

## PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE INSPECTION REPORT

### INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council's Development Control Service was inspected in October 2000 and the Final Report published in March 2001.
- 1.2 This report discusses the progress that has been made on the recommendations made in the Final Report. A summary (in tabular form) is attached at Annexe A.

### CORPORATE PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

#### Performance overall

- 2.1 Over the past 2 years, members and officers have worked hard to stabilise the Council's financial position, address the Government's 'modernising agenda' and deliver better services to local people.
- 2.2 Evidence from a number of sources suggests that the organisation has now started to move forward. In particular:

- Comments by the District Auditor in the most recent (2001) Audit Letter:

*'..You have made a positive start in addressing the demanding new agenda. You face some significant challenges, particularly to raise service standards using Best Value as a tool. However, stabilising the financial position should provide the foundations to enable the Council to move forward and strengthen arrangements further...'*

- Assessments of the organisation using the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management

The overall 'score' increased from 110 points in August 1999 to 160 points in August 2001. This was mainly due to progress on policy and strategy, people management, partnership working and financial planning.

- Performance against the national performance indicators.

Table 2.1 summarises this data.

TABLE 2.1: PERFORMANCE 2000-2002		
	2000-2001 No.	2001-2002 No.
BVPIs and ACPIs monitored	89	75
Upper Quartile (District Councils)	14	14
Performance at or above target	14 (out of 37)	30 (out of 57)
Improved (over previous year)	9	19
<i>Source: 2002 South Derbyshire BVPP</i>		

- User Satisfaction Surveys

The percentage of respondents satisfied with the services provided by the Council has increased from 58% in 2000 (BVPI 3) to 61% in 2002 (South Derbyshire Citizens' Panel)

- 2.3 It must be acknowledged that progress has not been uniform across the authority and there are still a number of corporate and service issues that have still to be tackled. Housing services are a particular area of concern at the present time.

## **Best Value and Performance Improvement**

### ***Performance management framework***

- 3.1 The Council has continued to develop its approach to Best Value. A key priority has been to improve arrangements for managing performance. The main components of our year old performance management framework comprise:

- **the Best Value Performance Plan**

This is the principal means by which the Council is held to account for the efficiency and effectiveness of its services

- **the Corporate Plan**

The purpose of the Plan is to:

- ◇ set out a vision for South Derbyshire
- ◇ explain how we intend to manage our business, the strategy we will follow and the implications for services in terms of priorities and methods of provision
- ◇ provide a framework for the Council's contributions to partnerships and joint working
- ◇ inform and involve internal and external stakeholders in the work of the Council

The Plan is monitored on a quarterly basis and is reviewed annually. It provides a context for Service Plans.

- **Service Plans**

These are now in place for all service areas. Each Plan (based on a standard template) contains information about the opportunities and challenges faced by the service; corporate, departmental and service related tasks; performance indicators and targets; and resources.

Progress is formally reported to Committees twice a year.

- **the Employee Development and Review Scheme**

The Scheme is used to set objectives for employees, review performance and identify training needs. It will be extended to cover all employees shortly.

- 3.2 To support this framework, we have also:

- strengthened the links between **service and financial planning**. A timetable has been produced setting out the key stages in the service and financial planning cycle. The Corporate Plan and Service Plans are now used to prioritise bids for resources for service improvements.
- reviewed arrangements for collecting and recording information on **performance indicators**.
- sought to develop the role of the Council's **Overview and Scrutiny Committees** in monitoring and scrutinising performance.
- provided training on performance management to members and employees

3.3 By the end of September, we had achieved just over half of the targets that we had set for ourselves in the Corporate Plan. In general, more progress has been made on simple, straightforward tasks. This would suggest that we need to develop more capacity within the organisation for managing larger projects, especially those of 'cross cutting' nature.

3.4 We are about to enter a second service planning cycle with the production of a new Corporate Plan and associated Service Plans.

#### ***Service Implications:***

- ✓ *Service Plan for 2002/2003 approved by Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2001*
- ✓ *Monitoring Report considered by Committee on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2002*
- ✓ *Second Monitoring Report and new Service Plan to be considered by Environmental and Development Services Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2002*

#### ***The Council's Vision, Guiding Principles and Key Aims***

3.5 As part of the development of the Corporate Plan, the Council reviewed its vision and objectives. These had been in place since March 2000 and some changes were needed in order to link our vision more closely to resources, address the new power of 'well being' and provide an appropriate context for service plans and strategies.

3.6 The new framework (detailed at Annexe B) comprises:

- a statement of the Council's vision for the future
- a note of the principles that will guide our actions and govern our relationship with stakeholders and partners
- a list of the key aims that will guide service delivery and help us to achieve our vision
- local priorities for service delivery

3.7 Recently, we asked local people attending Area Meetings and members of the South Derbyshire Citizens' Panel to prioritise the key aims. The next Corporate Plan will incorporate the new local priorities. (They can also be found in Annexe B).

### ***Service Implications:***

- ✓ ***The Planning Service is seen as integral to the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities. New local priorities comprise –***

- ***Providing Best Value services***
- ***Caring for the Environment***
- ***Managing our business***
- ***Economic Development***

- ✓ ***As a priority therefore, caring for the environment will have further implications for future resource allocations to Development Control***

### ***Best Value Reviews***

- 3.8 A 5 year programme of Reviews was established in April 2000. This has been updated annually to reflect progress on Reviews and the latest guidance from the Audit Commission. A copy of the current programme is attached at Annexe C.
- 3.9 Despite some slippage in the programme, all year 2 Reviews should be completed by March 2003. During the year, we also expect to complete a joint Review of *Community Safety* (with the County and other district Councils) and to commence work on new Reviews of *Procurement, Customer Services and Electronic Service Delivery, Housing Services (Landlord and Tenant)* and *Environmental Planning and Control*
- 3.10 The *South Derbyshire Best Value Framework* provides general guidance on carrying out Reviews. In addition, specific guidance is available on the '4Cs'.
- 3.11 At the present time, we are reviewing the Consultation Strategy. The purpose of this exercise is to incorporate new developments, like the South Derbyshire Citizens' Panel; take advantage of joint working with other councils and agencies; ensure that consultation is co-ordinated within the authority; and, provide a sound basis for the development of the South Derbyshire Community Strategy.
- 3.12 We also plan to update the *South Derbyshire Best Value Framework* in the light of the Local Government White Paper and the new statutory guidance.

