

# Council Plan 2009-11

Draft - work in progress

## Commitment to equality and diversity

We want to ensure that everyone using our services is treated fairly and without prejudice or discrimination. We also know that all of our customers are individual.

Our community is becoming evermore diverse. We want to celebrate and encourage this diversity. We are committed to ensuring that no-one is excluded from being able to use any of our services and that all our customers have the same opportunities to improve their quality of life. All customers should

have equal access to the services provided by the Council. This means that we recognise that people have different needs and requirements and we will do all we can to meet these. Our staff will respond promptly, politely and sensitively to all of our customers and have specific customer service standards. Councillors and staff have been properly trained, and more training is planned in the future.

We will continue to work towards complying with the requirements of equalities legislation to make sure

that the services we deliver, and the facilities we deliver them from, are fully accessible for all our customers, whatever their circumstances.

In improving access and communication, we want to reach those members of the public who are normally least likely to take up our services.

We will also ensure that we continuously improve the level to which we comply with the Equality Standard for Local Government.

If you need this information summarised in another language or format such as Braille, large print, CD or talking tape, please call the number below.

إذا اردت معرفت ملخص هذه المعلومات باللغة العربية اتصل على الرقم التالي  
Arabic

আনকাননে এই তথ্যটি পড়ে নিচের নম্বরে ফোন করুন।  
Bengali

假如您需要這份資料的中文摘要，請致電下面的號碼。  
Chinese

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات اردو میں درکار ہیں تو اس نمبر پر کال کیجیے۔  
Urdu

Jezeli potrzebujesz streszczenia tych informacji w języku polskim zadzwoń proszę na poniższy numer  
Polish

ਜਾਂ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਖ਼ਬਰ ਦਾ ਨਿਚੋੜ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਹੋਏ ਨੰਬਰ ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।  
Punjabi

यदि आप यह जानकारी का संक्षेप हिन्दी में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया निचे दिए हुए नम्बर में सम्पर्क करें।  
Hindi



(0191) 383 4964

## Foreword



Simon Henig  
Leader of the Council



George Garlick  
Chief Executive

### ***Welcome to our first Council Plan***

We are pleased to introduce the first Council Plan for the new Durham County Council. The new unitary council came into being on the 1st April 2009 following the merger of the county council and all of the previous district councils in County Durham.

This is a particularly important time for the new council and the communities of the county because residents, businesses and other key partners will start to see the benefits of the new council arrangements. Services across the county have been improving in recent years and the new council will have the vision, commitment and capacity to improve further and provide better value for money.

Last year we agreed a three year Local Area Agreement (2008-11) with our partners and the government. The agreement sets out clear priorities for the Council to work in partnership to improve the lives of people in County Durham. This Council Plan sets out the contribution we will make to achieve these improvements, as well as continuing to transform the way we deliver our services. Our Council Plan will normally cover a three year period but this first plan will cover the period 2009 – 2011 so that we can align with our partners' priorities and take time to review priorities for the future.

It is going to be a challenging time for us as we strive to meet the expectations of our customers and stakeholders. We are committed to delivering excellent services in County Durham which will continually improve. We want the best for our citizens and we will strive to be a 'flagship' council within the next two years. Through focussing on the delivery of a challenging yet realistic Council Plan we are confident that we will achieve our ambitions.

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## Introduction

This Plan is the overarching high level plan for the County Council, which is updated annually. It links closely to our medium term financial strategy and in broad terms sets out how we will deliver our corporate priorities for improvement and the key actions we will take in support of delivering the longer term goals in the interim Sustainable Community Strategy, the targets in the Local Area Agreement (2008-2011) and the Council's own improvement agenda.

The Plan has been developed with a two year time span to align with the new Local Area Agreement (2008-2011) but focuses primarily on 2009/10, during which time it will be reviewed by the new leadership of the Council, both members and managers, alongside the review of the interim Sustainable Community Strategy. The review will set a vision and values for the Council, within the wider partnership context, with the Council taking a leading role in defining and delivering the wider strategic goals for County Durham.

During 2009/10 we will be building on the Local Government Reorganisation programme to ensure that the transformational projects that have been identified for the new council are well co-ordinated and managed effectively. We will be introducing the 'Altogether better' programme for change that will deliver improvements and value for money by bringing together all eight former councils and take opportunities to implement best practice.

