

SETTING THE SCENE

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LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

from Councillor Andrew Williams, Leader of the Council

Welcome

to the third Best Value Performance Plan for Dacorum Borough Council. This document is a statement of where we are now, how we are improving and how we plan to make our services even better and more efficient. It sets out all of the key things we need to deliver in the year ahead, as we will be basing the promises we make to the public on this document.

Changes

2001/2 was a year of significant change at Dacorum Borough Council. The reasons for this came from a number of directions.

Financial – the need to make significant budget savings over the coming years.

Political – we continued to respond vigorously to the challenges of legislation such as Best Value, and the new political decision-making process was launched.

Managerial – the new management team established new structures to support the change agenda.

Technological – we told the Government our plans to meet their target of having all services on line by 2005.

Against this background we have been fundamentally changing the organisation and the ways in which we support our community, we have continued to provide high quality services for our residents.

More to come

In 2002/3 all the changes which have been set in motion will continue to have impact on the way we all work. We will work more in partnership: for example the Sports Centres Trust we will launch later this year and through working towards a Public Private Partnership to help deliver our support services. A Local Strategic Partnership to deliver the "BetterBorough" Community Strategy for Dacorum is also being developed.

The Government has recently published a Local Government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services". We will need to take account of the changes that this will mean to achieve even higher performance. In doing this we will be making our contribution to deliver on the public service priorities.

Our Aims

Are clear. We had a visit from the Improvement & Development Agency last year. They found that staff, Councillors and our Partners were aware of the Council's key aims. You can read more about the things we need to do For Prosperity, For the Future, For Living and For Everyone throughout this Performance Plan, along with how we will be Making it Happen. These aims are expressed in their simplest terms on page 14 of this plan.

Our Plans and Performance

Our aims are also reflected in the plans for each council service thanks to a new way of service planning and performance management, which has been rolled out over the last year. These new systems will help us make sure we are delivering on the promises we make about the services we provide for our community. Performance Management will help us identify and celebrate where things are going well, and take action to improve areas which are under-performing.

Performance management will help us in improving Dacorum, something members, our staff and our partners are committed to doing for the people we serve.

Best wishes for the next 12 months.

Andrew Williams

OUR MAIN PURPOSE:

We aim to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives or works in the Borough, and to make it a place where people, communities and businesses can flourish.

OUR STANDARDS

Dacorum Borough Council provides a wide range of services to residents, businesses and visitors. Some of these services are delivered by the Council's employees, others by businesses carrying out work under contract to the Council.

Each service has its own priorities and standards. But in addition the Council has set some standards which apply to all departments and services.

At Dacorum Borough Council we aim to:

- Provide you with the services you need where possible;
- Be fair and even-handed to everyone;
- Tell you when and where our services, including emergency services, are available;
- Always be helpful and courteous and wear a badge which will tell you who we are;
- Respond quickly and efficiently to your enquiries;
- Value the feedback you give us including complaints;
- Continuously improve our services;
- Encourage and support businesses and other organisations to improve their services to you.

The Council also has Customer First standards, which are designed to make it easier for you to get in touch with us. For example we aim to answer all telephone calls within 12 seconds. We aim to answer correspondence needing response within 5 working days, even if we cannot provide a full reply in that time. We monitor our complaints procedure to make it easier for you to tell us if you are dissatisfied with your service. We try to use Plain English in letters and other written items.

OUR METHODS

We will achieve our aims by:

Involving our community:

We will seek to involve all the communities in Dacorum in planning, designing and monitoring services we provide, respecting the differences and diversity that exist, and enabling everyone who wishes to contribute to local matters;

Setting targets:

We will set ourselves ambitious targets for achieving what our communities tell us they want. We will do this by setting clear objectives, monitoring performance and using the results to review our policies and our working arrangements. We will also improve our performance against national targets set by the Government.

Working in partnership:

The Council will safeguard and promote the interests of the residents of the Borough through joint working with all relevant partners, for example other local authorities, central Government and statutory agencies, non-elected bodies, industry and the voluntary sector.

Working together:

We will work **together** towards even more efficiency, effectiveness and quality in all services. We will treat customers well, uphold the Council's values and let the public know what we are doing.

Valuing and developing employees:

We will support our employees in delivering services by helping them reach their full potential through training and development and by providing a good working environment.

Generating funds:

We will seek external sources of funding through partnership working where possible to maximise the resources available for the Borough's residents.

Supporting National Initiatives

National Government and agencies control some of what we do. We work within this framework to provide local services.

Best Value

We will continuously try to improve the quality of all the services we provide. We will ensure that resources are used wisely by continuously reviewing what is provided and how it is provided. We will do this by following the Government's Best Value process.

