



Institute of Public Administration
Case Study Series

**DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODERNISATION:
PARTICIPATIVE LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC CHANGE**

The key message from the OECD review, *Towards an Integrated Public Service*(2008) 'is that there is a significant gain in productivity, in value-for-money and in satisfaction of the citizen to be realised by Public Service organisations and employees working across organisational, professional, sectoral and geographical boundaries.' (p.1, *Government Statement on Transforming Public Services* (2008))

This paper, a case study of Donegal County Council's development of Public Services Centres provides some useful lessons in developing a model of joined up thinking, integrated service delivery and creation of new management structures which place a strong emphasis on accountability, performance and improved service delivery. These are all traits advocated by the OECD review *Towards an Integrated Public Service* and the subsequent Report of the Task Force on Public Service, *Transforming Public Services* (2008). In particular:

- It was decided to decentralise council services to district offices based in the six electoral areas in the county. Since 2002, the Council has endeavoured to bring services closer to local communities with the opening of Public Service Centres in Dungloe, Donegal Town, Carndonagh, Letterkenny, and Milford. Most Council services are now provided through each of these Centres representing a significant improvement in quality and convenience for customers. (See appendix 1) This has established the local authority as lead partner for integrating the delivery of other public services around the needs of citizens and for co-ordinating the work of local development;
- Since 2002, Donegal County Council have created a new management and accountability structure in which managers are fully accountable for all aspects of delivering the service (financial, human resource, quality of customer service, etc.) (Mc Loone, 2003). The work of Donegal County Council has been divided into seven different directorates and into four levels of management (county manager, directors, divisional managers, and area managers) (See appendix 2)

Background

Donegal County Council as the Local Authority for County Donegal (exclusive of four Town Council areas) provides an extensive range of services in the County. These services include, Planning Control, the provision of Social Housing, the upkeep and improvement of Roads, Pollution Control, Fire Services, Library Services and Sanitary Services (<http://www.donegalcoco.ie/council/>). Donegal County Council has been headquartered in a village called Lifford in the North-East of the County for over a century. The organisation was seen as quite aloof from its customer base, which resided in towns sporadically throughout the large county and a number of customer service and internal administrative issues were highlighted in a number of reports commissioned in the early 1990s.

The organisation structure in Donegal County Council prior to the reform programme undertaken was based on the dual reporting structure for engineering/technical and clerical/administrative staff (see appendix 2) Donegal County Council commenced its reform programme prior to the reform agenda articulated in the policy documents of *Delivering Better Government (1996)* and more specifically to local government, in *Better Local Government (1996)*. But the national policy framework provides the backdrop to a number of the reforms in local government and helped reinforce aspects of the reform programme instigated in Donegal.

Three main desired outcomes of the local government modernisation programme are identified as an enhanced community leadership role for local government; the provision of services in a more efficient and effective manner; and the delivery of high-quality services to the users of local authority services (Boyle, et al. (2003)). These three characteristics are embodied in the Donegal County Council change programme and this case study examines the opportunities and challenges faced by Michael McLoone, County Manager, and his management team over the last decade to instigate the necessary changes.

The modernisation programme for the public sector (the *Strategic Management Initiative (1994)*) and in particular, the publication of *Better Local Government (1996)* provided the context for reinforcing the change programme in Donegal County Council. This organisation change programme was underpinned by the following crucial objectives:

- to create a new organisation designed around a clear structure of accountability for getting work done;
- to decentralise the delivery of the front line services to the electoral areas and to devolve authority for decision making in relation to individual customers or situations to front line managers;
- to establish electoral area committees with political accountability for delivering council work programmes and services in each electoral area;
- to establish the local authority as lead partner for integrating the delivery of other public services around the needs of citizens and for co-ordinating the work of local development;
- to create and sustain modern systems of financial, operational and service planning to achieve value for money in pursuit of agreed standards of service. (Mc Loone, 2003)

New manager, new direction

In 1994, Michael McLoone took up a new post as Donegal County Manager. Prior to this he spent six years as Chief Executive of Beaumont Hospital in Dublin and served in various posts in the Health Services and Local Government since 1966. Based on this experience, Mc Loone instigated a programme of re-organisation of Donegal

