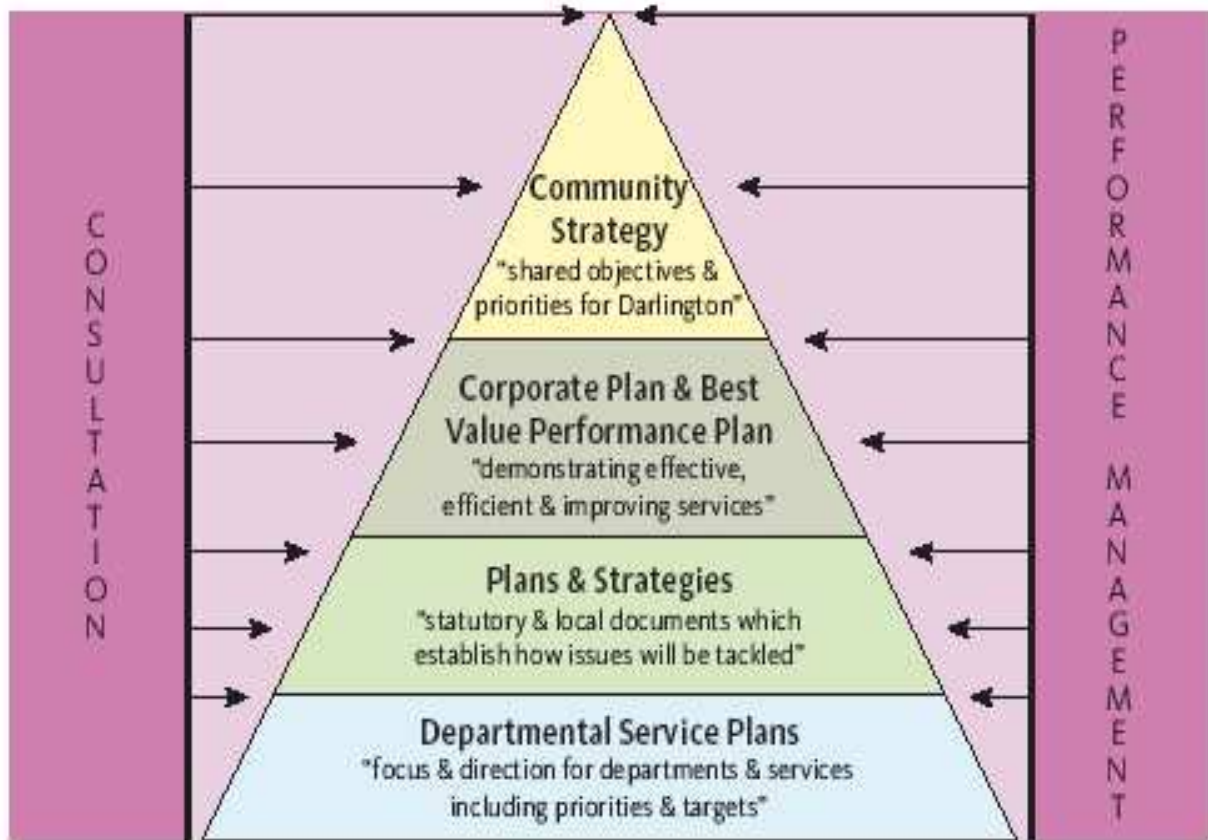
Aligned to the goals and themed aims of our shared vision, Darlington Borough Council has adopted five corporate objectives to shape its future corporate and service planning using a balanced scorecard<sup>1</sup> approach.

<p><b>Shaping a better Darlington</b></p>	<p>‘A better Darlington’ has been defined in the Community Strategy following extensive and inclusive consultation. This objective means that each service/strategy must identify how it specifically contributes to the Community Strategy.</p>
<p><b>Providing excellent services</b></p>	<p>Benchmarks/targets exist for practically all service areas. This objective means that, in accordance with the principles of Best Value, each service/strategy needs to identify how it can become/remain excellent.</p>
<p><b>Putting the customer first</b></p>	<p>Ultimately the opinion of service users determines the quality of the service. This objective means that each service/strategy needs to be clear on who its customers are; what the service looks like to them and how excellent customer satisfaction can be achieved/maintained.</p>
<p><b>Ensuring access for all</b></p>	<p>The authority is committed to equality and to ensuring that, even inadvertently; it is not discriminating against parts of the community. This objective means that all services/strategies need to be able to demonstrate that they are working to reduce inequality gaps.</p>
<p><b>Enhancing our capacity to improve</b></p>	<p>Each service needs to ensure that it is cost effective and investing in improvement. This objective means that each service/strategy must ensure that it is being delivered with appropriate standards of financial management, human resource management etc.</p>

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<sup>1</sup> By analysing how we are performing across each objective we aim to ensure that we balance, for example excellent services now with enhancing our capacity to deliver in future.

## Relationship to Other Plans



A clear hierarchy of plans exists in Darlington, all resourced by the MTFP.

The Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan exists within a framework and hierarchy of plans and strategies which are aligned to provide ever greater levels of detail, from at the top, a shared strategic direction, followed by a corporate contribution and perspective, down to individual goals and targets so that all and the sum of the whole contribute to the shared vision for the area.

The **Community Strategy** at the highest level articulates the vision and sets out the shared aspirations of all partners in securing outcomes for Darlington's communities.

The **Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan** provides the link between the Community Strategy and how the Council as a service provider contributes to the longer-term social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. It provides an annual assessment of our performance against our aims, priorities and targets at a corporate level and our contribution to the Community Strategy goals.

**Statutory Plans and Strategies** reflect the breadth of services the Council provides or has an involvement in, and which are developed to translate aims into specific spending programmes, targets and actions.

**Departmental and Service Plans** are created annually to convert spending programmes into operational business plans for individual services. They provide a coherent framework of planned activity against objectives, allowing for the appraisal of staff against agreed team goals and individual targets.

## Darlington's Planning Framework

Darlington's plans have been developed through a combination of top-down and bottom-up planning. In the former, the identification of four visionary goals, each comprising two main themes; and the development of five corporate objectives form the high level or top-down approach that shapes all other plans - departmental, service and statutory plans. The bottom-up approach involves service areas considering their drivers for change, i.e. Government policy, local factors such as Best Value Reviews (BVRs), performance levels and customer views, etc. and translating these into a series of potential actions for the coming years (2005/06 in detail and subsequent two years in outline). Before completion of service plans, the budget setting process considered all actions that could not be financed within existing budgets and resourced those considered to be a Council priority.

This approach, supported by investment in new performance management software has enabled the authority to continue to build a balanced scorecard into general planning.

To understand what this means, the five corporate objectives translate into the five broad type of indicators introduced by the Government some time ago.

<b>DBC Corporate Objective</b>	<b>Type of indicator</b>
Shaping a better Darlington	Strategic
Providing excellent services	Service delivery outcome
Putting the customer first	Quality
Ensuring access for all	Fair access
Enhancing our capacity to improve	Cost efficiency

This means that the authority can choose to report separately, e.g. on the main measures of equality of access, or customer satisfaction and understand how each component of overall performance is being delivered to ensure that, when necessary, the appropriate corrective action is taken.

## **SECTION 2 – LEADING EDGE**

### **Introduction – Purpose of this plan**

This Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan sets out an assessment of past and current performance against national and locally defined standards and targets. It also sets out our future priorities and targets for improvement. This document combines both elements for ease of reference and completeness.