Corporate Governance

This is the system by which local authorities direct and control their functions and relate to their communities. We will develop a local code in 2005 which will demonstrate the Council's:

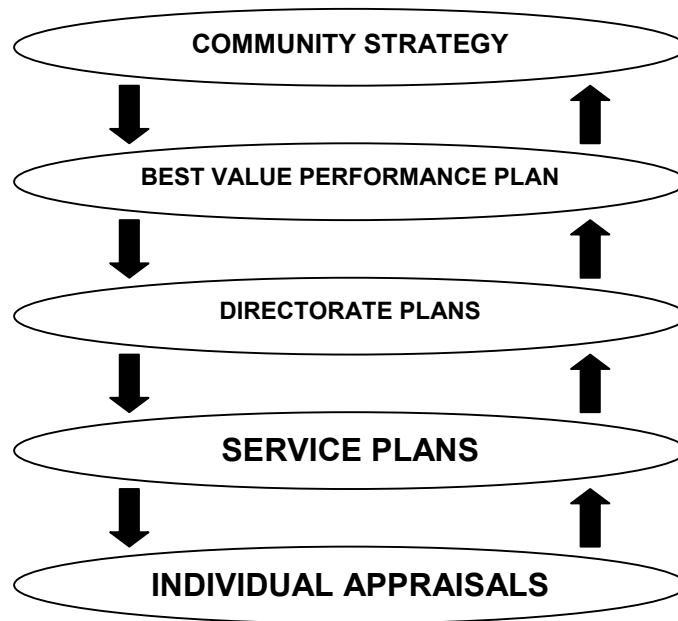
- accountability
- integrity
- effectiveness
- openness and inclusivity

We will ensure that our policies and procedures reflect best practice.

The Planning Structure at Dacorum

The number and level of plans that we have to produce and monitor as an authority is guided by the requirements of central government. The emphasis on joined up working and the introduction of the community planning and local strategic partnership process has seen the need for structuring these plans in a way that makes them streamlined and more manageable.

The approach at Dacorum is outlined in the diagram below.



Whilst this structure only names the two key plans that influence the authorities work, there are numerous others, both statutory and non-statutory, that shape and guide what we do.¹

The directorate and service plans provide the link from the corporate objectives to the work of teams and ultimately individuals and their appraisals.

THE VISION FOR DACORUM

Community Strategy

Part 1 of the Local Government Act 2000 provides a new legal framework for the Council's activities. The key elements in the guidance relating to the development of a Community Strategy and Local Strategic Partnership are:

- *a new power to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of communities; and*
- *a duty to prepare community strategies - in consultation with local people and partners.*

The Community Strategy will provide a 10 year vision for how Dacorum and its partners will work together to provide a Dacorum for the future that reflects what the communities want.

To identify the 'communities wants' a wide-ranging consultation took place in 2000 and 2001. The consultation included,

- 150 key interviews;
- Roadshows in three main towns; and
- a 'BetterBorough' special survey.

The consultation produced 13 statements from the community. These statements outlined that Dacorum in 2010 will be a place where every individual will have:

- The opportunity to play a part in society and a fundamental right to have their say;
- Affordable housing close to the family network;
- Accessible local employment;
- Effective and affordable transport to employment and leisure;
- A cleaner and healthier environment;
- Access to local green space;
- Access to local goods, services and new and emerging technologies;
- The opportunity to fulfil their potential through helping others;
- Easy access to whatever they need to lead a full and independent life;
- Confidence in their own safety and security and that of their families;
- Responsibility for and pride in their local area;
- Opportunities to learn throughout their lives; and
- Access to local leisure opportunities.

A sample population was asked for its priorities and the following 6 statements were identified as most important to the community:

- *Confidence in their own safety and security and that of their families;*
- *A cleaner and healthier environment;*
- *Accessible local employment;*
- *Effective and affordable transport to employment and leisure;*
- *Affordable housing close to the family network; and*
- *The opportunity to play a part in society and a fundamental right to have their say.*

These statements form the priorities of the Community Strategy. To ensure that these statements are realised, each member of the Local Strategic Partnership will commit to deliver them. A document will demonstrate how their work is contributing to the overall plan, how inter-agency working can develop and improve, and support the promotion of the partnership to increase profile and attract additional resources.

Local Strategic Partnership

The width and variety of the priorities suggest that Dacorum Borough Council cannot deliver these in isolation and we need to work with a wide range of partners and partnerships to deliver change. The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has been set up to deliver the key actions of the Community Strategy. The LSP will work closely with the Community Safety Partnership, the Early Years Partnership and the Health & Community Partnership to name a few.

Partners for the Local Strategic Partnership have been identified in the four main sectors within the borough, they are councils, public bodies, voluntary and community organisations and businesses. In order to keep the LSP a manageable size, yet capable of working across the authority, it is vital that members have influence within a variety of groups to ensure integration of interest and support. The partnership will be made up of representatives of the following organisations, who are most likely to be members of other partnerships.

