

How has the Council set about delivering its priorities for Improvement?

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The Council has identified that it needs to develop if the priorities are to be delivered to the satisfaction of the Community. Therefore we are working on issues of capacity and continuous improvement to underpin the Council's approaches to service delivery.

CAPACITY

Partnerships

In order to implement fully aspects of modernisation, particularly e-government, the Council has identified the need to overcome a shortfall in various resources including finance, skills and knowledge. The Council therefore investigated the possibility of embarking upon a Public Private Partnership (PPP) as a means of providing and managing 21 support services. The benefits for the Council included improved access to services by the public, investment in Council infrastructure, savings for Council Taxpayers, and guaranteed jobs for those employees transferring. Unfortunately we were unable to agree a commercially viable package with our preferred provider, however, the PPP objectives remain valid, and the knowledge gained throughout the process has not been lost. We are currently examining other means of achieving those objectives. Partnership remains a key element of our strategy. We are currently mapping out a mixed economy approach, which will still comprise some smaller and more incremental partnership working (particularly on e-government projects), but will also utilise the new skills that managers have acquired from the PPP process.

Recently our support services received a 2 star or "good" BV Inspection rating. This gives us a good base to build from, but we now have plenty of ideas to develop more innovative and adventurous improvement plans for the future. Some of the key things we will be looking at include:

- creating a new Head of Customer Services post to bring together all our diverse customer contact services, and create 3 one-stop shops and a single council-wide call centre
- seeking an external partner to support our e-government programme through a 'framework' agreement
- implementing new council-wide CRM, financial management and performance systems
- establishing a programme of business process re-engineering across the whole council
- developing more rigorous governance and guidance/support on procurement
- putting in place internal service level agreements for all support services.

Some services are actively pursuing joint working with other local authorities. In particular the Building Control and Internal Audit services are investigating the possibility of forming consortia with other district councils to deliver services which will optimise the scarce skills available in Hertfordshire, and reduce the cost to Council Tax payers. Other opportunities for joint working on issues such as Conservation are being considered.

To ensure sustained quality of services for local people and achieve value for money, the Council is increasingly taking an enabling role, not just a providing one. This means developing partnerships with a range of statutory, voluntary, community and business groups to deliver some services and eliminate waste and duplication.

This approach is being led by Dacorum's LSP which is seeking to co-operate and empower a number of second-tier partnerships. Our partnerships with the voluntary sector support many of the Council's strategies, and allow contact with large numbers of the local

community which would otherwise be difficult. Volunteering has an important place in Dacorum communities, both for the volunteers themselves and for residents who benefit from their efforts. The recently adopted Voluntary Sector Compact has been a significant step in cementing the relationship between Dacorum Borough Council and the voluntary sector.