### ***Service Implications:***

- ✓ ***A Best Value Review of Environmental Planning and Control is planned to commence in January 2003. This will cover all of the Planning Service, Building Control and the environmental protection functions of Environmental Health and Technical Services.***

### ***Procurement Strategy***

- 3.13 This strategy explains how the Council currently procures goods, works and services and how we intend to do so in the future.

- 3.14 An important role for the strategy is to provide guidance to Best Value Review Teams on the identification of service delivery options and partners - the so called 'make or buy' decision.
- 3.15 The strategy states that where our performance (in terms of cost and quality) is equal to, or better than, other providers, we will normally continue to rely on existing arrangements. However, where continuing with the service in its present form offers no realistic chance of improvement (or where improvement has failed to materialise), we will usually consider alternative, external methods of service delivery.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ ***The forthcoming Review will be implemented under the Strategy***

**Progressing the 'modernising' agenda**

- 4.1 The Council has also made progress on other aspects of the Government's modernisation agenda - political management arrangements, ethical standards, community planning and e-government.

***New Political management arrangements***

- 4.2 The Council adopted new political management arrangements on a trial basis in July 2001. These were based on a streamlined committee system, the option preferred by the community and other stakeholders. Earlier this year, the arrangements were reviewed and the new structure has now been confirmed. This is shown in Annexe D.
- 4.3 The review was conducted by the Overview Committee, helped by a study conducted by the District Auditor. The District Auditor concluded that the Council had responded well to the modernising agenda by introducing the new arrangements in an interim form and that there was much to commend about the way in which the overview and scrutiny function was developing. However, decision making needed to be streamlined further and this is now being addressed.
- 4.4 As a consequence of the changes, we have also reviewed our Financial Regulations and Financial Procedure Rules, based on guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ ***Planning Policy falls within the terms of reference of the Environmental and Development Services Committee. The Committee is also responsible for Economic Development and Environmental Health (apart from Housing Service matters). Planning applications and enforcement are dealt with by the Development Control Committee which is one of the Council's two regulatory Committees.***

- ✓ *The issue of Members of the Public speaking to the Development Control Committee is being addressed as part of the modernising agenda. This will help to ensure that the equity and resource implications are fully addressed at the corporate level.*

### **Ethical Standards**

- 4.5 A Standards Committee has been established to oversee the conduct of councillors and parish councillors. It has 8 members including 3 independent members (recruited by external advertisement) and 2 Parish Council representatives.
- 4.6 The Council and all Parish Councils adopted the Members' Code by the required date and we have provided training in the operation of the Code. Registers of Interest for all District and Parish Councillors have also been prepared.

### **Service Implications:**

- ✓ *As part of their training, Members have received specific advice on the operation of the quasi-judicial functions of the Development Control Committee.*

### **Community Planning**

- 4.7 During the year, we arranged for Dr Steve Rogers of The Institute of Local Government Studies at Birmingham University (INLOGOV) to provide training to members and managers on community planning and partnership working.
- 4.8 At the second session, members agreed that the way forward was to have an initial meeting with a small group of key stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors who would be likely to be part of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). This meeting has just been held and was facilitated by Dr Rogers.
- 4.9 The outcome was an agreement to set up a small 'business planning' group to carry out preliminary research, develop the timetable for producing the Community Strategy and make arrangements for the first meeting of the LSP. Partners agreed that this should take place before the end of March 2003.
- 4.10 In October 2001, the District Auditor assessed our arrangements for preparing the Community Strategy. He concluded that whilst the Council was at a relatively early stage, preparations were progressing well. However, there were a few areas that needed to be tackled as soon as practicable - the development of a project plan, clarification of member involvement in preparing the strategy and community involvement. This work is now underway.
- 4.11 At a county level, the Council is contributing to the work of the Derbyshire Partnership Forum, which is taking forward the community planning process in Derbyshire. The Forum includes the County Council, District Councils, the Police, the Probation Service and the (former) Health Authorities.
- 4.12 We are also working with Derbyshire authorities and partners in other sectors on the establishment of a Strategic Sub Regional Partnership for Derby and

Derbyshire. This will be an important delivery mechanism for the East Midland Development Agency's regional economic development strategy.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ ***Senior Planning staff and the Chair of the Committee have received training by INLOGOV in the role and establishment of Local Strategic Partnerships and the preparation of the Community Strategy.***
- ✓ ***The service will give effect to/implement the strategy for the District as it is rolled out***

***E-Government***

- 4.13 The Council's second Implementing Electronic Government Statement has recently been submitted to Government. Our first statement was judged to be satisfactory and we have received additional resources for our plans.
- 4.14 At the moment, 1 in 5 of our services are being delivered electronically. The current priority is to replace a number of our older systems to make them more accessible for local residents and more efficient for staff to use. New systems are being procured to deal with Financial Management, Environmental Health and Revenues and Benefits. (The latter forms part of an 'Invest to Save' with four other Councils.)
- 4.16 The Council is also undertaking work on the national Land and Property Gazetteer. As part of this work, it is proposed to upgrade the land charges system to make it compatible with our planning system. Finally, we are making improvements to our web site to include new features like online payment facilities and forms.
- 4.17 As a result of these initiatives, we expect to achieve 50% electronic service delivery capability by March 2003.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ ***Progress is charted under Action Point 10 in the accompanying report on the Implementation Plan***

**Corporate Governance**

***Overall arrangements***

- 5.1 Earlier this year, we assessed the organisation against the 5 dimensions of corporate governance identified by CIPFA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (i.e. community focus, service delivery arrangements, structures and processes, risk management & internal control and standards of conduct).
- 5.2 We concluded that we were well placed in a number of areas or else we had proposals in the Corporate Plan. We specifically identified the need to review our approach to the management of business risk and this is now underway.

