

Statement of Medium Term Improvement Priorities

2006/07 – 2008/09



Making a difference where you live

Introduction

Over the next three years Durham County Council faces a number of important challenges as we move forward with structural changes within the Council and the implementation of key strategies to continue the modernisation of services. In addition, the delivery of the 'Embracing Change' programme with a focus on community, localism and access to services, and greater emphasis on working with partners in the development and implementation of a Local Area Agreement for County Durham, will provide real opportunities to develop new approaches to service delivery and to make a difference to the lives of local people.

Our ambition is to continue to be amongst the top performing councils in the country and to retain and enhance our 'four star' status and we have clear priorities and plans for improvement. In working to achieve our ambition we will be taking action across all Council services to achieve our corporate aims and objectives. This statement provides details of the priorities for improvement that we will take forward over the next three years in order to improve the delivery of services to the people of County Durham.

Our Mission

Durham County Council's mission is:

'To make County Durham the best place in which to live, work and bring up a family'

Our Corporate Aims

The provision of high quality services and the ability to continuously improve service delivery relies on strong corporate governance and community leadership from both elected Members and officers. We are committed to effectively managing our resources and ensuring that future strategic plans respond to identified needs and aspirations.

Our corporate aims are:

- ◆ **To promote strong, healthy and safe communities**

- ◆ **To build a strong economy**
- ◆ **To look after the environment**
- ◆ **To develop lifelong learning**
- ◆ **To ensure effective corporate leadership**