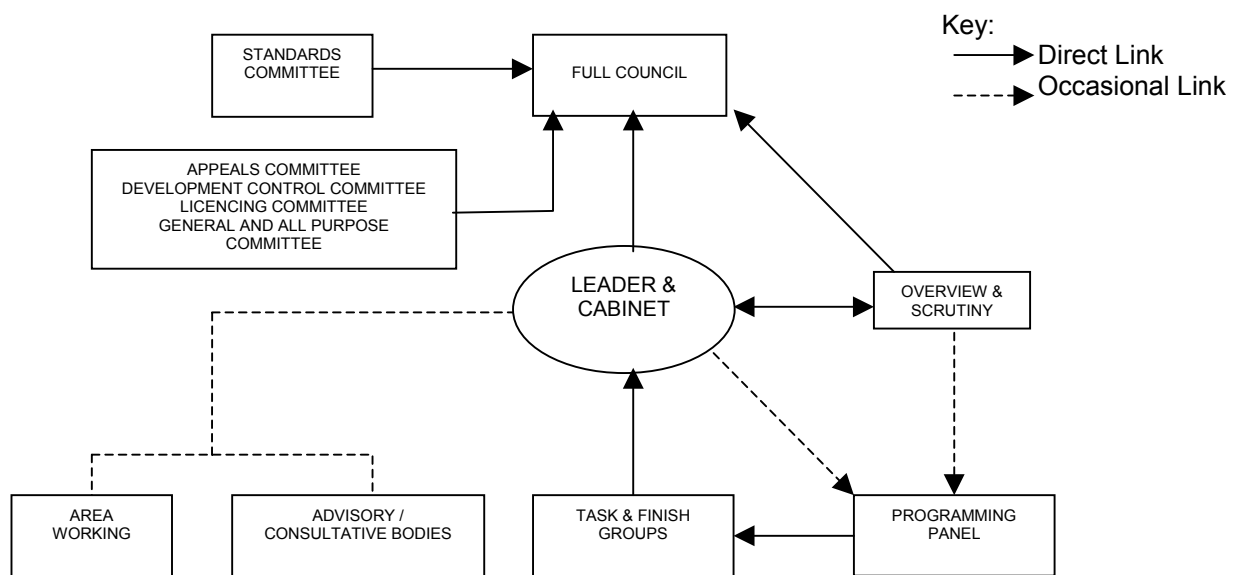
In 2002/03 the Council gave £1.05m to support a range of organisations in the voluntary sector in Dacorum. In addition to financial support, the Council provides office accommodation and other services to a number of these organisations, including the Council for Voluntary Service and the Citizens' Advice Bureaux. Besides providing funding to support organisations, like the Dacorum Domestic Violence Forum, the Council grant aids specific projects, for example the Income Maximisation advisory work, and community environmental projects. The procedure for decision on grant aid from the Council requires completion of a more stringent application, in which the benefits for the community are tested in order to ensure added value.

Recently the Council has taken opportunities to work more closely with health bodies on a range of activities to improve the health of residents in Dacorum. The Health and Community Partnership, formed in 2001, allows the co-ordination of initiatives across statutory and voluntary sectors, and a grouping from which new work can develop. There are several examples of joint working between NHS, County Council Social Services teams and the Borough Council.

If you would like to know more about partnerships please contact Ifor Jones, Head of Community Involvement on 01442 228496 or email ifor.jones@dacorum.gov.uk.

Members and Officers

The Council's Constitution and Scheme of Delegation set out the various roles and responsibilities of Members and Officers. As set out earlier in this plan, the Council reviewed its political structure (see diagram below) and believes that its Leader and Cabinet arrangement is leading to quicker, more transparent decision-making, although at the expense of democratic involvement. The Scrutiny function is progressing and all Non-Executive Members are now on one of four Overview and Scrutiny Committees.



Some Members have not found the transition to the new arrangements easy, nor have they found roles that are as satisfying as their previous engagement with Council business. There are differing views with regard to the Scrutiny function and the Non-Executive role in decision making. When new Area Working pilots can be replicated throughout the Borough, the experience gained will help develop the role of the "community" Councillor, and provide a valuable learning exercise for the Council as a whole.

Members have taken the lead in establishing a wide-ranging development programme to help learn the new skills needed in such markedly different roles. The Members' development programme will be extended after the local elections in May 2003 to help newly elected Councillors to become confident with their various roles and to meet expectations.

If you would like to know more about Members and Committees please contact [Michelle Evans-Riches, Member Support Manager, on 01442 228633, or email michelle.evans-riches@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.evans-riches@dacorum.gov.uk)

Finding and developing people with the right skills to achieve the best outcomes for the community in Dacorum has always been a priority for the Council. The latest national Performance Indicators for 2002/03 show that the Council's workforce now reflects the local community in some respects:

- 23.8% of the Council's top 5% earners are women (top quartile 27% in 2001/02)
- 2.9% of employees say that they meet the DDA definition of disability (top quartile 3% in 2001/02)
- 3.5% of employees are from ethnic minorities compared with the 2001 census figure of 4.56% in general population of Dacorum (top quartile 1.7% in 2001/02)

