

# **Stronger Together**

**Leading Northumberland to a Greater Future**

**The Corporate Strategy for Northumberland County Council**

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# Introduction

This Corporate Strategy defines our role purpose and approach for the next 3 to 5 years. It supports the Sustainable Community Strategy for Northumberland and together with our Corporate Plan it will guide our activities and provide staff, customers and partners with a clear understanding of our priorities and how we can work most effectively with them to achieve these.

Since the formation of the new Northumberland County Council in 2009 the focus has been on ensuring an effective transition from the previous arrangements. With this successfully achieved, along with other changes in the way we work, the Council is now entering a new phase of working.

Over the last twelve months there have been major changes within the Council particularly in the way we work with partners, residents, service users and communities and we have seen a continued improvement in the performance of our services whilst also achieving significant financial savings. We now have solid foundations to build on; politicians and staff with a strong commitment to Northumberland and a desire to build a better future for families and neighbourhoods, effective partnership working and an environment that is the envy of many.

But the world around us has changed significantly. The global economic recession, the subsequent effect of decreasing available public sector funding and the growing responsibility to do more to protect the scarce resources of our environment being some big challenges we share with every other place.

We also face challenges more specific to Northumberland; narrowing the gap that exists between our poorest and wealthiest communities; providing economic opportunities for our young people so they can continue to live and work in the county; providing the infrastructure to ensure that every resident is able to access services, regardless of where they live; providing decent homes for everyone, including for those people unable to buy or rent in the open market, in attractive neighbourhoods; developing more community spirit and cohesion by helping residents to have more say in what they need and what happens in their communities; and attracting and growing new enterprise to provide high quality jobs to sustain our economy and reduce our reliance on public sector employment.

Our challenge now is to find different and innovative ways of responding so that we help Northumberland meet these challenges and create opportunities that in turn convert into significant improvements for individuals, families, businesses and communities in Northumberland.

We are clear about the challenge and our response to this and our strategy is therefore focused on four priorities:

- Respect and Enhance our Environment
- Grow Northumberland's Economy
- Support and Enable our Residents, Families and Communities
- Promote Health and Well-Being

We recognise that to deliver these priorities, the Council needs to change the way it works; our world has changed and we must to fulfil our role in Leading Northumberland to a greater future.

Therefore this strategy outlines the steps we are taking to transform; new thinking and approaches to delivering services; developing our organisation so that our staff have the relevant skills, knowledge and insight; and becoming smarter in the way we do things.

# The Big Issues

This Corporate Strategy is the Council's response to the big issues that affect the County of Northumberland. Some of these issues are global or national nature whilst others relate the local circumstances within Northumberland.

## Climate Change

Not only is there a statutory and moral obligation on the Council to respond to this global issue, responding to this also supports the overall economic direction the Council wishes to lead. The carbon management agenda allows for the development of new business opportunities relating to renewable energy and environmental management.

It will also help deliver efficiency measures in the Council by encouraging better use of our assets, energy consumption and use of sustainable technology in the delivery of our services. Developing renewable energy production within Northumberland and providing home insulation measures will also help drive energy prices down thereby contribute to reducing long-term fuel poverty, furthermore encouraging local communities to lead local sustainable projects will enhance community cohesion, social capital and resilience.

The Local Strategic Partnership have outlined the strategic framework for Climate Change Planning in Northumberland through the *The Heat Is On*. This takes forward the ambitions set out within the Sustainable Community Strategy on climate change.

The Council has responded to this through the production of a climate change action plan which provides the corporate direction on the various activities which are required to address both mitigation against, and adaptation to, changing climate. In the short-term the Local Carbon Framework will provide a delivery mechanism to trial new ways of working and provide some short term resource to address particular barriers.

However to drive this further forward there will be a fundamental reconsideration of how the Council designs and commissions its services so that they reduce carbon and also ensure resilience to both extreme and incremental weather impacts and this will need to be built into all our operating and service plans in the future.