County Council, including decentralisation of services to electoral areas. A series of expert reviews were undertaken during the mid to late 1990s to garner the views of management, unions, employees, elected representatives and service users on how management of the organisation could be improved, the need for better quality of service delivery to the customer, and how to enhance the working conditions for staff. In the early 1990s there was pressure coming from local and national level to improve the organisation and delivery of services. The local pressures derived from both staff themselves and the elected members. Two local reports (Engineering Staff Committee's Review of the Engineering Staff Structure in 1989 and an IPA Review in 1993) were prepared which outlined the problems identified by staff and elected members and how they should be resolved. Administration was viewed as very bureaucratic due to lack of communication across the organisation which was reflected in less effective customer service provision. At a national level, the public service change programme (*Delivering Better Government*, 1996) and the Information Society strategies to exploit new technology to connect government services together and to connect the services to the customer were driving the national change agenda. These were further augmented by national wage agreements, the Local Government Act 2001, the introduction of new financial management systems, the establishment of county development boards, the national development plan (2000-6), and the national spatial strategy (Mc Loone, 2003).

A partnership approach was adopted between management and unions to work together to develop the organisation and deal with any issues in the re-organisation. It is important to note that 'this partnership approach was adopted prior to the establishment of the formal workplace partnership structures that emerged out of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000).' (p.21, LGMSB, 2005) This case covers both the internal management structure changes in the county council and the integrated service delivery changes which have been interlinked under the leadership initiative of Michael McLoone.

In 1995, the Donegal county manager established a project team to assess the possibilities for organisation change prior to the rollout of a service decentralisation programme. In 1996, the government published *Better Local Government: A Programme for Change* (BLG) outlining the agenda for the modernisation of the local government system. BLG advocated the development of one-stop-shop centres to serve as focal points for the delivery of customer oriented public services. The project team were given the task of developing proposals for a new organisational structure and consulted with colleagues across all sections in the organisation and also external public sector organisations in terms of the decentralisation of services in the county. The county manager proposed to drive this programme of change with the assistance of a dedicated project team and change management budget over a period of 5-7 years. It was decided to decentralise council services to district offices based in the six electoral areas in the county. Since 2002, the Council has endeavoured to bring services closer to local communities with the opening of Public Service Centres in Dungloe, Donegal Town, Carndonagh, Letterkenny

and Milford. Most Council services are now provided through each of these Centres representing a significant improvement in quality and convenience for customers. (See appendix 1)

“Seven years ago, the new structure was established, public service centres were created, and we assumed that with the new structure and clarity of roles, we would achieve the transformation we wanted. Over the intervening years we have come to realise that what has been done is necessary, but, not sufficient, to achieve the change we wanted and we questioned: what is missing? We gradually realised that while we had created the skeleton and muscular system, but, we needed to develop the circulation and nervous systems, in order to bring the body to life, i.e. we needed to look at systems for getting the work done, to make the organisation more agile so that we can readily respond to significant changes in the external environment..” [Sean Sheridan, Director of Corporate Services, May, 2009]

Part of this reassessment was prompted by an Interim Report on the Donegal County Council and the Integrated Services Project completed by Stephen Cang, the organisation specialist employed by Donegal County Council, in 2003. He observed that whilst the new organisational structure of Directors of Service, Divisional Managers and Area Managers are in place, the expected changes to a more dynamic, responsive and productive organisation led by its managers had not yet been realised. This culminated in a new research and development project being instigated over the period 2003 to 2008, by the Council in partnership with two organisation specialists (Stephen Cang and David Stroll of One Sigma Ltd, London).

The outcome of this review in 2003 and the subsequent research and development project (2003-2008) was a recognition that the changes required a single conceptual scheme called the *Whole System of Work* approach which enables multiple changes to be made in ways whereby the impact of one change would be planned, implemented and monitored in relation to their dependency and impact on other aspects of the organisation. (p.22, LGMSB (2005)) The *Whole System of Work* approach enabled a number of interrelated priority issues to be addressed, including, how the restructuring of accountability through regradings would impact on the organisation’s Performance Management and Development System (PMDS); how risk management tools are employed as part of PMDS; how service standard benchmarks and indicators become incorporated into process improvement methodologies; how changes required from staff in relation to work practices or developments in ICT are incorporated into management development and training programmes. (p.22, LGMSB (2005)) These priority issues were incorporated using the *Whole System of Work* approach into achievable objectives such as creating a new organisation with modern management systems and clear lines of accountability.