There is a history of substantial investment in training at Dacorum and it is seen as being key to provision of high quality services for the public, and in the past two years the corporate budget for training has been more than doubled. Recognising the need to modernise, the Corporate Management Team has stressed the importance of extending the development activities of the Council. A Management Development Programme has been in place since late in 2000, which now the top three tiers of management have attended. This programme focuses on the management skills and behaviours that are required in a culture of continuous improvement and change. The Council won a regional prize for workforce development in 2002. In 2003 the Council is committed to seeking Investors in People accreditation.

If you would like to know more about training and development please contact [Sharon Allen, Training & Development Officer, on 01442 228109, or email sharon.allen@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:sharon.allen@dacorum.gov.uk)

The Council's Human Resource (HR) function is substantially devolved to Heads of Service and Service Managers. This is facilitated through corporate HR policies standardised and accessible on the intranet. Innovative practices such as the temporary register and the use of the call centre for recruitment have eased the administrative burden on managers. The HR staff are accessible to managers and heavily involved in matters which require a high degree of professional expertise, as well as development of strategy and policy. However, we are well aware that we now need to focus our HR energies on

becoming a flexible, learning organisation, and are currently preparing an Organisational Development Strategy.

The Council undertook staff attitude surveys in 2001 and 2003 and is using the results to introduce a range of initiatives impacting on communication and involvement of a wider range of staff in change management. Among the ideas arising from the staff attitude survey the Council also introduced "Team Talk", a team briefing system and "Bright Ideas", the staff suggestion scheme.

Indicators of staff satisfaction show that:

- 62% of staff saying they gain job satisfaction working for Dacorum Borough Council;
- sickness levels higher than the national average in some services;
- turnover high in services where there are other employers competing for the same skills;
- recruitment of some specialist staff very difficult in a high-cost area.

The results from the 2003 survey are currently being reviewed and an associated action plan will be developed from these.

Market supplements have been applied in some services, for example for the building surveyors. In other services alternative means to tackle them have been tried for instance, in Environmental Health a restructuring allowed greater opportunities for employees to gain new experience as well as making the best use of professional resources.

The implementation of Single Status in 2003, placing all employees on a single pay scale and consistent terms and conditions following job evaluation, will resolve some of the long-standing reward issues. However there are risks, such as reduction in some salaries, which the Council has recognised and is planning to mitigate through protection arrangements.

If you would like to know more about the Council's Human Resources function please contact Ron Down, Head of Human Resources on 01442 2282510, or email ron.down@dacorum.gov.uk.

Area Working

Increasing the focus on the Community needs is seen as another way of improving the way the Council works. Area Working is a new way of working that ensures that local communities are involved in what happens in their community. As outlined in the Best Value Performance Plan for 2002/3 it was identified that people in the borough wanted a greater say in the way services are delivered.

As part of its submission to the DTLR (now ODPM) containing the new constitution and political management arrangements the Council made a commitment in July 2001 to investigate ways of achieving this through Area Working. Following consultation with a range of stakeholders, a series of options that could deliver greater sensitivity to local needs and aspirations were put forward.

The Council's Cabinet agreed that Area Working should be piloted in two areas, one urban area and one rural area. A standard methodology, core objectives and a budget for small schemes, consultation and project management were also agreed.

The pilots will run for 12 months starting from April 2003. The areas have been selected through consultation with local communities and examination of local needs as well as expressions of interest from the parish and town councils. The rural pilot will be located in the parishes of *Flamstead, Markyate* and *Great Gaddesden*. The urban pilot will be located in *Grovehill* and *Woodhall Farm* wards of Hemel Hempstead.

As part of this scheme consultation has been undertaken with the local communities to develop a set of local priorities and a baseline of satisfaction with current services. The Council is now working to respond to these priorities by greater co-operation with partner agencies and developing projects in the pilot areas.

