

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE

IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

INTO

COUNCIL PLAN KEY THEMES

## 1) Introduction

This report summarises the work carried out by the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee Review Panel 3 who were asked to investigate the Council Plan Key Themes.

This project was carried out between September to December 2000. Members met on several occasions to discuss the way in which the Council Plan Key Themes and Targets are set and the process by which they are monitored.

## 2) Background

### The Council Plan

The Council Plan is a corporate document that is used to determine the shape of services, define spending priorities and set targets against which the County Council's performance is measured. It provides the framework for every department's service and business plans. The Council Plan comprises of: -

1. The Council's Vision for Derbyshire which is *"To build on Derbyshire's reputation for championing local people's interest and for providing innovation, quality and efficient services which meet the needs of local people"*<sup>1</sup>
2. Council's Values and Aims – these are the fundamental beliefs which underpin the County Council's actions
3. Council's Core Themes and Targets – these spell out what different services intend to do, so that their achievements and performance can be measured.

All of the County Council's policies and programmes should stem from and interlink with the Council's key themes. The County Council has identified seven key themes, which are: -

- regeneration
- community safety
- learning community
- social inclusion
- environmental sustainability
- access to services
- service improvement

Under each key theme, targets are set, which aim to bring about measurable improvements to the delivery of services. For example, under the Community

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<sup>1</sup> Best Value Executive Summary pg3

Safety theme, one of the targets was 'To establish the new multi-agency Youth Offending Service by April 2000'. Similarly, for the Social Inclusion theme, one of the targets was 'To audit the Council's equal opportunity action programmes against the CRE standard by April 2001.'

### **External Auditors Value For Money (VFM) programme - Service and Financial Planning Study**

One of the 1998/99 VFM studies was Service and Financial Planning. This study examined service and financial planning that existed within local authorities looking at both corporate and departmental planning. Nationally the Audit Commission produced a management paper to complement the study. The paper acknowledged that there are an increasing number of statutory plans, such as the Best Value Performance Plan that local authorities have to produce. This brings with it demanding national standards and targets that services have to achieve. The management paper sets out recommendations for improvement that include: -

'The first is to strengthen the links between corporate, service and financial planning'<sup>2</sup>

The External Auditors carried out their study and reported back to County Council in October 1999. They recognised that the County Council was committed to a framework that provides a sound basis for planning and delivery of the Council's services. Indeed the External Auditor's overall position was: -

*'The importance of having a coherent and robust corporate, service and financial planning framework has been recognised by the authority. It is making good progress in devising and implementing its framework arrangements at a time when many changes are occurring, including the political management structure'*<sup>3</sup>

### **3) Current situation**

The panel was concerned as to how the key themes and targets expressed in the Council Plan are translated into service delivery. Furthermore concern was expressed as to how performance is monitored and reported back to Members.

Initially, it was decided that Members would concentrate upon how the Environmental Services Department developed and monitors its key themes and targets.

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<sup>2</sup> Management Paper 'Planning to Succeed' Audit Commission 1999 pg. 72

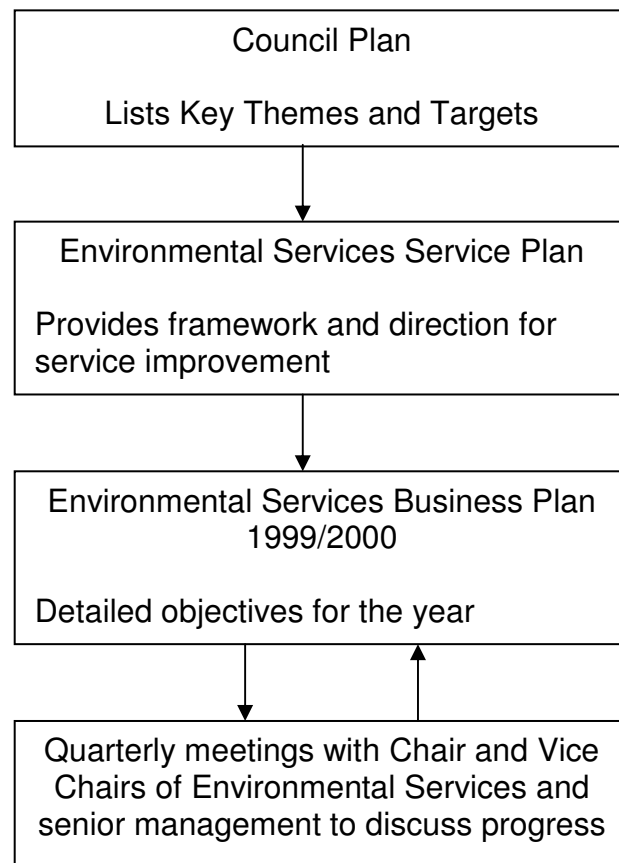
<sup>3</sup> Service and Financial Planning Review – VFM study 19<sup>th</sup> October 1999

## Environmental Services Department

The Environmental Services Department produced a Service Plan for their department. This was reported and approved by the Environmental Services Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1999. This Service Plan linked into the Council Plan's key targets and objectives, which were in draft form at that time. Following preparation of their Service Plan, the Environmental Services Department produced a Business Plan for 1999/2000.