The following two sections describe the organisational restructuring and decentralised integrated service delivery initiatives overseen by McLoone in more detail. While

described separately for convenience, they must be seen as working together to bring about the desired organisational changes.

Organisational restructuring

Much of the earlier work on the creation of new structures derived from an adaptation of some of the theories of Elliott Jacques (*Requisite Organisation*, 1996). These principles focus on designing organisational structures based around the complexity of work at each level of management in the organisation. The structure and clear division of unified management responsibilities at each level in Donegal County Council attempts to match requisite skills and competencies to complexity of work. This ensures that the organisational structure locates accountability for innovation and modernisation at the senior management levels. 'The staffing and management structures of Donegal County Council have gone through a period of sustained significant change over the past few years. A very significant investment has been made in terms of staffing and customer facilities' (Donegal County Council, 2004).

The work of Donegal County Council has been divided into seven different directorates and into four levels of management (county manager, directors, divisional managers, and area managers) (See appendix 2) The four levels of management represent different levels of decision making and responsibility. Another fundamental aspect of the design is that of managerial roles and accountability. In the old structure accountability was divided between professional and technical work, administrative work, finance work, human resource work etc. In the new structure, each managerial role has accountability for all aspects of the work of the staff for whom the manager is accountable. As a result, the new structure distinguishes the managerial roles from other roles in the grading structure. The council employs over 1,000 people. Around fifty now have managerial accountability for the work of others, i.e. on average one manager is accountable for the work of twenty persons (Mc Loone, 2003).

Given that the very nature of the work performed at each level of management is distinctive, the information requirements of managers at each level are quite different. For example, at area level, an area manager is interested in the state of individual cases in his/her area of responsibility. At divisional level, the focus is much more on what the state of the process is and how well the individual cases are being managed. At director level, the focus is at the strategic, macro-level: is Donegal County Council achieving the overall strategic objectives that were set out in the Corporate Plan? For directors it is important to determine what are the appropriate work processes and reporting systems that the organisation needs in order to manage the work effectively. The fundamental premise in Donegal County Council is that the information needs and the systems to deliver them, come from, and are based firmly on, the work to be done and how the organisation is structured and organised to do that work.

In terms of reporting relationships between the four levels of management, the majority are conducted on a face-to-face basis, but Donegal County Council also has a number of other reporting systems. For example, the Agresso financial management system is an important reporting tool that measures the relative importance of objectives and the extent to which resources are devoted to those objectives; 'if you follow the money it will always give you a fair indication as to where the real action is in the organisation'.

Based on recommendations from the review by the London based organisational specialists, specialised working arrangements reporting software is being developed to enable managers and staff to have a comprehensive view of working arrangements and to help distinguish between the properties of working arrangements (especially, quantity, time and cost) and the working arrangements themselves. This was also believed to be why Performance Management fails, due to a focus primarily on changing the value of working arrangement properties. It was recommended that distinguishing properties from working arrangements clarifies some of the difficulty of communication between front-line staff and first-line managers on the one hand and the rest of management on the other. The report recommended that the only satisfactory way to describe working arrangements is to commence a work narrative based on direct observation recording of the actual work as described by those actually doing it, and then to convert this narrative into a systematic view of the work, using a comprehensive working-arrangements language. This task proved difficult as most business process modelling notation (BPMN) language could not grasp the working-arrangements language, particularly, the central importance of 'role' and the managerial structure. This phase took four years to accomplish a set of specialised software tools to deploy the Working Arrangements Language. It is noted that the Working Arrangements Language tools are complementary and readily co-exist with existing IT infrastructure and HR systems. (Cang and Stroll, 2008)

A number of priority issues were incorporated using the systems approach into a number of achievable objectives such as 'decentralising service delivery in line with the county's electoral areas and devolving decision-making in relation to customers to area-based front line managers. Establishing Electoral Area Committees with political accountability for delivering council work programmes and services in each electoral area. (see appendix 3 for further information on electoral area committees) Establishing the local authority as a lead partner for integrating the delivery of other public services into the county, and coordinating the planning and delivery of local development initiatives.'(p.22, LGMSB (2005))

The majority of the key objectives outlined in 1996 have been achieved. Services have been decentralised to all electoral area offices. A new management and accountability structure has been put in place in which managers are fully accountable for all aspects of delivering the service (financial, human resource, quality of customer service, etc.) (Mc Loone, 2003).