Effective organisations need to have clarity of purpose, to know how well they are performing, and their strengths and weaknesses. In planning for the future it is important to have a clear set of goals with priorities, targets and key actions identified. We do this through the annual production of a rolling three year Corporate Plan.

Equally, to deliver the service improvements that local people have a right to expect, it is vital that local authorities have a comprehensive baseline of performance against which they and the people they serve can judge the progress they are making. We achieve this by the production of an annual Best Value Performance Plan.

Best Value was introduced in April 2000 as a key element of the Government's programme to modernise local government and places local authorities under a duty to seek continuous improvement in the way in which they exercise their functions.

Best Value aims to develop a culture in which:

- continuous improvement is the norm;
- there is a flexible approach to service delivery, based on the needs of client groups and communities, and not those of the local authority departments or public agencies;
- there is a focus on issues rather than on traditional service boundaries, and
- authorities adopt an approach that, while complying with the requirements set by central government, is implemented imaginatively, embraces innovation and allows for significant local choice.

The purpose of producing a Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan is to set out:

- how well Darlington Borough Council delivered services for local people over the past year, and
- the Council's priorities and targets for delivering services to the public in future years.

The Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan seeks to present this information in the context of the authority's aims and objectives, use of resources, programme and results of Best Value Reviews and external assessments.

The Plan is structured into four main parts.

**PART 1** – describes the Council's vision, its aims and corporate objectives. These elements are then set in the context of the organisational development strategy for the authority, and summarises the transition underway in this area.

**PART 2** – contains details of the Council's performance in summary, external assessments completed, and detailed performance analysis for the last year using the framework of the eight themes of the Darlington Community Strategy. For each theme this is followed by priorities and key actions that make up the Council's Corporate Plan. Derived from the service planning and budget setting processes here we identify our priorities against the Council's corporate objectives. Key actions are summarised for the current year and following two years for major initiatives. For both, performance indicators are identified which will be used to measure success.

**PART 3** – provides details of the Council's resources that are organised to deliver the above. This covers an outline of the medium term financial plan, revenue and capital spending and procurement practices. Details are also provided of the political and managerial structure of the organisation.

**PART 4** – is made up of appendices that provide background detail in support of the main body of the plan, covering; annual reporting against the full set of national Best Value performance indicators, government standards and local performance indicators, accounting for major variances in Best Value performance indicators, data on the Quality of Life Indicators for Darlington and national comparison, Local Public Service Agreement targets, a glossary of key words and acronyms and an index of performance indicators for quick reference.



## **The Darlington approach**

Having become an excellent authority to the planned timetable it is time now to plan to be a leading edge authority i.e. one of the very best in the country. Having successfully driven up performance over the past few years, the task is now to become an increasingly effective and efficient organisation. We will do this by ensuring that efficiency is at the heart of our corporate plan.

### **Innovation**

In Darlington, our approach to the efficiency review is not 'tick box', externally imposed or peripheral. We are relying neither on reinventing best value with its associated bureaucracy, nor creative accountancy. The efficiency review is at the heart of our corporate planning process, is the next natural step of our organisational development and therefore is fundamentally linked to our delivery of improved outcomes for local people.

The efficiency review will benefit from key strengths in Darlington – partnership working; robust community and corporate planning mechanisms and a highly developed performance culture. At the same time it will enable us to address our areas for development: value for money, re-engineering of core services and implementation of our ambitious procurement strategy to ensure that we provide services in the most effective manner.

We have built a delivery programme that will, in the medium term, more than address Gershon efficiencies (See section on context of change). We have identified the savings that we require as set out in our Medium Term Financial Plan 2005-2009. Our approach to the efficiency review is to:

- (a) Effect cultural change in the organisation to seek out good practice, enhance our ability to challenge the status quo and achieve greater innovation in service design;
- (b) In so doing we shall continue to work very closely with partners. Our well regarded Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is an excellent vehicle for considering partnership efficiencies;
- (c) Identify all the major, corporate initiatives that we are implementing over the next 3-5 years and assign a Gershon target to each – this is how we expect to generate the majority of efficiencies beyond 2005/06;
- (d) Build in an enhanced approach to project and programme management to ensure that efficiencies and other benefits are managed effectively and delivered to time;
- (e) Seek opportunities to collaborate with other organisations through the Regional Centre of Excellence;
- (f) Build in challenge from the beginning by securing early external opinion and challenge at the onset of the overall programme.

In simple terms, the efficiency review is therefore incorporated within our overarching strategy driving the design and implementation of our major corporate projects and programmes. This is explained in more detail below.

### **Building on Strengths**

Darlington has many strengths, as might be expected of an excellent authority. Our approach to Gershon has been linked to these strengths in the following areas:

- Strong partnership working
- Robust and aligned strategic plans
- Strong performance management
- Political and organisational leadership

### **Addressing Areas for Development**

The Audit Commission state that the hallmark of an excellent authority is that it knows where it needs to improve. Our recent corporate assessment confirmed our self assessment of the following areas for improvement which we shall address through our approach to the efficiency review:

Value for money – we have identified the main areas in which we predict that efficiencies will be gained through a more open and challenging approach to service delivery option appraisal. We have also built in an enhanced approach to value for money to our service and financial planning process;

Procurement – our revised procurement strategy was very well received. Implementing key elements of the procurement strategy will be central planks of our approach to Gershon;

Prioritisation – the overall programme described below is our prioritised set of the major changes we are seeking to make corporately as an organisation. We are not trying to review everything. We are focusing on those initiatives with the greatest potential to deliver efficiencies and improved outcomes for local people.

### **Organisational Development**

Darlington's approach to organisational development has been both successful and well-documented. For example it featured as the main case study in the LGA's publication *Route Map of Improvement*. To date it has followed three distinct processes as shown below:

**Seamless transition** – On becoming the country's third smallest unitary authority in 1997, seamless transition was our improvement goal. Bringing together two distinct cultures and running major services such as education for the first time were major challenges for us. Politically, anything other than seamless transition was not an option.

**Taking stock** – The next phase entailed taking stock of our progress as an organisation. We invited the Local Government Improvement Programme to undertake a peer review in Darlington in 2000. Other sources of opinion or evidence that were similarly useful were less voluntary! We had an Ofsted Inspection, Joint Review and six Best Value Inspections within a year. All of this gave us a fairly detailed picture of how Darlington looked to others and helped us launch the next phase of improvement.

**Striving for excellence** - This was the stage in organisational development where we stepped up a gear. Striving for Excellence was launched as a holistic means of development, encapsulating people management, performance management and communications. This reflected our view that to deliver real improvement, the culture must support members and employees to perform. Developing this culture required visible leadership, managerial and member buy-in and an openness to communicate the key challenges.

*Striving for Excellence* agreed five core values and a contract of rights and responsibilities that every Council employee can expect and which should underpin the way everyone works and behaves.

