2005/06

CENTRAL RESOURCES DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE PLAN

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

This Departmental Plan sets out the activities of the Central Resources Department and how they relate to corporate objectives. It covers the 3 year period 2005/06 to 2007/08.

It follows the corporately agreed format contained within the Performance Management Framework which seeks to achieve the Authority's corporate objectives of:

- The Council will use its statutory powers, resources and influence to help create a balanced, vibrant and growing population, across the whole of Wear Valley District.

- The Council will enable the development of a continuously improving economic infrastructure and environment in Wear Valley.

- The Council will use its services to help improve the health and well being of Wear Valley residents and promote healthy lifestyles.

- The Council will design its services to increase community safety and crime prevention and work closely with key partners to improve crime reduction.

- The Council will aim to secure new public and private investment to improve the built and natural environment.

- The Council will support the LSP's aim of promoting lifelong learning.

DIRECTOR'S AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY

To become the "best District Council", Wear Valley's Central Resources Department must provide services, both internally and externally, which encompasses the concepts of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and quality as a means of achieving corporate objectives. This is achieved through articulating in this plan the targets, plans and actions to be undertaken during the period covered by the plan.

The vision for the Department is to ensure service delivery which:

(i)   Is customer focused
(ii)   Is speedy and accurate
(iii)   Seeks to reduce the risk of errors and fraud
(iv)   Is accessible
(v)   Encourages good performance
(vi)   Is accountable to stakeholders.

Within this the following standards will apply:

(i)   The principles of customer care will be applied

(ii)   Services will be provided objectively

(iii)   Due care and competence will be applied at all times

(iv)   Constructive relationships will be fostered

(v)   Confidentiality will be observed.

The aims of the Departmental Service Plan document are:

(i)   Clarify the Department's contribution to the Council Plan.

(ii)   To clarify to our customers, both internal and external, the services which we provide and the standards of service that they can expect. This is achieved through the setting and monitoring of challenging yet realistic targets.

(iii)   To make the department's performance more visible to all stakeholders so as provide a platform for service improvement.

(iv)   To make staff aware of the wider environment in which they fulfill their duties and responsibilities and how their role contributes to achieving departmental objectives.

(v)   To give staff ownership of the processes and procedures which they operate.

The above can only be achieved by:

(i)   Measuring where we are today.

(ii)   Deciding where we want to be in the future.

(iii)   Planning on how to get there.

A key element of achieving the above is via customer surveys which will give the Department invaluable feedback in terms of service delivery and also identify areas for improvement. All key service areas will carry out customer surveys during the lifetime of this document. This will ensure that customer surveys and the focus of customer care is embedded into the culture of the Department.
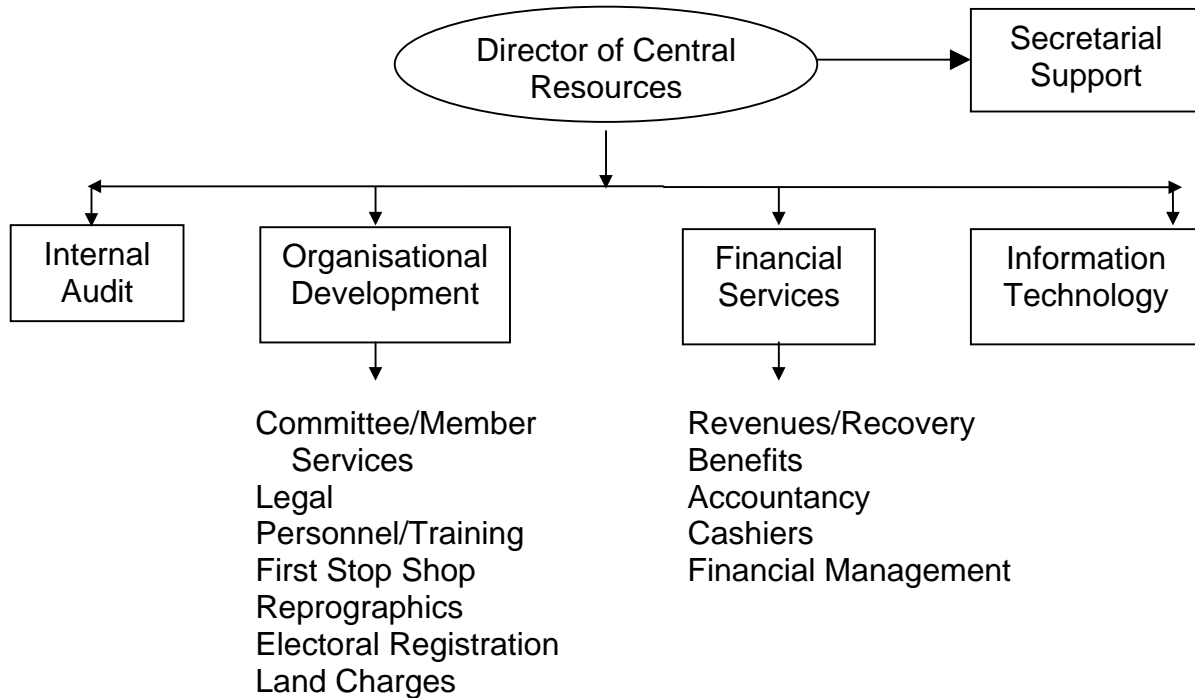
The performance targets that are set are extremely challenging and based upon the ethos of seeking continuous improvement in the efficiency and quality of service delivery.