Donegal Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) Project

In July 2001 a partnership was formed between Donegal County Council, the North Western Health Board, the then Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, and FÁS to appoint a project manager to explore the possibilities of utilising the framework of the Public Services Broker (PSB) to develop integrated interagency services to citizens. The intention was that integrated service centres (ISCs) be established to enable the customer to access information, advice and services across multiple channels and multiple agencies at a single point (Donegal County Council, 2002(a), 2002(b), 2001).

The Donegal Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) Project was initiated in 2002 and comprises a partnership of public service agencies, developing an integrated approach to the provision and delivery of services to customers in the county. The project is a partnership initiative involving Donegal County Council, the Health Service Executive, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, Comhairle, and Donegal Citizens, Information Service. Since 2002, five local public service centres have been established and are delivering information and services to customers in Carndonagh, Donegal town, Dungloe, Letterkenny and Milford (see appendix for map of Donegal County Council Public Service Centres). These centres have been added to with the development of outreach public service centres in towns like Ballyshannon and Ballybofey. Given that many public services share a similar customer base and that co-location of such services would create a single access point from which the individual could avail of a range of services conveniently, these agencies agreed to work together on initiatives focused on integrated service delivery. The ISD project aims to provide a seamless, quality public service to customers in Donegal through a range of access channels and to integrate services across the agencies, based on the needs of the customer. (see appendix 2)

Information and communication technology (ICT) innovation enabled the emergence of the new regional organisational model. ICT developments enabled effective communication systems and case handling across multiple agencies and sites through web-based document management systems and intranet facilities. The use of IT systems benefits the customer through access to planning applications online and information on the Council's website. (p.23, LGMSB (2005)) The flexible inter-agency structure of the ISD project aids innovation by allowing collaborative teams and working groups from various agencies and public sector organisations to work on innovative projects, for example the Rental Accommodation Scheme, and integrative services projects.

Implementation and change

Mc Loone (2003) notes perceived beneficial impacts from the change:

- The systems of decentralised service delivery and devolved decision making are making services and staff more accessible and are achieving other improvements such

as clear accountability for getting work done, enhanced cross-service collaboration, greater accessibility to managers and staff for customers and members, sharper focus on costs and improvements in the quality of services. A broad range of local authority services is delivered from local offices and the decision makers (area managers) are located in these area offices.

- Communication between service managers around the needs of particular towns, villages or rural areas is much speedier with face to face contact reducing the need for paperwork or long vertical lines of communication.
- The local authority has taken a lead role in partnering the provision of a wide range of public services from these new public service centres. This is helping to connect government to people through connecting the public agencies together. The data collected to date on the usage of these services demonstrates a high level of take up and satisfaction with the services.
- There is seen to be potential to have increased productivity and to reduce unit costs, as accountable managers begin to use the new financial management tools to target cost reductions, productivity and improved quality.

Donegal County Council and the Integrated Services Project set out a business case model for the next phase in their development. Management emphasise that the project has to date achieved a coordination of agencies under the public services centres but that the next phase will involve a move towards greater integration through a business process re-engineering and mapping exercise. Now that the structure, agencies and centres are in place, the next phase is intended to fully develop the business case model for the integration of services.

McLoone (2008) believes that 'providing leadership needs to be embedded in the role of every Manager. It requires active engagement with the staff for whose work the Manager is accountable.' He outlines that there are a number of leadership challenges facing local government including the perennial problem of funding sources, delivering on the National Development Plan in terms of Capital Programme, adhering to and implementing EU and National Directives, administering central and local working arrangements and the development of capacity for Strategic Management of national programmes.

McLoone believes that managerial leadership is the key to successfully achieving 'a significant gain in productivity, in value-for-money and in satisfaction of the citizen to be realised by Public Service if organisations and employees working across organisational, professional, sectoral and geographical boundaries' (p.1, *Government Statement on Transforming Public Services (2008)*) Managerial leadership is important for the change agenda to be successfully implemented as set out in the *Government Statement on Transforming Public Services (2008)* .

Strong managerial leadership is a key ingredient in driving the change process. In Donegal, change would not have happened without the drive and initiative of the county manager and other key leaders. The project manager and inter-agency project board have initiated core work programmes such as service re-engineering studies, analysis of means tested services, contact centre feasibility studies and data analysis of common client information (Sheridan, 2003).