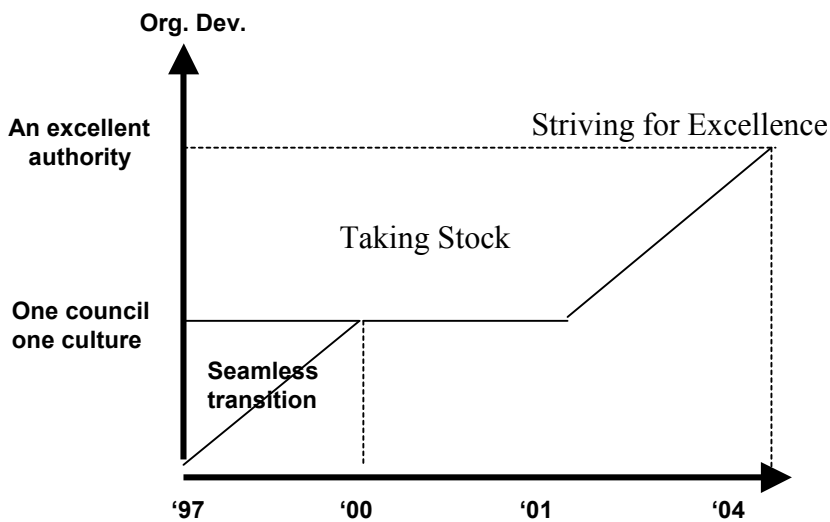
The core values are:

- Fairness and equality of treatment for all
- Respect for everyone's views and contribution
- Pride in delivering a high quality service to the best of our ability
- Trust: understanding, encouragement, support for innovation and new ideas
- Openness: keeping people involved and making sure people know what is expected of them, how their contribution is valued and fits into the overall picture.

Rights and responsibilities:

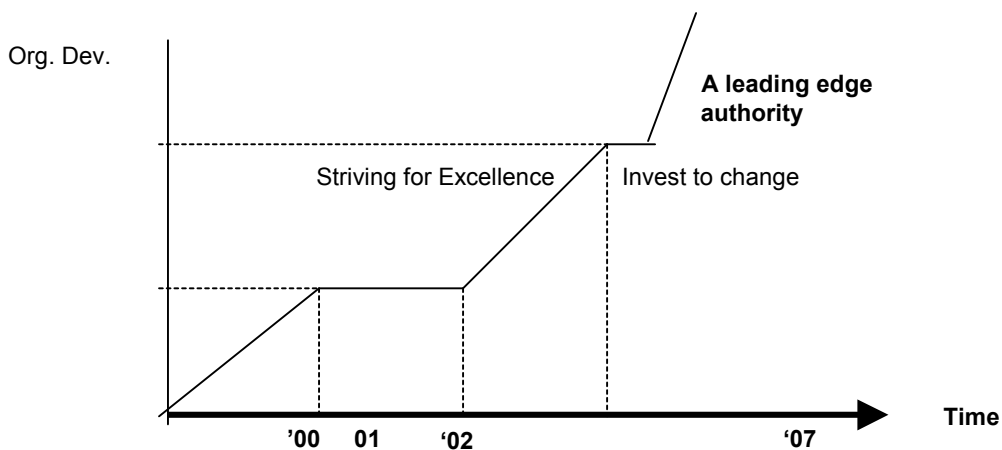
- It is agreed that all employees have a right to be developed (in line with the organisation and individual needs), to be treated fairly, to be consulted and listened to, to achieve a work/ life balance and to work in a safe environment.
- All employees are responsible for being committed to providing a high quality, value for money service and meeting Council targets, giving the maximum performance and attendance possible, communicating, following Council procedures and upholding the values of the Council.
- By creating a good working environment and culture that employees value and can be proud of, Council employees will be able to plan for, and rise to the challenges the future will offer.

Evidence of delivery and therefore of the effectiveness of our chosen improvement route can be seen across all of our major services. Even those for which improvement is still required, the story over the past few years is positive and the direction of travel is right. In early 2005 we were rated as an excellent authority.



Having become an excellent authority, we are aware that simply continuing to deliver services in the way we do now will not enable us to remain excellent for long. We need to change to address our areas for development, to free up resources to bridge our budget gap and for investment in frontline services.

Our approach to making efficiency gains is therefore to invest to change in the year 2005/06, which through the successful delivery of the projects and programmes outlined below will secure Gershon efficiencies in forthcoming years. This is shown in the diagram below.



**A Leading Edge Authority**

Darlington’s strengths of partnership working; tight geographical focus; the combination high performing public agencies (council, police authority and PCT) and strong private sector and voluntary and community involvement, together with the innovative approach to Gershon outlined above, means that there is a real opportunity for us to move from being an excellent to a leading edge authority.

**Priorities for Improvement**

Our robust service and financial planning process led us to identify 10 major corporate 'priorities for improvement' which are the significant projects and programmes that will change the organisation over the medium term (3-5 years). All of these projects/programmes have been linked to our community strategy goals and corporate plan objectives. Each is being managed through our developing corporate project management methodology. Key benefits, including Gershon efficiency projections and risks have been identified for each. This is summarised in **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1:** Diagram showing the linkages between the Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and the 10 priorities for improvement.

<p><b>Community Strategy</b> Four visionary goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An area creating and sharing prosperity</li> <li>• A location for learning, achievement and leisure</li> <li>• A place for living safely and well</li> <li>• A high quality environment with excellent communications</li> </ul>	<p>Targets have been set for key indicators</p>
<p><b>Corporate Plan</b> Five corporate objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaping a better Darlington</li> <li>• Providing excellent Services</li> <li>• Putting the customer first</li> <li>• Ensuring access for all</li> <li>• Improving our capacity to deliver</li> </ul>	<p>Targets have been set for key indicators</p>
<p><b>Corporate Priorities for Improvement</b></p> <p>Ten projects and programmes have been identified as DBC's medium term response to change drivers i.e. the things we need to change to ensure we deliver our Community Strategy and Corporate Plan, in accordance with our Medium Term Financial Strategy.</p>	<p>Targets are being set for each project and programme.</p>

We have further distinguished between those change priorities that will immediately impact on and improve outcomes for local people and those that are largely 'behind the scene' i.e. supporting, directing and facilitating organisational change. These are shown in **Figure 2** below. Our appreciation of the scale of change involved i.e. the fact that we are embarking on re-engineering of the majority of the council's services, led to the realisation that this constituted our approach to Gershon. In other words our local ambition to become a leading edge authority more than fulfils Gershon requirements.

## Context of Change

### Gershon

As set out in the Spending Review 2004, local government is required to achieve efficiency gains of at least £6.45 billion by 2007/08. Over the next three years each local authority is expected to achieve 2.5% per annum efficiency gains compared to their 2004/05 baseline.

The MTFP shows that prudent use of £6 million of reserves over the next four years will still result in a budget gap in every year from 2006/07. At the same time, the Gershon requirement for Darlington is that we must evidence 7.5% savings over 3 years or £5.7 million, of which £2.85 million must be cashable. £325k was identified as a change fund in the 2005/2009 MTFP in recognition of the fact that investment would be required to deliver medium term savings through re-engineering services rather than salami slicing of budgets.

Efficiency is about raising productivity and enhancing value for money. Efficiency gains are achieved by one or more of the following:

- (a) reducing inputs (money, people, assets etc.) for the same outputs;
- (b) reducing prices (procurement, labour costs etc.) for the same outputs;
- (c) getting greater outputs or improved quality (extra service, productivity etc.) for the same inputs;
- (d) getting proportionally more outputs or improved quality in return for an increase in resources.

The guidance is clear that savings accruing from cuts will not count as efficiencies. A cut is characterised as a significant reduction in the availability or quality of a particular service that the public receive and value.