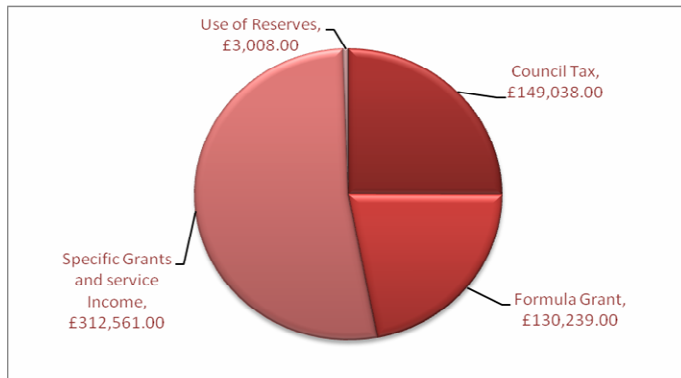
Furthermore, the Council will need to provide demonstrable strategic leadership through the planning process to move the county onto a low carbon trajectory; this will be accomplished through a forward thinking approach outlined in the Local Development Framework. Leadership will also be demonstrated through the carbon reduction of our own estate and by providing a range of services to homeowners, landlords and businesses to enable them to reduce their own carbon foot-prints. Finally the Council will encourage local businesses to take advantage of the economic opportunities that arise by adapting to and mitigating climate change.

## Economic Downturn

The recent economic downturn has affected our communities and businesses with fewer jobs being available, wage levels being frozen and the property market being less buoyant. This will significantly increase the challenges associated with narrowing the achievement gaps and reducing poverty and disadvantage. Another implication of the downturn will be the accelerated squeeze on public spending.

Future levels of central government funding are likely to be significantly reduced thereby representing a major driver in shaping the future approach of the Council. Furthermore with households and businesses continuing to limit their spending until the recovery is fully apparent the other income streams of the Council e.g. car parking, planning fees, traded services etc, are unlikely to grow. Finally the effect of economic downturn on individuals and families will also place additional strain on our services particularly social, family and community based services.

The way we are financed illustrates our particularly heavy reliance on specific grants and service income both of which are likely to be squeezed through the effects of the economic downturn. We therefore need to be smarter with our resources and be innovative in the way we secure finance to deliver the outcomes we want to achieve. In particular we need to change our approach in securing external funding and fully explore new innovative forms of public, private and social financing such as social impact bonds.



## ***The Population***

Northumberland is a county that is made up of geographically dispersed communities. Although Northumberland is home to 310,000 people, no single settlement has more than 35,000 residents.

The population in Northumberland is getting increasingly older and there is a decreasing younger population and this is increasing as the county continues to be an attractive location for the older generation to retire to. Traditionally, these new residents have largely arrived from other parts of the North East. However, there are signs that migrant workers from Eastern Europe are starting to arrive to take up lower wage jobs in tourism, food processing, and manufacturing. This movement, albeit relatively small in numbers, is expanding the diversity of the county's residents.

Furthermore, our younger people (aged between 20 and 29 years old) are now leaving the county in more significant numbers. A number of inter-related factors account for this trend; including an inability to get on the housing ladder, the search for a better-paid or more secure job, or a desire to go on to further or higher education. Furthermore, the school age population is rapidly declining in numbers particularly in rural areas of Northumberland.

This ageing process is being further compounded by a natural change in the population. The numbers being born is not keeping pace with the numbers dying and we are living longer. These trends are set to continue for the foreseeable future and will have implications for service demand and the vibrancy of our communities and economy.

The increasing number of older people in the county means that we will have to continue to increase the level of services required to support vulnerable people and there will be an increasing need to provide support to carers as their numbers also increase in the future.

We also need to ensure we deliver a high quality school system to improve the chances of young people securing positive outcomes. However, Northumberland's future success relies on this being co-ordinated with an economic strategy that creates new job opportunities, affordable housing, the infrastructure to start up new businesses and places to develop skills further so that young people choose to stay in the county.

## ***The Economy***

Northumberland's economy is characterised by stark contrasts in prosperity. Parts of the county are among the most deprived in the country (concentrated in the urban south east but many rural communities are also deprived) but others are among the most affluent (broadly clustered around the transport corridors with easy access into Tyneside).

However, the county's overall economic performance is poor with disposable income levels being significantly lower than both the regional and national equivalents. Unemployment remains broadly consistent with the national level, but the average wage in Northumberland is significantly lower.

Whilst there are a few large companies based in Northumberland that form part of a vibrant manufacturing base consisting of several renowned, hi-tech companies operating in global markets, the single biggest employers in the county are in the public sector and many of the available jobs (particularly in the north of the county) are seasonal, part-time or relatively unskilled.

Furthermore there are also significant concentrations of working age residents who are excluded from work. They may be trapped in the benefits culture, have a long-term illness, have literacy issues, care for others, or do not have the wherewithal to travel to work.

In Northumberland there are also a significant number of families who suffer the effects of poverty which, as significant evidence shows, will result in children in these families growing up with fewer qualifications and poorer skills in adulthood thereby reducing their income potential and increasing the likelihood of poverty being transmitted onto future generations.