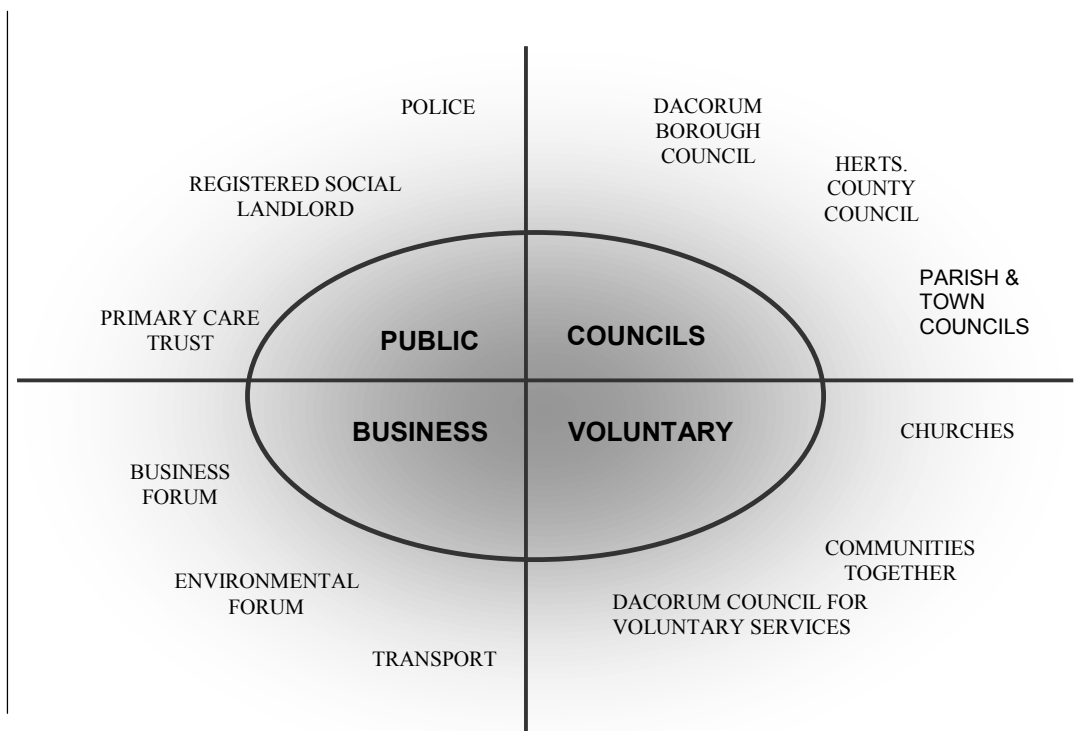


Diagram 1. Proposed make up of the Local Strategic Partnership.

The process of creating the Local Strategic Partnership and the Community Strategy is dynamic and constantly evolving. The planning aspect will ensure that the strategy and membership of the partnership are monitored and reviewed to ensure an effective and influential role in the local community.

If you would like to know more about the Community Strategy or the work of the Local Strategic Partnership, please contact Gordon Glenn on 01442 228571 or email: gordon.glenn@dacorum.gov.uk.

MODERNISATION AGENDA

The Council's Best Value Performance Plan for 2001/2 sets out the changing agenda that local authorities are facing over the coming years. The passing of the Local Government Acts of 1999 and 2000 set out significant changes in the way the Council should operate and deliver its services. There are numerous items on the agenda but the main changes are:

- Power of community well-being - encourages Council to take the community leadership role in the social, environmental and economic interests of their residents;
- Democratic Renewal - choosing a new political structure;
- Best Value - a regime for improving services through reviewing and managing performance, supported by external inspection and audit of all local authorities;
- Ethics and standards of behaviour of Councillors and officers;
- Local Government Finance - how local authority services are to be financed;
- Performance Management - using systematic performance information to achieve efficiency and effectiveness; and
- All underpinned by eGovernment and using ICT to improve services for users.

Community Well-being

Dacorum has made significant progress on many items of the agenda. In relation to the power of community well-being, the creation of a community strategy and a Local Strategic Partnership to deliver it is moving forward. Partners have been identified and the key priorities of the strategy are in place. The actions that deliver the priorities are in development and the strategy will be complete in 2002. The Community Strategy and LSP are described in greater detail within this document on pages 8 and 9.

Democratic Renewal

The Democratic Renewal process is in place. Following considerable consultation with the community; the Council opted for a political structure of a Leader and Cabinet with scrutiny and policy panels. The structure was piloted from September 2001 and a review will take place in spring 2002. The format of the new political structure is shown in the diagram below. The makeup of the Cabinet is shown on page 73, highlighting the portfolio holders and the strategies and services they have responsibility for.