Each area will have a Co-ordinating Committee which will agree and monitor schemes and initiatives. The urban pilot will also have an area consultative forum in lieu of the role played by the parish councils in the rural area.

Evaluation of the pilots will be ongoing and a task and finish group will meet quarterly to review outcomes and will make the final recommendation on the pilots to Cabinet in the Spring of 2004.

If you would like to know more about Area Working please contact Ifor Jones, Head of Community Involvement on 01442 228496, or email ifor.jones@dacorum.gov.uk.

E- Government

In March 1999 the “Modernising Government” White Paper stated:

“We propose that 100% of dealings (with Government) should be capable of electronic delivery by 2005. We believe that all local authorities should set and publish their own targets for electronic service delivery”.

In last year’s BVPP we stated that e-government is not just about ICT, and that major aspects of cultural and organisational change need to take place to ensure our business is centred around customer’s needs and expectations.

The Council produced Implementing Electronic Government statements in 2001 and 2002. These set out what and how we were going to develop and support services in order to achieve the 2005 target. Some of the key actions undertaken since then include:

Corporate Document Management – We have invested in new modules within Revenues and Benefits which when fully implemented will enable more automated processes and greater use of workflow technology.

Web site development – Our web site has been redesigned and is now hosted in-house allowing quicker updates and more control of content. Many features have been added including:-

- Reporting housing repairs;
- Reporting a change of address;
- Reporting a missed refuse collection;
- Buying tickets for the Old Town Hall theatre;
- On-line job adverts and application requests (as identified by our search statistics as the most frequently requested information);
- Housing Mutual Exchange.

Call Centre Expansion – We have increased the use of the Call Centre to deal with all rent statement queries thus providing more of a ‘One-Stop Shop’ for our housing customers.

Cultural Change Initiatives – We have run a series of training courses in house to ensure staff are aware of the e-Government agenda and the way it will impact on working practices.

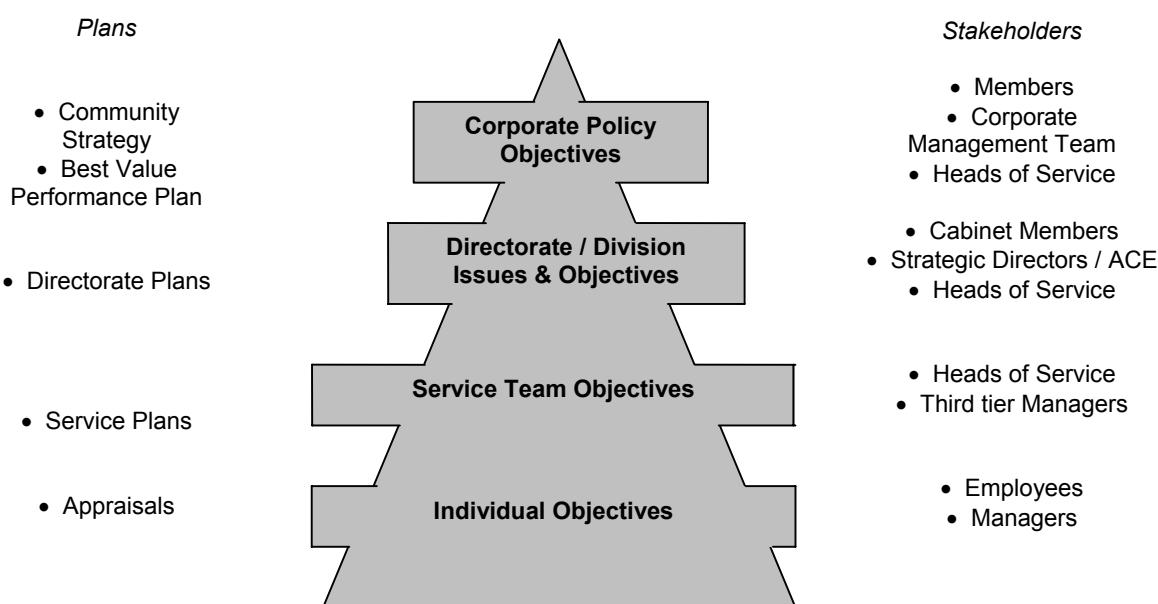
In addition to these IEG related projects we have made significant investment in infrastructure, replacing outdated and outmoded hardware to ensure that the Council has a firm base for future e-Government initiatives.