Moreover, this disadvantage also means that families are more likely to live in housing which is inefficient to heat and so suffer from fuel poverty, are unable to secure credit on favourable terms, are more likely to smoke and suffer poorer levels of health, for example through living in housing which is cold and damp. It is also well known that poverty is linked to other social problems such as crime, anti-social behaviour, substance/ alcohol misuse and domestic abuse which all affect the well being of individuals, families and communities which in turn can lead to tensions within communities.

Therefore, narrowing the poverty gap in Northumberland is one of the most significant issues for the Council and its partners and is seen as a significant driver for improving a number of outcome measures for the population including educational attainment, employment, health inequality, reduced crime levels etc. Moreover, tackling and preventing poverty and reducing attainment gaps leads to a smarter use of resources and supports the sustainability of communities.

## ***The Environment***

The County of Northumberland has some of the most attractive environments in the country which are a significant natural asset. There is therefore a need to protect and enhance this natural environment whilst maintaining a network of viable communities that allow their residents to stay and bring up their families within the county. Equally not everyone lives in such an attractive environment and we therefore want to ensure that everyone has access to affordable homes in attractive, clean and green environments.

In addition to this the Council is now covered by the provisions of the Carbon Reduction Commitment scheme which is intended to drive energy efficiency and sustainable development in the private and public sectors. In response to this a Carbon Management Programme has been established by the Council which includes a pledge to reduce our carbon emissions by 50% within 5 years.

The realisation of this ambitious target will require significant changes to the way the Council works so that we can reduce carbon emissions from our buildings, reduce emissions from our operational vehicles, reduce the amount of waste we produce, and buy goods and services from local suppliers and sustainable sources. Furthermore, the Council will need to switch to using more renewable energy sources for its operations.

Moreover, this agenda requires strong leadership by the Council to encourage individuals, businesses and our partners to reduce their impact on the carbon footprint in Northumberland. The carbon management agenda is also seen as key driver for delivering the economic strategy for Northumberland. The aim is develop a carbon

neutral economy and to utilise the environment and skills of the organisations and individuals in Northumberland to create new business growth opportunities in the field of carbon management technologies. The Council can also help facilitate the creation of community projects that are aimed at improving the environment and reducing the impacts of climate change such as local renewable energy generation projects.

## ***Connectivity and Community Well-Being***

Northumberland is made up of a number of diverse communities and places but it is largely a rural county characterised by a lack of access to facilities, services, connectivity, transport links and infrastructure you would see in other urban areas such as Tyneside.

This means that for many people in Northumberland, accessibility to employment, services and each other is a key issue. The sparse nature of the more rural elements of the county and lack of public transport, broadband connectivity make this even more profound for some communities. Therefore improving the access, transport and connectivity for and between individuals is key to promoting economic growth and social cohesion in Northumberland.

The Council's leadership role in promoting community well-being will also focus on two key strands. Firstly through securing and commissioning effective service provision for citizens that is delivered through a mixed economy of providers and secondly by leading and setting the appropriate partnership, democratic and governance framework which promotes the resilience and cohesion of communities. Promoting well-being through effective service provision is about ensuring that all people in Northumberland are as healthy as possible; that they live in decent homes within high quality neighbourhoods that are safe and cohesive that give people a sense of belonging; that they not only achieve good results academically but also have high levels of emotional intelligence and resilience; and that they also have access to good quality cultural, leisure and sport activities.

There is therefore an important place-shaping role for the Council and its partners in promoting well-being through the design, commissioning and co-ordination of services.

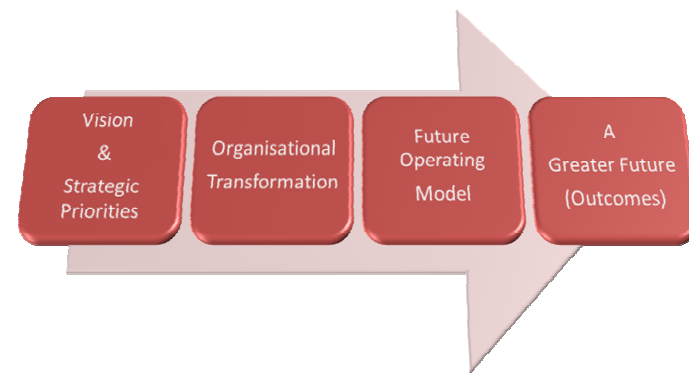
Promoting well-being through community and democratic leadership involves promoting social cohesion by challenging myths and negative perceptions of certain groups which may be held within communities as well as raising awareness of the benefits of living in a community with diverse cultural and national identities. Whilst the most cohesive communities are those which are the least diverse, the most creative areas are those which are made up of the most diverse communities. Therefore the economic development of Northumberland is reliant upon improving the diversity of communities but the Council will have to provide leadership to ensure that social cohesion is also promoted.