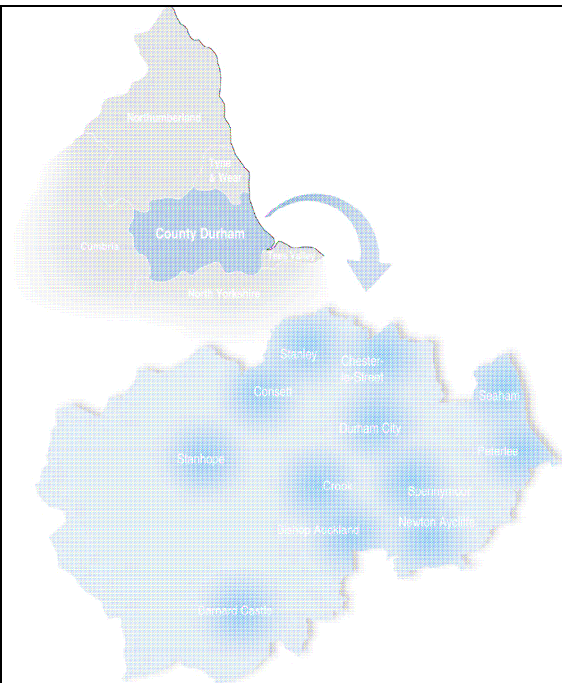
There are already significant improvement taking place, such as the major investments in rebuilding and refurbishing the County's secondary and primary schools through the Building Schools for the Future programme and the developments being implemented for the Durham City Vision. We are also looking to the future with plans to bid for the 'City of Culture' initiative.

However, there are also significant challenges for the Council and its partners over the next few years, not least of which will be to understand the impact of the current economic downturn and to put in place measures to support our communities and to ensure that County Durham is well placed to prepare for recovery.

## The County and the Council

### About County Durham

County Durham is located in the North East of England. It is bordered by the major conurbations of Tyne and Wear to the north and Tees Valley to the south. It extends from the North Sea Coast in the east to the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Beauty to the west and covers an area of 223, 260 hectares. While most of the county is rural there are 12 major areas of population (over 5,000) together with over 300 smaller towns and villages.



### **Your County Interesting facts:** (to be updated)

- *Close to 500,000 people live in County Durham.*
- *There are 219,000 households in the county.*
- *85 kms of motorway run through the county.*
- *Durham City is 265 miles from London and 125 miles from Edinburgh.*
- *142,000 Hectares of the county is agricultural land.*
- *25% of working people are employed in manufacturing in County Durham, 67% are employed in the service sector.*
- *Around one third of the population live in areas which are judged amongst the 20% most deprived nationally*

## **About Durham County Council**

The new unitary council, Durham County Council, came into being on 1st April 2009 with the merger of the Durham County Council and the district councils of Chester-le-Street, Derwentside, Durham City, Easington, Sedgefield borough, Teesdale and Wear Valley.

The creation of the new unitary council heralds a transformation in local government in the County. The Council leadership from both elected members and senior managers will promote the Council's role and reputation locally, regionally and nationally and work to deliver more efficient and responsive services and a better quality of life for local people.

Council elections are held every four years. The most recent election was held in May 2008 and the next is expected in 2013. The new unitary council is made up of 126 elected members of which:

- 68 are Labour councillors;
- 27 are Liberal Democrat councillors;
- 10 are Conservative councillors; and
- 21 are Independent councillors.

Political leadership is provided through a Cabinet and Leader model. The Cabinet, established from among our elected members, takes executive decisions on behalf of the Council. The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee enables all non-executive members to have a role in both policy development and scrutiny. The Council has established 14 Area Action Partnerships to engage with communities and ensure that their views are taken into account and help to shape the Council's future vision and plans.

The Corporate Management Team, comprising the Chief Executive and six Corporate Directors, supports the elected members in their roles as executive decision makers and provides managerial leadership in the planning, development and delivery of the Council's services.

## **Becoming a Flagship Council**

As we implement our proposals for unitary local government we will be establishing new and innovative governance arrangements so that the Council can maintain a strong strategic role and also empower communities at the most local level. We want the new

council to become a flagship council, leading the way on empowering citizens and communities, promoting prosperity, and modernising local service delivery to achieve greater efficiencies and better outcomes.