Committed staff are a key to continuous improvement. As part of the corporate move to attain the Investors In People Standard, the Department will continue to induct all new members of staff and produce Personal Development Plans for all staff annually. Departmental Training Plans will also be produced annually and used in helping to achieve our goals. Training budgets will reflect the development needs of staff, who will also be supported in attaining external/professional qualifications relevant to their post. The Department plays a key role in developing the Council's strategy in terms of developing staff. A draft Human Resources strategy has been produced and will be developed further during the period covered by this plan.

2 DEPARTMENTAL PROFILE

2.1 Activities

The basic structure of the Department is shown in the following diagram:

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                    ┌──────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
                    │ Director of Central  │───────▶│ Secretarial  │
                    │      Resources       │        │   Support    │
                    └──────────────────────┘        └──────────────┘
        ┌──────────────┬──────────────┬──────────────┬──────────────┐
  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
  │ Internal │  │Organisational│  │Financial │  │ Information   │
  │  Audit   │  │ Development  │  │ Services │  │ Technology   │
  └──────────┘  └──────────────┘  └──────────┘  └──────────────┘
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Organisational Development	Financial Services
Committee/Member Services	Revenues/Recovery
Legal	Benefits
Personnel/Training	Accountancy
First Stop Shop	Cashiers
Reprographics	Financial Management
Electoral Registration	
Land Charges	

The above structure is a result of the corporate restructuring exercise carried out in 2001. This exercise merged the old Finance and Administration Departments into the Central Resources Department.

The Department provides a varied range of services which are either statutory or discretionary, some of which cover all households and businesses within the District.

The majority of staff are however engaged in front line service delivery which includes:

- Council tax and non-domestic rate collection
- Benefits admin and fraud investigation
- Cashiers
- Electoral registration
- Land searches.

The remaining staff are engaged in providing support services to other departments and to Members.

Each main service within the Department has a vision and objectives. These are outlined below.

Service	Vision/Aims of Service	Supporting Documents
Benefits	To provide a high quality, efficient and customer focused service that seeks to maximise benefit entitlement where possible whilst also minimising the incidence of benefit fraud	Benefits Business Plan
Council Tax/NNDR and Recovery	To provide a customer focused and efficient service that balances the legal requirements of the Council to recover sums due whilst treating individuals in a fair and reasonable manner	Debt management framework
I.T.	To assist departments in the delivery of their services via the provision of economic, efficient and effective ICT, and to assist departments in achieving 100% capability in electronic service delivery, in ways that stakeholders want.	ICT strategy/draft e-government strategy.
Human Resources	To support the Council in providing high quality services via: 1. Ensuring appropriate and flexible staff resources. 2. High quality recruitment, training and retention practices. 3. Developing a diverse workforce. 4. Maintaining good employee relations.	Draft HR strategy
Accountancy/ financial management/ Internal Audit/ Exchequer	To provide a customer focused and efficient service that supports the effective stewardship of the Council's financial resources and assists in the provision of Council services	Draft SLA's/insurance framework/treasury management practices/ Constitution

Service	Vision/Aims of Service	Supporting Documents
Committee/ Member Services	To provide for the efficient and effective servicing of the Council's democratic processes, including advice and assistance to Members in their role within the community and the Council. To support the Council's community (quality of life) objective by ensuring appropriate policies and procedures are in place to allow the public to participate, where possible, in the decision making process as part of democratic renewal.	Constitution
Legal Services	To provide a high quality legal service to the Authority.	Constitution
Electoral Registration	To maximize the opportunities for the public to participate in the democratic process.	
First Stop Shop	To provide a customer focussed service to all citizens regardless of means of access.	

The above service vision and objectives all support the overall Authority aim to become 'the best District Council in England'. Action plans included in this service plan support the above objectives.

2.2 Staff

The following tables outline staff numbers and resources used against each service.

Service	Staff No (FTE)
Council Tax and Recovery	16
Benefit Admin/Fraud	43
Cashiers	3.5
Electoral Registration	3
Land Searches	1.5
I.T.	9
Accountancy/Fin Management/Directorate	14.8
Internal Audit	3.0
Legal/Committee	10.5
Human Resources	5
Reprographics	1
Reception/Telephony	5

2.3 Financial Resources

The table below shows the total departmental net cost of providing front line services.

Service	2005/6 Net Cost £000
Council Tax Admin	425
Housing Benefit Administration	420
Concessionary Travel	371
Electoral Registration	62
Business Rate Administration	(24)
Land Charges	(141)
Total	**1,113**

2.4 Assets

The table below gives information relating to assets used by the department.

Asset	Date Purchased	Estimated Life	Replacement Strategy
Revenues/Benefits/IT System	2003/04	5-10 years	Capital Bid
Financial Management System	2003/04	5-10 years	Capital Bid
PC's (approx. 350)	Ongoing	4 years	Capital Bid
Cash Receipting/IT System	2000/01	5-10 years	Capital Bid
Telephony System	2004/05	7 years	Capital Bid
CRM	2004/05	5 years	Capital Bid

The Department also uses the following assets to provide services:

(i) Civic Centre, all departmental services provided from this location.

(ii) Royal Corner, HR/Personnel/IT services provided from this location.

(iii) Old Bank Chambers, cash receipting service and benefits outreach service provided from this location.

3   REVIEW OF PREVIOUS YEAR 2004/05

This section of the plan falls into 2 parts. The first part examines the performance of the department in relation to Best value performance indicators. Of the 22 BVPI's which are covered by the department, 9 relate wholly to the department and 13 are corporate. These corporate indicators are indicated as such in the table below.

2004/05 performance is compared against:

- The target set for 2004/05.
- The previous year's performance.

The second section outlines the initiatives/service improvements which have been achieved, and also emerging issues for the Department to respond to.