Communities cannot be expected to live cohesively without the reassurance of a responsive approach to their needs by the Council. In addition, the Council will need to make explicit efforts to ensure that all individuals and groups receive equal opportunities to access services, contribute to the economy, receive education and health care and participate in a wide range of positive activities. Cohesion can also be facilitated through locally led community initiatives, promoting access to volunteering and by promoting community leadership where individuals feel empowered to co-ordinate and lead their own interventions and actions.

## ***Delivering a Greater Future for Northumberland***

We do not want to just respond to these big issues or tackle the challenges ahead, we want to lead Northumberland to a greater future and to turn these big issues and challenges into opportunities and convert these opportunities into significant improvements for individuals, families, businesses and communities in Northumberland.

To deliver this greater future we will first articulate the picture for the future through our Vision and Strategic Priorities but we then need to make some radical changes to the way the Council works and delivers its services through a process of organisational transformation. In particular this organisational transformation will be about ensuring that we have the right leadership capacity, organisational flexibility and resources to deliver a greater future for Northumberland.



# Vision and Strategic Priorities

The council's Vision for Northumberland is *Leading Northumberland to a Greater Future*. The picture for this greater future for Northumberland is articulated through our strategic priorities of:

- Respect and Enhance our Environment
- Grow Northumberland's Economy
- Support and Enable our Residents, Families and Communities
- Promote Health and Well-Being

These corporate priorities in turn inform the Council corporate plan which details the operational priorities which in turn inform individual service plans and staff appraisals.

## **Respect and Enhance our Environment**

We want decent and efficient homes, including for those people unable to buy or rent in the open market, which are located in neighbourhoods and communities that are attractive, green, clean and sustainable. We also see the County's environment, heritage and natural resources as being major drivers economic growth in Northumberland particularly through the development of renewable energy and environmental services.

## **Grow Northumberland's Economy**

We want economic growth for the County of Northumberland and to rebalance the economy, in particular reducing the reliance on the public sector. In addition to enabling growth in new markets in renewable technologies and hi-tech industries we want to promote entrepreneurialism and the growth of home grown businesses and social enterprises. Furthermore we want to take full advantage of the significant potential the County has to offer in natural resources, cultural, leisure and tourism services.

## **Support and Enable our Residents, Families and Communities**

We want to empower all individuals by raising aspirations and promoting access to lifelong learning and educational opportunity. In the future to the Council will work in partnership with individuals and communities who are best placed to take responsibility for directly leading their own destinies. We will also improve connectivity through improved highways, broadband and community development to support the resilience and sustainability of communities.

## **Promote Health and Well Being**

We want to deliver well-being to all individuals and communities. In particular we want to tackle inequality health and achievement gaps and give everyone the chance to live in safe cohesive communities which have access to high quality services, facilities and activities. In the future communities will be more resilient and there will be a greater focus on prevention so that council doesn't have to provide costly services. At the same time we will ensure that we safeguard and protect the most vulnerable in society.

# Transformation Programme

It is clear that we need to become more efficient and effective in the way we deliver and commission services. Resources will continue to come under pressure through ongoing effects of the global economic downturn and central government reductions. We need to be smarter in the way we use our resources and more innovative in the way we secure funding.

Our aspiration for transformation in the way the Council works and delivers services is based on our new philosophy for service delivery.

First we must understand what the needs, wants and aspirations of our communities are and to identify what interventions work in addressing local issues. We then want to use this intelligence to deliver services that are tailored and integrated to meet the needs of a particular locality (Place Based) and personalised to meet the needs of the individual and their families (People and Families focused).

Our approach is in tune with the Government's *Total Place* agenda which will be the philosophy for public service delivery and local government in the future. The Council is committed to this approach and intends to take this philosophy forward in to its future thinking, however to be successful the Council recognises it must genuinely *Total* and about the whole *Place*, i.e. our approach needs to encompass all public services and focus on whole communities not a particularly segment of service users.

It is important to emphasise that to be successful in delivering transformation through this new approach the Council needs to work with partners and local communities in a dispersed and networked fashion. Put simply this means empowering communities to lead their own service delivery model and integrating services to the level at which will optimise efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness.