A clearly articulated vision of the organisation change required is a key driver. In this case, the use of the organisation change model advocated by Jacques (1996) in *Requisite Organisation* provided a sound theoretical and practical basis for re-thinking the council organisation structure in the light of ICT-enabled service decentralisation.

There is a need for buy-in locally and by other agencies, to provide a critical mass to further develop the integration of services. The engagement of additional agencies in the process is also important, in terms of developing co-ordinated shared services and common means-tested services across agencies. The development of integrated services offers the customer a single point of contact for a variety of services.

Communication and consultation with all stakeholders is important. Relationship building and trust building is important. This involves engagement and involvement with stakeholders, not just consultation. It is crucially important to provide strong leadership coupled with partnership building so as to minimise the chances of staff feeling threatened by the change. It is also important to be adept at gauging the pace of change and this involves having a vision but also having a realistic approach towards achievement. Gradual implementation of a plan enables people to feel comfortable with change because things are being taken in steps.

It is important to quantify and demonstrate the benefits of the €40 million investment in the provision of new buildings, ICT and the organisation change project. This was done by undertaking a cost-benefit analysis, demand analysis and qualitative analysis to assess improved efficiency, and to test access and convenience to public services for the customer on the ground. Analysis of the savings should include an assessment of a more effective human and financial resources structure, designed to apportion responsibility at the appropriate level. Analysis is also needed of the benefits of integrated services in terms of providing a choice of access channels and the efficiencies generated by reduction of duplication of activities between agencies.

Time and patience are vitally important steps in relation to large-scale organisation change: 'One clear lesson from our work is that these changes take time. It has taken seven years of sustained effort to get this far – it may take another seven to realise our vision of integrated public service provision to citizens' (Mc Loone, 2003).

Future Directions

The *Government Statement on Transforming Public Services (2008)* advocates that ‘local government, as the level of Government closest to the citizen, will be given a leadership role in providing integrated responses to the needs of citizens through case working and other methods, while elected Councils will be the focus for consultation and feedback on all services delivered at local level; a database of all publicly-funded programmes and projects will be established and maintained at county level, to avoid duplication and encourage integration.’

The Statement recommends that, wherever possible, service providers adopt county boundaries for the organisation, delivery and evaluation of services. It also emphasises that ‘Government Departments and agencies will explore the feasibility of devolving more responsibility for service of national programmes at local level to individual Local Authorities. This will include the designation of lead agencies for the delivery of local services, where agencies have clients in common and contracting private and not-for-profit bodies for local delivery; and the multi-agency County/City Development Boards (CDBs) will be strengthened to improve the co-ordination of local service delivery.’ (p.8, p.10-11, *Statement on Transforming Public Services (2008)*) The Statement further outlines that the Government want to see the development of shared services on a wide scale across the Public Service by building up centres of expertise. (p.10, *Statement on Transforming Public Services (2008)*)

The Statement also points out that the ‘Government are committed to better integration of the Public Service so that policies, planning and service delivery are focused more closely on citizen needs. We believe this will require improved communication, information and reporting arrangements to be established between the central Departments—the Departments of the Taoiseach and Finance –and other Government Departments. It will also require Departments to manage their agencies in new ways, and central government and Local Authorities to change how they interact.’ (p. 10, *Statement on Transforming Public Services (2008)*)

Based on the OECD recommendations and the *Government Statement on Transforming Public Services (2008)*, county committees have been established in the area of developing children’s services in an integrated manner across agencies and local government bodies. As part of this four pilot counties have been selected to develop children services committees, and given Donegal County Council’s record of interagency work in establishing integrated services centres, they have been chosen along with South Dublin County Council, Dublin City Council and Limerick City Council. The interagency children services committees are beginning to get off the ground, involving the Health Service Executive, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Education., Vocational Education Committees, FAS, and the County Council. There are four interagency working groups on these committees in Donegal to look at particular

elements, for example, health and wellbeing, safety and security, education and learning, economic security.

It will be a major leadership challenge in the public sector to change conceptually things at organisational and at a strategic level in terms of how services are delivered on an inter-agency basis, particularly, co-operation/integration of services and rationalisation of information provided by these organisations to the citizen. Interagency development is one of the key challenges in the *Transforming Public Services* Statement, to break down conceptual barriers to enable benefits to be seen for citizens on the ground. The integrated services centres project at Donegal County Council provides some useful lessons in developing processes and systems for these new county committees and insights on how to further integrate services and rationalise information provided to the customer.