The purpose of the Business Plan was to inform employees and stakeholders of the activities being undertaken in the financial year 1999/2000, and to deliver the range of key objectives promised in their Service Plan and corporate Council Plan.

The Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Environmental Services Committee are conducting quarterly reviews of the Business Plan. At these meetings, senior managers are asked to report progress and to explain any issues arising. The chart below demonstrates this process.



## **Other Departments**

Other departments monitor themes and targets differently. Attached at Appendix 1 is a brief summary of the monitoring process followed by each department.

This demonstrates that there is no consistent approach to monitoring themes and targets, especially in relation to Member involvement. In general, monitoring tends to be done against Service Plans and Performance Indicators, with cross-references to the Council Plan as appropriate. Several Service Plans were prepared before the current version of the Council Plan was approved. In these circumstances, linkage between the Council Plan's core themes and targets, and Service and Business Plans are not transparent, thereby making it more complex for Members and employees.

## **4) Conclusions**

The development of the Council Plan and their linkages with service and financial planning is an evolving process. The County Council now has to build upon the good progress made to date. Members are especially concerned that Members be included in a meaningful way in monitoring arrangements.

There are two stages that Members wish the County Council to address: -

### **Stage 1 – Review of Plans - Themes and Targets**

The Council Plan needs to be reviewed to reflect changes arising from the preparation of the Council's Best Value Plan, a new 'national agenda' initiative and the ongoing consideration of new political management structures associated with Modernising Local Government.

The Council's duty to promote well being, and the requirement for local government to provide leadership of the Community Planning process should also be reflected in the Council Plan. It is clearly essential that the themes reflect current policy priorities, and are expressed plain English. The relationship between themes and cabinet portfolios needs to be considered, to clarify leadership and accountability.

It would also be appropriate to seek a greater consistency between the "levels" of targets in the Council Plan. The current Plan includes targets which range across precise County-wide performance targets (e.g. At Key Stage 2, to increase from 59% to 75% the number of pupils achieving the benchmark level in maths and from 65% to 81% the number attaining the benchmark level in English by 2002), to single activity targets (e.g. To secure the completion of the Markham Employment Growth Zone feasibility studies by March 2000).

The precise nature of some of the targets leads to difficulties when those targets are changed as a result of Government initiatives (e.g. Public Service Agreements and Best Value Performance Indicators). This has already led to targets in the published Council Plan being out of step with targets being pursued in service departments.

Target setting in the Council Plan needs to be considered in the context of the many other plans that exist or will need to be prepared. These include Statutory Plans, Service Plans, Partnership Plans and Business Plans. There is a case for the Council Plan setting high level Goals rather than detailed targets. These would reflect the Council's overall priorities and desired outcomes. An example could be "Young People's Learning: to achieve continual improvement for all benchmarks at a level of performance above the average for comparable councils".

As part of the review process, the linkages between the Council Plan and other Statutory, Service and Partnership Plans needs to be reviewed. These Plans should contain service specific targets set at levels that stimulate action, and drive service improvements towards the achievement of the Council Plan goals. They should reflect the outcomes of Best Value Reviews, and be identical to local Performance Indicators selected for inclusion in the Best Value Performance Plan.

## **Stage 2 – Monitoring & Communications**

Consideration needs to be given to the implementation of an efficient and consistent system for elected Members to monitor progress against Council Plan targets. The process currently followed by Environmental Services could be a starting point for developing such a system. It would need to be broadened however, to enable Members to monitor Council Plan themes as well as Service and Business Plans.

An important feature of any new system is that it should make efficient use of information that is being collected on a systematic and regular basis. Member monitoring should flow seamlessly from management information being used by officers for monitoring and resource planning. It should not become a separate activity requiring extra effort other than presentation.

There is also a need for an effective communications strategy to inform Members, employees, partners, interest groups and the general public about the Council Plan and the Council's achievements. A key element of this strategy will be to inform employees of how their day to day activities contribute to the delivery of the Council Plan themes and targets. There is clear evidence that many employees find it difficult to make these connections, even though they may have a clear idea of what is expected from their current job. Giving employees a better understanding of how they fit

into the bigger picture will help employees to feel more valued, and may stimulate employee participation in ideas for service improvements.