### ***Equal Opportunities***

- 5.3 The assessment also highlighted the need for progress on equal opportunities issues.
- 5.4 The Council adopted an Equal Opportunities Policy in July 1999. This makes explicit our commitment to equality of opportunity in employment and access to services. However, the policy now needs to be reviewed in the light of legislative and other changes.
- 5.5 For 2002/3, we have set the target of reaching Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

### ***Managing Resources***

- 6.1 The Council's resources are limited and a major challenge for members and employees is to ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively to support the achievement of our vision for the future.

### ***Financial Resources***

- 6.2 To follow.

### ***Managing People***

- 6.xx The organisation was restructured in 2000, following the financial crisis. This has resulted in a Corporate Management Team (CMT) of four headed by the Chief Executive. Each member of CMT is responsible for a number of service areas. These are managed by a Divisional Manager who has responsibility for a number of operational units.
- 6.xx These arrangements are illustrated in Annexe E. In general terms, they appear to be working well, a view confirmed during 2001 by the District Auditor.
- 6.xx The size of the establishment at 31 March 2002 was 319. By the same time next year, it is planned to rise to 325.
- 6.xx Over the past 2 years, a wide range of policies designed to support good employment practice and the management of change. The Employee Development and Review Scheme has already been mentioned. Other examples include policies and procedures for handling grievances, taking disciplinary action and managing sickness absence. We have also developed a corporate Training Plan, established a new Occupational Health Service (procured jointly with neighbouring Councils) and developed a project plan to progress the introduction of the Single Status Job Evaluation Scheme.
- 6.xx Earlier this year, an assessment of the organisation was undertaken to determine what needs to be done to achieve 'Investors in People' status. The consultants reported that the Council *'has come along way since the crisis of two years ago and there is a clear vision of where they want to be. The workforce are committed to the future of the Council and are keen to be involved..'*



- 6.xx The report concludes that we have already currently achieved over half of the indicators for the award. An action plan has been developed to enable us to achieve the remainder.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ *Performance, Development and Reviews undertaken annually.*

## **SERVICE PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

### ***Implementation Plan***

- 7.1 The Council produced an Implementation Plan and an Action Plan by July 2001.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ *Planned actions guide service delivery.*

### ***IT System Improvements***

- 7.2 System development now provides the capability to report on performance on processing applications in as varied a way as the database stores information. The configuration of this database is as specified by the supplier, with minor variation enabled to the end user. The Council is part of a user group devoted to influencing product development. The system is currently being transported to the Oracle database. A budget allocation under the IEG Strategy will enable upgrading to this platform. We will implement this as soon as we are satisfied that the system is performing to a satisfactory level and the Land and Property Gazetteers have been cleansed.

### ***Customer Charter***

- 7.3 The Charter was rolled out in April 2001 with indicators that form a basis for monitoring delivery. The performance indicators will be reviewed in the light of experience.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ *Monitoring in a pro-active manner to maintain and improve performance has been enabled and will remain a key feature of service delivery.*

### ***Pre Application Advice***

- 7.4 Since the Best Value Inspection, Supplementary Planning Guidance has been produced to deal with:

- Town Centre regeneration with a brief for the derelict Hepworths Pipe Works
- Advertisement Applications
- Urban Capacity (brownfield sites available for development)

Revisions of a further 6 documents are in progress to update them and to make them more user friendly.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ *Pre application advice is easier to follow and more relevant.*

***Local Plan Review***

- 7.5 The Local Plan has been formulated within the objectives and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and within Government guidance and policies specifically address sustainability, affordable housing, regeneration, designing out crime, accessibility and social inclusion. Progress is detailed in the accompanying report on the Implementation Plan under Action Point 11. The consultation process undertaken is detailed under Action Point 12.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ *The linkage between the Local Plan and Development Control is clearly governed by Section 54A of the Planning Act 1990. Development Control will be guided by relevant and up to date policies, rolled out in a timely manner.*

***Consultation***

- 7.6 Matters recommended under this heading are detailed in the accompanying report on the Implementation Plan under Action Points 7 and 8.

***Service Implications:***

- ✓ *Consultation is integral to the Development Control process and will be pursued vigorously.*

Table C.1 Best Value Inspection - Development Control Action Plan (March 2001)

Recommendation	Timescale (BVPP2)	Accountable Manager	Progress
<i>Corporate</i>			
Establish and implement a comprehensive performance management system	March 2002	Deputy Chief Executive	<p>This is now in place. The main components comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Best Value Performance Plan</li> <li>➤ Corporate Plan</li> <li>➤ Service Plans</li> <li>➤ Employee Review and Development Scheme</li> </ul> <p>We have also strengthened links between service and financial planning, improved arrangements for collecting PI data and sought to develop the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in monitoring and scrutinising performance.</p>
Produce a robust procurement strategy	June 2001	Policy and Best Value Manager	<p>A corporate Procurement Strategy, based on guidance contained in the Byatt Report was agreed by the Finance and Management Committee in October 2002. This is now being implemented.</p>