Part 1

The following tables show the Departmental Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's) performance for 2004/05 against target.

BVPI		2003/04 Actual	2004/05 Target	2004/05 Probable
8	Invoice Payments	96.3 %	100 %	96.5 %
11a	Senior Women in post	16.66 %	12 %	12 %
11b	Senior Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) in post	3.7 %	4 %	4 %
12	Sickness days	11.06 days	10 days	10 days
14	Early Retirement	1.7 %	1 %	1 %
15	Ill Health	0.94 %	0.6 %	0.6 %
16a	Disabled staff	3.11 %	2.4 %	2.4 %
16b	Active Disabled Population	20.8 %	-	-
17x	BME staff	1.13 %	1 %	1 %
17y	Active BME Population	0.87 %	-	-
177	Legal Advice	34 %	50 %	50 %
78a	Process Days – benefit	46.4 days	40 days	34 days
78b	Change in Circs – benefit	10.68 days	10 days	9 days
79a	Accuracy – benefit	99 %	98 %	99 %
179	Local Land Searches	87 %	93 %	96%
79b	Benefit overpayment recovery	N/A	60 %	40 %
9	NNDR collection	98.8 %	98 %	99 %
10	Council Tax collection	98.2	98.9	99 %
157	E-government	42	71	87%
2a	Equality	0	2	1
2b	Equality Race Relations	0	-	-

The above shows that 13 indicators have improved compared to 2003/04 actual. Against this, 3 have worsened i.e. women in senior posts, BME staff numbers and numbers of disabled staff, whilst 5 have remained the same. This shows that the majority of indicators are improving in line with continuous improvement aspiration. In terms of those indicators that have not improved, 2 of these are based on the 2001 census and will remain unchanged until the next census is undertaken. However regard will continue to be given to poorly performing indicators in order to identify areas for improvement. Monitoring procedures exist to identify problem areas, which then leads onto a an action plan to improve performance.

Part 2

The following table shows service improvements/important initiatives carried out in 2004/05:

Frontline Services

1.   The number of households which pay council tax by direct debit has increased from 42.5% to 45%.

2.   A council tax customer satisfaction survey was carried out. (see section 5)

3.   The Department for Works and Pension (DWP) performance standards for benefits improved from 73% to 91%.

4.   A benefit take up campaign commenced in Autumn 2004 to meet the Council priority as set out in the council plan to increase the income of those reliant on state benefits.

5.   The organisation for recovery of rent rebate overpayments was improved although the full benefits will not be achieved till 2005/06.

6.   The process for collection of council tax and non-domestic rates was streamlined and new methods of recovery introduced.

7.   Elections using all postal voting carried out for Regional Government and European Elections.

8.   E-government progress made as follows:

       (i)   Benefit calculator on website.
       (ii)   Remote benefit processing developed.
       (iii)   On-line Committee minutes introduced.
       (iv)   CRM system introduced.

<u>Internal Support Services</u>

1. Training was rolled out to staff in all departments for the recently installed financial management system.

2. The Personnel Handbook was introduced via staff training sessions.

3. A new system of electronic ordering and invoice authorisation was introduced.

4. A new system of budgetary control reporting to members and officers was introduced.

5. A new computer system for management of benefit fraud was implemented

6. Member training continued to be provided

7. IT security improved.

4   PARTNERSHIP PROFILE

The Department recognises that partnership/joint working is the way forward in certain areas and has developed a joint working framework which can be used to develop proposals in this area.

The Department's main partnership is in the area of ICT. This covers the following areas:

Name of Partnership	Purpose	Specifying/monitoring arrangements
ISP	Derwentside District Council have established themselves as an approved 'Internet Service Provider'.	Wear Valley currently use Derwentside to provide this service via a 2 megabit megastream link between the Civic Centre at Crook and Consett, thus delivering Internet access to all pcs on the Authority's local area network.
CRM	To provide a CRM for the Authority on behalf of the County Durham e-government partnership.	Currently includes Environmental services. Future rollout to include benefits and other environmental services.

(i)   Broadband

A broadband system is in operation within the County.   The Authority receives broadband from Derwentside District Council.

(ii)   County Durham E-government Partnership

The eight local authorities within County Durham have formed an e-government partnership to conduct a Best Value review of e-government within the county. A key outcome of the review will be the introduction of shared service delivery channels. These will include a joint Customer Relationship Management system.

Other partnerships include:

(i)   Personnel

Joint working with Derwentside District Council is being developed. This will include the secondment of their Personnel Manager to work within Wear Valley for 1 day per week. From 2004/05 the Job Analyst from Derwentside is working with the Authority to help implement job evaluation.

(ii)   Internal Audit

The Council's external auditors (District Audit as from November 2002) place high reliance upon the work of Internal Audit especially in assessing whether the Council has effective systems of internal control. The annual audit plan is prepared in co-ordination with the planned work of external audit.

(iii)   Benefit Administration

Financial support has been received from the Department for Works and Pension to fund:

(i)   Training Officer. This post is dedicated to training staff and is increasing the quality and quantity of training delivered to staff.

(ii)   DIP/Workflow. This will be a major task to be undertaken during 2005/06 as part of the e-government initiative.

(iv)   Agresso Financial Management System

Six local authorities in County Durham and one in Northumberland continue to work closely together on developing use of the Agresso financial system in areas such as e-procurement and supplier liaison.

(v)   Benefit Take Up

Benefits staff work with a variety of partners in promoting take-up of benefits. These include the Pensions Service, Job Centre Plus, CAB, Welfare Rights, Age Concern and the Rent Service in liaison meetings, joint advice surgeries etc.

