

Council (Plan) Governance Framework
Final Version
12th June 2013



A document to explain how Flintshire County Council is run and governed, our priorities and values, and internal roles and responsibilities in the governance of the organisation.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| INTRODUCTION AND FORWARD | 3 |
| 1. THE COUNCIL AND DEMOCRACY..... | 4 |
| 2. ORGANISATIONAL VISION AND VALUES | 9 |
| <i>Having Vision and Setting Priorities</i> | 9 |
| <i>The Regional vision</i> | 9 |
| <i>The County Vision and priorities</i> | 9 |
| <i>The local Council priorities.....</i> | 10 |
| <i>Organisational Values.....</i> | 10 |
| 3. RESOURCES..... | 12 |
| 3.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy..... | 12 |
| 3.2 People Strategy and Workforce Engagement | 13 |
| <i>Purpose</i> | 13 |
| <i>Key Themes and Strategic Objectives</i> | 14 |
| 3.3 Asset Management Plan..... | 15 |
| <i>Purpose</i> | 15 |
| <i>Principles</i> | 16 |
| <i>Context</i> | 17 |
| <i>Consolidation</i> | 17 |
| 3.4 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy .. | 17 |
| <i>Purpose</i> | 17 |
| <i>Principles</i> | 17 |
| <i>Context</i> | 18 |
| <i>Objectives</i> | 18 |
| <i>Essential Parts of the Strategy.....</i> | 19 |
| 3.5 Procurement Strategy | 19 |
| 3.6 Health and Safety | 20 |
| 3.7 Organisational Change Strategy: ‘Flintshire Futures’ | 20 |
| 3.8 Corporate Services support and functions | 22 |
| <i>i. Finance</i> | 22 |
| <i>ii. HR and Organisational Development</i> | 22 |
| <i>iii. ICT and Customer Services.....</i> | 25 |
| <i>iv. Legal and Democratic.....</i> | 25 |
| 4. BUSINESS PROCESSES..... | 27 |
| 4.1. Business Planning and Review | 27 |
| <i>Service and Directorate Planning.....</i> | 27 |
| <i>Resource Planning.....</i> | 29 |
| 4.2 Risk Management | 30 |
| <i>Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges.....</i> | 30 |
| <i>Operational Risks.....</i> | 31 |
| <i>Business Continuity Plans</i> | 31 |
| 4.3 Regulation and Assurance..... | 31 |
| <i>Internal Audit Plan.....</i> | 32 |
| <i>Regulatory Plan</i> | 33 |

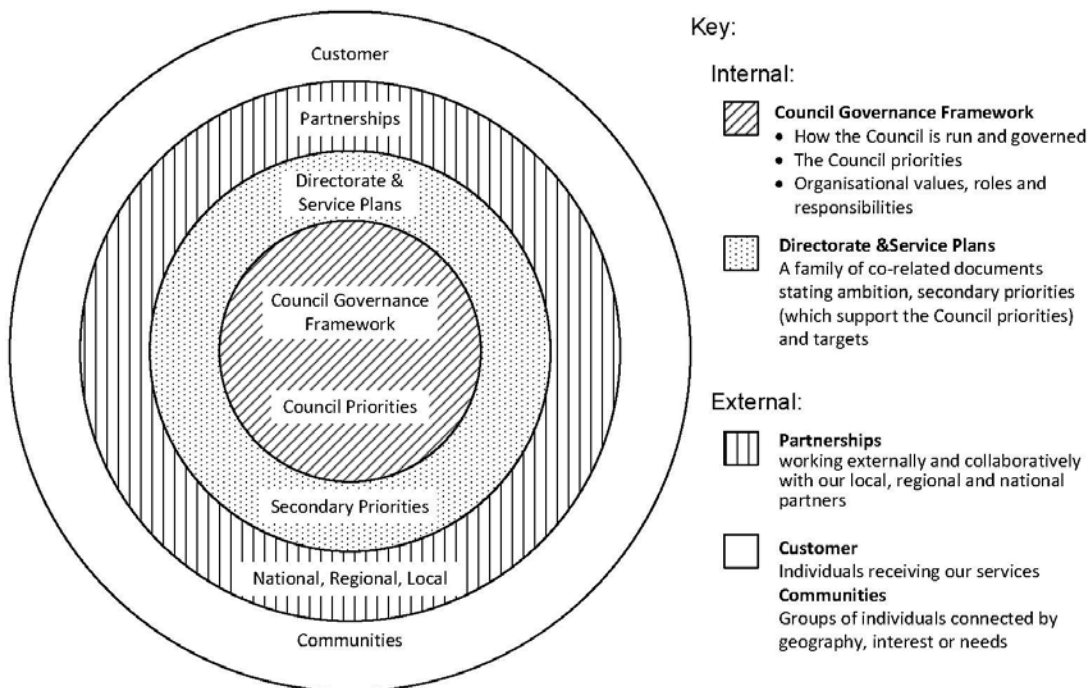
| | |
|--|-----------|
| 5. CUSTOMER SERVICES AND CITIZENSHIP | 35 |
| 5.1 Customer Services Strategy | 35 |
| <i>Purpose</i> | <i>35</i> |
| <i>Principles</i> | <i>35</i> |
| <i>Context</i> | <i>35</i> |
| <i>Strategic Priorities</i> | <i>36</i> |
| 5.2 Communications and Engagement | 37 |
| 5.3 Equalities and Welsh Language | 38 |
| | |
| 6. PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION | 39 |
| 6.1 National..... | 39 |
| 6.2 Regional..... | 39 |
| 6.3 Local | 40 |
| <i>Flintshire Local Service Board</i> | <i>40</i> |
| <i>Partnership Engagement</i> | <i>41</i> |

INTRODUCTION AND FORWARD

Flintshire County Council has adopted a Council Planning Framework which is a family of co-related documents which state ambition, priorities and targets against a governance framework of values, roles and responsibilities.

This Council (Plan) Governance Framework provides a compendium of documents to explain how Flintshire County Council is run and governed, our priorities and values, and roles and responsibilities in governance.

It takes us on a journey from the core of the organisation; its priorities and values, through to how these are reflected in the Directorates and services, and how we work with and interact with partners, our customers and our communities.