Ensure that the Best Value Review programme is less fragmented e.g. Development Control reviewed out of context	March 2001	Policy and Best Value Manager	The programme has been revised in the light of guidance from the Audit Commission. It provides for a Review of <i>Environmental Planning and Control</i> which will include all parts of the Planning Service as well as Building Control and Environmental Health protection services (such as contaminated land, air quality etc). This Review is scheduled to commence in January 2003.
Focus on 'outcomes' of planned actions within service improvement plans	March 2001	Policy and Best Value Manager	Achieved. This is incorporated in the 'South Derbyshire Best Value Framework' which contains guidance for Review teams. It is also reflected in training modules on Best Value.
Ensure a joined up approach to development issues	September 2001	Deputy Chief Executive	<p>This had been addressed in several ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Environmental and Development Services Committee is now responsible for planning policy, economic development and much of environmental health service.</li> <li>➤ The Corporate Plan identifies 'team working' as a critical success factor for the organisation and seeks to promote 'joined up' services through Departmental Plans</li> <li>➤ A development team approach is now applied in respect of particular projects (e.g. the strategy for the town centre etc).</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Accountable Manager</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<i>Service Strategy</i>			
Develop a comprehensive and challenging improvement plan which incorporates a vision, priorities and forward strategy for the service and addresses the wider agenda	July 2001	Planning Services Manager	Plan in progress.
Produce clear service objectives and SMART targets which link to corporate priorities in a measurable way	November 2001	Deputy Chief Executive / Planning Services Manager	See Plan.
<i>Human Resources</i>			
As part of performance management, identify staff training needs through personal appraisals and (as planned) investigate a forward plan and resources	June 2001	Planning Services Manager	A corporate Employee Review and Development Scheme is now in place. This sets objectives for employees, measures performance and identifies training needs.

Recommendation	Timescale	Accountable Manager	Progress
<b>Service Process</b>			
Use new IT system to improve internal management/monitoring systems for service	September 2001	Planning Services Manager	Ongoing System development to meet requirements to monitor performance in place. Funding for further development in place.
Continue with plans to produce and disseminate a charter which sets targets for service delivery	April 2001	Planning Services Manager	Charter in place from April 2001.
<b>Service Outcomes</b>			
Take a more proactive approach to pre-application advice e.g. design briefs with local plan review, more user-friendly design guides, expand web site etc.	July 2001	Planning Services Manager	Local Plan Review well advanced – 1 <sup>st</sup> Deposit due out in July 2001. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Deposit out November 2002. Review of Supplementary Planning Guidance ongoing 50% complete.
As part of the Local Plan review, create a strong design vision for South Derbyshire/incorporate positive guidelines for new development	July 2001	Planning Services Manager	Comprehensive programme undertaken, exceeding statutory requirements and will continue through 2 <sup>nd</sup> Deposit stage.

Recommendation	Timescale	Accountable Manager	Progress
Service: Added Value			
Ensure Local Plan review actively addresses key corporate objectives and priorities and is responsive to the wider National agenda e.g. on issues such as sustainability, affordable housing, regeneration, designing out crime, social inclusion etc.	July 2001	Planning Services Manager	Being worked up as part of Local Plan review. Fully compliant.
Ensure that community and stakeholder involvement is maximised and taken account of in the Local Plan consultation process	July 2001 onwards	Planning Services Manager	Opportunity for involvement exceeds statutory requirements including full Web access.
Ensure that consultation is used to inform future service delivery e.g. 106 Agreements, Design Briefs, enforcement activity etc.	April 2001  July 2001	Planning Services Manager	Section 106 agreements subject to policy based on Local Plan Design Brief produced following consultation. Enforcement policy will be subjected to consultation.
Ensure that the resultant policies translate into clear guidelines for implementation by Development Control	July 2001 onwards	Planning Services Manager	Noted. These considerations are being reflected in Local Plan policies and Supplementary Planning Guidance.

## ANNEXE B

# THE COUNCIL'S VISION, GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND KEY AIMS

### The Council's Vision for the future

**'to promote and enhance the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the community through the provision of cost effective, customer focused services'**

### Guiding Principles

- making decisions openly and with integrity
- being accountable to the people of South Derbyshire for our decisions
- involving the community in choices about services and local priorities
- being open and responsive to change
- treating people fairly and promoting equality of opportunity in employment and service provision
- providing reliable and responsive services to our customers
- working with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to achieve more than we can on our own
- ensuring that the actions we take are sustainable in the long term
- valuing employees and the essential role they play in service provision

### Key Aims

1. to strengthen and develop the local economy through support for business development and inward investment (in short '*economic development*')
2. to safeguard and enhance the natural and built environment ('*caring for the environment*')
3. to address the needs of South Derbyshire residents for good quality homes, of a variety of tenures, located in well planned and safe environments ('*the provision of decent homes*')
4. to promote the health and welfare of all sections of the community, including access to leisure and cultural activities ('*community and leisure development*')
5. to secure continuous improvements in the quality and efficiency of services provided by the Council ('*providing Best Value services*')
6. to manage resources efficiently and effectively ('*managing our business*')
7. to listen to, represent and provide leadership to the people of South Derbyshire in local, regional and national arenas ('*community leadership*')
8. to support the development of the National Forest and its enjoyment by residents and visitors ('*support for the National Forest*')