## **5) Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee makes the following recommendations to the Policy & Resources Committee:

- 1 That the Council Plan key themes and targets be regularly reviewed to:
  - Ensure the themes reflect current policy priorities and match Cabinet portfolios
  - Ensure themes are meaningful to the general public
  - Achieve a greater consistency in 'level' of targets
- 2 That the Council Plan be reviewed against the background of the Council's duty to promote 'well being' and the requirement for local government 's leadership of the Community Planning process.
- 3 That the linkages between the Council Plan and Service and Business Plans be reviewed to ensure that key themes are being translated into action.
- 4 That the targets are defined in accordance with key themes but also bearing in mind the outcomes of Best Value Reviews and the local Performance Indicators to be included in the Best Value Performance Plan
- 5 That an efficient and consistent system for Members to monitor progress against Council Plan targets be implemented.
- 6 That a communications strategy be implemented, appropriate to the different themes and services involved, to inform staff of the key themes and the part they can play in delivering them.
- 7 That the recently established Senior Corporate Managers Group be tasked with investigating these recommendations

## **6) Next Stage**

This report will be referred to Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

It is recommended that:

*the Chair of Improvement and Scrutiny Committee presents this report to the Policy and Resources Committee and following consideration of this report, it is suggested that should the Policy and Resources Committee agree to implement the recommendations in this report the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee receives a report at its meeting to be held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2001 to outline progress made. (Action Plan attached at Appendix 2)*

## **IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**



## **Appendix 1**

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF COUNCIL PLAN THEMES & TARGETS**

#### **SUMMARY OF MONITORING PROCESSES BY DEPARTMENT**

##### **Environmental Services**

- Service Plan links to early draft of Council Plan with Key Targets
- Annual Business Plans link to Service Plan
- Quarterly monitoring of Business Plan performance by Chair & Vice Chairs of Committee
- Reports to Committee on specific projects and programmes
- Preparation of five year Local Transport Plan with targets & annual monitoring statements submitted to DETR following Member approval
- Monitoring and reporting of PI data

##### **Education**

- Millennium Education Development Plan pre-dates Council Plan
- Council Plan reflects MEDP
- MEDP runs until 2001. New Plan will link to Council Plan
- Reports to LEA Services Improvement Panel every 6 months – monitors progress and agrees plans for subsequent year.
- Monitoring and reporting PI data

##### **Social Services**

- Service Plans are cross checked to ensure consistency with Council Plan
- Reports to Committee on progress on Key Themes, but not explicit reporting/monitoring on the County Plan
- Recent establishment of interdepartmental Officer Group to drive Social Inclusion Theme forward seen as positive initiative.
- Monitoring and reporting PI data

##### **Public Protection**

- Service Plan links to Council Plan
- Monitoring and reporting of PI data
- No other monitoring involving Members

### **Libraries & Heritage**

- DCMS requires preparation of Annual Library Plan – takes lead from Council Plan Targets – progress reported back to Committee & DCMS
- District Library Plans link to Annual Library Plan
- Reports to Area Committees on District Library Plans

### **Corporate Resources**

- Generally supportive role – all Divisions asked to produce Local PIs
- County Property Business Plan links to Council Plan – no direct reporting to Members on progress
- Monitoring & reporting of PI data

### **Overall Monitoring of Key Themes**

- Report to Policy & Resources Committee on progress against Council Plan Key Themes and Targets in context of Council's Best Value Performance Plan.

## Appendix 2

### Action Plan

The table below sets out the recommendations outlined in this final report.

Recommendation	Implement Yes/No	What action has taken place?	Lead Officer	Timescale
<p>1) That the Council Plan key themes and targets be regularly reviewed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the themes reflect current policy priorities and match Cabinet portfolios</li> <li>• Ensure themes are meaningful to the general public</li> <li>• Achieve a greater consistency in 'level' of targets</li> </ul>				
<p>2) That the Council Plan be reviewed against the background of the Council's duty to promote 'well being' and the requirement for local government 's leadership of the Community Planning process.</p>				
<p>3) That the linkages between the Council Plan and Service and Business Plans be reviewed to ensure that key themes are being translated into action.</p>				
<p>4) That the targets are defined in accordance with key themes but also bearing in mind the outcomes of Best Value Reviews and the local Performance Indicators to be included in the Best Value Performance Plan</p>				

## Improvement and Scrutiny Review – Council Plan Key Themes

5) That an efficient and consistent system for Members to monitor progress against Council Plan targets be implemented.				
6) That a communications strategy be implemented, appropriate to the different themes and services involved, to inform staff of the key themes and the part they can play in delivering them.				
7) That the recently established Senior Corporate Managers Group be tasked with investigating these recommendations				