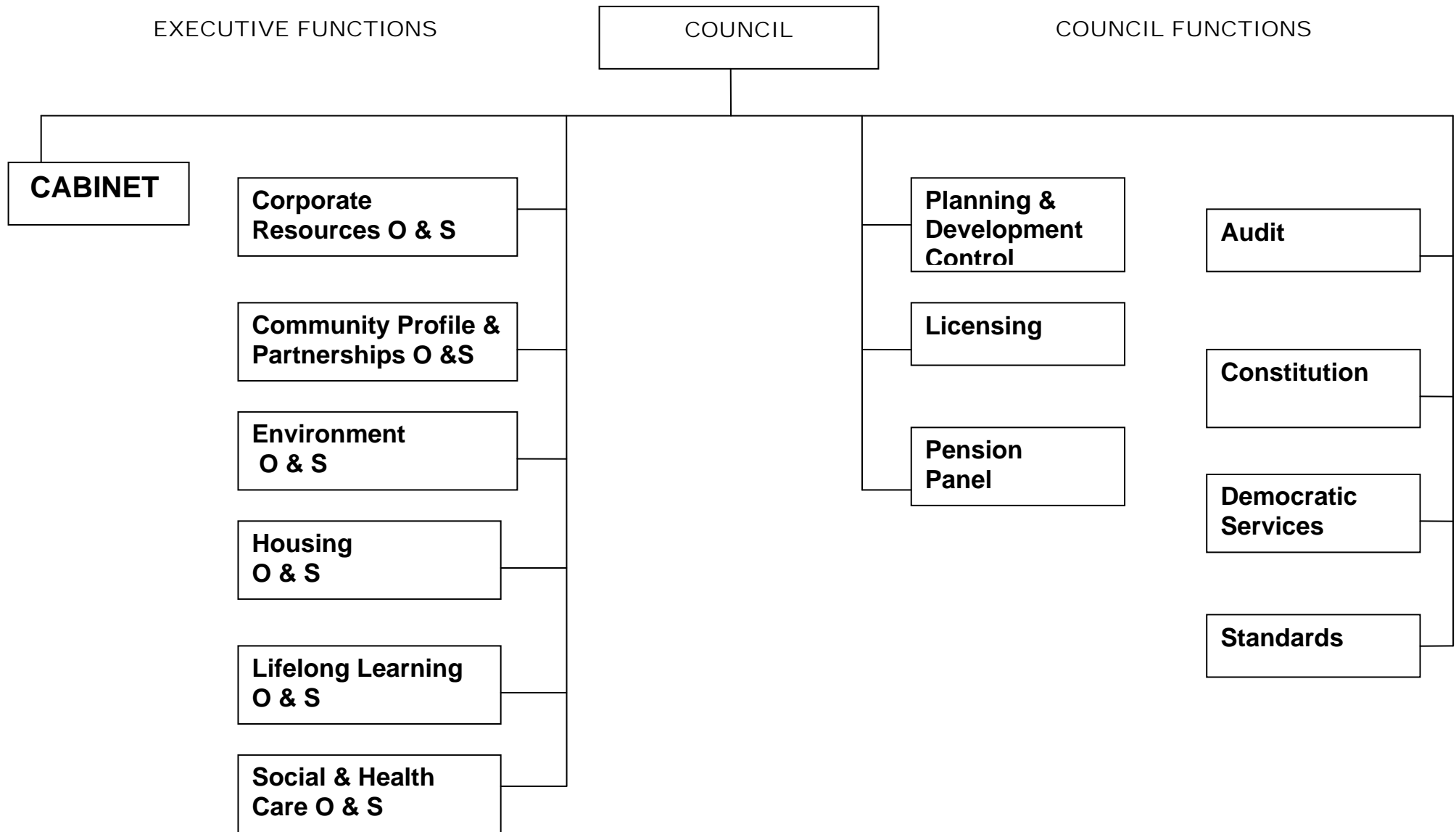


1. THE COUNCIL AND DEMOCRACY

Flintshire County Council is a corporate body created by the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. As a Unitary Authority it is responsible for all the functions of a principal authority within its boundaries. It is composed of 70 Councillors usually elected every four years. Councillors are democratically accountable to residents of their electoral divisions; their overriding duty is to the whole community of Flintshire alongside a special duty to their constituents including those who did not vote for them.

The Council has agreed a constitution which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable. Some of these processes are required by law, while others are for the Council to choose.

Following a consultation exercise in the year 2000 the Council adopted a Leader and Cabinet system of governance. Under this system the Cabinet makes decisions within a framework decided upon by the Council as a whole. Decisions on a limited number of high level policies and plans and the budget are reserved to the Council itself. Overview and Scrutiny Committees are appointed to hold the Cabinet to account in relation to performance, advice on policy formation and review areas of Council activity.



Councillors have to agree to follow a code of conduct to ensure high standards in the way they undertake their duties. The Monitoring Officer trains and advises Councillors on the code of conduct.

The Standards Committee promotes high standards of conduct and support Members' observation of their Code of Conduct.

The Council elects a Chair to be its civic head at its annual meeting in May. The role of the Chair is distinct from that of Leader of the Council who is also elected at the annual meeting. The Leader appoints Members of the Cabinet and agrees their respective roles and responsibilities (portfolios). At present the Cabinet Portfolios are as follows:-

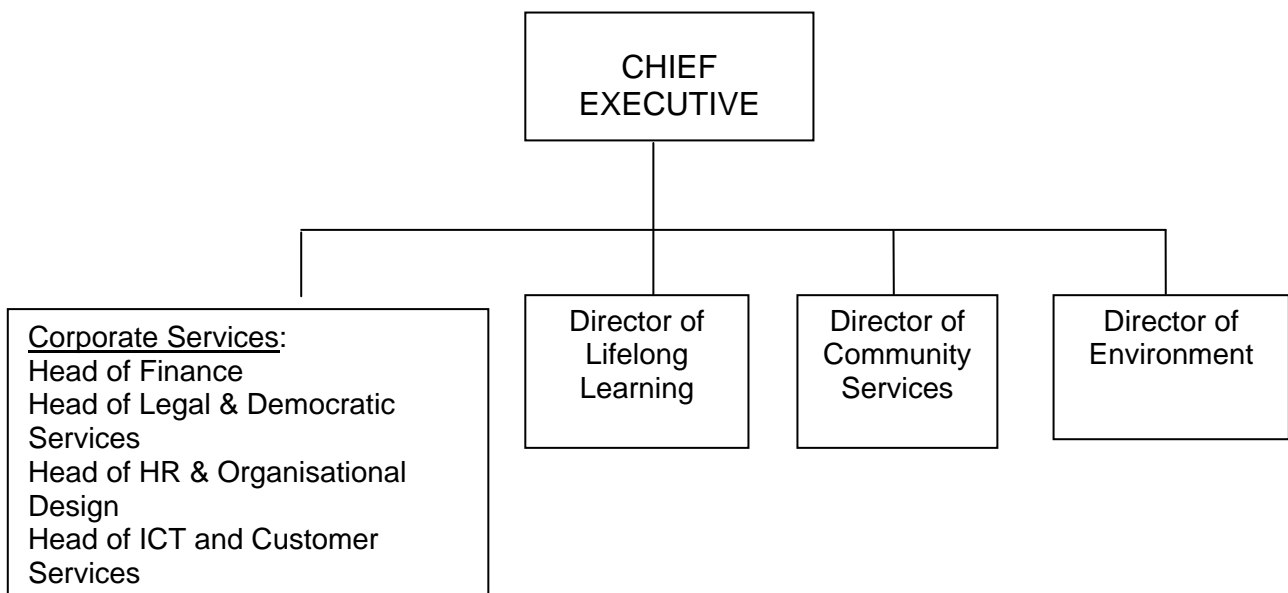
- Leader and Finance
- Deputy Leader and Environment
- Housing
- Social Services
- Regeneration, Enterprise and Leisure
- Public Protection, Waste and Recycling
- Corporate Management
- Education

Planning decisions are made by the Planning and Development Control Committee and the Council has appointed an Appeals Committee, Audit Committee and a Licensing Committee to deal with particular areas of work.

The Constitution Committee's terms of reference include matters relating to corporate governance and the Constitution. The Constitution describes how the Council operates, how decisions are made and contains the procedures which must be followed to ensure that decisions are transparent and that those making them are accountable to local people.

The Council aims to be as open as possible in terms of sharing access to information both with Councillors and with members of the public. Accordingly members of the public are welcome to observe meetings of the Council, its committees and the Cabinet except in exceptional circumstances, for example when personal or commercially sensitive information is being discussed.

The Council's workforce is lead by the Chief Executive (who is Head of the Paid Service) and the Corporate Management Team set out below:-



The Head of Finance is also the Council's Statutory Section 151 Officer responsible for financial propriety within the Council and the Head of Legal & Democratic Services is the Statutory Monitoring Officer responsible for ensuring the lawfulness and fairness of decision making.

The Council is required to conduct a review, at least annually, of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and this is published in the Annual Governance Statement which is also required to reflect the Council's corporate governance environment as described in the Code of Corporate Governance.

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance describes how the Council seeks to achieve six important objectives:-

- Being purposeful to achieve outcomes for the community and creating and achieving a vision for the local area.
- Members and Officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.
- Promoting values for the Authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.
- Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk.
- Developing the capacity and capability of Members and Officers to be effective.
- Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust accountability.

The Code is updated annually and the Code revised as necessary.

The Council is an active member of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), a representative body, which promotes better local government in Wales, its reputation and supports authorities in the development of policies and priorities that will improve public services and democracy. The WLGA is the main interface between local government in Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government. There are also a number of influential national professional bodies which meet on a regular basis to co-ordinate activity and develop policy across Wales.

The Council has various roles in a number of other national, regional and local partnerships – see section 6. Within these partnerships the Council may have a representative democratic role i.e. where elected individuals (our Councillors) represent the people, or the partnerships themselves may undertake direct engagement with individuals or communities to contribute towards assessing need and setting priorities. More information on consultation and engagement can be found in Section 5.

2. ORGANISATIONAL VISION AND VALUES

Having Vision and Setting Priorities

The Council sets a vision for the future state of the society it serves and for public service at three levels:-

- the Regional level as a partner
- the County level as a partner
- the Local level as a provider and a commissioner of public services.

The Regional vision

The Regional vision is set with the five regional local authorities and the key statutory partner agencies in North Wales. The regional vision is based on:-

- improving the quality of life and opportunity in the region
- improving public services in the region
- promoting collaboration for the most efficient and effective use of the resources of the partners
- promoting the interests of the region nationally and internationally

The vision (**Community Strategy 2009 - 2019**) and priorities are set and managed by a Regional Leadership Board which brings together the lay and professional heads of Conwy, Denbighshire Flintshire, Gwynedd, Wrexham and Ynys Mon and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, North Wales Fire and Rescue and North Wales Police.

The County Vision and priorities

These are set by the Flintshire Local Services Board (LSB) – see section 6 - for the aspirations of the County partners for the future state of Flintshire and its public services.

The current County Vision (**Community Strategy 2009 - 2019**) has five priorities:-

- economic prosperity
- health improvement
- learning and skills for life
- living sustainably
- safe and supportive communities

The Vision was reviewed and refreshed during 2012 to respond to new challenges and better integrate partners' strategies in the solution of specific cross-partner issues such as 'Effective Services for Vulnerable Groups'.

From this review the LSB has identified four priorities:-

1. Lead by example as employers and community leaders
2. People are safe
3. Vulnerable people have their support needs met and their wellbeing is promoted and enhanced.
4. Organisational environmental practices

The local Council priorities

The local Council priorities guide the aims and activities of the Council as a provider and a commissioner of services are set by the Council.