The recent economic downturn has affected staffing levels (238 staff reductions are forecast, 71 contract staff have currently been let go) in Donegal County Council given the reduction in the Council's budget. It is questionable what impact this will have on the public services centre model? The structure and people were in place in each of the Public Services Centres, the whole of work approach has been implemented since 2004 and should enable the model to adapt to these changes. The next phase may prove the most challenging for the public service centres but, the flexibility of the model is crucial in terms of redeploying responsibilities across grades and locations to ensure the viability of the decentralised public service centres and use of working arrangements language software tools, innovative HR and IT systems to ensure the effective provision of services to the citizen across the county.

Five questions for teaching and training purposes at the end of the case-study:

1. When Donegal County Council set about the change programme, the challenge that McLoone and his senior management team faced was to create an interorganisational structure and processes that successfully integrated service delivery across regional locations. Critically examine the need for developing the structure (bureaucratic, matrix or other)? Explain how it allowed decentralisation of powers at the local management level while ensuring control by headquarters?
2. What are the key challenges to be faced in order to get multiple organisations working collaboratively to provide the customer with a more seamless service? Does the Donegal model provide any pointers as to how these challenges can be met?
3. Donegal County Council's combination of multi-service local presence located in regional centres coupled with headquarters remaining at Lifford means that this is a unique response to the integration of service delivery. What benefits did Donegal County Council reap by establishing a multi-service local presence? How successful

has integration been with other service providers? Critically comment on the advantages and disadvantages of this model.

4. What impact do you think will the Government *Statement on Transforming Public Services (2008)* have in terms of the Donegal Public Services centres and integration of services? Will it have an impact on the functions of the Council and its relationship with the central Departments and other agencies?
5. What do you think are the key features that will enable the model to be adaptable to changes in the economic situation (when both Donegal County Council's budget and staff numbers are reduced)?

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Interview with Sean Sheridan, Director of Corporate Services, on Monday, 18th May, 2009, at Donegal County Council Headquarters, Lifford, County Donegal.

Appendix 1

Donegal County Council's Mission statement

Donegal County Council's Core values

Objective 3 of Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009 and summary of Integrated Service Delivery Project

- **Mission statement of Donegal County Council:**

To lead the economic, social and cultural development of County Donegal to meet the needs of all of our residents and visitors and of future generations.

Source: p.8, Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009

- **Donegal County Council's Core Values**

Democratic principles:

a recognition of the electoral mandate of the Council and a commitment to doing our business in an open and fair manner;

Community leadership:

taking a leadership role in negotiating and developing partnerships and networks to co-ordinate the efforts of state agencies, communities and individuals to improve the quality of life in the County;

Customer driven:

a commitment to providing excellent service to all of our customers in terms of quality, responsiveness and convenience;

Human resources:

creating an organisation and environment that will enable staff to achieve their full potential in a culture of continuous, measurable improvement;

Integrity and accountability:

members, management and staff are committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct and probity;

Sustainability:

a commitment to meeting current needs in a way that will not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs;

Social inclusion:

recognising that every member of the community has a stake in the development of the County and has a right to participate fully in the development process, and that the Council has a duty to recognise and respond to the needs of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion;

Irish language and culture:

protecting, sustaining and promoting our unique heritage and culture, with a particular focus on the Gaeltacht area of the County.

Source: p.10, Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009

Objective 3 Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009

To achieve significant improvement in the quality and level of service to all our customers and communities, including those who are common customers of other agencies, with a particular focus on achieving greater social inclusion.

Directorate

Corporate Services

Strategies

Continue to develop the Public Services as focal points for the delivery of local authority services. Over the lifetime of this Plan, all remaining customer services will be decentralized to the PSCs. Develop the provision of outreach services in the principal towns not served directly by a Public service Centre, beginning with Ballyshannon and Bundoran.

Continue to work with partner agencies in the development of integrated customer-centric public service provision, through a variety of access channels including the Public Service Centres, by telephone and over the Internet.

Enhance the quality and convenience of customer service by securing staff agreement to the introduction of longer opening hours.

Implement a comprehensive contact management system (eDirect) for the entire organization by mid 2006

Co-ordinate the collation, reporting and analysis of service indicators, including those prescribed nationally, as a key driver in achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services.