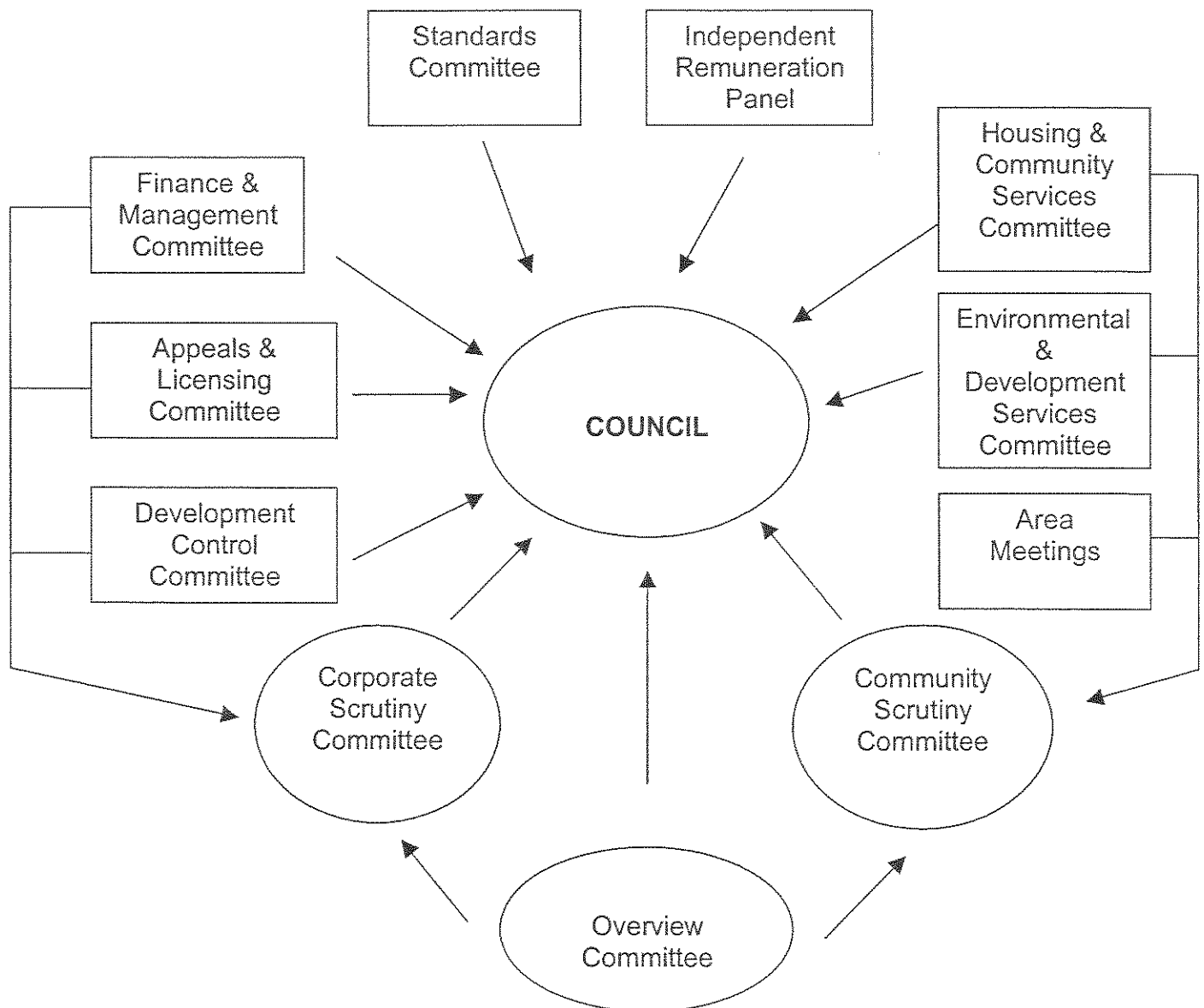
**ANNEXE C:  
BEST VALUE REVIEWS – REVISED FIVE YEAR PROGRAMME (2000/01 TO 2004/05)**

Year 1 (2000/01)	Year 2 (2001/02)	Year 3 (2002/03)	Year 4 (2003/04)	Year 5 (2004/05)
Development Control (completed)	Financial Services (underway)	Environmental Planning and Control	Democratic Renewal	Corporate Planning & Communication
Cash Collection Services (completed)	Housing Services Part 1: Strategic Housing (underway)	Customer Services and Electronic Service Delivery	Technical Services	Legal Services
Sheltered Housing & the Warden Service (completed)	Asset Management (underway)	Housing Services Part 2: Landlord and Tenant Function	Regeneration	Partnership Working
Cleansing the Environment (completed)	Human Resource Management (underway)	Community Safety (Joint Review with County Council)		
Financial Management & Control (completed)	Bretby Crematorium (Review by Joint Committee)	Procurement		