The Council draws its priorities from a number of sources:-

- Local democratic choice
- Customer feedback
- The priorities of local partner organisations
- The priorities of regional partner organisations
- Welsh Government policy
- Statutory requirements
- The recommendations of regulatory bodies
- Welsh Local Government Association collective decisions
- The standards set of comparative performance
- Good practice and peer influence

The Council's priorities are supported by the more detailed set of sub-priorities set out in the three Directorate Plans for the Community Services, Environment and Lifelong Learning Directorates and the four corporate resources plans for Assets, Finance, ICT and People. A set of ten priorities were endorsed in June 2011 and have been subject to annual review.

The priorities are classed as the 'Improvement Objectives' of the Council as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The priorities are set out in the Improvement Plan and performance against them is evaluated and reported on twice yearly.

The priorities are open to continuous review and partner organisations and the communities and stakeholders are consulted on the relevance of priorities and the adequacy of our action plans and ambitions periodically.

Organisational Values

Flintshire County Council aims to be a modern public body which has the **philosophy** of operating as a social business which:-

- is lean, modern, efficient and effective
- is designed, organised and operates to meet the needs of communities and the customer
- works with its partners to achieve the highest possible standards of public service for the well-being of Flintshire as a County

To meet these aspirations the Council has set the **standards** of:-

- achieving excellence in corporate governance and reputation
- achieving excellence in performance against both our own targets and against those of high performing peer organisations
- being modern and flexible, constantly adapting to provide the highest standards of public, customer, and client service and support
- using its four resources - money, assets, people and information - strategically, effectively and efficiently
- embracing and operating the leanest, least bureaucratic, efficient and effective business systems and processes

To achieve these standards the Council's **behaviours** are:-

- showing strategic leadership both of the organisation and our partnerships
- continuously challenging, reviewing, changing and modernising the way we do things
- being as lean and un-bureaucratic as possible
- using new technology to its maximum advantage
- using flexible working to its maximum advantage

The Council is committed to the **principles** of being:-

- a modern, fair and caring employer
- fair, equitable and inclusive in its policies and practices
- conscientious in planning and managing its activities, and making decisions, in a sustainable way

3. RESOURCES

3.1 Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Council has a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) (**Medium Term Financial Strategy**) which integrates financial planning with strategic and service planning for Council services on a medium (3 year) and longer term basis (over 3 years).

The MTFS provides a framework for the financial principles through which revenue and capital resources will be forecast, organised and managed to deliver the Council's vision and strategic objectives.

The key financial objectives of the MTFS are to:

- Ensure revenue and capital resources are targeted to achieve the Council's priorities and strategic objectives
- Fully integrate revenue and capital expenditure plans
- Maintain Council Tax increases to affordable levels
- Optimise opportunities for income generation from fees, charges and grants
- Maintain an appropriate level of reserves and provisions
- Provide strong financial services, systems and processes to deliver and support the strategy and annual balance budgets

The Council has a net Council Fund budget of £258m in 2013/14, with a total budget of £293m when funding from specific and unhypothecated grants are included. The annual capital programme is in the order of £30m when funding from specific grants is included.

Around 80% of the funding for Council services comes from Welsh Government (WG) through Revenue Support Grant. In 2013/14, the Council's funding (adjusted for transfers) increased by 1.2%. However, from this the Council needs to fund the pressures of inflation, demographic growth and service demands, the impacts of the economic downturn to protect services, and also find resources to fund Council priorities for improvement.

Faced with this financial challenge, the Council adopted a budget strategy which:

- challenged and compressed identified service/budget pressures by drawing on evidence-based forecasting and a risk management approach.
- reviewed previous year decisions on pressures and efficiencies and revised them to meet current need.
- took a targeted approach to the allocation of inflation
- reviewed the 2012/13 in-year position on an ongoing basis to identify challenges and opportunities for 2013/14.
- reviewed the adequacy of reserves and balances

- progressed the work streams within the Flintshire Futures Programme to help achieve efficiency targets.

However, despite the above it was still necessary to identify £5.4m of new efficiencies to set a balanced budget.

Significant pressure on public sector finances is expected to continue to the end of the decade through a combination of UK Fiscal Policy, a flat economy and increasing demands and expectations for key services.

Whilst the Council has an indicative level of funding for 2014/15 from Welsh Government, it's funding from the UK Treasury has subsequently been reduced. As a result of this, it is highly probable that the indicative allocation will be reduced which will impact on the projected budget shortfall in future years (£29m over 5 years as per 2013/14 budget report)

In addition to the pressures on the revenue budget, capital funding constraints also continue, and the Council is having to look to other ways of securing capital funding to finance major investment,

The Council recognises that strategic financial planning is critical to matching financial resources to priorities and improvement objectives and to ensure the sustainability of service delivery.

The Medium Term Financial Plan forecasts funding levels and resource requirements over the medium term, identifies the gap between the two and enables specific actions to be identified to balance the budget and manage resources.

The Council's organisational strategies and plans and its financial strategies and plans must work in tandem to inform each other of resource, demand and availability.

Our *Flintshire Futures* Programme to modernise services and further reduce operating costs will be key to continued investment in front line services whilst managing the constraints on public finances which are set to continue for some years to come.

3.2 People Strategy and Workforce Engagement

Purpose

The People Strategy for 2009 – 13 sets out the Council's vision and strategic objectives for effective organisational change and modernisation, improved leadership and management practice, increased performance and productivity, updated working practices and pay and reward arrangements. The delivery of the strategy is the collective responsibility of the Council from Elected Members and the Corporate Management to front line employees, with the Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR and OD) team providing specialist expertise, advice and support. The strategy plays an important part in the achievement of the Council's aspirations, ambitions and values of being a modern, high performing and trusted public sector organisation.

Key Themes and Strategic Objectives

In developing the strategy, five key themes (branded as the Five C Model) have been identified which reflect the challenges and priorities for the Council over the three year life cycle. In addition, the strategy and underpinning Action Plan encompasses new programmes and priorities under the Workforce Workstream of the Council's Flintshire Futures Programme. The themes, with the associated strategic objectives, are as follows:

Customers:

- To ensure that employees have the skills, knowledge and behaviours to deliver accessible, responsive, customer focused services to meet customer expectations
- To design our organisation to meet the requirements of our customers, ensuring that our structures are shaped with the primary aim of delivering excellent customer services
- To develop a 'world class' HR service; supporting the facilitation of change; developing and retaining talent in the organisation
- Supporting the delivery of strategic objectives and the provision of responsive transactional HR services to achieve customer excellence

Change:

- To ensure that managers are confident and competent in being able to lead and manage change effectively
- To promote a culture whereby employees and teams understand and participate in organisational change
- To achieve planned organisational change, and on-going modernisation, throughout business practices and service planning
- To create and design a framework for managing change effectively

Capacity:

- To promote desired behaviours, in line with the 'Flintshire Competency Dictionary', across the organisation
- To remodel the workforce as part of corporate and service planning to ensure we have the right people with the right skills, at in the right place at the right time
- To promote succession and continuity planning; identifying the potential and nurturing talent at every level of the organisation
- To develop key skills, experience and knowledge for employees to support the delivery of services now and in the future

Consolidation:

- To enhance Flintshire's reputation as a 'modern employer of first choice' to attract and retain talent within a highly competitive labour market
- To ensure we set and meet high standards in organisational, team and individual performance through sound people management practice, applying consistent practice in attendance management, performance appraisals and recruitment
- To provide and maintain a fair and equitable reward strategy to recognise and reward the contributions of employees and to support the organisation in recruitment and retention

Collaboration:

- To continue to develop and maintain a positive employee relations culture by promoting open and effective partnership working with trades unions
- To lead collaborative working innovative and responsive Human Resources shared solutions across the North Wales region
- To work collaboratively with stakeholders (elected members, trade unions, employees, directorate management teams and corporate management team) to promote a culture in which collaborative working is pursued when appropriate
- To develop good practice principles and capacity to lead and participate effectively and successfully in collaborative working projects
- To promote mobility across the public sector to achieve workforce planning, protect recruitment and retention and develop talent

The strategy is designed to ensure that as a Council, we are able to adapt flexibly to the challenging pace of change within the public sector but also to respond to the changing context of local government at a local, regional and national level.

The delivery of priorities under the strategy are monitored and managed in accordance with the Council's corporate project management approach and update reports on progress are considered by the Corporate Management Team and Elected Members on a regular basis. The specific people objectives which relate to service delivery are incorporated into Directorate Plans, and are tailored to meet the specific priorities of the directorate and individual services accordingly.

3.3 Asset Management Plan

Purpose

The Corporate Asset Management Plan seeks to deliver a comprehensive Asset Management function adopting a corporate strategic approach. The Council's

assets exist for the benefit of the whole authority and are utilised by all service areas without exception, consequently there must be clear linkages with service areas and wider corporate aims and priorities.

We need to align our asset provision with future service delivery requirements, consider new ways of working and be prepared to effect large scale changes so that we can rationalise our property holdings. These objectives also need to take account of wider Public Sector reform. Opportunities to add value are likely to be created through working strategically with other Public Sector partners so that we are able to maximise and create strategic mergers of land or assets. The continuing and challenging economic climate is likely to remain in the foreseeable future and requires a significant, more developed and innovative approaches to the delivery of our services.