From 2006 a council's appointed auditors will review the robustness of the process by which the authority identifies and calculates its efficiency gains. Further guidance is expected on how to carry out 'quality crosschecks' in each area where efficiency has been reported. Where quality has fallen, there will be further external assessment to assess whether the claimed efficiencies are actually cuts.

It should be noted that the ODPM will not prescribe efficiency indicators, nor the proportion of savings to come from each service area (though schools and the police are to be treated separately). It is for each authority to plan and deliver efficiencies based on local circumstances. Obviously it will be important to relate this to the council's overall objectives.

*For further details on the Gershon Efficiency agenda contact – Lorraine O'Donnell, Head of Policy. Tel (01325) 388013 [Internal Ext 2013]*

### **Partnership Working**

The Local Government Act 2000 gave councils a clear role in leading their communities, as 'the organisations best placed to take a comprehensive overview of the needs and priorities of their local communities and lead the work to meet those needs and priorities in the round'. Part One of the Act requires councils to produce a Community Strategy.

In recognition of the reality that public services are delivered by a range of agencies, and in accordance with government guidance, the Council has developed its Community Strategy through 'Darlington Partnership' the area's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). Following extensive community engagement and consultation the Council and LSP Board jointly adopted a Community Strategy in March 2003.

Conversion of the strategy into practical actions to achieve the stated and desired outcomes is an ongoing process. The constituent members of the partnership produce an annual action plan for implementation. Monitoring and review is a key process for each of the four themed sub groups with wider feedback and appraisal achieved via public assemblies at least twice a year.

*For further details on the Community Strategy and/or Darlington Partnership contact – John Bosson in the Council's Policy Unit. Tel (01325) 388016 [Internal Ext 2016]*

### **National Quality of Life Indicators**

Quality of life indicators are designed to help local authorities and their partners in Local Strategic Partnerships to monitor their Community Strategies. They cover three broad areas of economic, social and environmental well being and are intended to complement Best Value performance indicators. The Council took part in the piloting of these indicators in 2001/02. The final recommended set of voluntary quality of life indicators was first published by the Audit Commission in September 2002.

The full set of 38 cross cutting quality of life indicators are unlike traditional local authority performance indicators. They are not limited to measuring the impact of the local council's activities and they cover a much wider set of well being issues. The set is designed to paint a picture of the quality of life in the local area and to challenge all partners locally to address these cross cutting issues. Details for the set of indicators used are provided at Appendix 3.

*For further details on Quality of Life Indicators contact – David Goodchild in the Council's Policy Unit. Tel (01325) 388015 [Internal Ext 2015]*



## Corporate Governance

“Corporate governance is the system by which local authorities direct and control their functions and relate to their communities”

The council has a key role in governing and leading the community, and this relies on public confidence in elected councillors and officers. Good corporate governance underpins credibility and confidence in the services that we provide.

There are three fundamental principles of corporate governance:

- **Openness** – to ensure stakeholders can have confidence in the decision-making and management processes of the Council; and to ensure an inclusive approach;
- **Integrity** – based on high standards of propriety and probity in the stewardship of public funds and management of the authority’s affairs;
- **Accountability** – whereby the Council and all members of staff are responsible for their actions, including their stewardship of public funds, and submit themselves to appropriate public scrutiny.

The authority’s Local Code of Corporate Governance is consistent with the principles and requirements of guidance issued by CIPFA/SOLACE. Our code is a framework that reflects the different dimensions of the authority’s business, which can be summarised as:

- Community focus
- Service delivery arrangements
- Structures and processes
- Risk management and internal control
- Standards of conduct

In order to show good Corporate Governance, the authority must assess itself on the five dimensions listed above. To do this, the main documents and functions that support Corporate Governance have been identified with three distinct types of actions identified:

- awareness - making sure that everyone who needs to know about the document or function does know about it;
- monitoring - ensuring that the duty is carried out and awareness raising actually happens;
- review - parts of the corporate governance code will continue to evolve and develop as local government modernisation continues and legislation changes.

These documents and their contribution to each dimension have been detailed and published on the Council’s Intranet: [Local Code Implementation Progress](#). The documents themselves are process driven and are continually updated as the Local Code of Corporate Governance is in itself not a one-off piece of work, but a fluid document. To this effect, since the Local Code was first approved by Cabinet, four new documents have been added, i.e:

- (a) Treasury Management;
- (b) Social Inclusion;
- (c) Equalities;
- (d) Information Governance.

The Council's external auditors, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) have recognised the Local Code as a key management tool for strengthening and improving the Council's corporate governance arrangements and again this year awarded the Council the maximum score of 4 for Corporate Governance arrangements under the Auditor Scored Judgements through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment

*For further details on the Local Code of Corporate Governance - contact Andrew Robinson, Policy Advisor. Tel. (01325) 388014 [internal ext. 2014]*

### **Local Public Service Agreement (PSA)**

In March 2004 the council signed a Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) with central government, which challenged the authority to meet or exceed twelve extended targets during the period up to 2006. Granted in excess of £750,000 pump priming grant to help facilitate these extended, or 'stretched' targets, the council has set out to improve performance in key areas such as the economy, education and social inclusion, in line with priorities stated within the borough's Community Strategy.

The extended targets stretch existing planned local targets in the areas of:

- PSA1 - Helping older people live independently
- PSA2 - Reducing vehicle crime
- PSA3 - Increasing the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs A\* - C
- PSA4 - Improving the condition of highways
- PSA5 - Reducing unauthorised absence in schools
- PSA6 - Increasing the employment rates of disadvantaged areas and groups
- PSA7 - Improving cost-effectiveness
- PSA8 - PE and Physical Activity Sessions beyond the school curriculum
- PSA9 - Improving the street environment
- PSA10 - Improving the condition of private sector housing in Darlington
- PSA11 - Increasing the number of people receiving intermediate care
- PSA12 - Improving the speed and accuracy of benefits processing

### **Details for each target are provided at Appendix 4**

All targets were negotiated successfully with Central Government Departments. Should the council meet, or exceed the required stretch in performance for all targets, it will receive approximately £2.3 million as a performance reward from the Government.

Now in its final year, the LPSA has been a key driver in improving performance in priority areas.

*For further details on the Local Public Service Agreement contact - Andrew Robinson, Policy Advisor. Tel (01325) 388014 [Internal Ext 2014]*

## Corporate Procurement

In July 2001 the Council approved a first Procurement Strategy that identified the need to develop the procurement function to assist officers in routine procurement. Following the appointment of the Procurement Advisor a programme of work was agreed; meetings were held with the members of the working group, and key officers in departments, to get an overview of the procurement situation in Darlington. This information was used to inform a strategy for a way forward, built around four main areas identified as essential to improving procurement and some good progress has been made in these areas: -

- **Economies of scale** - securing economies of scale by developing corporate contracts; reducing the number and cost of transactions; standardisation of products.
- **Procurement infrastructure** - evaluating and making improvements to our current system of procurement.
- **Strategic procurement (BVRs)** - contribute to improved option appraisals in BVRs and exploration of strategic partnerships.
- **Training/awareness of procurement** - communications and people management aspects of procurement

However the increased emphasis the Government has placed on procurement through the Gershon and Byatt reports, Comprehensive Performance Assessment, Implementing Electronic Government and more recently, the National Procurement Strategy necessitated the need to review and revise the existing strategy to consider all procurement beyond Best Value Review decisions. The revised Procurement Strategy (adopted October 2004) therefore:

- Reflects the Council's Core Values and support the themes and objectives of the Community Strategy and Corporate Plan.
- Promotes effective procurement across the whole organisation.
- Set out a flexible framework for the further development and reform of procurement practices.
- Ensures that issues of equality and sustainability are considered at every stage in the procurement process.
- Secures commitment from Members and officers at all levels of the organisation.
- Provides a corporate focus to assist in the coordination of procurement activity to achieve both economic and efficiency savings.
- Maps out a way forward for the reform of the Council's Corporate Procurement function.
- Promotes long-term thinking and commitment to strategic procurement issues.