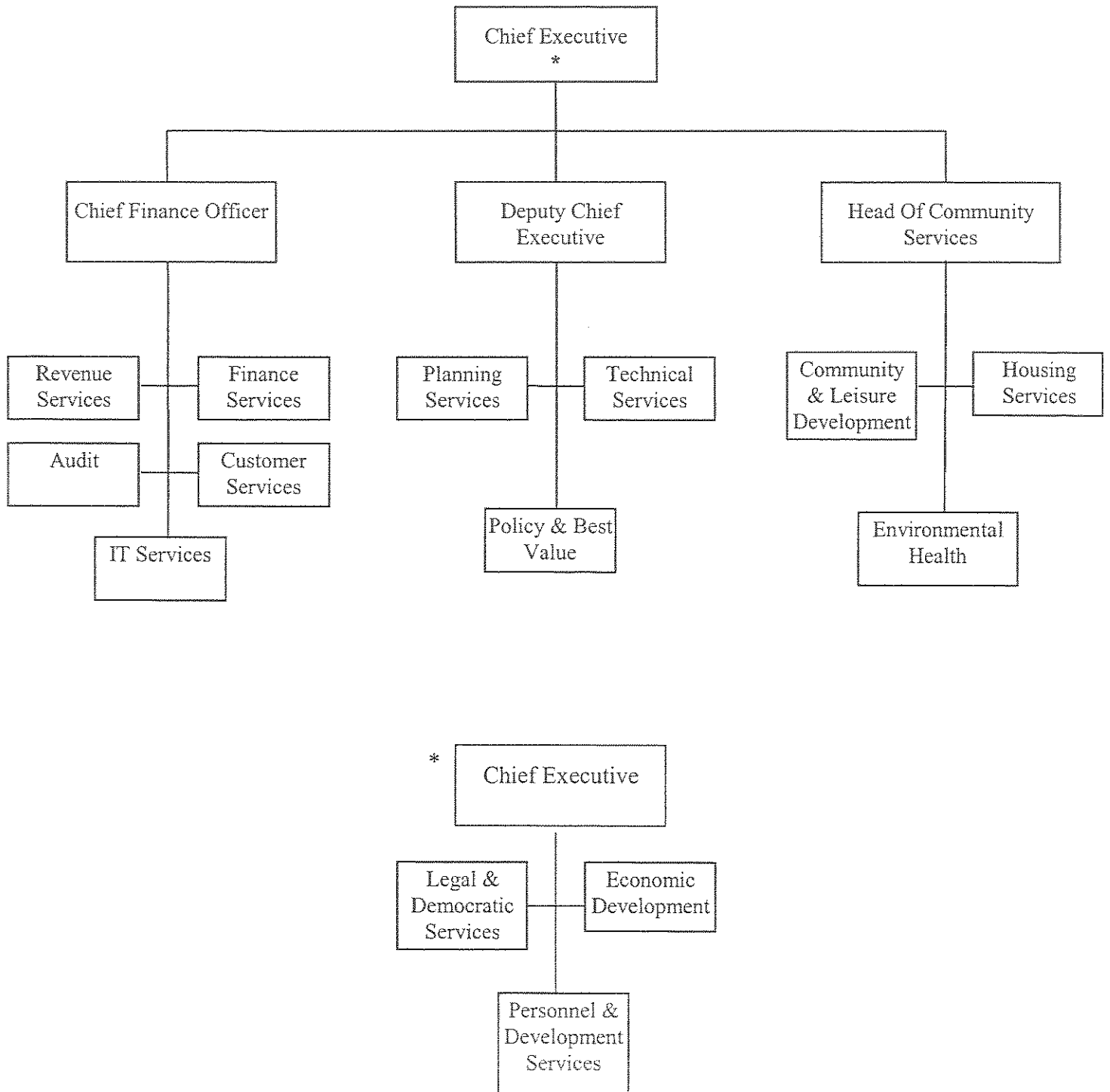
### New Political Structure

In May 2002, these arrangements were reviewed and the new structure has been confirmed. This comprises 6 policy committees, 2 scrutiny committees, an overview committee, 2 regulatory committees and a Standards Committee. In addition, Area Meetings are held in each of the six county wards. The new structure is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 - The Modernised Committee Structure**



# SOUTH DERBYSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL STRUCTURE



## Development Control Best Value Implementation Plan Report for Best Value Inspectors on Progress to October 2002

### Introduction

This document sets out our progress on actions contained in the Implementation Plan compiled following your review. They have been grouped together under a 'planned action' heading with subsections in italics for ease of reporting. They also take account of your comments that the report should concentrate on public facing improvements. A summary table together with evidence of the outcomes is presented in tabular form at Annex A. The subsections are described as follows:

- Planning the service
- Deploying resources
- Engaging the public
- Producing the local plan
- Enforcement
- Other involvement
- Conclusions

### Planned Action

#### *Planning the Service*

Action 1: Integrate service delivery with Corporate and Community Plans

The Service Plan incorporating the appropriate elements of the Best Value Implementation Plan was put in place by November 2001. It aligns planning service goals with those set out in other departmental and corporate plans and strategies and it identifies the contribution that the planning service makes to wider corporate objectives. Figure 2.1 sets out the relationship of the various council plans and strategies.

Action 2: Apply Performance Management to resources and outputs

Service priorities were defined in the Improvement Plan. These have been adjusted to meet circumstances as and when they arose. In practice, efforts have focussed on:

- meeting Government and local Performance indicators (PI's)
- production of the Local Plan (See separate heading below)
- maintenance of service levels generally.

The eight week period for determining applications has been maintained at the mid 70% range despite increases in workload until mid 2002 when staff turnover impacted adversely. The planning applications caseload has increased by an average of 5% year on year since 1997/8. This represents a 20% increase overall (See Table1). The increase since April this year to date

is 8%. Considering the inherently low staff/application ratio (Table 2), the performance represents a considerable achievement which benefits applicants through the receipt of timely and qualitative planning decisions.

**Table 1 Total Number Of Application Received**

Year	Number
1997/1998	1023
1998/1999	1034
1999/2000	1126
2000/2001	1180
2001/2002	1291

Table 2	Development Control Staff		AS AT PRESENT 2001/2			
Authority	Case officers and Technicians	Total staff /support and associate staff	Apps/ case off	Apps/ D C staff	% in 8 Weeks 2001/2	Cost/ 1000 popul.n.
Amber Valley	5	13	232	89	74	2293
Bolsover	3.5	11.5	143	43	66	1346
Chesterfield	5	9	128	71	69	2633
Derbys. Dales	7	20	108	38	75	4827
Erewash	4	11	221	80	67	?
High Peak	4.5	11	187	76	72	2782
N.E. Derbys.	7	20.5	155	53	75	?
S. Derbys.	4	11.2	287	118	74	1770
N.W.Leics.	6	11	175	95	56	?
E.Staffs.	11.5	18.3	107	67	64	4757
Daventry	7	16	158	69	69	1855
E.Northants.	7	11	133	85	63	?
Forest of Dean	11	22.75	124	60	79	5631
Lichfield	8	20	114	46	58	3354
Mid. Beds.	13	30	123	53	55	5346
N. Kesteven	5	16	260	81	69	1835
N. Warwicks.	7	13	111	60	65	4136
Rochford	6	15	142	57	79	?
Staffs. Moorlands	8	16.5	123	60	64	3228
	Upper quartile		181	81	74	1965
	2nd quartile		142	67	69	3005

Source: survey +CIPFA returns

Performance indicators as required by Government were reported in the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) and audited by the District Auditor (DA). Difficulties arose on accessing information from the planning database. These have recently been overcome and improved reporting facilities have now been enabled.

The task remains one of monitoring performance to enable staff resources to be directed to prioritised areas of work without losing sight of other necessary objectives, all in a customer focussed manner. We achieve this through regular team meetings to review performance and constantly revise procedures. The meetings accommodate occasional guest speakers from outside the service.