Principles

In light of the strategic importance that land and property has for the Council's future, the Corporate Asset Management Plan sets out a five year vision for our land and property assets. It identifies and considers internal and external drivers and influences affecting our assets. It seeks to address key challenges by the identification of ten work areas which will be developed over this period and which will result in real improvements and efficiencies.

There are ten key areas which are major strategic drivers for change:-

- Collaboration – working Locally, Regionally and Nationally
- Corporate thinking – Developing stronger cross Directorate thinking and a Corporate approach to asset management ensuring those strategic linkages to IT Strategy, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Flintshire Futures, Community Asset Transfers and other key strategies and drivers for change
- Re-think our Accommodation – Challenging its current use and creating opportunities, flexible space and increasing utilisation
- Accommodation Management – Managing our assets more effectively working strategically and using accommodation to catalyse change
- Service Asset Management Planning – using robust asset management planning to deliver change and create opportunities
- Agile and Mobile Working – To release space, create flexibility and support modern methods of working
- Property Review and Rationalisation – using this to challenge property and land holdings, its location, why its held and supporting delivery of services to the heart of the community for example through Flintshire Connects
- Sustainability – using sustainable methods of construction and infrastructure, locating assets where community need is greatest and ensuring connectivity to sustainable and effective transport networks
- Data Management – using robust data to support sound management decisions which add value and make a difference to the Communities that we serve
- Performance Management – using performance information to benchmark within the public sector, add challenge and inform understanding

Context

There is a clear need to explore the potential benefits collaborative working can bring. We continue to identify synergies within the public sector and develop a framework within which Asset Management becomes a cross-cutting issue. Integrated within the Flintshire Futures workstream there is fundamental review of our approach to customer contact and the rationalisation of our current asset base. Multiple contact points often exist within our towns where Council service can be accessed; this can create confusion for our customers. The creation of single multi-functional modern access centres through 'Flintshire Connects' will assist in consolidating current accommodation, generate opportunities for capital receipt generation and revenue savings and lead to a much leaner property asset base from which to operate. Opportunities to join and deliver services with other Public Sector and Third Sector partners will further assist in developing a more joined up approach.

A number of assets in our ownership, which will become surplus as a direct result of our rationalisation plans, may have significant community value. We will seek to encourage local communities to manage this accommodation and our approach will be facilitated through our emerging Community Asset Transfer Policy.

Consolidation

Assets is one of the 5 key themes within the Flintshire Futures Programme of activity and is a critical path function influencing a number of other aspects of Council service delivery and driving change. It has strong linkage to IT, Human Resources, Agile and Mobile Working, our plans for delivering Flintshire Connects to the hearts of our towns. This consolidation is predicated on significant rationalisation of our current land and property holdings to create a lean enabling and supporting infrastructure from which we will deliver modern and integrated 21st Century Public Sector Services.

3.4 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy

Purpose

The purpose of the ICT Strategy is to plan the development and use of ICT to support the Council, in delivering its priorities for change and improvement. ICT is a key enabler for internal change and collaboration, and provides opportunities to improve services and improve how they are delivered to and accessed by our customers. A comprehensive Information Management Strategy and Web Development Strategy are also in place which complements the ICT Strategy.

Principles

The principles on which the ICT Strategy is based are:

- Flexibility – responsive to change.
- Innovation – exploiting the potential of new developments and technologies, including supporting new ways of working.
- Accessible and customer focused – recognising the important role of ICT in communicating with and providing services directly to the public and providing choice of access channels to meet the needs of individuals.

- Partnership – maximising the potential benefits of partnership and collaborative working.
- Value for Money & Efficiency – continuing to deliver relevant, cost effective and efficient services.
- Reliability – ensuring that ICT services are available for use when required.
- Security – ensuring that we protect the Council’s information assets and all personal information we hold regarding our customers.
- Valuing and Developing our staff – equipping staff with the skills and knowledge to enable them to make effective use of ICT
- Standards – ensure that all technologies and developments adhere to locally and nationally defined standards.

Context

The Councils ICT infrastructure is robust, resilient and makes use of modern tried and tested technologies. However the budget pressures we will face for the foreseeable future will restrict our ability to keep our technology architecture up to date and meet demand. This is increasingly an issue as services expect more from ICT and ICT is being seen as a key enabler of service improvement and efficiency.

These expectations and additional demands require investment to ensure increases in capacity, the implementation of new and improved technology and the replacement of business systems. We must ensure that we prioritise investment in to those technologies which will deliver real efficiency gains which can be reinvested in frontline services. We will need to ensure that the Council’s medium term financial strategy reflects this investment and planned efficiency gains.

Objectives

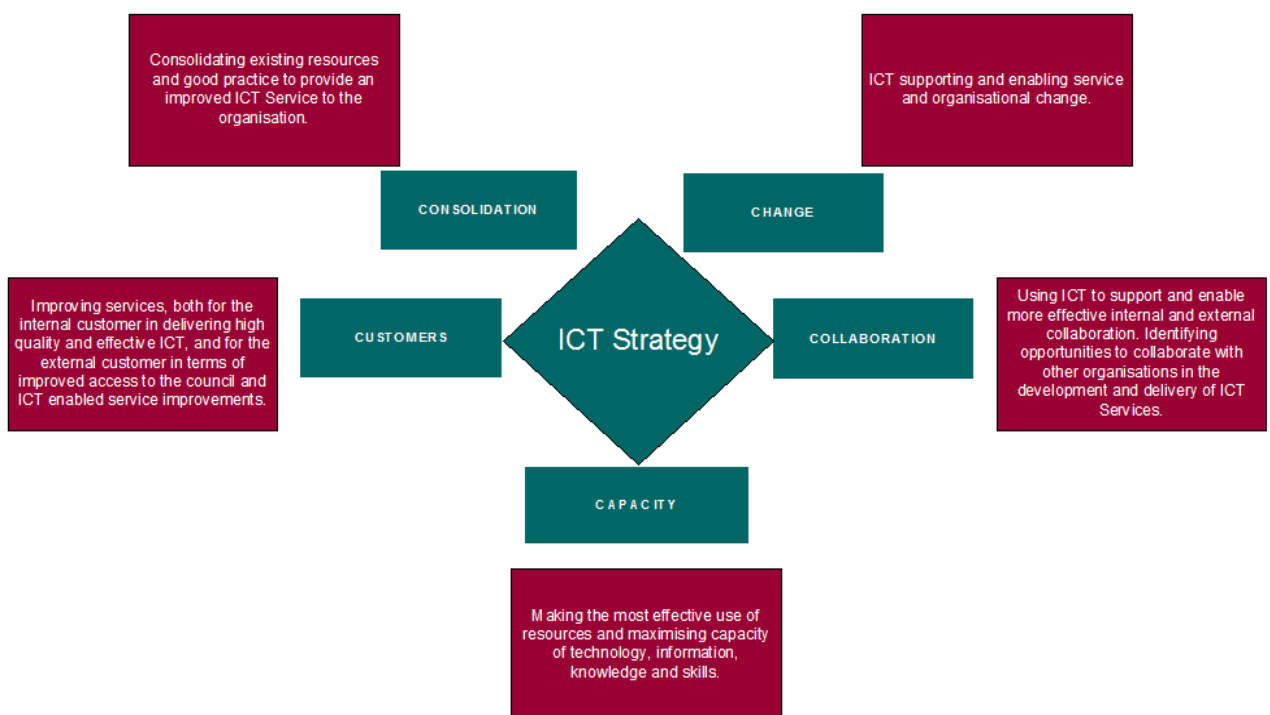
The objectives of the ICT strategy are to:

- underpin the Flintshire Community Strategy, the Council Plan (Governance) Framework and Directorate/Service Plans.
- provide a highly available, resilient, flexible and secure ICT infrastructure to meet the Council’s business requirements.
- develop, implement and support information systems that meet the Council’s business needs.
- provide and support a comprehensive communications infrastructure to enable the Council to deliver its vision for Customer contact and accessibility.
- ensure the potential benefits offered by emerging technologies are maximised.
- ensure that all Council staff have the skills to use and exploit the ICT services provided to them.
- provide the customer with greater choice as to how, when and where they access the Council.
- enable the resolution of enquiries, requests for service and any other matters at the first point of contact with the Council.
- facilitate collaborative and partnership working.

Essential Parts of the Strategy

The ICT Strategy sets out a vision for the use of ICT within the organisation and how it supports service improvement and our change and improvement programme (Flintshire Futures). However we are realistic in terms of what can be achieved with the resources available to us.

The strategy is centred on the 5 C Model, as shown below. Key priorities are identified for each section of the strategy and these are reflected in the ICT divisional service plan. The strategy is business focussed it avoids the use of technical jargon and focuses on how ICT can support the organisation and services in delivering their priorities. Obviously there has to be a technical route map to support this strategy and this is set out in the Council's Technology Blueprint which is published on InfoNet.