The strategy includes an action plan that will be reviewed and revised annually and the progress made on implementing the strategy will be monitored using performance indicators in the Council's Performance Management Framework.

*For further details on the Council's approach to procurement contact -  
Susan White, Procurement Advisor. Tel (01325) 388019 [Internal Ext 2019]*

## Consultation

Best Value places a duty on local authorities to consult with its partners, local people, businesses, and service users about the exercise of their functions, the setting of new targets for service delivery and the establishment of corporate priorities and objectives. We do this using a range of techniques to ensure all interested parties are able to inform the development of service delivery and policy. The Council's Consultation Strategy provides overall co-ordination, encouraging innovation within a framework of standards and promotion of good practice.

Groups	Consultation Methods
External Partners	Presentations, briefings and special meetings with partners boards, co-ordination groups and forums, e.g. Darlington Partnership, Parish Councils, Transport Forum.
Residents	Questionnaires, focus groups and meetings e.g. Citizens' Panel, Annual Community Survey, Residents' Panel.
Employees	Open presentations, briefings and workshops with staff generally and representative groups, e.g. Joint Consultative Council, Employee Panel.
Service users	Questionnaires, focus groups and events with users of specific services, e.g. tenants, licensees and developers.

## Key Consultation Activity

The list below provides examples of the wide range of consultation activity undertaken during the last year:

- **Community Survey** – Over 1,000 face-to-face interviews were completed with residents in September 2004.
- **Citizens' Panel** – A database of over 1,000 residents is maintained who have volunteered to complete surveys for us and take part in follow up discussions. Surveys were undertaken in May/June 2004 and November/December 2004.
- **Employee Survey** – A third annual survey of all staff was undertaken in January 2005.
- **Darlington Assemblies** – Open forums on topical issues linked to the Community Strategy, routinely attended by over 200 delegates, held June 2004 and January 2005.
- **Pedestrian Heart** – Series of exhibitions, presentations and briefings inviting input and comments on the options and proposals for the town centre.
- **Town on the Move** – A major piece of qualitative consultation in the Borough to establish a baseline of travel behaviour patterns supplemented by quantitative exercises to inform this nationally sponsored project.
- **Major strategies** – programmes of consultation events and activities to inform the development of a range of major strategies up for review: including the Crime and Disorder Strategy, Local Transport Plan and Local Development Framework.

Since 1998 Darlington Borough Council has carried out an annual Community Survey seeking the views of residents on overall satisfaction with the Council, satisfaction with its individual services, and priorities for improving services. Increasingly, quality of life issues have been picked up to address wider thematic considerations and the Council's contribution to partnership working.

Results from the Annual Community Survey for 2004 show that:

- General satisfaction with the Council (at 69.3%) is best quartile and has remained relatively stable in recent years with a positive trend emerging;
- Satisfaction with local neighbourhoods is high overall (at 77.9%) but this is variable, decreasing from rural wards (88.3%) down to the most deprived areas (67.5%);
- Pleasingly those who lived in Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy priority areas were more likely than others to think things had got better over the past two years.
- Satisfaction with Council services indicates:

<b>Services with the highest satisfaction levels are</b>	<b>Services with the lowest satisfaction levels are</b>
Street lighting	Road maintenance and repairs
Refuse collection	Pavement maintenance
Upkeep and appearance of town centre	Car parking in town centre
Civic Theatre	Children's play areas

- Citizens' top priorities – identified as services most in need of improvement (with a corresponding low or negative net satisfaction rating) are:
  - (i) Road maintenance and repairs.
  - (ii) Youth clubs and other facilities for young people.
  - (iii) Pavement maintenance.
  - (iv) Children's play areas.
  - (v) Social care for older and vulnerable people.

These results are used to inform a range of processes and are timed to be available in order to influence the annual review of budgets, business and service plans. Results are increasingly being used not only by the Council but by partner agencies as well. The Council can demonstrate an ever closer correlation between budget spend and citizens' priorities.

Comparison of responses from the 1998, 2001 and 2004 Community Surveys shows a largely positive trend in residents' perception on the success of dealing with the themes of the Community Strategy.

## Performance Management

### Introduction and overview

“Since 2002 the council has focused well on Striving for Excellence, its organisational development strategy; particularly the introduction of a new service planning and performance management framework. The effects of this are evident throughout the council and service performance has improved as a result.”

So said the Audit Commission in our Corporate Assessment published in April 2005. The development of the Council’s Organisational Development Strategy recognised that the attainment of a performance culture was necessary in order to improve services systematically. This culture is embedded throughout the authority and has been a key element in our attainment of ‘Excellent’ status through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

As reported in last year’s plan, the authority invested in strengthening our approach to performance management. Securing innovative funding allowed for the purchase and implementation of new performance management software; *Performance Plus*, an integrated performance management software tool. This software enables the Council to strengthen the links between the different levels in the planning and performance hierarchy. The performance of various indicators, including Best Value Performance Indicators, Quality of Life indicators, etc. are mapped within overall goals, aims and objectives as identified in the Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and departmental and service plans.

Performance reports from PerformancePlus are tailored for cabinet portfolios, scrutiny committees and departments, with the result that Councillors’ involvement in performance management has increased with portfolio holders helping to develop service plans and both cabinet and scrutiny receiving regular reports on performance. Darlington Partnership has adopted the same performance management system as the council, enabling seamless reporting against community strategy themes and corporate objectives.

Improved performance management has contributed to demonstrable service improvements in key areas including social services and housing benefits, in turn showing demonstrable improvements to key priority areas of improving the economy and promoting inclusive communities.