### **Services provided by Durham County Council**

Durham County Council provides a wide range of services to people living and working within the county, which include:

- Caring for more than 3,300 people in residential and nursing care
- Helping over 16,000 vulnerable people to live in their own homes
- Providing more than 2.5million hours of home care each year
- Providing xx local libraries and loaning over 3.5 million library items each year
- Providing learning opportunities from three years old
- Educating almost 75,000 pupils in 292 schools
- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people
- *Providing parks, playgrounds and open spaces*
- 

- Maintaining 3,699kms (2,295 miles) of roads and 3,353kms (2,144 miles) of footpaths and bridleways
- Maintaining 83,000 streetlights and 1,144 bridges
- Handling 28,000 tonnes of waste annually
- Promoting safe and fair trading
- Dealing with over xxx planning applications per year
- *Leisure facilities*
- *Housing*
- *Litter and graffiti removal*
- 
- (To be updated)

### **Working with our communities**

We are committed to working with local communities and partners to ensure that communities have influence over the delivery of services locally. Our network of 14 Area Action Partnerships will be an important link between our communities and the Council. They will give local people greater voice and choice in local affairs and more say on the quality of life within their communities.

### **Customer Excellence**

Our customers will be at the heart of everything we do and we will put systems in place to listen to, and better understand, customer needs and respond to them. Our customer care standards will apply to all services. We are committed to equality of access, making sure that access is easy for everyone and that we recognise diversity across communities and support vulnerable groups.



## Our Shared Ambition

### Regional and national context

The Council will continue to relate positively to the changing national, regional and local context. Our approach to improvement will align to the new national performance framework but with a clear focus on local priorities and outcomes. We will define our role and strategic position within the wider regional context and make our contribution in relation to the Regional Spatial Strategy, the Integrated Regional Strategy and the development plans of the Tyne and Wear and Tees Valley City Regions.

### Successful working in partnership

In County Durham there is a clear understanding between partners of the issues that need to be addressed and recognition that collaborative working is essential. We will work at the most appropriate level to support and deliver regional and county level strategies. The Council will develop its approach to strategic and community leadership with reference to the new County Durham Partnership framework and we will take a strong and leading role in working with partners to achieve the targets set out in the Local Area Agreement (2008-11) and the long term goals and priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy for the following seven key themes:

- A thriving **economy** – a modern, dynamic and diverse economy; an enterprising and entrepreneurial society; improved employability and skills in the workforce; improved economic competitiveness of our major towns; and a reduction in poverty.
- Everyone **achieves** to their potential – improved attainment in education and work for people of all ages; more young people involved in employment, education or training; and increased levels of adult education and skills.
- A high quality and sustainable **environment** – a high quality clean, green, attractive environment; provision of sustainable residential accommodation across all tenures; enhanced choice and access to sustainable and integrated transport networks; and a reduced impact on climate change.
- All residents lead long and **healthy lives**
- Everyone is **safe** and feel safe
- People **enjoy** life - culture, leisure and sporting opportunities to meet the needs and aspirations of the community and people have a sense of pride in our culture and heritage and high aspirations for the future
- Everyone can make a **positive contribution** - strong cohesive communities and a vibrant and sustainable voluntary and community sector.

## Our Vision

**“A council committed to developing a prosperous, safe and sustainable future for County Durham, listening to and working with local people, leading and shaping our communities and working in partnership to ensure quality, cost effective services”.**

We aim to do this by:

- Being **outward facing** and **ambitious** and raising the profile of the County and the Council
- Being **customer focused** and **accessible** with contact points across the County
- **Engaging and empowering communities** and having **good communication** between local areas and the Council to influence decision making
- Organising and providing services in a **modern and flexible** way
- Making **efficient and effective** use of resources
- Working in **partnership** and striving for **excellence and innovation** in service delivery to improve outcomes for local people

## Principles

In taking decisions we will:

- Be open and transparent
- Listen and respond to local communities
- Promote fairness and equality
- Be focused and timely