The strategy is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it reflects the Council's priorities for change and improvement, the financial strategy, national direction and changes in legislation. A full review of the strategy is scheduled during 2013/14.

3.5 Procurement Strategy

This Council's Procurement Strategy sets out a framework for procurement across the Council, ensuring that all procurement activities operate within the context of value for money, efficiency and continuous improvement, and support the Council's aims and objectives.

The Council spends in excess of £100 million a year on the external procurement of goods, works and services. It is vital that all procurement activity is managed and co-ordinated to obtain value for money on all procured goods, services and works.

The Procurement Strategy sits alongside the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy and identifies the need for a corporate approach to procurement linked to the drive for efficiencies. Procurement is a key workstream in Flintshire Futures, our change and improvement programme, underpinned by modern e-sourcing and purchase to pay systems with the objectives to simplify, standardise and automate procurement activities across the council.

The Council's Vision for Procurement which is reflected in this strategy is:

"To deliver value for money for all procured goods, works and services, through smarter, sustainable and commercial procurement practice which is strategically managed and maximises opportunities for sustainability, collaboration, partnering and exploitation of technology to support the aims and objectives of the Council and the wider national agenda."

We actively participate in collaborative procurement activity on a regional and increasingly on a sub-regional level with Denbighshire. We are also committed to the new National Procurement Service which starts in November, 2013.

3.6 Health and Safety

The Council has a corporate occupational health and safety policy and safety management system within which the Council:-

- recognises and accepts the duties and responsibilities as an employer with regard to the health and safety of each of its employees and all others who may be affected by the Authority's activities.
- endeavours to meet the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and other associated legislation as far as is reasonably practicable.
- determines roles and responsibilities for the health and safety of employees and the workplace
- provides process and procedures for communication, monitoring and review
- determines the training and support required to reduce risks and contribute to a safe and healthy working environment
- develops a positive health and safety culture that is committed to continual improvement as a modern employer and to meet the changes in legislation and public expectation

The policy is reviewed annually and is supported by a governance framework to facilitate and monitor the strategic development and progress of health and safety practice and the health and safety culture within the Council.

3.7 Organisational Change Strategy: 'Flintshire Futures'

In 2010 the Council adopted *Flintshire Futures* as a programme to promote further organisational change and re-design to achieve the maximum financial efficiencies. This programme follows two earlier phases of organisational change

and re-design. The first, in 2007/08, formed the new directorates based on a new business model for the Council. The second, from 2008/09, introduced a number of service reviews to redesign selected services, introduced new business and efficiency driving systems and extended our commitments to regional collaboration. The *Flintshire Futures* programme is the third and latest phase which builds on these earlier two phases and takes them further.

Goals and Milestones for maximising the use of our resources have been developed as part of the *Flintshire Futures* programme (**finance, workforce, customer, procurement and assets principles**).

The *Flintshire Futures* programme has four parts which, taken together, will further modernise and change the organisation, make efficiencies and improve the resilience and quality of services.

The four parts are:-

- Corporate Change: centrally led corporate projects which affect the whole organisation e.g. systems, lean working, procurement, costs of employment
- Service Change: service led projects which affect specific services and functions e.g. transforming social services for adults
- Regional Collaboration: regional and sub-regional collaborative projects with other councils and other public sector partners e.g. school improvement services
- Local County Collaboration: county level collaborative projects with public and third sector partners e.g. carbon reduction and maximising opportunities/anti-poverty

The *Flintshire Futures* Programme has the aims of:-

- creating a modern and flexible organisation which makes the best use of its resources
- making the greatest possible efficiencies and savings to limit the impact of reducing public sector funds on local services
- improving local services and access to them and achieving the highest possible performance standards

The *Flintshire Futures* Programme is designed to:-

- maximise the benefits from collaboration with others
- maximise the benefits from organisational change and modernisation

The Corporate Change elements of the programme were refreshed and subject to internal and external challenge in early 2012. They are now grouped around five distinct sub-programmes Assets, Customer, Finance, Procurement and Workforce. The achievement of our projected cumulative efficiencies from the Flintshire Futures Programme will be critical to our Medium Term Financial Plan

and our ability to manage our finances for 2013/14 onwards given the indicative local government settlements set by the Welsh Assembly Government for 2013/14 and 2014/15 and our forecast budget pressures and needs.

3.8 Corporate Services support and functions

i. Finance

The Finance Division carries out four major functions:-

- Corporate Finance
- Internal Audit
- Revenues & Benefits
- Clwyd Pension Fund

Corporate Finance and Internal Audit are responsible for support services to internal customers, whilst Revenues & Benefits and Clwyd Pension Fund provide services to external customers.

Corporate Finance contributes to the overall financial management of the Council through the Medium Term Financial Strategy; budget preparation, monitoring and the production of the annual financial accounts; technical accounting, treasury management, banking, tax advice and insurance.

Internal Audit provides an internal audit and assurance function across all council services and systems, as well as investigations into areas of irregularity and the provision of advice to management.

The Revenues & Benefits Service administers Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing and Council Tax Benefits on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions, benefit fraud investigations, cash collection and debt recovery services to taxpayers, claimants and those paying monies to the Council.

The Clwyd Pension Fund is managed by the Council on a lead authority basis, providing Pension Fund benefits administration and Pension Fund investment activities to Flintshire County Council, Denbighshire County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council and a range of smaller scheduled and admitted bodies in the scheme.

ii. HR and Organisational Development

The HR and OD service carries out the following functions for the whole Council, including Schools:

- Human Resources Business Partnering
- Employment Services (including all HR and Payroll transactional support and Systems Management)
- Organisational Development (including Organisation Design, Policy Development, Learning and Development, Job Evaluation and Pay and Reward)
- Single Status

- Occupational Health and Well-Being Services

Human Resources Business Partnering and HR Advice

- Proactively identifying areas where HR can add value and identify solutions in support of strategic goals and improved organisational and service performance as HR Business Partners
- Develop a high level of understanding of Directorate-specific service issues and provide 'expert' HR advice to actively support service delivery and ensure that Corporate and Directorate needs are considered and provided for.
- Contribute to the design and review of HR Policies and Procedures in accordance with employment legislation and the organisation's strategic aims and objectives (People Strategy) and support the implementation of these across the organisation
- Provide strategic support on a full range of HR activities including organisational change, workforce planning, senior recruitment, performance management arrangements including support in setting 'people' targets, service planning (focusing on people element)
- Develop and maintain partnership with Joint Trades Unions ensuring consultation and communication practices are routinely adopted during HR activities to ensure that all issues are properly presented and maximum opportunity of representation is available
- Provide advice, guidance and 'hands on' support to managers in the implementation and application of HR policies and procedures including recruitment, attendance management, individual performance management (capability procedure), disciplinary, grievance and Dignity at Work case work
- Maintain effective and constructive relationships with Trade Union colleagues and work in partnership for early resolution of employee relation issues
- Support managers in the implementation of service reviews, including assimilation and consultation processes
- Support and coach managers in sound people management practice in applying HR policies and procedures

Employment Service Centre

- Provide transactional support to all employees and Members (payroll services) on the full range of employment activities, including payroll services, recruitment, advice on terms and conditions of employment, contracts of employment, advice and support on HR policies and procedures including flexible and early retirement, exit interviews, annual leave provisions, establishment control, attendance management, maternity and adoption leave, carers policy, professional subscriptions advice and processing
- Provide payroll services to external payroll contracts on behalf of the relevant employer
- Administration of Child Care Voucher and Cycle to Work Schemes
- Advice and guidance on disclosures and processing of Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks

System Management Team (Part of Employment Services Team)

- Control, maintain and support the HRMIS (Midland Trent System) to ensure the integrity and security of the data
- Provide the link between all system users and the ICT technical support team

Organisational Development

- Provide specialised guidance, advice and support on the design of service structures and job roles and the options for alternative service delivery models
- Design and review of the HR policies and procedures in line with employment legislation
- Development, delivery and maintenance of the Council's Pay and Reward arrangement and strategy
- Maintenance and development of the Management Development Framework (in line with the People Strategy) to provide a career / development pathway for Supervisor to Leadership level
- Delivery and design of People Development Programmes to develop employees at every level in the organisation, incorporating "Essential Skills" development in every programme
- Identification and provision of Work Experience opportunities
- Commissioning of equalities training and development for the organisation
- Delivery and development of the Modern Trainee Programme.

Single Status Team

- Design and implementation of an equality proofed pay and grading structure
- Implementation of a Single Status Collective Agreement, in partnership with the Joint Trades Unions
- Job evaluation processing and advice and support to managers on GLPC Scheme

Occupational Health and Well-Being Service

- Deliver a professional and modern Occupational Health Service, providing advice, assistance and guidance both to managers and employees with regard to health and well-being at work
- Develop effective solutions, aligned to the needs of the business, to improve health and well-being and reduce the main causes of sickness absence, e.g. targeted physiotherapy
- Support the development and coaching of managers in relation to key tools, e.g. stress risk assessments

iii. ICT and Customer Services

The ICT and Customer Services Division is responsible for three major functions:-

- Corporate ICT
- Customer Services
- Corporate Procurement

The Corporate ICT function is responsible for the delivery of a full range of technology, information systems and support services across the Council. This includes a complex technical infrastructure of processing capacity, storage, telecommunications and networking facilities providing resilient and secure access to corporate and service based information. The service supports in excess of 2700 service users and 300 business systems both corporate and service specific, these include in-house developed and third party systems. The ICT Help Desk provides comprehensive support to day to day issues faced by internal customers and associated service requests.