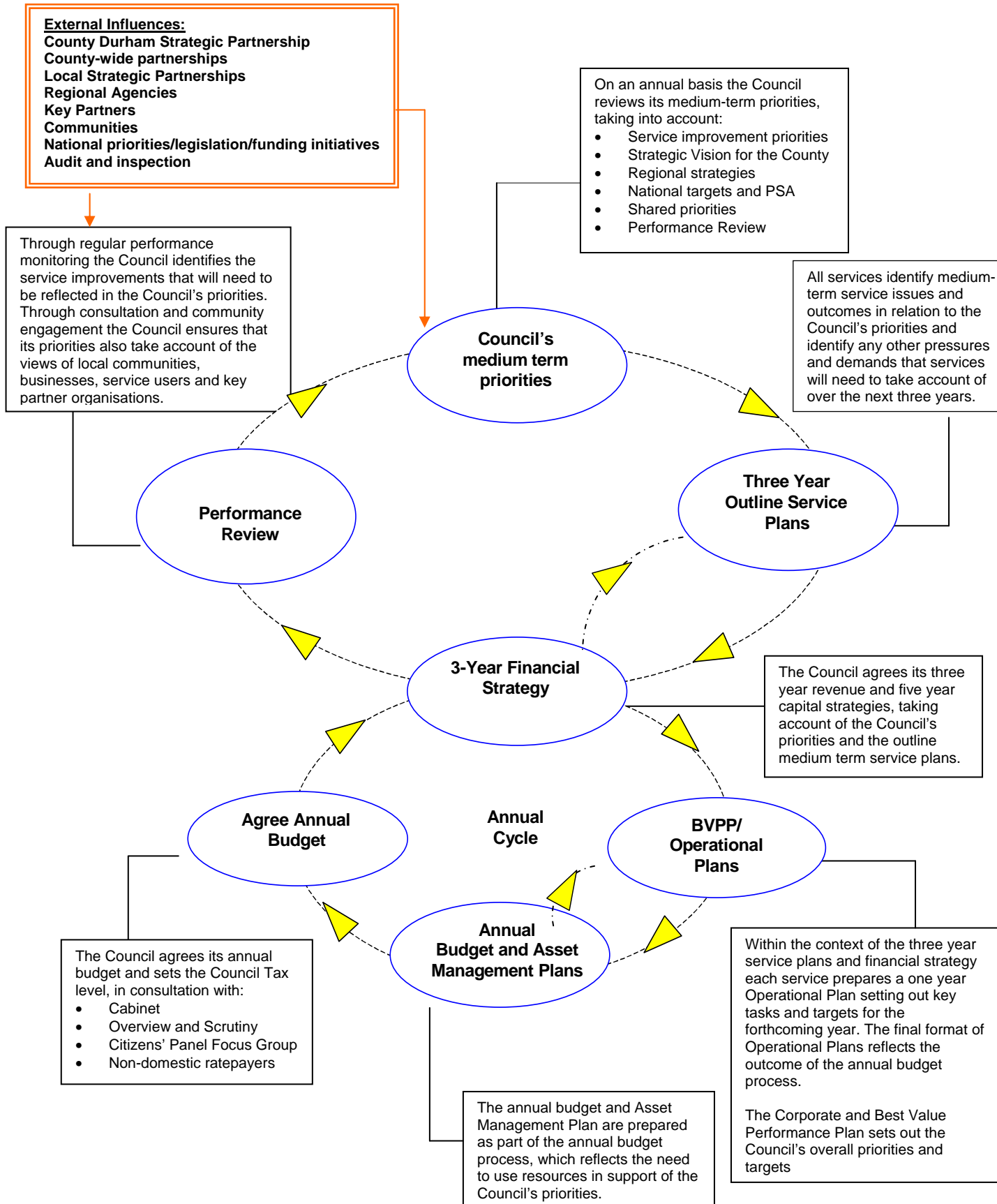
Our Values

We value:

- ◆ **All people** who live, work or learn within the county and those who visit it, and strive to enable them to enjoy the best possible quality of life.
- ◆ **Excellence** in the way we provide services and will constantly seek to improve them.
- ◆ **Our attractive county** and its rich culture, heritage and environment, and we will ensure that in meeting the needs of today we do not compromise our ability to address the needs of the future.
- ◆ **Difference.** We respect and celebrate individuality and we will ensure that everyone's rights are preserved and promoted.
- ◆ **High aspirations**, and will seek to promote a culture in which people can develop and achieve their full potential.
- ◆ **Working with others** in an open and understandable way so as to bring about a sense of trust in the Council, our employees and partners.
- ◆ **The participation of everyone.** We are committed to listening to all views and will help you to be involved and included in issues, which affect your quality of life.

Our Plans for Improvement

Our medium term priorities and plans for service improvement will be integrated with strategic financial planning, as illustrated below and outlined in our arrangements for developing the Medium Term Financial Plan.



STATEMENT OF PRIORITIES

This statement follows on from the completion of our annual review of medium term improvement priorities. The review focused on better outcomes for people living in, working in and/or visiting County Durham and identified the main areas of service delivery that we need to improve. We adopted an evidence based approach using feedback from consultation and external assessment and also baseline information that reflects the position in County Durham relative to national floor targets in key areas such as health, worklessness, educational attainment and crime.

The review was conducted alongside the joint discussions with our partners to agree priorities and outcomes for inclusion in the Local Area Agreement (LAA) for County Durham.

Service Priorities

The following six key areas have been identified as key priority areas for improvement.

- **Protecting and supporting vulnerable children** - Outcomes for this priority area will focus on reducing the incidence of children at risk.
- **Improving educational attainment/achievement** - The main focus for educational attainment will continue to be achievement at Key Stage 4 (GCSE), which will also include attainment of children in care at KS4 and narrowing the gap between boys and girls.
- **Protecting/supporting vulnerable adults** - Outcomes for this priority area will focus on preventative services for adults and older people.
- **Improving health** - We will focus on outcomes where the Council has a direct influence, either as an employer or as a key partner working with others on the health improvement agenda.
- **Promoting economic well-being** - We will focus on improving economic activity in County Durham reflecting a combination of reducing the number of people claiming incapacity benefit, job creation and focus on the knowledge economy.
- **Quality of the Environment** - The main focus will continue to be waste management but with a specific focus on reducing the levels of waste produced.

Corporate priorities

The Council's 'Embracing Change' programme, which was introduced in 2003 represents the main corporate priorities. Following a review of 'Embracing Change', the focus for the next two years will be Community, Localism and Access. The core activities will be access to services, community engagement and partnerships, delivered together with the requirements of the e-Government agenda.

The 'Embracing Change II' programme will also continue to ensure the ongoing integration of priority areas of work from the first phase of 'Embracing Change' encompassing:

- Leadership

- Performance management
- Equalities and diversity
- People strategy

Protecting and Supporting Vulnerable Children

Outcomes for this priority area will focus on reducing the incidence of children at risk and protecting and supporting vulnerable children. We are committed to an approach based on prevention, early intervention and support to parents and carers. In working to protect and support vulnerable children, we are focused on narrowing the gap in outcomes between vulnerable children and their peers and on increasing their lifetime chances.