### The planning process in Darlington

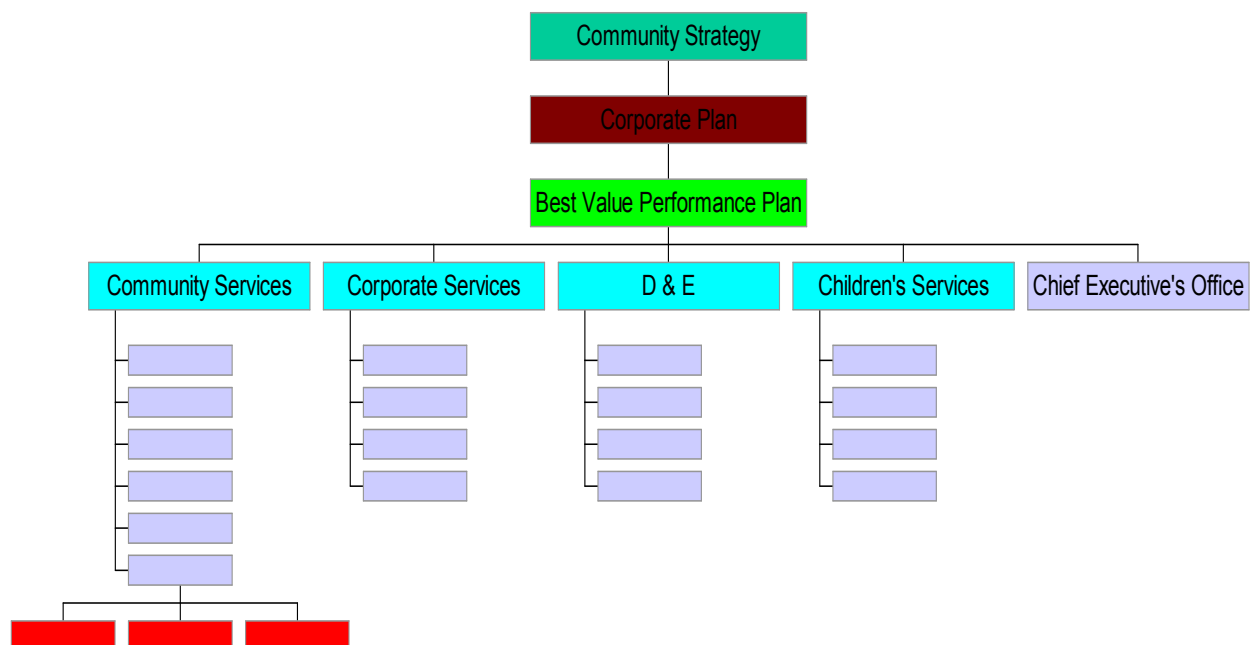
Service plans translate the organisation’s strategic direction into a series of actions and targets for service areas, through to individuals who actually deliver services on the ground. Managers and staff have a high level of awareness of how their work contributes to the achievement of the council’s objectives, and what standards of service they are expected to provide. Service planning posters are produced for each key service area, setting out how it links to community strategy themes and corporate objectives, and these are widely displayed throughout council offices.

The process has full departmental ownership, with named individuals leading on service planning on behalf of their respective departments, together with the Head of Policy and members of the Policy Unit. This group, known as the Corporate Planning Network (CPN) leads on developing and strengthening performance management in the authority and this includes the implementation of *Performance Plus*:

Department	Departmental Planning Network Representative	Policy Unit Representative
Community Services	Sharon Brown	Andy Robinson
Corporate Services	Ian Wilson	David Plews
Development & Environment	Peter Roberts	John Bosson
Education	Julian Kenshole	David Goodchild
Social Services	Neville Simpson	Andy Robinson

The service planning arrangements in place were recognised as a strength in the 2005 Corporate Assessment, and our good practice has led to the authority presenting our performance management arrangements to wide audiences at major conferences, including the LGC 'Excellent performance management in local authorities' seminar. This has led to many enquiries from other organisations wishing to benchmark against our arrangements.

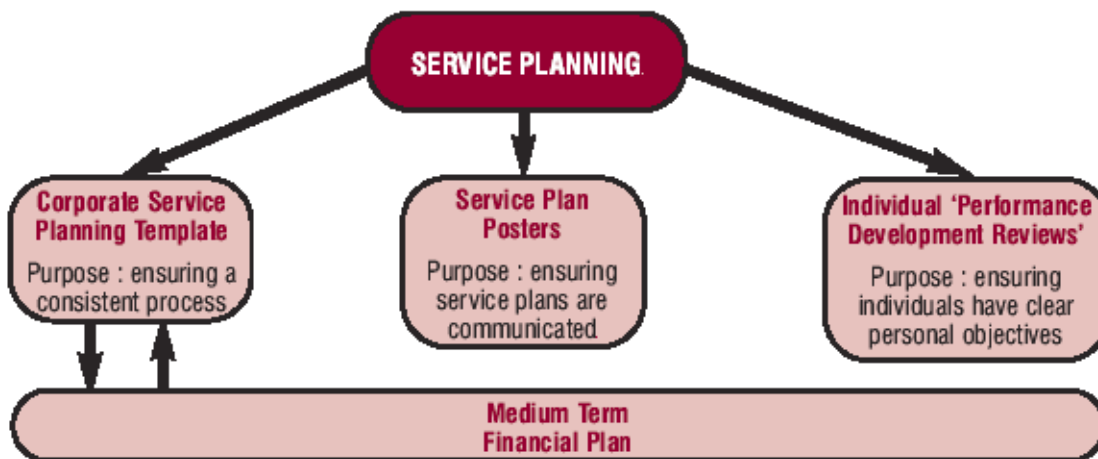
### Service Planning in relation to the Performance Management Framework



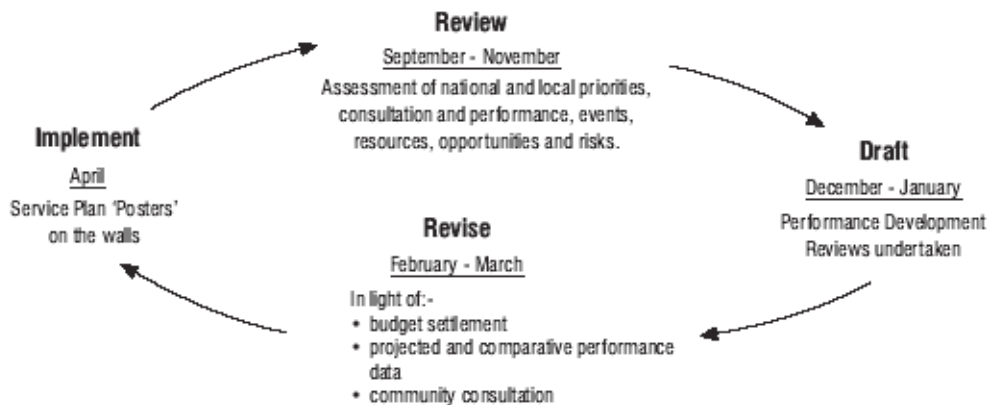
**The service planning process**

The authority’s service plans are key documents that assist in the council’s aim to provide excellent services. They represent key priorities that have been identified via the corporate planning template, resulting in posters that aid communication, and link directly to staff Performance Development Reviews (PDRs). These ensure that individual employees have clear personal objectives.

The service planning cycle can be represented diagrammatically as follows:



These components are built into a service planning timetable which ensures a continuous cycle of improvement shown schematically below;



Preparation for 2005/06 service planning began in October 2004, when departmental teams met to identify core and non-core work, priorities for improvement, and linkages to the medium term financial plan, so that budgetary implications could be assessed (**Review**). This stage of service planning is achieved using a corporate template, which assesses drivers for change, to include national and local priorities, risk management, stakeholder consultation, performance management, events, opportunities and available resources. Actions for improvement are prioritised and linked to the budget setting process. Service objectives are aligned to a balanced set of performance indicators, ensuring that progress can be monitored, managed and reported.