The Information Systems team assist services in identifying and building ICT based solutions to meet business requirements and enable business change.

The Information Governance team is responsible for Information Management and Security, ensuring the technologies and policies are in place to protect the Council's information assets and to comply with the Government Secure Extranet code of connection.

The Customer Services function is responsible for the provision of a central focus for customer services within the Council in respect of access, customer care and complaints. It has responsibility for all customer access channels web, phone and face to face, this includes the corporate contact centre and Flintshire Connects centres.

It also has responsibility for the registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships, and other corporate services including Welsh translation, central despatch, and the provision of administration for Corporate Services.

The Procurement function provides a management, support and coordination role for the Council. It assists services with procurement projects providing professional advice in relation to procurement legislation and good practice.

iv. Legal and Democratic

Legal and Democratic Services provide the Council with:-

- A dedicated legal support service. This includes advice and support to all the Council's service areas, to Members in their various roles (including committees) and to Officers at all levels of management within the Authority. It also includes advice to joint committees and collaboration projects with other local authorities.
- A support service for the democratic process which includes the management and administration of the committee system, Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny arrangements and support to all Members. It is

also responsible for electoral registration arrangements, the administration of elections and supports the Council's civic functions.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services is also the Statutory Monitoring Officer and the division provides him with the necessary support to ensure the propriety, lawfulness and fairness of the Council's activities and decision making processes. The Democracy and Governance Manager is the statutory Head of Democratic Services. This is a new legal requirement.

4. BUSINESS PROCESSES

4.1. Business Planning and Review

The Council considers business planning and review as fundamental for:-

- setting direction and purpose
- setting specific performance targets
- providing internal accountability and regulation
- accounting to Government

A consistent and modernised approach has been developed to ensure 'fit' and cohesiveness amongst all these operational parts:-

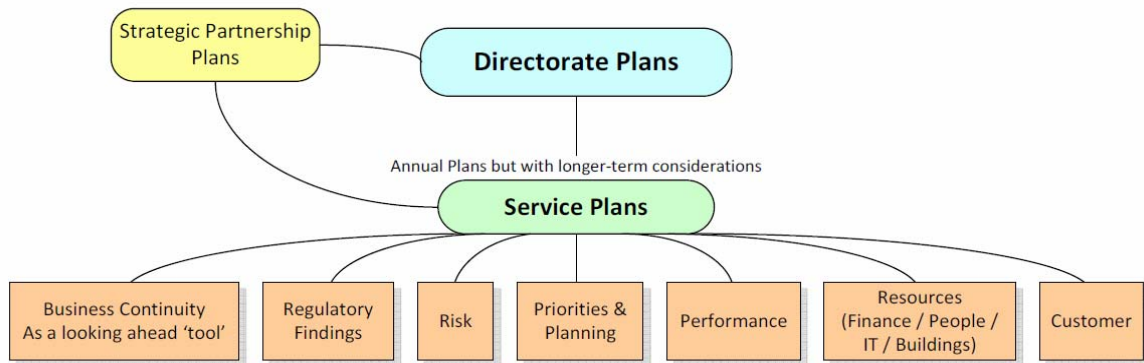
- service planning at Head of Service level and directorate planning arrangements for the three public service directorates
- categorisation and review of performance targets
- consistent approach to target setting methodology and action planning
- setting and monitoring the Outcome Agreement with Welsh Government (WG)
- development of the model for presentation and review of the Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges
- setting plans to continue to deliver our services in times of business interruption such as severe weather
- co-ordinating internal and external regulation

Service and Directorate Planning

The Council has three public service directorates. These are Community Services, Environment and Lifelong Learning. The Directorates produce Directorate Plans (**Environment, Lifelong Learning, Community Services**) which summarise the critical priorities, performance, risk and improvement activity for their grouped service functions and show the key commitments we have made through our strategic partnerships with other organisations. The Plans are produced annually based on the Council Municipal Year (May to April). The plans also project the anticipated budget pressures and efficiencies. The four corporate services are shown in the service plans for Finance, Human Resources, ICT and Customer Services and Legal and Democratic Services.

All Council service functions produce their service plans at Head of Service level. These are annual plans set with a view on the longer-term. Progress and performance is reported quarterly to the Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Underpinning Directorate and Service Plans are processes of mature and open self evaluation. In the case of Education and Social Services approaches advocated by Inspectorates have been adopted. The Council also completed a full self assessment of its services, Corporate Governance, strategies and strategic Partnerships during 2012.



In setting direction and prioritising our resources the Council **sets performance targets** and monitors them. It does this through the use of **performance indicators**.

The performance indicators used are based on: -

- National Indicators as set by the Welsh Government (WG) which we are required to use; and
- Local Indicators as set by the Council over and above those set by WG by local choice.

Performance indicators are the ‘success measures’ for the Council and are viewed publicly by Government, our regulators and our customers. Internally we monitor performance indicators to:-

- assess how well we are doing over time (trend)
- judge how well we are doing against our comparators (e.g. other authorities and organisations) to understand where we may learn good practice
- keep a check on any dips in performance to be in a better position to manage performance proactively

Performance indicators can measure a variety of parts of the business:-

- the time of a process e.g. application for service
- the number of people receiving a service e.g. visitors to a leisure centre
- the achievement of a standard e.g. educational attainment.

To determine the direction of improvement for our performance indicators we set **performance targets**. These are based on the direction of improvement we wish to see and how much improvement within a given period of time; usually one year. Some targets are also set nationally by WG such as the recycling targets, but mostly we choose the level at which targets are set.

These annual targets are set as either:-

- an **improvement target** - where performance is currently unsatisfactory and needs to be improved markedly
- an **incremental target** - where some improvement in performance is sought as a business objective and current performance is satisfactory or

- a **maintenance target** - where performance is currently good and needs to continue ; or
- management information – performance indicators that the authority may have little or no control over but the information is useful to know

A review of the categorisation and setting of targets is undertaken annually by Heads of Service. Internal challenge of these proposals and consideration of the action plans which support the targets is undertaken by Overview and Scrutiny members.

All Improvement Targets that we set are supported by an action plan which details the steps to be taken, by when and whom to achieve the target performance. These action plans are monitored in the quarterly performance reports.

The Improvement Targets that we set ourselves also include the measures which are contained in the **Outcome Agreement**.

The Outcome Agreement 2010 – 2013 (**Outcome Agreement**) has been developed with Welsh Government (WG). Performance against the Agreement draws down £1.47m of grant funding per annum. WG introduced the Outcome Agreement to promote local outcomes which meet its national priorities.

The Outcome Agreement is a three year agreement based on ten strategic themes - with one broad outcome selected from within each theme to meet the needs of Flintshire as a County. Outcome Agreements must show collaboration and partnership working. The themes and outcomes are agreed by Cabinet and endorsed by the Local Service Board (LSB). The Local Service Board's role satisfies the collaborative requirement of the Agreement.

Progress against the Outcome Agreement is monitored by WG annually.

Resource Planning

The Council reviews the resources at its disposal to make most efficient and effective use of them. The four principal resources include:-

- Finance
- Workforce
- Assets
- Information and Communications Technology

The Medium Term Financial Strategy, People Strategy, Asset Management Plan and ICT Strategy support the organisation with resource planning to support improvement and the achievement of its objectives as stated in the three public service Directorate plans.

In turn the consideration of these resource plans is taken into account in business planning within service and Directorate planning arrangements and also corporately (across the whole Council) within each of these four resource functions' Service Plans or Management Plan (Assets).

See section 3 for further information.

In addition the Council has a range of methods and guidance used to support improvement, be it through service reviews or change projects. These include:-

- Project management toolkit and in-house software system
- Programme management methodology and toolkit
- Change management and organisational design toolkit including principles, policy and practice

In considering the use of the Council's resources for the long-term the organisation also reflects on the principles for **sustainable development**.

Sustainable development is a set of principles for integrating decisions for the benefit of society today with the longer-term consequences for future generations. This means taking into account the shorter-term and the longer-term benefits and dis-benefits for the environment, society and the economy and the consequences of our decisions when we make them.

The Directorate and Service Plans consider these sustainable development issues in relation to their service areas.

4.2 Risk Management

Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges

The Council's strategic risk register is entitled the Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARC). This 'live' document defines and details the priorities for change and improvement and is supported by business planning processes and disciplines of service planning, risk management, business continuity, financial planning, resource planning, monitoring and review.