5   CUSTOMERS

The Department has established regular customer consultation as a means of improving service delivery.   The following table outlines the results of consultation:

Service Area	Results	Action Taken
Council Tax (September 2004)	74% satisfied with facilities to get in touch with the office 79% agreed staff friendly and polite 66% satisfied with clarity of bills, leaflets etc 80% satisfied with visiting the office	System of telephone payments improved to ensure no missed calls. Improved information placed on web site about council tax.

Service Area	Results	Action Taken
E-government (September 2002)	64% still have the telephone as the preferred medium to contact the Council. 21% would contact the Council via e-mail if they had the capability to do this. 19% would like extended opening hours (either one late night and/or Saturday opening)	Ongoing development of e-government

Support service users are currently being surveyed and the results are not yet available.

Service Area	Results	Action Taken
Internal Audit	80% of respondents thought that Internal Audit made a positive contribution to their service. Scored 4.5 out of 6 on overall performance.	Clearer guidance to clients on the audit process and more frequent reporting to members. Greater accountability to clients through charging process.

Service Area	Results	Action Taken
Legal	Service quality scored 4.5 out of 5. Staff helpfulness scored 4.5 out of 5	

The above shows that:

(i)   The public are generally satisfied with the level of customer service on Council tax although there are improvements that we can make in a number of areas. Repeat surveys will be conducted to ensure that a high level of service continues to be delivered.

(ii)   Whilst action has been taken in response to survey results, there are some instances where action has been delayed. This will be rectified in order to support the credibility of the survey process especially with internal customers.

The following surveys are planned for 2005/06:

(i)   National non-domestic rates.
(ii)   Agresso Financial Computer System

6   <u>BEST VALUE</u>

The Department has yet to undertake any best value reviews. However, staff from within the department have played a full role in assisting existing reviews.

As part of the 2003 CPA process the following areas were externally examined:

- Benefits
- Financial Management
- Corporate Governance.

Prior to examination substantial time and energy was expended to improve the operation of these areas as per the relevant guidelines i.e. DWP Performance Standards for benefits and Auditor Scored Judgements for financial management and corporate governance. This involved comparing and improving service areas against best practice. The results were as follows:

Benefits – Fair to good prospects for improvement
Financial Management and Corporate Governance – average score of 2.8 out of 4.

Plans have been put in place to improve the scores of the above services.

These areas will continue to be subject to external scrutiny via the 2005/06 CPA process.

7   BALANCED SCORECARD

Population

	Critical success factor	Measurement	Target	How collected	How often collected	Responsible Officer
Customer Centred	Customer satisfaction with Benefits service Internal customer satisfaction with Central Resources services					
Citizen Focused	Achievement of required and good Priority Outcomes. For e-government within timescale					
Community Led						
Finance and Resources	Council Tax collected Budget versus actual spend Production of medium term financial plan by target date					
Developing and Empowering People	Develop Human Resources Strategy					
Management and Organisation	Corporate Governance Financial Management model – standard reached % increase in top quartile PI's/reduction in lower quartile PI's					

Health						
	Critical success factor	Measurement	Target	How collected	How often collected	Responsible Officer
Customer Centred						
Citizen Focused	Improve average family incomes through maximising benefit take up					
Community Led						
Finance and Resources						
Developing and Empowering People						
Management and Organisation						

Lifelong Learning						
	Critical success factor	Measurement	Target	How collected	How often collected	Responsible Officer
Customer Centred						
Citizen Focused						
Community Led						
Finance and Resources						
Developing and Empowering People	Member development programme on time					
Management and Organisation						

8   PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND TARGETS

The following table shows the Departmental Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI's) targets for 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08.

BVPI	2004/05	2005/06 Target	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target
8 Invoice Payments - %	100	100	100	100
11a Senior Women in post - %	12	16	20	20
11b Senior Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) in post - %	4	4.2	4.5	1
12 Sickness days – days	10	9	8	8
14 Early Retirement - %	1	1	1	1
15 Ill Health - %	0.6	0.55	0.6	0.6
16a Disabled staff - %	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.6
16b Active Disabled Population - %	-	-	-	
17x BME staff - %	1	1	1	1
17y Active BME Population - %	-	-	-	
177 Legal Advice - %	50	50	50	
78a Process Days – benefit – days	40	30	27	24
78b Change in Circs – benefit – days	10	8	7	7
79a Accuracy – benefit - %	98	98	98	98
178 Local Land Searches - %	93	95	96	97
76a No of benefit claimants visited/1000	204	210	210	210
76b No of fraud staff/1000	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4
76c No of fraud investigations/ 1000	28	24	26	28

BVPI	2004/05	2005/06 Target	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target
76d No of prosecutions/sanctions/ 1000	0.8	1.4	1.6	1.8
80a Access – satisfaction - %	-	-	80	-
80b Benefits Office satisfaction - %	-	-	80	-
80c Telephone service – satisfaction - %	-	-	70	-
80d Staff – satisfaction - %	-	-	80	-
80e Forms – satisfaction - %	-	-	70	-
80f Speed of service – satisfaction - %	-	-	70	-
80g Overall satisfaction - %	-	-	75	-
9 Council Tax collection - %	98.0	98.1	98.2	98.3
10 NNDR collection - %	98.9	99.0	99.1	99.2
157 E-government - %	71	100	100	100
2a Equality Standard – no.	2	2	3	3
2b Equality Race Relations	-	-	-	

The above targets will be monitored as outlined in Section 14. They have been subject to consultation with staff as part of performance management arrangements within the Department.