If you would like to know more about E-Government please contact Judith Richardson, ICT Advisor on 01442 228388, or email judith.richardson@dacorum.gov.uk.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Performance Framework

In order to ensure that we are delivering the services at a level and quality that we said we would, the Council has established a framework that places council plans in a hierarchical structure that promotes links and supports information cascade. The structure of the framework is as below,



The Performance Management Framework

The Performance Management Framework provides for both service-level monitoring of progress and reports to Members, through a tiered approach up to the Cabinet. The approach requires measuring against national and local Performance Indicators, reporting on targets from the BVPP and milestones in delivering the Council's Key Aims which informs the Council on its progress in delivering high quality services for the public. Through discussion between managers and Members, with information from the services as well as corporately generated, all parts of the Council's management structure are now helping to deliver improved performance.

At the heart of the framework is the Council's Service and Financial Planning process that includes a full EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) assessment for each service undertaken by qualified internal facilitators. This means that all our services are continually identifying, planning and implementing service improvements, which will have a direct impact on the experiences of service users. We are able to look at our services from the external stakeholders' view. We produce plans with a three year focus, linked to medium-term financial plans. The strength and robustness of Service and Financial Planning means that key service changes which lead to improvement are now an

ongoing part of managing services, and not just linked to Best Value Reviews. However, the Service and Financial Planning process also prepares services for Best Value review. A programme of training, advice and support is available to all service managers and staff to assist with the process.

An aspect of the Performance Management arrangements includes appraisals for all employees. The Council is set to achieve this in 2003. The format of the appraisal requires employee and manager to agree individual targets related to the objectives in the service plans for the year. The targets for the previous year are monitored, and there is a mid-year review to check progress.

The increased monitoring of performance has led to a range of improvements, these can be seen in the next section. One example is the improvement made in the Planning Service, thanks to early and radical decisions taken about processes and roles. An increase in applications, due partly to the housing market conditions, was being handled by a team of Planners reduced due to shortage of staff. The process was examined and repetitive administrative tasks were stripped out of the aspects of work handled by the qualified planners, to be given to administrative and technical colleagues. The use of external assistance in managing the workload has assisted in the improvement, and the recruitment of Planners has improved through the application of market supplements to some posts. The performance for 2002/03 has been improved significantly.

It is anticipated that with planned investment in ICT, a more effective performance monitoring system will be introduced, enabling increased monitoring of key performance issues. If you would like to know more about performance management please contact the Performance and Planning Officer on 01442 228530, or email matthew.hamilton@dacorum.gov.uk.

Financial Management

The Council operates a Service and Financial Planning Framework that links priorities to resources and contributes to successful forward planning. In terms of financial management this means: -

- Service Planning for each portfolio which covers future Revenue and Capital requirements.
- The Capital Strategy and the Asset Management Plan which together help to provide or pay for new facilities.
- Forward Resource Planning – which identifies how changes in the number of properties chargeable for Council Tax and variations in Government Grants will affect the Council.
- Medium and long term financial forecasts and regular reviews of levels of the Council's financial reserves.
- Performance Management which will ensure that we work within budgets and aim for reductions in unit costs.
- A Risk Management Strategy which will help to assess the possible Financial consequences of changing levels of risk.