## Our Planning and Performance Framework

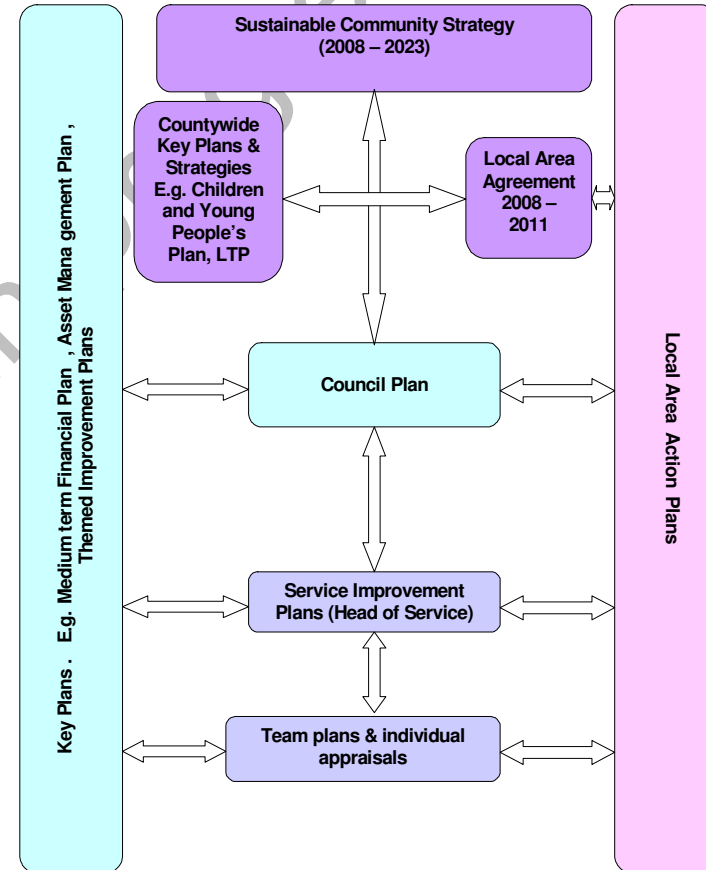
Our Council Plan provides the link between the Council's planning arrangements and the wider strategic planning at County level. It is the overarching plan that directs the planning of all services in the Council and it is the basis for a performance management framework that is shared with for the County Durham Partnership.

The Council Plan sets out the high level priority themes and the main outcomes for improvement with key actions, performance measures and targets. The plan is monitored on a quarterly basis through reports to Corporate Management Team and Cabinet, and to Scrutiny Committees as appropriate.

Three year Service Improvement Plans provide more detailed information on the actions we are taking to deliver our priorities, including details of the resources needed and risk assessments. Service Plans are monitored by management teams in the directorates to ensure that our priority areas are on track. Service Plans are in turn supported by team plans.

Our plans will be influenced by and link to the Local Area Action Plans being developed by each of our Area Action Partnerships.

Our approach helps to build performance management into the ongoing operation of the Council at all levels so that decisions are being informed by sound performance management intelligence.



## Our Priorities

There are two major influences on our medium term priorities from 2009/10 onwards. The first is the new Local Area Agreement (LAA) for 2008 – 2011, which has been agreed with partners and was signed off in June 2008. The second is the transformational agenda for the new council from April 2009, the framework for which is set out in a high level blueprint agreed by the Council.

Agreement of the LAA (2008 – 2011) involved engagement with a broad range of stakeholders with consideration of information and evidence from a number of sources, including new evidence from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for health and social care; a review of the Children and Young People's Plan which has taken account of the results of our second survey of children and young people across the County; a new Economic Development Strategy for the County, which is being finalised following a major consultation exercise and updated to take account of the latest economic position; and the views of the public taken from recent surveys.

The LAA does not cover all of the priority areas of work that the Council is engaged in, either as an organisation or in key partnerships, where work is ongoing to deliver longer term strategies, but our priorities are aligned to the longer term goals in the Sustainable Community Strategy and more closely aligned to the LAA. Our priorities are grouped by the following themes:

- Healthier communities
- Safer communities
- People enjoying, achieving and making a positive contribution
- Economic well being
- An improved environment
- Transformation

Our transformation agenda will include the improvements in service design and delivery that will be necessary for the new council to achieve the efficiencies for reinvestment in front line services, improve outcomes and meet our ambition to be a flagship authority within the next two years. This will be delivered through our 'Altogether Better' improvement programme. The following key themes will steer the way that the new council operates in the future:

- Customer focus
- Community engagement and empowerment
- Modern and flexible services
- Efficient and effective use of resources
- Improved outcomes

## Theme 1: Healthier Communities

### Why is this important?

The overall health of the population in County Durham is poor compared with the national picture, and inequalities in health across the county remain persistent and pervasive. Although trends in male and female life expectancy at birth are upwards, there are unacceptable gaps in life expectancy between County Durham and England as a whole. Good health will support improved attainment in education and work for people of all ages and will be a cornerstone of a modern, dynamic and diverse economy, which will in turn support improvements in the health of the population.