9   CORPORATE MAPPING

The Department's frontline services links to the Authority's corporate themes in a number of ways. The table below shows the linkages. In addition to this, support services contribute to all objectives via their delivery and support to frontline services.

Objective 1:

The Council will use its statutory powers, resources and influence to help create a balanced, vibrant and growing population across the whole of Wear Valley District.

Sub-objectives
To achieve balance in the population by age and geography
To reduce levels of net out migration
To help establish vibrant, energetic communities
To encourage population diversity by attracting new people to live and work in the area

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Council Tax Benefits

Timely provision of benefits reduces "ill will" towards the Council and level of Council tax bills which may reduce levels of net out migration.

Housing Advances

Provision of mortgages as lender of last resort will have encouraged people to remain domiciled in the area.

Housing Benefit Rent Allowances

Provision of safety net which allow residents to live in more expensive areas/remain in area and does not create barriers to work.

Womens Refuge

Provision of safety net for vulnerable women thus reducing likelihood of seeking support outside the District.

Concessionary Travel

Establish vibrant and energetic communities by increasing potential travel area of elderly residents,

Council Tax Admin.

High collection rate reduces non payment provision therefore maximising service delivery. Underpins the objective through the collection of council tax which funds service provision.

Land Charges

Increased efficiency in dealing with information required for property purchase will facilitate sales and acquisitions and create an initial positive impression of the Council.

Electoral Registration

Those on electoral roll will feel have some say in determining Council policies and thus increased affinity towards the area.

Objective 2:

The Council will enable the development of a continuously improving economic infrastructure and environment in Wear Valley

Sub-objectives

To focus on the key strategic issues that will develop the economy of Wear Valley

To use public expenditure to support effective partnering that will contribute to economic development

Council Tax Benefits

Payment of CTB increases net disposable income of households and thus ability to support local economy.

Housing Advances

Provision of mortgages as lender of last resort may reduce demand on council tenancies thus releasing resources for economic development and will have encouraged people to remain working in the area.

Housing Benefit Rent Allowances

Payment of RA increases net disposable income of households and thus ability to support local economy. Linked to service objective of increasing benefits take-up.

Womens Refuge

Womens refuge will support jobs within the local community.

Concessionary Travel

Increases potential travel area thus increasing potential customer base of local businesses. Supports the provision of local transport services through subsidy thus boosting local economy and maintaining transport links.

Council Tax Admin.

Tackling non payment increases well being of those who pay.

Land Charges

Efficient processing of information increases likelihood of successful sale and increases business to solicitors, estate agents and longer term tradesmen when home improvement is undertaken.

Electoral Registration

Increased affinity to area from being on electoral roll and thus use any purchasing power locally.

Objective 3:

The Council will use its services to help improve the health and well being of Wear Valley residents and promote healthy lifestyles

Sub-objectives
To improve the co-ordination of Council activities promoting healthy lifestyles

To focus on Council services as prevention measures

To work in close partnership with the key health agencies

Council Tax Benefits

Payment of CTB increases net disposable income of households available to spend on health and well being.

Housing Advances

The support of increased owner occupation will encourage households to tackle poor living conditions e.g. dampness, thus improving health. Well being increased through home ownership.

Housing Benefit Rent Allowances

Payment of rent allowances increases net disposable income of households available to spend on health and well being. Links to service objectives of allowing people to live in decent housing and preventing eviction through rent arrears.

Womens Refuge

Provision of refuge will assist well being by providing accommodation and support to residents whose health is endangered by their partner. It may also alleviate alcohol and drugs problems which are exacerbated by an individual's domestic situation.

Concessionary Travel

Increases the mobility of the elderly and infirm and thereby improving their general health. Also supports the well being of carers, relatives etc. by increasing independence of travel. Increases ability of residents to access services e.g. leisure facilities, support groups which may be based outside walking distance.

Land Charges

More efficient property acquisition/disposal should reduce stress associated with that transaction.

Electoral Registration

Less frustration by being able to influence local democracy.

Objective 4:

The Council will design its services to increase community safety and crime prevention and work closely with key partners to improve crime reduction

Sub-objectives
To target harden crime hotspots
To ensure capital investment programmes design out crime
To improve neighbourhood and area management arrangements with partners
To reduce the number of citizens becoming offenders.

Council Tax Benefits

Prompt payment of CTB will reduce poverty amongst households and thus propensity towards crime.

Housing Advances

Increased owner occupation is associated with reduced crime, increased likelihood of participation in Neighbourhood Watch schemes, and propensity of householders to take preventative measures to secure their property and contents.

Housing Benefit Rent Allowances

Prompt payment of RA will reduce poverty amongst households and thus propensity towards crime. Also links to service objective of preventing and deterring fraudulent claims.

Womens Refuge

It may alleviate alcohol and drugs problems which are exacerbated by an individual's domestic situation which give them a greater likelihood to commit crime.

Concessionary Travel

Reduces fear of crime as residents feel less trapped in their homes.

Land Charges

Recent property purchasers more likely to undertake home improvements including additional security measures.

Electoral Registration

Participation in local democracy leading to reduced feeling of social exclusion and thus reduced propensity to commit crime.

Objective 5:

The Council will aim to secure new public and private investment to improve the built and natural environment

Sub-objectives

To maximise the opportunities for public sector regeneration investment
To create the policy conditions that will attract and retain private sector investment
To use planning policy to lever environmental gain
To use the quality of environment to brand the image of the district

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Council Tax Benefits

Prompt payment of CTB will help to offset increased council tax bills arising from regeneration within the District.

Housing Advances

Increased pride amongst householders to maintain external attractiveness of their property.