Revenue Budget

Changes in Government legislation have considerably reduced the amount of income available to spend on services and further reductions will continue to be made for at least

8 years. At the same time the Council needs to provide more services – some being a legislative requirement. As a result the Council is currently spending considerably more than it brings in from regular and continuing annual income. A medium term financial framework is in place to reduce reliance on reserves, with a view to moving towards balancing our books with as little impact upon service provision as possible. Against this background, despite a savings package of over £2 million the Council has found it necessary to increase Council Tax by 6% in 2003/04.

General Fund Revenue Budget 2003/04

Expenditure	Revised 2002/03 £ million	Estimate 2003/04 £ million
Budget for Year – net of fees and charges	21.71	21.74
Income		
Meet from Housing Revenue Account (transitional arrangement)	-3.60	-3.20
Interest	-2.05	-1.99
Met from Reserves and Collection Fund Surplus	-1.42	-1.32
Government Grant	-8.48	-8.67
	-15.55	-15.18
Net Expenditure	6.16	6.56

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

This is a separate account and running costs are met from rents and Government Subsidy. In 2003/04 we expect to spend £34 million on services and repairs. This will be met from rents, subsidies and reserves.

The Council has a history of prudent financial management and as well as being debt free it maintains an adequate level of Reserves. The ability to operate in a changing financial and service climate where ideas for improvement can occasionally attract temporary risk requires Reserve levels that will protect essential services. These Reserves are under pressure, however, and financial plans and controls are focussed at keeping a minimum level available, approved and supported by Cabinet, to protect those services in case unforeseen circumstances occur.

While substantial short term cost reductions and other initiatives have been identified to contribute to early budgets, three year Service and Financial Planning focuses on new ways of working such as partnerships, outsourcing, re-engineering of systems etc to ensure that longer term objectives can be met. The Asset Management Plan is, in turn, expected to identify ways to provide at least part of the Capital Investment needed to carry all these changes through.

Part of the solution for achieving corporate priorities will be to attract, develop and maintain finance professionals. They, in turn, will be able to harness and encourage the use of cutting edge financial systems whilst assisting with Service Planning and change across the Authority.

A Capital Strategy Steering Group led by the Chief Financial Officer and with corporate and directorate representation has been established to evaluate and recommend on all proposals for capital spending. Bids for capital spending are assessed through the contribution and support they give to implementing the Council's Key Aims, thereby making a difference to the public's quality of life, before recommendations for proceeding are considered by Cabinet Members.

If you would like to know more about Council Finances please contact Dave Kirk, Head of Accountancy and Exchequer Services on 01442 228318, or email david.kirk@dacorum.gov.uk.

Budget Consultation

For the last two years, Dacorum Borough Council has undertaken extensive consultation on its budget proposals. In addition to more traditional methods of consultation, we pioneered a new "real life scenario" type of budget consultation called SIMALTO (simultaneous multi-attribute level trade-off).

We needed to make a certain number of the proposed savings which were listed in the SIMALTO "grid". The grid showed the "worst case scenario" for a range of reductions in service or increases in revenues as a starting point, and participants were then able to show their preferences by spending "points" to "buy back" the potential cuts that they disliked the most.

The system calculated the "Ideal Budget Model" which showed the package of reductions in service or increases in revenues which would give the highest level of satisfaction to the highest number of residents.

Based on Cabinet's original proposals, the system identified the following areas as high priorities for this year's budget:

- charges for Meals on Wheels were proposed to increase by inflation plus 10 pence – residents preferred an inflation-only increase;
- adventure playgrounds were planning to close on Saturday afternoons – residents wanted them to remain open all day; and
- Dacorum Days (additional subsidised bus fares on two days per month) were going to be scrapped – residents wanted both these days retained.

The system also identified a number of areas where residents' were prepared to accept increases in charges in order to achieve the 3 main priorities above. These included increasing fees for building control, survey work, bulky collections, and sports activities.

If you would like to know more about SIMALTO and Consultation please contact Caroline Fitz-gibbon, Community Consultation Manager on 01442 228504, or email caroline.fitz-gibbon@dacorum.gov.uk