Service planning templates remained in **draft** form until January 2005 when they were **revised** in light of targets being set, budgetary demands, etc. Service plans were **implemented** from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005, with the 2005/06 service planning process resulting in the production of 5 departmental plans and 24 service plans\*. These service plans were translated into posters and communicated to all employees, for example:

[Service Plan Poster Diagram to Insert]

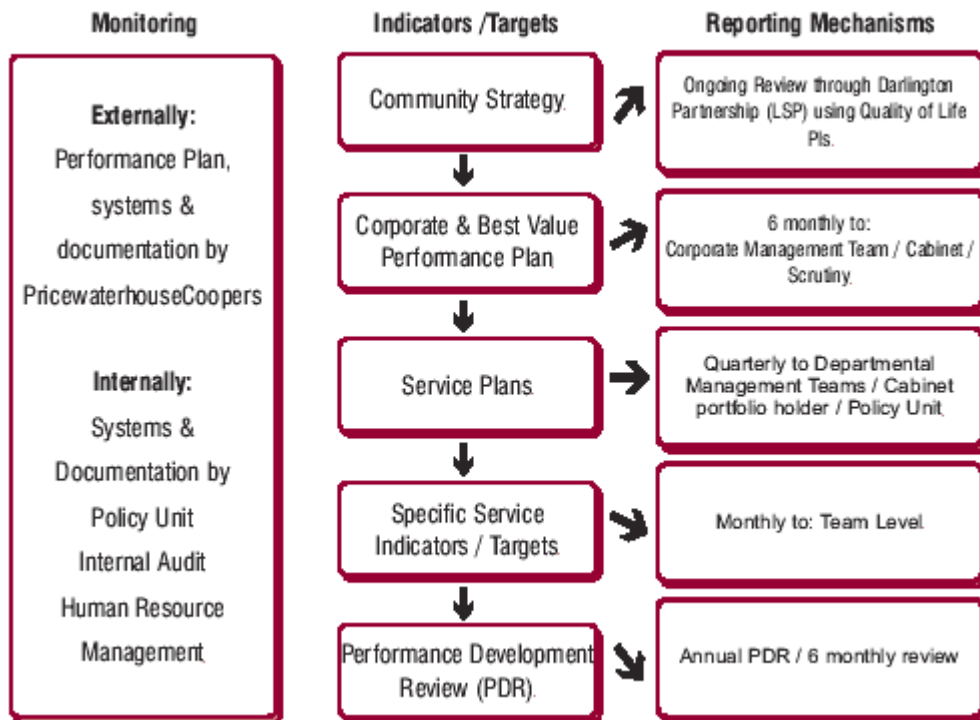
Service planning posters attempt to simplify both the relationships between our large number of plans and the different, though inter-connected roles, of Executive, Scrutiny Members and officers. In brief, these roles are:

- Executive Members, who agree the content of plans and have overall accountability for delivery;
- Directors, who are held to account by Executive Members;
- Scrutiny, who monitor overall progress against plans and can call Executive Members to account for non-delivery.

\* Note: 2005/06 represents a transitional year in terms of service planning as Social Services and Education cease to exist following the creation of a Childrens' Service Department.

**Performance Management Framework (PMF)**

In last year’s combined Corporate Plan/Best Value Performance Plan, it was reported that, along with the Local Strategic Partnership (Darlington Partnership), the Council had committed to a clear vision for performance management. The implementation of *Performance Plus* software has followed a project plan, and delivered effective performance management information for the year 2004/05. Clear lines of responsibility and monitoring systems are becoming well established in departments. The framework in place is not simply a data gathering mechanism, but a system that collects, disseminates and uses performance information to drive forward service improvement. The Policy Unit manages *Performance Plus*, but it is a corporate system with full ownership from departments and the Darlington Partnership. All departments have modelled their service plans and are entering performance data to an agreed timetable. The diagram below is still relevant, but will be modified in detail as the use of *Performance Plus* in managing performance develops:

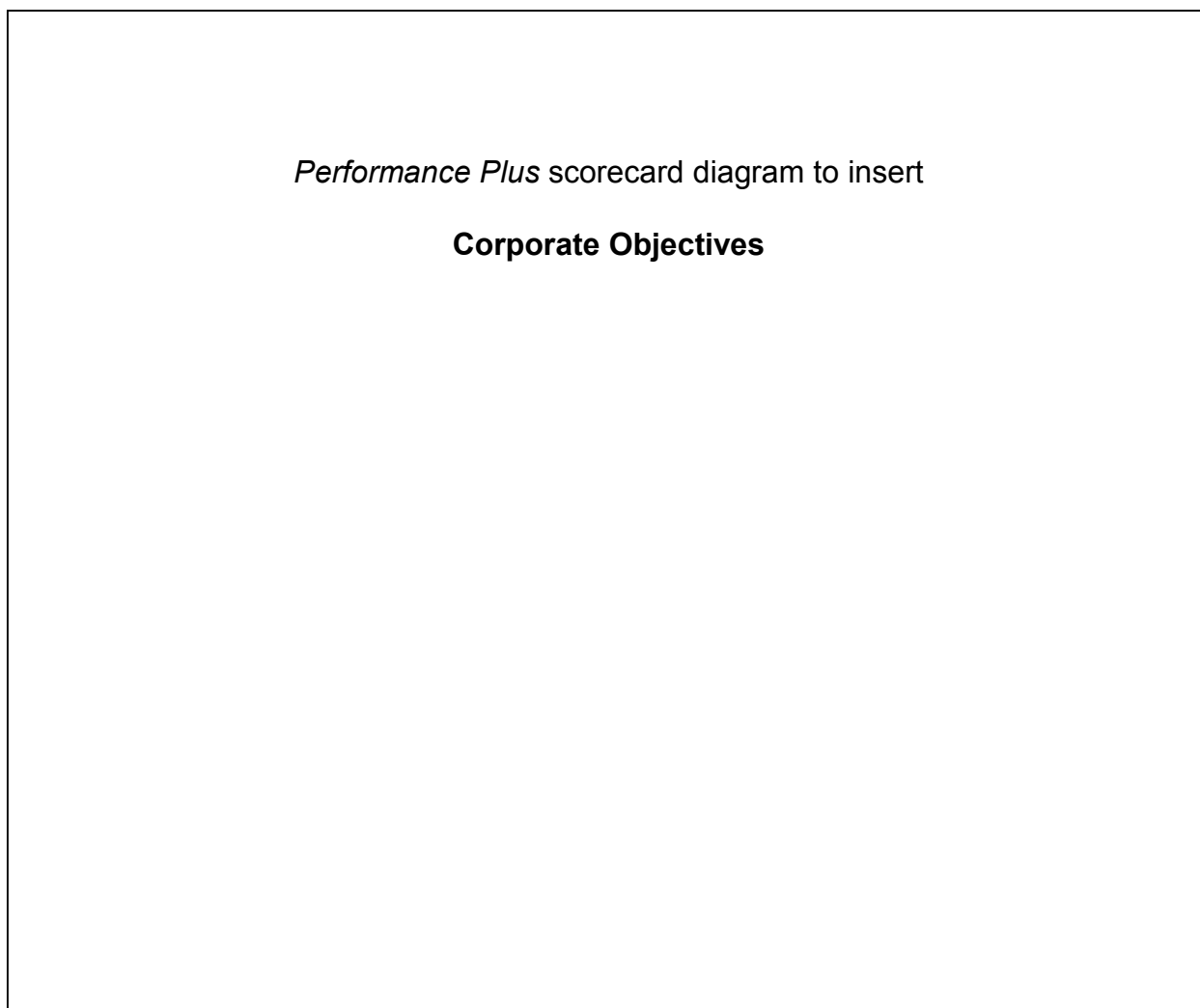


Service plans are modelled in *Performance Plus* as ‘causal maps’, which are a series of objectives linked together with performance indicators attached. Performance is aggregated up the structure as data is entered.