Housing Benefit Rent Allowances

Creation of wider potential pool of tenants for landlords thus giving them an incentive to renovate their property in preparation for letting as opposed to leaving it vacant. Links to service objectives of providing speedy and accurate assessment of benefit and treating all claimants courteously and with respect.

Womens Refuge

Will assist in reducing domestic strife and increase likelihood of householders maintaining attractiveness of their property.

Concessionary Travel

Allows residents to travel to other scenic areas and thus increase support and appreciation for the built and natural environment.

Land Charges

Greater property turnover leads to increased home improvements thus benefiting the environment.

Electoral Registration

Able to influence local policies on environment.

Objective 6

The Council will support the LSP's aims of supporting lifelong learning.

Training

As part of the e-government agenda staff are being trained in the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDC) qualification and Project Management training.

Personnel/HR

The Council has agreed to the further development of a Modern Apprentice Programme within the Housing Services Department.

10   PEST AND SWOT ANALYSIS

The following tables form the results of a PEST and SWOT analysis carried out by the senior departmental managers:

PEST

POLITICAL ANALYSIS
External Threat/Opportunity   1.   Benefit Fraud Inspectorate/Performance Standards   2.   E-Government   3.   Local Government Re-organisation   4.   Stock Transfer   5.   Impact of new legislation
Actions   1.   BFI review   2.   E-government – PEG (Promoting Electronic Government) (self assessment), FMS/Open Revenues & Benefits   3.   Local Government Re-organisation – future IT suppliers/common IT platforms   4.   Possible Stock Transfer – promote work of Department   5.   Legislation – prepare/publicise for legislation/staff training

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

External Threat/Opportunity

1.   Interest rates
2.   Inflation non-pay
3.   Unemployment/deprivation
4.   Funding due to population decline
5.   Collection rates on Council Tax and NNDR

Actions

1.   External advice/benchmarking of treasury management
2.   Take prudent view
3.   Benefit processing performance
4.   Debt surgeries
5.   Benefits/improvement plan (on-going monitoring)

SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
External Threat/Opportunity 1.   Demography 2.   Transient population 3.   Unemployment 4.   Teenage Pregnancies 5.   Fraud/non-payment culture 6.   Dependency culture 7.   Health levels 8.   Crime Statistics 9.   Tolerance to fraud/punishment
Actions 1.   Service planning 2.   Health, crime etc. has links to the Benefits service

TECHNOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
External Threat/Opportunity 1.   Potential IT failures 2.   Broadband 3.   Emerging technologies (payment methods) 4.   Benefit information on-line 5.   New working methods
Actions 1.   Disaster Recovery Planning 2.   Partnerships 3.   Monitor new methods 4.   E-enabling/telephone access 5.   Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)/benchmarking

SWOT

STRENGTHS ANALYSIS
Strengths
1.   Experience/knowledge/commitment of staff 2.   Workforce stability 3.   Low cost base 4.   Introducing best practice in certain areas 5.   Improved IT 6.   Performance monitoring (benchmarking) 7.   Customer satisfaction surveys 8.   Adaptable to change 9.   Comprehensive Performance Standards in certain areas 10.   Strategic views 11.   Members Support for staff and for change
Actions to optimise
1.   Training 2.   Keep staff informed/valued 3.   "Manage" new initiatives 4.   Customer interface needs to improve 5.   Procedural review 6.   Positive feedback

Department: Contact Person:

Weaknesses ANALYSIS
Weaknesses 1.   Sickness levels 2.   Service disparity 3.   Communication is poor 4.   Lack customer focus 5.   Budget monitoring information 6.   Performance monitoring 7.   External communications 8.   Lack of vision
Actions to improve 1.   Train Managers on sickness procedures/inform staff of problem 2.   Improved working/awareness 3.   Identify and act/benchmark 4.   More staff meetings/team briefings 5.   User groups 6.   Use of enhanced facilities within Agresso system 7.   Devolve performance indicator monitoring 8.   Customer opinions/liaison meetings 9.   Clear priorities e.g. adoption of Benefits Service Statement of Intent 10.   Staff surveys

OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS
Opportunity 1. Knowledge becomes more important depending on problem 2. Partnerships 3. Improvement plans 4. Build on staff commitment/knowledge 5. National priorities 6. New IT systems 7. External funding
Actions 1. Publicise services 2. Maximise use of IT 3. IT training (bite size)

THREATS ANALYSIS
Threat 1.   Staff turnover 2.   Local Government Re-organisation 3.   Stock transfer 4.   IT system failure 5.   Poor performance 6.   Legislation
Action to turn into opportunity or to neutralise 1.   Build on staff commitment, succession planning 2.   Pro-active approach to Local Government Re-organisation 3.   - 4.   Better training/in-house knowledge, increase internal audit knowledge 5.   Identify and implement action plan (performance monitoring/improvement plans) 6.   Plan for legislation

The senior staff within the Department have prioritised the services of the Department as follows:

Benefit Administration (including fraud)	H
Internal Audit	M
Council Tax and Recovery	H
NNDR and Recovery	H
Land Charges	M
Electoral Registration	L
Cashiers	M
Legal Services	H
Personnel	H
I.T.	H
Financial Management/Accountancy	H
Committee	M
First Stop Shop	H
Concessionary Travel	L
Exchequer	M
Reprographics	L

From this list it appeared that there were: 8 = H, 5 = M, 3 = L

The top eight H's were again broken down into the following:

Benefit Administration (including fraud)	H
Personnel	H
Financial Management/Accountancy	H
Council Tax and Recovery	M
I.T.	M
First Stop Shop	M
NNDR and Recovery	L
Legal Services	L

The five mediums were broken down into the following:

Exchequer	H
Committee	M
Internal Audit	M
Land Charges	L
Cashiers	L

The three lows were:

Electoral Registration
Concessionary Travel
Reprographics

11 RISK ANALYSIS

The following table shows the main departmental risks to be managed.