Smoking is the biggest single contribution to the shorter life expectancy in County Durham and efforts to reduce rates must continue to be a focus for all partners. Alcohol and drug misuse impacts upon crime, domestic violence, anti-social behaviour and individual health. Dangerous drinking, both chronic and binge drinking, is significantly higher than the national average in County Durham. Levels of obesity in adults and children are amongst the highest in the country and concerted efforts are required across agencies to prevent this situation worsening. Under 18 conceptions are higher than the national average and it is well evidenced that this can impact on an individual's access to opportunities and overall health and wellbeing and can be a factor in child poverty.

The Council recognises the adverse health impact of the high levels of deprivation present within some areas of the County where many of our staff live. We are committed to improving the health of our workforce, which will have major benefits within the Council as well as having a positive effect on the local communities from which the majority of the workforce is drawn.

### These are the priority outcomes we are trying to achieve:

HC1: Narrowing locality variations in life expectancy over a three year period
HC2: Reduced levels of childhood obesity
HC3: A reduction in the harm caused by substance misuse
HC4: A reduction in teenage pregnancies
HC5: Improved emotional well being of children & young people
HC6: A healthier County Council workforce with lower levels of sickness absence

## Theme 2: Safer Communities

### Why is this important?

Crime in County Durham has been steadily decreasing and there is a strong track record of working in partnership to prevent and reduce crime and provide public reassurance. However, evidence shows that crime, and in particular anti-social behaviour, is a major concern for local people, though there is statistical evidence that levels have fallen by about 14% between 2006/07 and 2007/08. Crime and fear of crime can impact negatively on economic growth and areas that are perceived as safe are more attractive to businesses and their customers. People also need to feel safe when they are travelling to access services, leisure facilities or learning opportunities.

It is important to address issues that impact on personal and public safety, such as domestic abuse and persistent and prolific offenders. Misuse of alcohol and drugs also impacts negatively on the quality of life for County Durham communities and is a key issue for partners to tackle. We also want to protect the most vulnerable in our society, both adults and children.

### These are the priority outcomes we are trying to achieve:

SC1: People being safe and feeling safe
SC2: The welfare of all children and young people is continually safeguarded and promoted.
SC3: Reduced levels of youth crime
SC4: Reduced levels of domestic abuse

### Theme 3: People Enjoying, Achieving and making a Positive Contribution

#### Why is this important?

In an increasingly diverse county it is important to create the right conditions for participation and for community spirit to flourish. The development of strong, sustainable communities will be enhanced if residents are given the opportunity to achieve to their potential, enjoy local facilities and to make a positive contribution to their local community.

A sense of achievement comes not only from success in learning and at work but also from participation in cultural, leisure and sporting activities for personal and social development. This in turn supports learning and feelings of self worth and inclusion, as well as being enjoyable. Leisure, cultural and sporting activities also make a huge contribution to health and wellbeing.

While educational attainment levels have improved significantly in recent years, the county still faces problems of low aspirations and underachievement and there is a mixed picture across the county with lower levels of educational attainment in certain geographic areas and for certain groups of children and young people.

As numbers of older people in the population of the county increase, there will be a growing demand for different types of care, support and rehabilitation services. Independent living in suitable accommodation with appropriate support is essential if vulnerable people are to feel safe and included in society. We will work with vulnerable people to enable them to enjoy a full life within their local communities.

#### These are the priority outcomes we are trying to achieve:

EAP1: Raised aspirations with everyone achieving their potential
EAP2: Improved places to go and things to do for teenagers
EAP3: Improved choice and control for vulnerable adults and older people
EAP4: Older people and vulnerable adults making a positive contribution
EAP5: Improved community cohesion and participation
EAP6: Improved aspirations through culture, leisure and sporting opportunities

## Theme 4: Economic Wellbeing

### Why is this important?

The gap in economic performance between County Durham and the regional/national economies is widening. The long-term decline of traditional industries has created a negative economic, social and environmental legacy in parts of the county and globalisation pressures have impacted on the sustainability of some of the inward investment which replaced those jobs. In recent years the County has generally recorded a lower unemployment rate than the North East region as a whole, but with the onset of the current recession this picture is changing rapidly. Unemployment has risen nationally but in Durham it is rising at a much faster pace than the rest of the North East and the UK average. Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the contribution to the economy of each individual producer, industry or sector in the United Kingdom. GVA data for County Durham is showing a stubbornly declining trend and is accounting for less of the regional total.