Our approach will be to seek to deliver a mixed economy of services; in some circumstances that may involve sharing services with other local authorities or appointing partners to work with us or it may involve devolving services to the local community through a social enterprise, parish or town council.

Our approach will not be about making arbitrary cuts to budgets or services. We will take a strategic view based on:

- Re-designing services and improving business processes around the needs of customers with a focus on what adds value
- Being more innovative in the way deliver services and also in the way we secure finance
- Using our assets more effectively and efficiently
- Developing a mixed economy through smarter commissioning and procurement.

In support of delivering this transformation a programme of activity has been established which has the focus on the following key areas:

- **People**-developing the organisation, culture and performance management system,
- **Systems**-Ensuring the ICT, information and customer service infrastructure is in place to deliver services in line with the council's strategic objectives
- **Efficiency**-Improving our business processes improvements, exploring smarter commissioning and procurement options , and developing innovative service delivery and financing methods
- **Capital Strategy**-Developing and implementing a capital strategy which creates new resources and gives a clear set of priorities for capital investment in the future.

This is a strategic programme that will be governed by the Strategic Management Team to ensure the programme moves forward. The transformation programme will use programme and project management methodologies (based on Prince 2) to guide its work

There will be a number of projects reporting to their own boards, each project will have a senior management sponsor (Corporate Director or Head of Service) and will be part of the council's performance management framework.

The performance management framework will assign delivery of the projects to a sponsor and this will be part of the key deliverables by which they will be assessed. The rigour of the way of working is a key aspect of the cultural change agenda itself.

## People

This Corporate Strategy outlines the need for change across the whole Council, however a major change programme such as this will bring uncertainty for staff and partners and we recognise that.

As we go through this process of change it is important that we engage all our staff and partners to outline why this change is happening but more fundamentally we need all staff to feel that are able to contribute or influence this change process. Our staff are our biggest asset and the Council significantly values the contribution they make. Moreover the successful delivery of our vision is reliant upon all our staff feeling empowered to do deliver it.

A large proportion of our employees are also citizens of Northumberland who have an inherent stake in improving the quality of life in Northumberland; we therefore need to harness this and create a workforce that is motivated to share knowledge, information and intelligence about service users with others and to come up with solutions to customer and community requirements at a local level.

Therefore it is important that we create the right culture and shape for the Council that enables us to make changes to the systems and processes that are covered elsewhere by our transformation programme. We need to move away from a hierarchical, departmental structure that which is driven by the needs of the organisation to one that is non-hierarchical where responsibility is devolved to individuals who are empowered to be proactive and work in an integrated fashion to deliver value to our customers.

The senior management structure of the Council recognises the need to move from a traditional departmental structure by ensuring all corporate directors have responsibility for both corporate and front line services and functions.

However our new approach recognises that it is not only directors and managers that can lead but that people at all levels can drive and support change. Therefore the Council needs to ensure that we encourage and develop the whole organisation to allow the capacity, skills and talents of the whole workforce to flourish.

Furthermore we need to ensure that all people in the workforce possess the competencies, management skills, knowledge and understanding of the key issues facing Northumberland.

Moreover, we are committed to working in partnership with others to deliver meaningful and lasting improvements for local people. We will work with our partners at a strategic, county, neighbourhood and community level to deliver integrated and focused solutions to the key issues facing Northumberland. We therefore need to give all people in the workforce the skills and understanding of the challenges and issues relating to partnership working, integrated working and information sharing.

We therefore need to develop our whole workforce through a leadership and management development programme. To do this we will build on the success of the 'Stronger Together Programme' to continue to create the right culture to support the ongoing development of the Council. For example, a programme of work to develop the role of the Stronger Together Leaders will be created to provide additional capacity to support the culture change programme and a Stronger Together Team toolkit will be developed to help challenge and support teams to embed the Stronger Together culture.

In addition to developing the right organisational culture, enhancing our organisational capacity is a key priority for the medium term. We need a strategic approach to recruitment and development which raises the profile of careers in local government which attracts and nurtures talented individuals and develops their talent, skills and careers further by making experiences, qualifications, training and progression routes more accessible.

## **Systems**

This element of the transformation programme will focus on ensuring we have the appropriate mechanisms and ICT infrastructure to enable the council to deliver its services in line with the Council's aspirations

### ***Better use of information and intelligence***

Our aspiration is to have effective design and delivery of Council services which is founded on a sound understanding of the needs, wants, expectations, behaviours and experiences of our customers and communities. This will enable the Council to focus on the services that matter the most and more crucially prevent service demands occurring in the first place, thereby reducing costs and negative outcomes for our citizens. Identifying an effective method of relaying this intelligence, from the variety of partnerships of community-focused practitioners that work together, to strategic bodies within the Council is a key developmental challenge. It should be the Council's responsibility to act upon such intelligence in a considered and responsive manner and feed-back to partnerships in order for them to disseminate information and actions effectively.