Financial – S Reid	Score	Response	Actions
1 **Asset Management and Capital Investment** Failure to effectively manage/maintain assets leading to reduced efficiency and increased costs	4	Develop Asset Management Plan and Capital Strategy	Action Plan established
2 **Budgetary Control and Financial Management** Lack of effective budgetary control leading to poor allocation and control of resources	4	Develop a financial control framework and effective budget process	Report agreed at Management Team. New financial management system (Agresso) introduced
3 **Treasury Management** Risk of losing investment leading to monetary loss and loss of reputation	3	Adopt CIPFA treasury management practices	Agreed at committee
Revenues and Benefits – A Baker			
1 **Staff Security** Possibility of staff assault/accident whilst working alone	3	Review lone worker policy	Done by Health and Safety Officer
2 **Benefit Payment** Failure to process benefit on time	6	Additional resources received via budget process	Improved performance management arrangements put in place

Revenues and Benefits – A Baker			
3 **Collection Rates** Failure to collect NNDR and Council Tax leading to financial loss	2	Effective recovery procedures necessary/staff training	
Administration – A Foster			
1 **Sickness/Absence Monitoring** Failure to manage sickness leading to impact on service delivery and reduced efficiency	2	Review of relevant polices and procedures	Improvement plan produced
I.T. – P Errington			
1 **Physical Damage to Computer Room Equipment** Flood, fire, sabotage etc. resulting in loss of service	3	• Reduce effect of disaster • Control access to computer room • Disaster Recovery Plan	• Fire detection system with Inert gas extinguisher system • Access control devices on computer room doors • Devise and test a plan which provides alternative hardware solutions • Off-site storage of backup tapes

I.T. – P Errington				
2 **Security** Corruption of data and/or programs via malicious or accidental means		4	• Security Policy • Security Handbook for Users	• Access to the network(s) is controlled by passwords which are required to be changed regularly (by the user) • Access to system functions is controlled by passwords setup by system administrators • IT Section are informed immediately when staff leave Council employment – user ids and passwords deleted
3 **Systems Implementation Failure** Systems not installed on time/budget and/or not producing required functionality		4	• Requirements Specification • Project Planning • Acceptance Testing • Post Implementation review(s)	

Work is on-going to manage the risks identified above.

12   ACTION PLANS

Council Plan

The Departmental requirements of the Council Plan are shown in the "mantra" format.

Ref	Priorities	Lead Officer	Key Tasks in next 3 years	Key Measures	Partners	Relevant tools/plans
3c	Land assembly	G Ridley	Identify key development sites Commence site development process	Land made available for industry/ housing/ other planned development	One North east GONE Durham County Council	Regional Economic Strategy Local Development Framework
6b	Provide and support Modern Apprentices hips (including basic skills elements) and NVQs	A Hall	Audit the business community to identify skills gaps Deliver and develop Council-sponsored Modern Apprentice-ships Develop NVQs in partnership with Bishop Auckland College	Number of Modern Apprentices qualified as a result of our input Number of NVQ students qualified as a result of our input	Bp. Auck. College Forum for Business	LSC Local Strategic Plan (countywide) Performance Management Framework

Ref	Priorities	Lead Officer	Key Tasks in next 3 years	Key measures	Partners	Relevant tools/plans
7b	Human resources	A Foster/ A Hall	Develop a HR strategy which: • Identifies the human resources we need to deliver our priorities • Identifies the gaps between our current capacity, competencies, culture and structures and where we want to be • Addresses areas of poor performance (e.g. sickness) • Puts in place an action plan for delivery Develop a parallel approach to member development including participation in the Leadership Academy	Production and implement-ation of Strategy and action plan to timescale Measurable increase in management capacity Number of working days lost to sickness (BV12) Employee satisfaction with the Council as an employer	Staff Members Trade Unions Audit Comm-ission IDeA SOLACE	HR Strategy

Ref	Priorities	Lead Officer	Key Tasks in next 3 years	Key measures	Partners	Relevant tools/plans
7e	Financial manage-ment	G Ridley/ S Reid/ M Laing/ R Hope	Deliver the HRA recovery action plan developed with the Audit Commission Tighten the link between priorities and budget setting over medium term so that funding is clearly moved from non-priority to priority for a period which allows sustainable change Use the budget process to mainstream proven activities that reduce exclusion and deprivation	Achievement of Recovery plan to satisfaction of the Audit Commission Demonstrable link between budgets and priorities Development of three year budget forecasts	Audit Commission	Financial strategy (capital and revenue) Asset Management Plan Housing Business Plan
7i	E-government	G Ridley/ P Errington	Undertake a review of Council-wide business processes with a view to utilising electronic systems to improve business efficiency and access to services	Improvement in relevant PIs	County Durham authorities (joint BV review)	

Ref	Priorities	Lead Officer	Key Tasks in next 3 years	Key measures	Partners	Relevant tools/plans
2f	Map the transport issues facing our communities in terms of travel to work and reaching community facilities (prior to our input to the Local Transport Plan beyond 2006)	G Ridley	Identify demand and potential delivery models	Mapping completed by target date	LSP West Durham Rural Transport Partnership Transport providers Community transport partner-ships	Community transport strategy for Stanhope and Weardale (part of Weardale Strategy)
5a	Increase the income of those reliant on state benefits through the use of money advice campaigns over a 3-year period	A Baker	Identify resources to deliver money advice, benefit uptake and debt control campaign Plan, implement and evaluate campaign, targeting: • disabled people • those with a disabled child • lone parents • those living in most deprived wards in health terms • elderly people	Percentage of claimants making new claims based on Council campaigns Number of benefit recipients apportioned to wards (this is a factor in IMD)	LSP PCT Strategic health authority CAB Other voluntary sector agencies Benefits Agency	

The above will be monitored in line with the corporately developed monitoring procedures.