### *Deploying resources*

Action 3            prioritise staff deployment in core delivery areas

Action 4            Employ additional BCO to improve access, security, energy consumption, and waste recycling in buildings

Staffing levels were an area of weakness identified by the previous inspection and the service was judged to be vulnerable to loss of highly experienced staff. Since the review the following staff changes have occurred.

- Two Area Planning Officers (APOs) replaced
- New Development Control Manager appointed
- Local Plans Officer left (two separate occasions) and replaced twice (2<sup>nd</sup> not yet in post).
- A support Service Assistant was re-deployed as a Building Control Technician and replaced by a new recruit.

As a result of these changes staff were re-deployed in an effort to continue to meet performance targets, especially the eight-week turn around of planning applications. During this period a retired Development Control Officer was also employed temporarily to help maintain performance. However staff turnover and vacancies have affected performance to some degree. Later, as the staffing situation improved the opportunity was taken to refocus staff resources and give attention to lower priority areas of work e.g. updating supplementary planning guidance.

The appointment of a new Development Control Manager made available an additional competency in the use and development of the planning computer system and to help redress the longstanding inability to make more effective use of the planning software especially its reporting facilities. This helps us to manage performance more effectively and to respond more speedily to customer enquiries.

With the replacement APOs the opportunity was taken to disperse responsibility for tree matters amongst all APOs. This redistribution has

broadened the knowledge base in the subject and made it more readily available to customers.

Since the review, additional staff resources have been secured which include an admin/support worker and a ½ time Enforcement Assistant. The appointment of a Development Control Technician is also under consideration. However a Service Development bid for an additional Building Control Officer (intended to develop the team approach to service delivery, especially in relation to sustainability) was not successful. These additional resources together with the transfer of the footpaths officer to the Economic Development Unit has strengthened the service's ability to improve it's performance and help with increasing work loads.

Other areas in which resources have been deployed to advantage are in procuring consultancy advice namely:

- The Council now has an arrangement with East Staffordshire Borough Council to supply an arboricultural Officer one day per week providing advice to APOs.
- The Contract with Derbyshire Wildlife Trust was enlarged from £6000 pa to £14000 to facilitate production of the Local Plan and to assist with dealing with relevant matters on applications.
- A new police liaison visit weekly to facilitate designing out crime builds on the long standing weekly visit by and liaison with the County Council Highways Engineer, to collect and discuss applications for their attention. This helps to support the council's crime and disorder strategy.
- As of 1 November 2002 the Council has procured the services of an Archaeological Development Control Officer from the County Council to provide expert advice on applications where relevant.

The prioritisation of staff deployment has also involved a development team approach for larger applications. Initial and subsequent meetings with developers have been co-ordinated as between Planners, Arboriculturalists , Building Control, Environmental Health Officers, Highways Officers and the Environment Agency. In one case a public forum of invited householders, Members, Planners, Environmental Health Officers and the applicants met to resolve a number of issues and concerns relating to a proposed concrete plant. This sort of activity is responsive to customer demand and provides them real benefits in the processing of their applications.

By comparison with other Local Planning Authorities however, our planning service remains under resourced (See Table 2). We have learned however that even with very low staff numbers we can maintain high output levels in a timely manner if we remain as flexible as possible in operational matters and reduce duplication of effort to the minimum. This requires dedicated and well-trained staff, exercising high levels of professionalism to meet customer

expectations, with maximum delegation of responsibility and minimal second checking. The downside of occasional mistakes and lack of consistency needs to be worked through. We reduce these to an acceptable minimum by peer group networking, regular team meetings, occasional tours of the district to review and evaluate results on the ground and maximum support from senior managers, bolstering morale.

Action 5: Complete and maintain staff reviews and implement training

The staff performance and development review scheme (PDR) has been successfully implemented. Objectives and training plans have been developed for all employees. The second review was completed in March 2002. Staff indicate that they appreciate the effort put into the process and welcome the opportunity to discuss issues with managers.

*Engaging the public*

Action 6: Review Delegation Agreement

Our priority has been to review the delegation agreement and to use it as a means of gaining service efficiency and improved customer service. The Delegation Agreement has a two year review period and was reviewed in April 2002. The agreement already provided for high levels of delegated decision making of 85%. The 2002 review has enabled the Government target of 90% to be achieved, with the result that there is more time to deal with other matters, such as informal advice to prospective applicants and their neighbours. Prospective applicants can now obtain an informal view on the need for planning permission by completing a form outlining the development they wish to undertake.

Action 7 Disseminate customer charter and plain English versions of all Supplementary Planning Guidance for comment

The customer charter was published in April 2001. It was sent to all Parish Councils and made available over the office counter. (The charter is shortly due to be published on our Web site which will afford a greater opportunity for public comment). The response to the charter has been limited but no criticism or adverse reaction of any material note has been received. The lack of adverse re-action could indicate a basically well run service and a satisfied customer base.

Of the eleven published supplementary planning guidance documents, 6 have been revised/written in plain English and 5 are in course of revision. One is in course of preparation.

Other indicators of customer satisfaction are responses to consultations on planning applications. These provide an opportunity for interested parties to voice their views not only on specific planning issues but also on the planning process. The level of official complaints on the manner of dealing with applications, is however very low. This chimes with the general feedback



officers experience on a daily basis that the service compares well with that provided in other authorities.

The Government PI 112 re-introduces a formal satisfaction questionnaire survey for the coming year. Using this as a base we will carry out a wider examination of satisfaction levels on a more formal basis.