We will target work with vulnerable young people and their families to ensure a reduction in the number of re-registrations of children on the at-risk register.

The 2005 Annual Performance Assessment (APA) of the Council's education and children's social care services identified access to mental health services for young people referred by the Youth Engagement Service as an area for improvement.

An emotional well-being strategy, led by Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS) will be developed involving a broad range of provision in order to ensure that all children and young people are able to access services to support and promote their emotional well-being.

This priority area will also include a focus on activities to help to prevent young people re-offending which is another area for improvement identified in the 2005 APA.

77% of respondents from the Citizens' Panel survey considered protecting and supporting vulnerable children to be of high importance and 57% considered activities for vulnerable young people to help prevent crime to be of high importance.

Outcomes and measures

Outcome	Measured by:
Fewer children at risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in the number of re-registrations on the child protection register
Better access for young people to mental health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % young people who offend, and who have acute mental health needs, who can access assessment within 5 working days and within 15 days for those with non-acute mental health problems • % looked after children who have acute mental health needs, who can access assessment within 5 working days and within 15 days for

	those with non-acute mental health problems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children and young people participating in programmes to develop self esteem and emotional well-being
Fewer young people offending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System (LAA Stretch target) • Rate of re-offending

Improving Educational Attainment

The main focus for educational attainment will continue to be achievement at Key Stage 4 (GCSE). The Council's 'Beyond Expectations' strategy has had a positive impact on achievement at Key Stage 4 in recent years. The latest exam results for summer 2005 show that 51% achieved 5 GCSE passes at A* - C grade, which is 4.4% higher than 2004 and represents an increase of 10% over the last three years.

However, performance is still below national average and this has been identified as an area for improvement in the 2005 APA. The focus on achievement at Key Stage 4 will also include outcomes relating to attainment of children in care at KS4 and narrowing the gap between boys and girls.

51% of respondents from the Citizens' Panel survey considered improving GCSE achievement in schools to be of high importance.

In the longer term the Council is also implementing a Building Schools for the Future programme for secondary schools, which will support improvements in educational attainment and will also help to address the relatively poor performance of the Council in relation to surplus places in secondary schools.

Improving secondary school buildings was considered to be of high importance by 49% of respondents from the Citizens' Panel survey.

Outcome	Measured by:
Better educational attainment at Key Stage 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % pupils achieving 5 or more A* - C passes at GCSE or equivalent • % pupils achieving 1 or more A* - G passes at GCSE or equivalent • Average points achieved at Key Stage 4 (LAA stretch target)
Better educational attainment of children looked after at Key Stage 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % children leaving care with 5 or more A* - C passes at GCSE or equivalent
Narrowing the gap in attainment between boys and girls at Key Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % pupils achieving level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 in maths and english

Protecting and Supporting Vulnerable Adults

Outcomes for this priority area will focus on preventative services for adults and older people.

The Council has invested significantly in preventative services for older people and in 2004/05 the Council improved performance in intensive home care for people over 65 and the number of older people helped to live at home. We have completed the opening of Phase 1 of our extra care homes across the County and increased the number of Intermediate Care beds across the County. We are now commencing Phase 2 of our strategy for investment in modern services for older people (IMSOP2).

The Council will need to address the increased demand for people with learning disabilities arising from a significant estimated increase in the number of school leavers who will require services and greater numbers of ageing learning disabled people. Additionally care and support for adults living with older carers will need to be provided. There is also a need to improve day services to secure better outcomes for people with learning disabilities and to improve the choice and flexibility in service provision, including opportunities for employment.

59% of respondents from the Citizens' Panel survey considered a wider choice of social care services for older people to be of high importance.

Outcome	Measured by:
Improved opportunities, choice and independence for vulnerable adults and older people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of adults and older people receiving Direct Payments per 100,000 18+ population (LAA stretch target) • % older people in receipt of Council Tax benefit (LAA stretch target) • % care packages for older people delivered within 4 weeks of assessment • % equipment delivered within 7 days • Proportion of users receiving intensive home care as a proportion of those receiving intensive home and residential care
Improved employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % people with learning disabilities known to the Council who are in work

Improving Health

Health in County Durham is poor in comparison with England as a whole, and there are also significant inequalities in health within the County. This interlinks with economic and educational performance, as well as having direct impact on our caring services and above all the families and communities we serve. Many of the determinants of health are our business, and we have a key role in tackling this problem. We will focus on outcomes where the Council has a direct influence, either as an employer or as a key partner working with others, on health improvement and health inequalities agenda.