The following actions, over the years indicated, are planned.

Accountancy Action Plan 2005/06

No.	Objective	Action	Responsible Officer
1	Issue Budgetary Control Reports to Committee and CMT as per protocol agreed April 2003	Quarterly budget report to each policy committee by department plus quarterly report to CMT by service.	Alan Cooper
2	Develop new budget virement scheme to monitor budget transfers	Review financial regulations and provide training to budget holders	Stuart Reid
3	Completion and reporting of Final Accounts by end of July 2005	Close down on high level estimates	Alan Cooper
4	Conduct benchmarking exercise for accountancy and exchequer services	Complete questionnaire and analyse results with other authorities	Alan Cooper
5	Develop Agresso functionality	Integrate system with cash receipting	Julie Oram
6	To improve auditor scored judgements (CPA process)	To be agreed with external auditors	Stuart Reid/ Gary Ridley
7	Electronic notification of remittances to suppliers	Assess cost from Agresso	Ed Thompson
8	Electronic distribution of orders to suppliers/ electronic receipt of invoices	Investigate Agresso functionality and consult with suppliers	John Elliott
9	Introduce automated telephone payments	Assess cost and process requirements	Stuart Reid
10	Increase financial management awareness of members	Conduct training and provide written guidance	Stuart Reid/ Gary Ridley

Revenues and Benefits Action Plan 2005/06

No.	Objective	Action	Responsible Officer

1	To meet 80% of Performance Standards Enablers by June 2006	Monthly reviews of performance	Ann Baker/ Stuart Reid
2	To increase take up of HB and CTB of those eligible in the District	To participate in County Durham Partnership against Poverty and work with other agencies	Gillian Osgerby
3	To implement Document Image Processing and Workflow technology	To procure software and re-engineer processes	Ann Baker/ Tracey Robinson
4	To increase the number of prosecutions and administrative penalties levied for benefit fraud	Further improve Interview under Caution skills and participate in national data matching exercises	Sandra Fitzsimmons
5	To improve mobile working for visiting officers	To examine capture of data and evidence and process claim	Gillian Osgerby
6	To attain above average performance in all benefit PI's	Monthly reviews of performance/staff training/process re-engineering	Tracey Robinson / Sandra Fitzsimmons
7	To streamline direct debit processing	Introduction of AUDDIS, ADDACS and Bacstel –IP	Muriel Finlay
8	To improve recovery process for council tax and NNDR collection	To review processes and compare with best practice	Julie Dowson
9	To improve recovery process for overpaid housing benefit	To review processes and compare with best practice	Maureen Clayton

I.T. Action Plan 2005/06

No.	Objective	Action	Comment
1	Further develop CRM system	Rollout CRM to agreed timetable	During 2005/06
2	Further develop IT security/ disaster recovery	As outlined in external audit reports	During 2005/06

Internal Audit Action Plan 2005/06

No.	Objective	Action	Responsible Officer
1	Key Controls of all major systems audited	Scheduled within annual audit plan	John Redfearn
2	Review Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy	Review and brief relevant officers	John Redfearn
3	Completion of 90% of audit plan	Quarterly monitoring, rescheduling of activities where necessary, minimise report turnarounds	Stuart Reid/ John Redfearn
4	Review whistle blowing policy	Review and brief relevant officers	John Redfearn
5	Compliance with Code of Practice	Check continued compliance	Stuart Reid/ John Redfearn
6	Improve Computer Audit	Further external training plus feedback from IT auditees	John Redfearn
7	Widen audit plan remit	Incorporate corporate risks identified in corporate risk registers	John Redfearn

Human Resources /Training Action Plan 2005/06

No.	Objective	Action	Comment
1	Achieve IIP	Co-ordinate the corporate move to attain the Investors in People Standard	Ongoing during 2005/06
2	Improve sickness absence within the Authority	Raise staff and manager awareness and set departmental targets	Summer 2005

13 MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Department recognises the importance of monitoring and managing performance as a means of improving service delivery and accountability and motivating staff.

Monitoring and review of this service plan will be as follows:

(i)   Targets agreed at Committee.

(ii)   Six monthly performance reported to Committee for all Best Value and local PI's.

(iii)   Outturn performance reported to Committee for all Best Value and local PI's.

(iv)   Quarterly monitoring of key PI's reported to Departmental Management Team and Corporate Management Team.

(v)   Progress report to Departmental Management Team quarterly on action plans.

Where performance is found to be below target, remedial action is taken as appropriate. This includes a diagnosis of the problem/reason for poor performance and a consideration of how improvements can be brought about and sustained.

14   <u>WORKFORCE STATISTICS</u>

The following tables show workforce statistics for each service:

Area	Total Staff	Sick Days in 2004/05 per employee	Turnover Rate 2004/05	BME Staff	Disabled Staff	Women in Senior Positions
Admin	29	5.8	1	0	2	1
I.T.	11	5.5	1	0	0	0
Financial Management etc.	28	2.5	0	0	0	0
Benefits/Council Tax/NNDR	59	16.7	5	1	2	1

Sickness is regarded as a key risk within the Authority therefore a departmental target of reducing sickness by 10% during 2005/06 has been set.