Action 8: Review all documents in the light of feedback from stakeholders

Forms, notices and standard correspondence have been revised and standardised. Notes for neighbours on how to respond to consultations have also been reformatted and made simpler to follow. In all cases the new documents have been rolled out and modified in the light of feedback from the public. This has simplified the process from the public's point of view. Documents can be down loaded from the Web. Following consultation with other LPA's, the Committee resolved to adopt guide lines for Section 106 Agreements in April 2001. All the necessary notices for enforcement and a proforma Section 106 Unilateral Undertaking have also been reviewed and are in regular use. The latter has helped to speed turnaround of decisions. (Sample documents are included in Annexe B)

Action 9: Produce policy for public to address Committee site visits

As a consequence of an incident during a Committee site visit, where one party was inadvertently excluded from taking part in an onsite address given to Members, rules for site visits were amended in January 2002 to exclude any form of address by other than Council Members and Officers. (See Committee report)

Resource implications in widening access and the need for similar consideration at other Committee Meetings have inhibited progress in allowing the public to speak at meetings where planning applications are determined. Further consideration of this issue will take place in the future in accord with the Review of Political Arrangements Action Plan.

Action 10: Develop Council's web page/internet access and advertise it

Internet access has been improved by placing the Local Plan on the Web. Also revised application forms and guidance notes for applicants can now be down loaded. Lists of applications received and determined are published and updated regularly. E-mail responses are regularly accepted both from Parish Councils and the general public. These innovations have been introduced progressively, the latest in April 2002. The Web site was advertised in a pamphlet called 'Know your District Council' sent to every household late in 2001.

The Council's Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) statement commits it to improved internet access and new features are being introduced progressively. The next step change being considered for the planning service is the electronic handling of all correspondence by scanning it into the

system. Digitised plans and drawings will require scanning equipment or an agency arrangement for outsourcing the work. Receipt of digitised plans over the internet will require CAD software capable of reading data from many different initiating sources. These matters are currently being given consideration in relation to a new software release from the Council's planning system software supplier.

### *Producing the Local Plan*

#### Action 11 Prepare and implement a project plan for the Local Plan review

A published timetable agreed with Government Office East Midlands (GOEM) all in accordance with guidance contained in PPG12 has been produced for reviewing the Plan (See Annexe C). The timetable includes targets for the completion of each stage in order to meet the envisaged completion date and this has subsequently become the de facto project plan. The majority of the target dates were met despite staff changes during this period. The only targets which have varied have been those which it was recognised needed to be flexible from the outset. Publication of the 1<sup>st</sup> Deposit was accomplished within a month of the target date of January 2002 and publication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> deposit is imminent (November 2002).

#### Action 12 Implement consultation on the Local Plan

Some 1500 representations have been received in response to the formal consultation, 1200 of which are objections. This process is governed by statutory procedures but all objectors have subsequently been written to in order to clarify whether or not their objections have been properly summarised and ensure that they address relevant policies in the Plan. The proposals map, written statement and objection forms have also been made available on the council's Web site. Between 18 February and 22 April the site had 2401 hits. This use of the web generated more interest than any other means of publicity.

A comprehensive database of objections has been compiled that will greatly assist in dealing with objections at the forthcoming Inquiry, planned for May 2003. The Local Plan has been produced far closer to target than its predecessor and to an acknowledged tight timetable. This is in spite of staff vacancies. A statement of consultation is attached at Annexe D. In addition to the formal consultation on the local plan an informal questionnaire has been produced for use with a citizens panel; this awaits an opportunity to be sent out.

The Development Control section played an instrumental part in the plan preparation process. The Local Plans Manager organised meetings to discuss draft policies prior to publication and amendments were made to the plan as a result of this additional consultation. Furthermore, all APOs now have desktop access to the draft deposit plan available on their PCs and the Planning software system records spatial policies of the Local Plan in relevant application records as they are plotted on the GIS system.

## *Enforcement*

### Action 13 Prepare an Enforcement priority policy

A relatively low priority was placed on this activity pending employment of a second Enforcement Officer who is now in post. However a draft policy document has recently been completed with a view to it becoming formal Council planning service policy. Parish Councils are to be consulted on this first. The Council is proud of the achievements of its Enforcement Officer in the light of the caseload experienced. To further enhance this area of work a computerised enforcement system has been created which aids the processing of complaints and, importantly, allows monitoring of performance.

Some of the Senior Enforcement Officer's time has been hitherto devoted to the supervision of the Footpaths Enforcement Officer. However, as stated earlier, this position has been re-deployed to the Economic Development Function in August 2002. Efforts will now be re-focussed on monitoring planning conditions in addition to dealing with complaints received from the public

### Action 14 Produce and negotiate policy with Parish Councils for them to monitor breeches of Planning Control

We are consulting with Parish Councils on the possibilities of their involvement in reporting enforcement matters. It is hoped that future discussions will result in a more proactive approach being developed.

## *Other Involvement*

### Action 15 Active involvement in review of financial and accountancy services

Managers in planning services are involved in many corporate activities. Networking with other officers strengthens lines of communication and leads to greater collaboration on matters related to respective services, e. g.

- The Planning Services Manager has been a member of a panel reviewing the Council's Financial Information system that has selected a new suite of software. In October 2002. New working practices were instituted early in 2001 to prevent overspending of the magnitude that led to the Council's previous severe financial difficulties.
- The Local Plan Manager is involved in formulating the Council's Housing Strategy, which includes monitoring the provision of affordable housing in accordance with the council's local plan policy. This in turn informs negotiations between APOs and applicants and the resulting planning decisions which facilitates affordable housing in the district.

- Managers have been members of Best Value working parties on financial management, financial services and procurement in addition to contributing to The Housing Strategy. In each case rolling out the recommendations and strategies will lead to service improvements both within the section and in the wider council.

### *Conclusions*

The Implementation Plan has been useful in directing developmental activity in a structured way resulting in measurable improvements. A summary of the progress and outcomes is attached at Annexe A.

The whole Planning Service is to be incorporated in a cross cutting review with relevant aspects of Environmental Health in the New Year. Consideration will be then given to a further review of the Implementation Plan for Development Control.