Associated with the process of relaying intelligence, the Council will explore how it can best capture and respond to the intelligence that frontline workforce will become aware of in undertaking their jobs. For example, how should a refuse collection service respond to the gathering of milk bottles at the door of an elderly resident?

Ultimately, the aim is to give local communities the social intelligence they need to help identify what works for them and for them to have the power and wherewithal to address local issues themselves.

The Council currently uses a number of techniques to gather such information including performance management analysis, benchmarking, consultation processes; surveys; people's panel; mystery shopping; area profiling; customer relationship management systems; Councillor surgeries; complaints; etc.

In some parts of the Council there are already some very effective systems in place that brings together this data and information to enable strategic analyses to be undertaken that inform future commissioning and design of services, the work done on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Children and Young People's Plan are good examples of this.

However there is a need to work across the Council and with its partners to embed this good practice so that this information is brought together into a coordinated fashion that allows it not only to be readily accessible and shared across the Council and partners but also to be synthesised into useful insight that can then inform, on a consistent basis, subsequent service commissioning, design and delivery.

### ***Effective Engagement and Communication***

The geographical and diverse nature of Northumberland requires strong partnership working at a community and neighbourhood level to ensure that we can engage with communities effectively. Improved community engagement through existing mechanisms e.g. parish councils, community groups, voluntary groups etc will help but this needs to be underpinned with tangible evidence of services providing good value for money, being better integrated and tailored to the needs of our customers and citizens, particularly for those that are most vulnerable.

Improving engagement and communication involves listening to the diverse range of voices in our communities, many of whom may not feel confident that they have a voice that is worth hearing. One voice may be that of someone with English as their second language who struggles to convey their views. Another may be that of an individual who, upon release from prison, feels isolated from their community. Consequently, identifying channels of communication that are more appropriate for those who are 'hard to reach' should be considered. Establishing links with community organisations or groupings, for which this field is their expertise, is crucial.

The role of the Council will be focused on developing the appropriate mechanisms for supporting debate within communities, ensuring the smaller voices are heard and ensuring that views of local people inform and directly influence policy and decision making processes; and in time ensuring that local communities take decisions about their local communities directly.

There is a key role here for local elected members in providing this local leadership and facilitation and we see the local ward member being the main conduit of the successful delivery of this community engagement approach.

The ultimate aim for our community engagement is to reach a point where local communities understand, influence and lead their own place. The Council's role should therefore be moving more to be being around facilitating local democracy and decision making, resolving conflict and giving support to local communities to help them build and shape their local identity.

In addition we need to strengthen the way in which we communicate our key messages to residents in Northumberland. In particular we want to fully explore the use of Social Networks to improve the way we communicate with residents and to facilitate better communication amongst communities, partners and employees. Furthermore these technologies can greatly support the sharing of knowledge and integrating working amongst the workforce and our partners if designed and managed in an appropriate fashion.

If this engagement is successful then local people will increasingly want and feel they have the skills to coordinate action within their communities. The Council and its partners can help facilitate this by running training events, mentoring, linking individuals to the right support mechanisms, etc. Over time, this approach will foster greater interest from local people in standing as school governors, elected members, and justices of the peace. This will in turn ensure that our public services are more representative of the communities they serve.

### **Customer Services**

Against a backdrop of rising customer expectations for better-quality services and an ever tighter financial environment, it is important that we improve our understanding of customers and the way we deliver services to them. Moreover better and more efficient customer service delivery has the potential to release significant efficiency savings.

Delivering the right services at the right level, first time, every time is crucial to delivering satisfaction to our customers and enhancing the reputation of the Council. Customer service delivery is the main contact our communities will have with the Council and so it plays a hugely important role in shaping opinions about us. Good customer service delivery also provides channels for communication with individuals and communities and creates opportunities for residents to engage with us. However we cannot rely on a customer services function to deliver excellent services to residents and businesses in the county. All services and all staff who work in communities will be operating as the eyes and ears of the Council.

Because Northumberland is a county of diverse communities the challenge is to avoid operating as a centralised single authority that provides a service offer that is limited to “one-size-fits-all”. A one-size fits all approach to service delivery does not exploit the potential opportunities for that exist for efficiency and is generally associated with lower levels of customer satisfaction. Our aspiration is to deliver services that are personalised, integrated and place-based so that wherever possible, we will bring services together so that they are tailored to meet the needs of individuals, families and communities.