As a tool it collates the risks the Council has to consider, with regular updating and reporting on progress. It considers:-

- Emerging Risks
- Reviews of new business risks, external threats and opportunities
- Existing risks and changes in priority

It uses a red, amber, green (RAG) matrix to evaluate the current risk status and predicts the period when the risk will be mitigated or managed within the Council's risk appetite. It also identifies any change in level of risk status.

The SARC has three sections:-

- Community Leadership – critical local issues which cannot be solely delivered by the Council (e.g. Affordable Housing)
- Council Delivery – public service issues which are largely within the control and responsibility of the Council
- Council Governance – issues of organisational governance and management (e.g. Finance)

The SARC risks are described in:-

- Directorate Plans
- Service Plans
- Quarterly performance reports

Operational Risks

The Council identifies operational risks at a service level and details the risks along with actions to mitigate, milestones and accountabilities within each service plan at a Head of Service level.

Business Continuity Plans

Business Continuity management is how the organisation plans an effective response to business interruptions, such as severe weather or a power outage, for its critical services to function and then return to normal as soon as possible.

Flintshire has developed a resilient approach to business continuity. This approach has included:

- the identification of Mission Critical Services which must be maintained or recovered as a priority should a business interruption occur, these services have Business Continuity Plans in place.
- the development of a Corporate Business Continuity Plan which provides the overall framework within which the Plans for Mission Critical Services operate and sets out the actions to be taken should a number of business continuity impacts be faced at the same time across e.g. accommodation or ICT infrastructure.
- regular testing and updating of all Business Continuity Plans to ensure they are kept up to date and current.

Overall strategic responsibility for ensuring that services are maintained is the responsibility of the Council's Corporate Management Team.

4.3 Regulation and Assurance

Regulation and accountability provides assurance for the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for the services it is responsible for and the achievement of its objectives. It is undertaken both internally within the organisation through its governance arrangements, practices and procedures and externally by various organisations such as the Wales Audit Office (WAO) who have an independent statutory role.

Internal arrangements through our business planning, accountability and governance arrangements including: -

Business Planning

- Improvement Plan – the Councils annual document which sets its priorities and sub-priorities for in-year focus and impact. The Plan also details what outcomes are to be achieved and how these will be measured.
- Directorate plans – the annual setting, endorsement and monitoring by the Council's Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- Service plans – set annually for each Head of Service's functions and monitored through:
 - Quarterly Performance Reports (***Quarterly Reports***) by Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- Periodic review of the Council's Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARC) – included within Directorate and service plans and quarterly reports as above.

Reviews and change projects are undertaken periodically as determined through SARC or as part of the Flintshire Futures programme. The governance of these is undertaken at various stages:-

- Scoping – at the outset a review or project is scoped to determine what is included and what is not. These scopes are approved internally by the Corporate Management Team before endorsement by Cabinet and consideration by relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees. These endorsements give the decision to proceed.
- Staged reporting – depending upon the level of complexity of a review or change project there may be periodic reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees for particular decisions to be endorsed.
- Approval of outcomes once a review or project has been completed is required from the Council's Cabinet endorsing the decision to implement the changes.

Internal Audit Plan

Internal Audit produces a three year Strategic Plan (***Strategy for Internal Audit***) which is reviewed and updated annually and takes into account council priorities, risks and areas for improvement. The plan covers all Directorates and Corporate Services and is agreed by the Audit Committee. Progress against the plan is monitored and reported upon to the Audit Committee along with the results of the audit work.

The plan includes systems work which is relied on by external regulators, risk-based work which is based on the SARC and operational risks, and advisory / consultancy work which is requested by or agreed with Directors and senior management. The plan is agreed with external regulators to minimise duplication and promote effectiveness.

The audit work carried out during the year is amalgamated into the Internal Audit Annual Report (***Annual Report***) which gives an independent opinion on the standard of Corporate Governance, Risk Management and Internal Control within the Authority and feeds into the Annual Governance Statement. The Annual Report is reported to the Audit Committee.

Audit Committee

The Council's Audit Committee's role and function is to provide assurance of the system through:-

- Reviewing the effectiveness of the authority's systems of internal control and risk management systems
- Overseeing the financial reporting process to ensure the balance, transparency and integrity of published financial information
- Monitor the performance and effectiveness of the internal and external audit functions within the wider regulatory context

External arrangements for regulation and assurance are provided by a number of statutorily appointed bodies such as the Wales Audit Office (WAO), Estyn and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate (CSSIW), plus a number of other external regulatory bodies.

Their role is independent of government and they examine various aspects of how Welsh public bodies work. For example the WAO carries out financial audits and examines how the organisation manages and spends public money, including achieving value in the delivery of public services. Other bodies such as Estyn focus on the quality and standards in education and training providers in Wales.

According to the role and remit of each body, they produce either periodic or annual reports on their findings. Internal arrangements for coordinating regulatory activity are held by Chief Executive's (Policy & Performance). All external reports are shared with the Team and agreement reached here the report is to be presented too. In addition, a Council response/action plan is prepared by the lead Directorate with each report. All formal reports are presented to the Cabinet and Audit Committee and considered by the various Overview and Scrutiny Committees as appropriate. Progress against the resultant action plans are also monitored by Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny. Some reports, such as the Annual Improvement Report (see below) are presented to the full Council.

The WAO also has a co-ordinating role with other regulatory bodies (Estyn and CSSIW) and meets regularly with the Chief Executive to discuss the achievement of co-ordination and proportionality of external regulatory work, as well as the role that regulation can play in 'adding value' through supporting improvement.

Regulatory Plan

The Wales Audit Office (on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales) undertakes an annual Corporate Assessment which assesses the Council's forward looking plan and its corporate arrangements for improvement. This assessment is undertaken once the Council has agreed its Improvement Objectives for the year (April/May).

On the basis of this assessment and the previous year's Annual Improvement Report (**Annual Improvement Report 2012**) the WAO produce a Regulatory Plan which identifies further assessment or inspection work. The Plan also

identifies planned work to be undertaken by other regulatory bodies such as the Care and Social Services Inspectorate (CSSIW) and Estyn.

All regulatory reports are reported to the Council's Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Audit Committee (where appropriate). The Annual Report is also reported to the full Council.

5. CUSTOMER SERVICES AND CITIZENSHIP

5.1 Customer Services Strategy

Purpose

The Council's Customer Services Strategy sets out our plans and priorities for achieving customer service excellence consistently across all council services. It articulates our Customer Services vision.

“We will put the customer at the heart of everything we do and deliver consistently excellent customer service”

The strategy explains what we mean by excellent customer service and the outcomes we are looking to achieve from its implementation not only for our customers but for our employees and the Council as a whole.

Principles

The principles on which the Customer Service Strategy is founded, very much underpins our view of what excellent customer service looks like:

- **Quality** – high quality, reliable, flexible and responsive services which continuously strive to improve.
- **Relevant** – tailoring services to meet specific needs.
- **Choice** – through a choice of access channels, putting the customer first.
- **Accessible** – in locations, at times and in ways which suit the needs of all our customers.
- **Consistent** – using information effectively to ensure the same level of service and same information is available to all.
- **Joined Up** – both internally within the Council and with our partners, access to services should be seamless and transparent.
- **Value for Money** – greater cost effectiveness, reliable and efficient.
- **Language Choice** – communicating with our customers in English and Welsh giving equality to both languages in all aspects of customer service.

Context

We know from feedback that generally customers are satisfied with the individual services they receive from the Council. However, there are lower levels of satisfaction in contacting the Council with the last residents' survey showing that 20% of people who contacted Flintshire in the previous 12 months were dissatisfied with the experience.

We know that customer expectations are on the increase, research has shown they increasingly expect to have their enquiries dealt with at the first point of contact. They don't want to have to understand the organisational structure and which department delivers which services.

Customers want to contact services at times that are most convenient to them, as well as in places and in ways that most suit their needs. We already have a range of other out of hours arrangements in place. We need to develop a consistent approach across all services.

National research indicates that customer preferences are shifting away from the telephone being their preferred means of accessing services with preferences now split roughly equally between face to face, on-line and telephone contact. and increasingly the use of text, social media and smartphones.

Our website has improved significantly in recent years but there is more we need to do to make it more available for all customers, to increase its attractiveness and ease of use, to improve content and to increase the availability of on-line transaction. If we can get our customers to move to the website there are significant efficiency savings to be made with Channel Shift being a key element of our Flintshire Futures programme.

Strategic Priorities

The Customer Service Strategy sets out in some detail our aims, objectives and plans for each of the identified strategic priorities that we believe are critical to delivering customer service excellence:-

- Developing Integrated Services Channels
- Putting the Customer First
- Supporting Staff and Managing Change
- Transforming the Business

Our vision for improving Customer Services in Flintshire is exciting, ambitious and will take many years before it is delivered fully across the County. There is much detailed work, consultation and planning taking place. We are now seeing this coming to fruition with the opening of our Contact Centre in March 2012 and the opening of our first Flintshire Connects centre in Holywell in November, 2012. Funding has been secured to roll out a further three Connects centres during this financial year. A new web site is scheduled to be launched in September 2013, which will provide a modern platform to extend our range of digital services. We are also launching a fully bilingual Mobile Application at the same time providing an alternative method for our customers to contact the council. The use of social media is beginning to develop with a focus on the use of Twitter by the Customer Services Team providing instant information about Council services and quick responses to simple enquiries.