Work to close this gap, whilst making sure that local people are well placed to take advantage of the opportunities that emerge, will have an impact on virtually every aspect of quality of life in the county. Economic wellbeing is fundamental in creating the right conditions for people and places to thrive. Low skills levels in the adult working population can prevent individuals from achieving their full potential. The County has a low number of businesses and lower business start up rates in relation to our population, compared to the national average. We also have lower than average participation in the labour market, with high levels of incapacity benefit and other forms of economic activity. Also, despite recent improvements the percentage of 16-18 year olds not participating in education, employment or training remains high.

### These are the priority outcomes we are trying to achieve:

EW1: An increased level of support - helping people into work
EW2: An increased level of entrepreneurial activity
EW3: Higher levels of investment in the physical fabric of the County
EW4: Young people actively engaged in education, employment or training
EW5: Vibrant town centres
EW6: Highly effective business support (aiding economic recovery and diversifying the local economy)
EW7: More people with the skills required for business and employment



## Theme 5: An Improved Environment

### Why is this important?

The quality of the physical conditions that surround communities has a very significant impact on feelings of happiness, security, wellbeing and pride. Clean streets, attractive towns and villages, decent affordable housing, good transport facilities and minimised impacts from climate change all contribute to people's satisfaction with their area as a good place to live.

There are challenging targets for local authorities to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill and to increase levels of recycling and composting. Actions to address, mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change are needed, not just to safeguard our own communities, but to contribute to national and global targets.

The county's rural nature and low levels of car ownership, particularly in deprived areas, makes accessible public transport a high priority. A well maintained road and footway network is a necessity to allow everyone to access services, employment, education, health and leisure facilities safely and efficiently.

There is a shortfall in the availability of decent, affordable housing suitable to the needs of a growing population with diverse needs

### These are the priority outcomes we are trying to achieve:

IE1: Less household waste going to landfill
IE2: Increased accessibility and a halt in the decline in public transport
IE3: Reduction in the County Council's impact on climate change
IE4: Improved highway and network condition
IE5: A cleaner, greener, more attractive and accessible environment
IE6: Improved choice and quality in the housing market

## Theme 6: Transformation

### Why is this important?

The creation of the new unitary council from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 is only the start of a major change programme that will ensure the new Council fulfils its ambitions as set out in the original bid to become a unitary council and in the subsequent high level blueprint. The foundations for the new Council will have been put in place by April 2009 but considerable work is required to deliver the transformational change required to respond positively to the aspirations and needs of the residents of the County.

We will put in place a corporate improvement programme to deliver the changes required. The '*Altogether better*' improvement programme will build on the work of the Local Government Reorganisation programme and is named to signal that the improvements will be driven by bringing together all eight former councils and working together to improve services and implement best practice.

The starting point will be early work by elected members, Corporate Directors and the extended management team to develop a vision and values for the Council and County Durham, based on a review of the current interim Sustainable Community Strategy and this Council Plan. It will be important to develop a culture of continuous improvement through the corporate improvement programme as well as at an operational level through innovation in service delivery identified in Service Improvement Plans.

The core of the '*Altogether Better*' programme is the establishment of a small number of cross-council Improvement Groups which will be focussed on specific aspects of performance and will be tasked to deliver incremental and continuous change.

### These are the priority outcomes we are trying to achieve:

T1: Strong customer focus, improved access to services and good customer service standards
T2: Enhanced community engagement and empowerment and new locality governance arrangements
T3: Efficient and effective use of resources with modern and flexible services
T4: A more structured approach to improvement and change
T5: 'One organisation' culture and behaviours

## Our Plans

### Delivering our plans

Here we set out the actions that will help to achieve our priorities. On the following pages for each of the priority outcomes we provide:

- A description of the context for the priority
- The key actions that we will be taking with an identified lead Head of Service
- The performance indicators that will be used as measures of success and targets for 2009/10 and 2010/11
- Any strategic risks associated with achievement of the priority

The actions identified in the Council Plan are, by necessity, at a relatively high level, but it is expected that these actions will be underpinned by much more detailed information in the Service Improvement Plans prepared by all of the Heads of Service.

Achievement of many of the priority outcomes will not be achieved by the Council alone but as part of joint approaches with partners, either as part of county level strategies or more specific partnership projects. This is particularly true of actions to support the delivery of the Local Area Agreement, and we will be working with partners to agree delivery plans for the LAA as part of a wider network through the Delivery and Improvement Group of the County Durham Partnership.

The actions and measures in the Council Plan will be the basis for quarterly performance management reports to the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet and, where relevant, to the County Durham Partnership.