Furthermore, people today use a mix of traditional and electronic channels when accessing services from organisations. In particular online services have been shown to improve the reputation of organisations (such as First Direct) and have encouraged more customers to go online. Therefore enhancing on-line Council services can not only enhance our reputation but can also help release significant efficiency gains.

However, customer preferences vary considerably by age, socio-demographic group, and location. Universal preferences cannot be assumed and therefore customer preferences in relation to our services and the types of transactions they require needs to be identified. Through our social intelligence work we will build up a much better understanding of our customers’ needs and expectations and then we will be able to segment and divert them to cheaper service delivery channels (web, telephone, customer contact centre, home visit etc) or by reducing the demand on services through prevention or reducing avoidable contact with the Council altogether.

To deliver this we will develop and then implement a revised customer service strategy which will have three guiding principles which need to be addressed the whole of the Council.

*Effectiveness*-This is about listening to what customers need and satisfying customers at the first point of contact through their preferred access channel. A key element of this principle is resolving issues at the first point of contact. This will be supported by giving our employees the tools and skills to deliver an effective customer service and standardising and simplifying customer contact processes across the Council

*Value for Money*-The Council will deliver services to its customers in an efficient and well managed manner and will make the full use of technology to improve the range of cost effective customer access channels

*Accessibility*-This principle is about ensuring that arrangements for service delivery are built around the needs of customers and that customers also have opportunities to contribute to the future shape and direction of services. However, accessibility can also be achieved by segmenting the needs of distinct groups of customers and then redirecting them to the most appropriate customer access channel and including on-line Council services.

# Efficiency

If we are going to be successful in delivering a greater future the council needs to move to a new operating model. The operating model is as yet undetermined but it will be determined by undertaking a thorough analysis of customers, communities, the market and the Council. However the council aims to deliver a mixed economy in the way it delivers services.

So, for some circumstances that may involve sharing services with other local authorities or undertaking procurement exercises to appoint strategic partners to work with us. In other circumstances, that may involve devolving our services to the local community level through a social enterprise or parish council.

However a major driver for the new operating model will be the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness in the way we deliver and commission services. As outlined in this strategy resources are going to continue to come under pressure through the effects of the global economic downturn and central government spending reductions. We therefore need to be smarter in the way we use our resources and be innovative in the way we secure funding in the future.

## **Business Process Improvement**

Business process improvement is about redesigning and improving service delivery by focusing on what adds value to our service users. Business improvement processes also reduce wasteful processes thereby keeping costs down. To deliver this we need to:

- Focus on, and transform services around, what delivers value to our customers
- Strip out waste and inefficiencies on those processes that did not add value to our customers we deliver services
- Reduce the cost of delivering what adds value

To ensure that this thinking is embedded into all our services we will provide training in the areas of business process improvement and lean methodologies for managers and teams.

We have also been selected to be one of twelve local authorities to take part in the national *DECATS* (Delivering Efficiencies through Corporate and Transactional Services) programme. *DECATS* has provided us with a measurement of the costs of undertaking service transactions and resource consumption across the Council and has highlight a number of potential opportunities to make improvements and efficiencies in the way that we deliver, organise and commission services. These opportunities will then form a set of business cases for taking these opportunities forward into the future operating model for the Council i.e. service redesign and/or commissioning.

### ***Innovative Service Delivery and Financing Mechanisms***

As outlined previously, our aspiration is to deliver services that are personalised, integrated and place-based so that wherever possible, we will bring services together so that they are tailored to meet the needs of individuals, families and communities. We also want to deliver services that based on sound social intelligence and are more focused on prevention rather than reacting to problems and demands for services.

To test this out in practice we have commissioned the *Berwick Project* which is aimed at looking fundamentally at the way we design and tailor services to meet the needs of individuals, families and communities within the area of Berwick. We are aware that currently services can appear to be disjointed, ill-coordinated, and appear to be designed around needs of professionals who deliver them rather than being tailored around the actual requirements of the individuals they serve.

The *Berwick Project* is aimed at being innovative in the way we deliver our services in line with our ambitions. We want to know our citizens and their needs so well that we can spot when things are going wrong early enough to provide an intervention that will stop issues escalating to the point where costly, time and resource consuming provision is needed.

The two largest areas of Council expenditure by far are Adult Social Care and Children's Services. These two areas make up over 50% of the Council's total expenditure and a large proportion of this relates to social protection and reacting to social issues in our community.