5.2 Communications and Engagement

Effective communication and engagement with customers, businesses, partner organisations and within its own workforce is used within the Council to inform developments and improvements.

It must:

- be clear, concise, open and two-way
- be customer focused and take into account the public's views and concerns
- be clear, easily understood, timely, relevant and up-to-date in all formats
- meet the standards set out in the Council's corporate branding guide to safeguard image and reputation.
- engage with people from all different backgrounds and age groups and those with disabilities; ensure language preference is met
- meet plain language and clear print guidelines so that information is easy to read and understand.
- align to the Council's vision, corporate values, aims and objectives
- be planned and managed in the event of emergencies or major incidents to ensure effective contact and engagement with all those affected and the wider public.
- follow media relations protocols to encourage positive and balanced reporting of Council news and activities to protect organisational reputation
- help the workforce and members carry out their duties in providing excellent services for the public
- keep employees well informed and enable them to engage with the Council and make their views known
- promote the county of Flintshire as the best place to live, work and visit
- help improve people's understanding of the Council's work by promoting services and explaining how people can access them and get in touch.

Consultation and engagement with our customers and communities takes place on a number of different levels: representative democracy through our elected members, structured engagement through for example our County Forum (with Town and Community Councils), formal needs assessments through our strategic partnerships, surveys and feedback mechanisms such as workshops and roadshows. The methods used are selected according to requirements, audience and coverage.

In July 2011 the Council endorsed the National Principles of Public Engagement which had been developed by Participation Cymru on behalf of Welsh Government.

To underpin these National Principles in October 2012 Cabinet approved a set of Flintshire County Council Core Principles for Engagement and Consultation. These provide a set of overarching core principles for the organisation and all its services in the preparation and delivery of engagement and consultation activity.

The principles also clearly define the minimum standards which can be expected by Flintshire Citizens when their views and opinions are sought.

5.3 Equalities and Welsh Language

The Council's Directorate and service plans consider and endorse their approach to implement and embed the organisation's equality and Welsh language principles, policies and plans from a customer, workforce and language perspective.

As a major public sector service provider and employer we have a statutory duty to promote equality, eliminate discrimination and harassment and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share a protected characteristic. Equality is an integral part of providing customer focussed services and is an essential element of becoming an "Employer of Choice".

The Council has worked in partnership with all the public bodies across North Wales to identify high level regional equality objectives as well as local equality objectives. These are set out in the Council's Strategic Equality Plan (2012-2016) alongside the actions that will be taken to address specific areas of inequality to achieve the equality objectives and make a real difference to peoples' lives. The objectives are based on the following:-

- Health
- Education
- Employment
- Personal Safety
- Representation and Voice
- Access to information, services and environment

The Council's **Welsh Language** Scheme supports that Welsh language is an essential part of the cultural identity and character of Wales.

The scheme embraces the duty to promote, support and safeguard the Welsh language. Similarly, offering language choice is one of many aspects of good customer service.

By implementing our Welsh Language Scheme we:

- contribute to the realisation of the broader national strategy
- create more opportunities for customers to use the Welsh in their dealings with us by ensuring that more of our services are available in Welsh
- ensure that services delivered in Welsh services are as instant and as good services delivered in English
- create and sustain a working environment for our employees in which the Welsh language is both visible and audible.

6. PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION

6.1 National

Flintshire is part of the local government 'family' in Wales. The Council makes a contribution to national policy development and evaluation with the Welsh Assembly through:-

- being an active member of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) - the representative body for unitary, national park, police and fire and rescue authorities in Wales
- being a statutory consultee recognised by Government and Government agencies
- participation in national studies and programmes of work and national boards, networks and working groups

Flintshire also has a presence and an influence through the national professional bodies of whom its senior directors are active members. These include the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), the Association of Directors of Education Wales (ADEW) and the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS). These bodies are actively involved in national programmes of policy and practice development and evaluation.

Flintshire is also active in the work of other national bodies such as the Wales Audit Office with its programme of national 'value for money' and innovation studies and the UK body the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) which promotes improvement through comparative study and practice sharing.

Flintshire supports its elected members and professional officers to be active in all of the above to represent Flintshire's interests and to enhance our reputation as a leading Council.

6.2 Regional

Flintshire County Council is an active member of regional partnerships and representative bodies.

The Council:-

- nominates members to the North Wales Police and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authorities
- nominates members to various bodies with a regional remit
- is active in regional networks such as the North Wales Economic Ambition Board
- is a member of regional consortia such as the regional transport consortium TAITH
- is a member of formal joint committees which oversee joint services such as the Joint Committee for the North Wales Residual Waste Treatment procurement partnership
- is a full member of the Regional Leadership Board, a regional committee of the WLGA (see section on Vision and Values)

- is a member of the Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA) which agrees to work together on common strategic interests to sustain the economic future of the travel-to-work area, and facilitate a coherent approach to social, economic and environmental issues.

The Council helps shape regional priorities and policy through all of the above in addition to promoting and defending the interests of the region on a Wales and UK level and the interests of Flintshire on a regional level.

The Council is also an active member of the Mersey Dee Alliance which promotes cross-border strategic planning and co-operation for economic development and infrastructure development.

Regional Collaboration

North Wales has a developing portfolio of collaborative projects which range in type and scale e.g. North Wales Waste Treatment Partnerships, GWE: Schools advisory services supporting School improvement to cross sector systems reform e.g. health and social care integration.

Governance models for each collaboration can vary. The Council has introduced a protocol to ensure that appropriate bodies such as Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny Committees consider each principal collaboration at appropriate stages.

6.3 Local

Flintshire Local Service Board

The Local Service Board (LSB) brings together the public service providers in Flintshire including: Flintshire County Council, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Deeside College, Glyndwr University, Flintshire Local Voluntary Council, Public Health Wales, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, North Wales Police, Wales Probation and Natural Resources Wales.

The Flintshire LSB was established in 2008. Its remit is as follows:-

- Effective and trusting partnership relationships as a set of local leaders.
- Discharging the responsibilities of the LSB - this includes producing a meaningful and fit for purpose Community Strategy.
- Consistent and effective governance and performance of strategic partnerships – see list below.
- Identifying common issues as public bodies/employers.
- Promoting collaboration in the design and provision of local public services to make best economic use of local partner's resources, such as people, money, assets and technology.

Working alongside the Flintshire Local Service Board (LSB) are eight key Strategic Partnerships:

- Children & Young People's Partnership
- Community Safety Partnership
- Flintshire and Wrexham Local Safeguarding Children Board
- Flintshire Housing Partnership

- Health, Social Care and Well-being Partnership
- Regeneration Partnership
- Voluntary Sector Compact
- Youth Justice Board

These Strategic Partnerships exist for a number of reasons:

- a. Statutory provisions i.e., Children and Young People's Partnership; Community Safety Partnership; Health, Social Care and Well-being Partnership; Local Safeguarding Children Board, Youth Justice Service.
- b. National agreement e.g., Voluntary Sector Compact.
- c. Local agreement to ensure a more strategic and integrated approach, e.g., Regeneration Partnership, Housing Partnership.

A review of the North Wales Partnerships has resulted in a series of changes including the setting up new joint Boards for Flintshire and Wrexham for:

- Local Safeguarding Children's Board
- Youth Justice Executive Management Board

A North Wales Safer Communities Board has also been established.

In June 2009, Flintshire County Council formally adopted the Community Strategy as a 'County Vision' (**Community Strategy 2009 - 2011**) for Flintshire 2009 to 2019. The vision is used to not only shape the local authority's financial and business planning processes but also those of all its LSB partners.

In July 2012, as part of a refresh of the County Vision the LSB agreed a set of 'primary' and 'secondary' priorities (**County Priorities Diagram**):

- The primary or top priorities are the ones the LSB will concentrate on.
- The secondary priorities would be those supporting priorities which are the top line for the specialist partnerships.

The two fit together to provide a coherent vision with responsibilities for who leads what (the LSB or a specified partnership) set out clearly.

The LSB has a Partnership Governance Framework that is used by all strategic partnerships. The purpose of this is to ensure a consistent approach in the application of partnership governance arrangements.

Strategic partnership performance is reported to the Council's Cabinet and the Community Profile and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee every six months.

Partnership Engagement

The Council is also involved in other partnerships which work to improve the quality of life for the communities of Flintshire. A principal function of these partnerships is engagement to help shape policy; for example the County Forum (where the County Council meets quarterly with leads from the Town and

Community Councils). The Council jointly developed and created a Charter (**A Shared Community**) with the Town and Community Councils in February 2012.

Fundamental principles for engagement and collaboration are contained within our Flintshire Futures principles for both the Voluntary Sector (**Funding Principles**) and more generally for collaboration (**Collaboration Principles**).