**Causal map diagram to insert  
reflecting corporate objectives**

Performance data needs to be available in a format that employees, managers and Members can use. *Performance Plus* enables scorecards to be produced that summarise performance for any part of the service required. The scorecard below shows performance for 2003/04 against the Council's five Corporate Objectives, using priority performance indicators. Achievement against targets is depicted using symbols:

Green Star	Above target performance
Blue Circle	On target performance
Red Triangle	Below target performance
Question Mark	Insufficient data



These scorecards can be built into Briefing Books that can be interrogated online or exported to a web page, to be viewed by anyone with access to the internet or the Council's intranet.

## **Risk Management**

The council has established robust risk management arrangements. Improvements since 2002 have included involving councillors in assessing and managing risks and ensuring that risk management becomes more of a continuous process linked to service planning and the achievement of priorities.

**Corporate Assessment April 2005, p.12 (Audit Commission)**

Risk management is about making the most of opportunities (making the right decisions) and about achieving objectives once those decisions are made – the latter achieved through controlling, transferring and living with risks. Risk management is a strategic tool and is an essential part of effective and efficient management and planning. As is noted by the Audit Commission in the above quote, a key strength of the Council's risk management procedures is that they are embedded into the corporate service planning arrangements, thereby ensuring that risk management is at the centre of everything that we do.

As reported in last years Corporate Plan/Best Value Performance Plan, in 2003/04 the Council were assessed by our external auditors PwC for risk management and scored 2/4. Although our arrangements were classed as 'adequate', we set out to implement improvements for 2004/05. The risk management process was clearly evidenced in departmental service plans, the risks identified were more specific to service objectives and member involvement was explicit. Cabinet and CMT together identified and analysed key corporate risks to the Council's business and similarly portfolio members were involved in identifying and analysing risks as part of the departmental service planning process, prior to the presentation of those plans to Cabinet for formal sign off. Risks at service level that were considered to require further management were identified as priorities for improvement with appropriate action plans and associated performance indicators monitored through the Council's performance management framework.

Given this improvement, it was acknowledged through various external inspection processes that risk management was well embedded within the Council, integrated with service planning and considered strong. This was reflected in an increased score from 2 to 3 from PwC under the CPA Auditor Scored Judgements.

Of course, the authority continues to review its arrangements. A simplified process has been introduced for 2005/06 to identify and document key emerging risks during the year to enable them to be adequately managed in a timely manner. All emerging risks (both departmental and strategic) are to be raised ultimately through the Council's Corporate Management Team. The Chief Internal Auditor is advised of any such risks in his capacity as Risk Management Co-ordinator, who will then organise completion of the appropriate documentation with the relevant officer(s).

Risk management continues to be an essential management tool utilised across the authority. A Risk Management Strategy has been in place since 2002, and its implementation has helped in the achievement of the council's priorities.

For further details on Risk Management, contact: Brian James, Chief Internal Auditor. Tel: (01325) 388140 (Internal Ext 2140)

## Best Value Review Programme

### Introduction

Best value remains a central part of the Government's modernisation programme for local government. Under best value arrangements, the authority has a duty to achieve continuous improvement across its functions, taking due account of improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Each year the council publishes its Best Value Review programme, with each review having to:

- **challenge** why, how and by whom a service or function is being provided
- secure **comparison** with the performance of others across a range of relevant indicators, taking into account the views of both service users and potential suppliers
- **consult** local taxpayers, service users, partners and the wider business community in the setting of new performance targets
- use fair and open **competition** wherever practicable as a means of securing efficient and effective services

Best Value Reviews in Darlington have largely been of a crosscutting, thematic nature and have been based upon addressing areas of improvement identified by officers, members, stakeholders and external inspection. External inspection of reviews has been largely positive and the authority has learned and improved services from the process.

The authority works within a context of continuous improvement. The methodology of selecting reviews for inclusion in the best value programme has to date been based upon performance, local/national priorities, etc. However, with the council striving to become a 'Leading Edge' authority, it is necessary to change our approach to selecting and undertaking Best Value Reviews in light of our changing approaches to prioritisation, new forms of service delivery and more modern approaches to procurement.

### New methodology – an overview

A new strategic methodology has been devised to ensure that all major service areas are interrogated against key criteria including cost effectiveness, performance and procurement. By interrogating key service areas with these criteria, each service will effectively be analysed according to the 4Cs methodology on an ongoing basis, i.e.:

	Cost effectiveness	Performance information	Procurement
Challenge	Y	Y	Y
Compare	Y	Y	Y
Compete	Y	Y	Y
Consult		Y	

Applying these criteria to each service area (utilising the council's service planning arrangements) will result in a value which can then be used to assess the degree of intervention that service will then need in terms of review, e.g. should a service area have below average performance, be high cost and use traditional procurement arrangements, it would require intervention at the highest scale, i.e. an in depth review. Higher scoring services would require less, little or no intervention.

### How does this change our Best Value Programme?

Last year, it was stated that our Best Value Programme of reviews was as follows:

2004/05 (Year 5)	Completion date		2005/06 (Year 6)	Completion date
Combined review of Community Safety and Street Environment	October 2004		Waste Management	March 2006
Support Services			Support Services	September 2005
Regulatory Services	August 2004			
Children's Services			Children's Services (Continued from 2004/05)	March 2006

All of these reviews are being carried out as part of our drive towards becoming 'Leading Edge'. To assist with effective challenge, these reviews and others as outlined elsewhere in this plan are being project managed according to corporate project management methodology, based on Prince2 principles, led by Corporate Management Team and having both Project Managers and Project Sponsors. These 10 key projects/programmes are our high level reviews for 2005/06 and encompass our Best Value Review programme, as follows:

<b>Existing Best Value Reviews</b>	<b>Ten Key Projects/Programmes</b>
Children's Services	Children's services
	Gershon
Combined review of Community Safety and Street Environment	Street scene
	Education Assets
	Single status/equal pay
	Call centre/contact centre
	Feethams
	CPA/JAR
	DLO relocation
Waste Management	Waste Management
	<b>Additional reviews</b>
Support Services	Support Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT</li> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Administration</li> <li>• Public partnership</li> </ul>
	Repairs & Maintenance review

The review of Regulatory Services has been completed, with an implementation plan developed.

### **The new methodology in detail**

Our Best Value Review programme for the year 2005/06 is as scheduled in last year's Best Value Performance Plan, with the addition of a number of other high priority programmes/projects as outlined. New arrangements for the best value intervention model will now come into force.

A selection of cost indicators for each service area is being developed. These will be benchmarked against other providers, and assessed against a baseline position. The service will then be interrogated against performance information resulting in a value for cost effectiveness. A value for money judgement will be made by taking into account cost effectiveness, satisfaction and procurement arrangements. It is this judgement that will inform the degree of intervention required. This results in best value not only being integrated into the council's PMF, but in addition value for money becomes an intrinsic part of service review in Darlington.

Intervention will be on 3 levels, with the degree of review based upon the cost/performance over acceptable levels:

- Performance reviews (a desktop review)
- Best Value Reviews
- Corporate projects

All three types of review will however adhere to best value principles and ensure that the four Cs are applied.