A key element of our future strategy therefore is to introduce more personalised and preventative based services so that these major areas of expenditure can be diverted to either other service delivery improvements or savings.

A number of techniques are currently being used to research all the issues for the whole of Berwick. This adopts the same philosophy and thinking being applied to government's *Place Total Place* agenda. This will tell us what works and what doesn't, what citizens need and what they don't want and identify possible innovative ways of delivering services. We should then be able to align our service offer to communities' needs and we should also be able to save money and get better results. The lessons learnt from the *Berwick Project* will therefore inform the future commissioning of services at a local level across the whole county.

Linked to this, the Council will also fully explore the potential of using new and innovative financing methods such as Social Impact Bonds, to secure funding and develop the way we commission services.

### ***Smarter Commissioning and Procurement***

As outlined previously we do not have a one size fits all philosophy and this will also translate into our commissioning strategy. We will fully explore all options but wish to see a mixed economy in the way we deliver services including:

- Strategic and collaborative procurement arrangements with partner organisations
- Local authority trading
- Further developed commissioning at the local community level

Partnership working will continue to be an important vehicle for the Council in its strategic commissioning and delivery of services. The new agenda for public services will require us to work in an integrated and co-ordinated fashion in the way we commission and develop services with other parts of the public sector. This is aimed at removing the bureaucracies and duplication that may exist between a number of organisations and also about transforming services around the needs of citizens.

We will therefore need to continue to look at improved integration, service design, alignment of budgets, joint commissioning etc to improve the way we deliver services to residents in Northumberland.

We will also explore further potential of collaborating on strategic procurement projects and sharing services with other local authorities and partner organisations. By working with other commissioners and procuring bodies there is significant potential in reducing costs. This

will be achieved through a category management approach where analysis of expenditure and service needs will be analysed across

the region and segmented into appropriate categories e.g. social care, construction, professional services, facilities management etc. This analysis will then be used to manage the market and supply chains much more effectively.

The third area we want to explore the use of existing local authority powers to trade and create companies so that we not only create income streams for the Council but also to create new employment and training opportunities for Northumberland. A particular area where we wish to explore trading further is through the development of an Energy Services Company (ESCO). The emphasis of this company would be to provide a range of related services including local renewable generation projects, carbon off-setting schemes, carbon management consultancy services and support to home owners to reduce carbon emissions but the focus being around creating a whole community solution to carbon management.

Finally, we want to encourage local businesses, parish and town councils, social enterprises and other organisations to deliver services for us on our behalf. This is strongly associated with other themes identified in this strategy such as community engagement, promoting well being and enhancing customer service delivery. Where there is local demand for changes in the way services are configured, we will support and develop other organisations to respond to these challenges and enable them to provide services or initiatives on our behalf. This will not only engender community cohesion and community led intervention, it will help with job creation in Northumberland.



### ***Transformation of our Assets***

The way the council designs, commissions and maintains its estate will have significant potential to enable the council to deliver its strategic priorities

Improving the quality, design and location of our front-facing assets will act as a significant lever to improve the integration and quality of customer services to residents in Northumberland. Furthermore, the way our customer facing assets look and feel will act as a powerful mechanism in communicating our brand to Northumberland.

Furthermore, strategically planning our assets can significantly improve the efficiency of service delivery across all areas of our operations. For example, smarter and leaner office accommodation, facilitated by effective information systems and agile working policies will reduce our overall need for assets, thereby reducing the cost of service delivery.

Furthermore sharing our assets with partner organisations can assist in both improving the customer service offer to Northumberland and the efficiency of services. In addition, reducing the overall footprint of our assets, improving their design and their energy and management systems will reduce our own carbon emissions.

Exploring mechanisms such as Community Asset Transfers to local councils and community organisations will also assist in our strategic aim of promoting a mixed economy of service provision in Northumberland and the strategic acquisition and management of assets can enable the growth of new markets and economic opportunities e.g. renewable technologies.

However it should be noted that many of our assets are not fit-for-purpose and many carry significant back-log maintenance issues. Therefore the council needs to ensure that its responsibilities relating to property are appropriately discharged.

We therefore needs to transform our estate based on the service, community and technical needs for our citizens and communities. This will then enable the council to commission and deliver assets based on these requirements. Assets will also become more efficient, greener and more attractive. Much of this work will be facilitated by working at the strategically level with the Systems and People elements of the transformation programme so that new working practices such as agile working and new technology is fully developed as part of the Asset Transformation programme