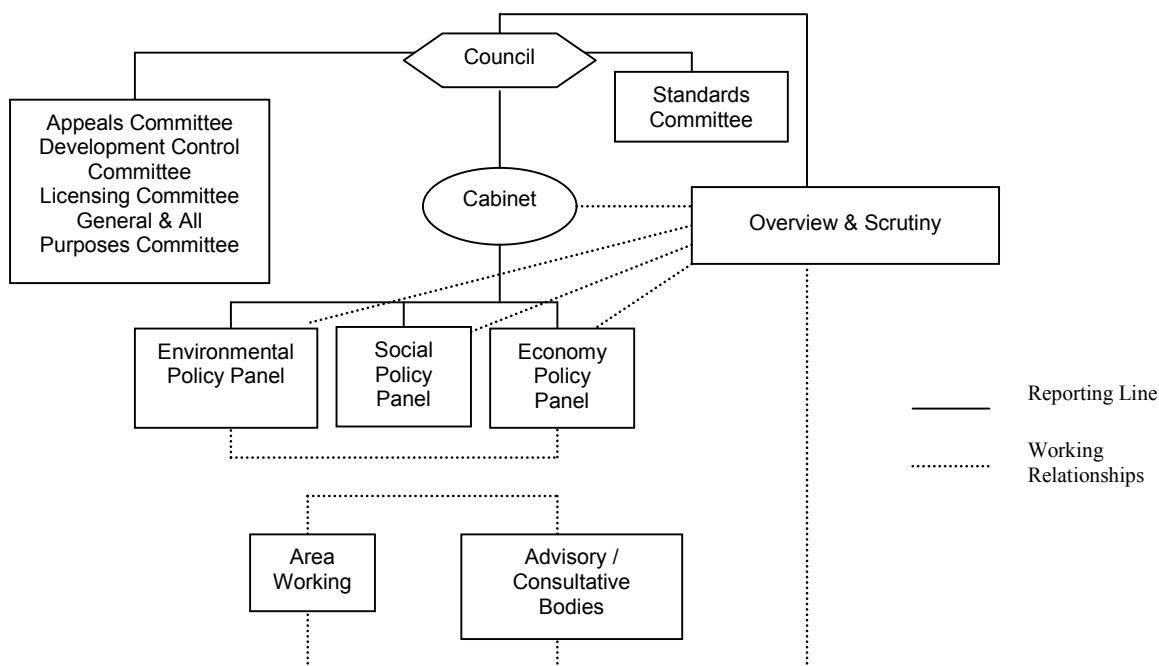


Diagram. Political Structure for Dacorum Borough Council – September 2001

Ethical Framework

The ethical framework of the council has been updated to reflect the duties of the act. This is described in greater detail later on page 82.

Local Government Finance

The financing of local government services has undergone major change over the past two years. A key change with a high impact is the transfer of money between the housing revenue and general fund accounts being reduced over a number of years. The balance of this money will be transferred to Central Government. This will reduce funds for all services.

Nationally, low interest rates have also impacted on the money available to fund Council services. The rising cost of insurance premiums caused increases in the expenditure of the council. These developments have influenced the approach the Council has to take to the provision of services and how best the public's money is used. The Best Value regime has contributed to the Council examining services and identifying alternative methods of providing them.

Performance Management

Best Value underpins much of the modernisation agenda. Seeking efficiency savings of at least 2% across the council is closely linked to the larger savings that must be made due to the financial restraints (referred to above). The 4 C's of Best Value (challenge, consult, compare and compete) are relevant not only to service reviews but also to the wider context of the authority and how it operates. The authority has three services that have been inspected by the Best Value Inspection Service, details of two of which are found on pages 117 and 118. The Council has achieved good results in these reviews and the 'mainstreaming' of Best Value is still proceeding.

Essential to the process is performance management, a theme that central government has put at the core of modernisation. Performance management is the process and framework that ensures that strategic objectives are being delivered at service level. Members and officers are made aware of what is being delivered and how and are held accountable to the public. Further detail of the performance framework can be found on page 74.

eGovernment

The rapid development of information technology and methods of communication mean that the Council has taken a radical view of how services can be more accessible to the public. The Council web-site has already enabled the community to make payment of taxes, rates and rents. This is a first step towards eGovernment. The Council's approach to eGovernment can be found on page 70.

Working in Partnership

Many of the initiatives described in this document require us to work with people in other organisations and in the community. Progress has been made in working out ways of creating and sustaining joint projects and strategies for community safety, community planning, health improvement and in many Council services. In future partnership working will be an even stronger theme, for example in working more closely with Town and Parish Councils to deliver best value services.