As an employer we will promote our health at work programme and aim to reduce sickness absence. We will also promote a more consistent approach to assessing the health impact of council decisions. As a key partner we will actively contribute to the wider health improvement agenda with a focus on the targets jointly agreed for the Local Area Agreement

59% of respondents from the Citizens' Panel survey considered helping to improve the health of local people to be of high importance.

Outcome	Measured by:
Reduction in County Council sickness absence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of working days/shifts lost to sickness absence
More children eating and drinking healthily and regularly and involved in physical activity inside and outside school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of schools involved in healthy Schools Standard (LAA stretch target) % children aged 7-14 who spend a minimum of 2 hours each week on high quality PE and sport within and beyond the curriculum (LAA stretch target)
Reduction in the number of people smoking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult smoking rate (people aged 15-75 years smoking status recorded on GP register). Number of 4 week smoking quitters who attended NHS Smoking Cessation services. (LAA stretch target)
Reduction in teenage pregnancies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under 18s conception rate

Promoting Economic Well-being

Although unemployment in the County is below the national average, the level of worklessness, which includes other measures of economic inactivity, is one of the highest in the Country. Together with partners we will focus on improving economic activity in County Durham with a specific focus on reducing the number of people claiming incapacity benefit and supporting job

creation. We will continue to promote the development of job opportunities in the knowledge-based economy.

89% of respondents from the Citizens' Panel survey considered creating and retaining jobs in County Durham to be of high importance. This was by far the highest level of support expressed in the survey. 55% of respondents considered developing opportunities for high quality jobs in research and knowledge-based industries to be of high importance.

Outcome	Measured by:
Reduction in the level of worklessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of incapacity benefit claimants (LAA stretch target)
Increased entrepreneurial activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of new VAT registered businesses (LAA stretch target)
More people with the skills to meet current and future business needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of adults in the workforce achieving level 2 NVQ or equivalent (LAA stretch target)

Quality of the Environment

The main focus in relation to the quality of the environment will continue to be sustainable waste management but with a specific focus on reducing the levels of waste produced.

Additional capital and revenue investment has supported improvements in waste management. Premier Waste completed the second tower of their aerobic digester at Thornley and it became fully operational in January 2005. Performance in waste recycling and composting has increased substantially in the last two years with a combined performance of 18.5% in 2004/05 compared to 10.6% in 2002/03. However, performance in relation to the kilograms of waste produced per head of population in County Durham is still in the worst quartile nationally. The introduction of the waste permit scheme has seen a significant improvement in 2005/06 but further action will be required.

72% of respondents from a survey of the Citizens' Panel considered reducing levels of waste and improving recycling to be of high importance.

Performance in relation to the condition of footways is in the worst quartile nationally and this is also an area for improvement.

Outcome	Measured by:
Less waste collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of kilograms of waste collected per head of population
Less waste sent to landfill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % household waste which has been landfilled % household waste recycled

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % household waste sent for composting or treatment by aerobic digestion
Footpaths in better condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condition of surface footway

Corporate Priorities

The Council's 'Embracing Change' programme, which was introduced in 2003, is embedded within our overall plans for improvement. Over the previous two years the change programme has focused primarily on improvements in corporate management but, following a review of 'Embracing Change', the focus for the next two years will be Community, Localism and Access. The core activities will be access to services, community engagement and partnerships, delivered together with the requirements of the e-Government agenda.

An initial focus has been on ensuring that the e-government Priority Services Outcomes are being addressed, but more strategically, the change programme will link with the work of the County Durham E Government Partnership, where the County Council will be taking a lead on delivering the Access to Services Strategy, telephone technology and Geographic Information Systems and also contributing to implementing the CRM system.

The 'Embracing Change II' programme will also continue to ensure the ongoing integration of priority areas of work from the first phase of 'Embracing Change' encompassing:

- Leadership
- Performance management
- Equalities and diversity
- People strategy

Priorities for Additional Investment in 2006/07

The majority of the improvements outlined above will be achieved through targeted management of existing resources in line with agreed priorities. Key priorities for additional investment in service improvement in 2006/07 are:

- Services for people with learning disabilities
- Home care services and aids and adaptations
- Building schools for the future