Co-ordinate the preparation in 2005 and the subsequent implementation of a Customer Action Plan which will set out the standards of service to be delivered to our customers by all Directorates and how these standards will be achieved, monitored and reported. The Plan will also provide for the introduction of an effective appeals/complaints system.

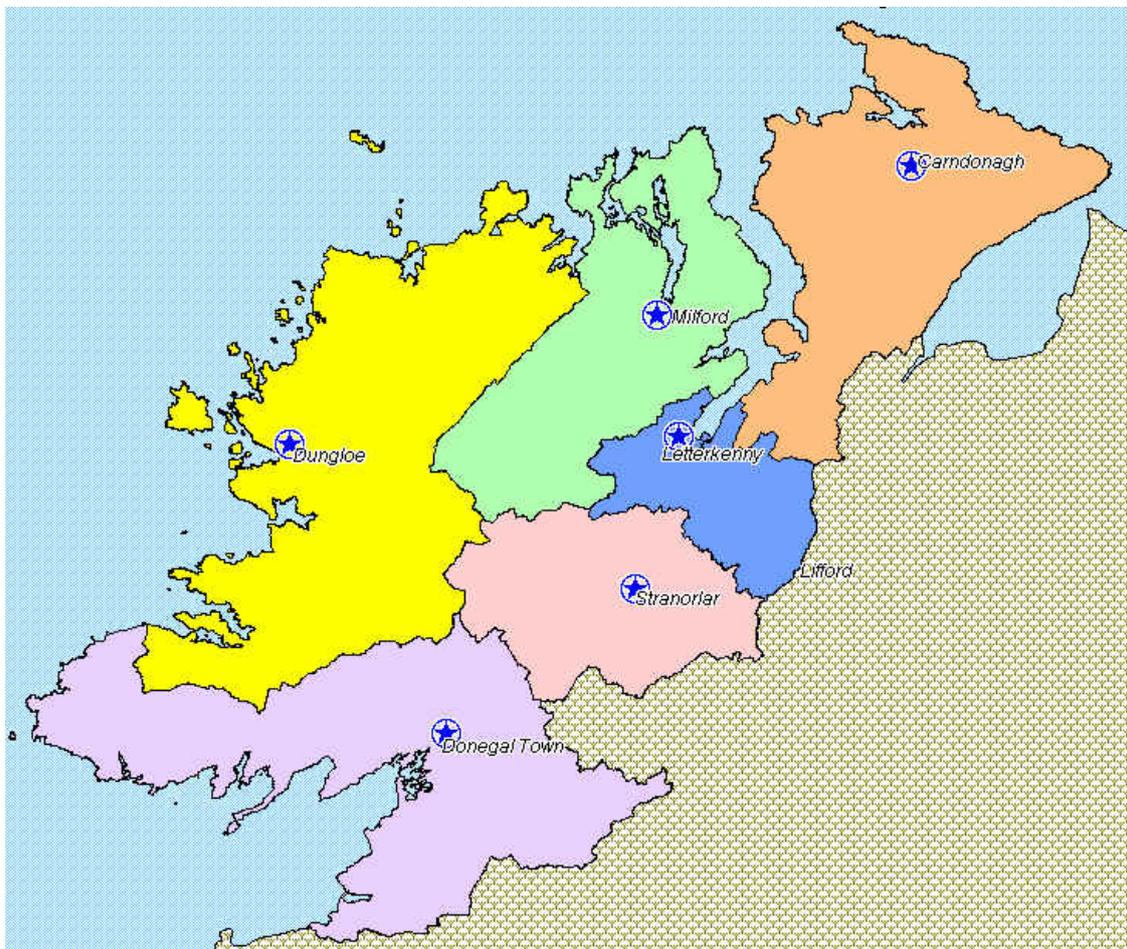
Source: p.20, p.36-38, Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009

- **Donegal Integrated Service Delivery Project** involved a partnership of public service agencies, which was formally inaugurated in June 2001 to advance the interagency collaboration required to deliver on the vision of integrating service delivery around the needs of the customer. The Partner Agencies in the project included Donegal County Council, FAS, the Health Service Executive North West, Comhairle and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

The vision of the Donegal Integrated Service Delivery Project project was:

“To deliver a seamless, quality public service to customers and communities in Donegal through a choice of access channels”

Figure 1: Donegal County Council: headquarters in Lifford and each of the Donegal Integrated Services Centres in the electoral areas.

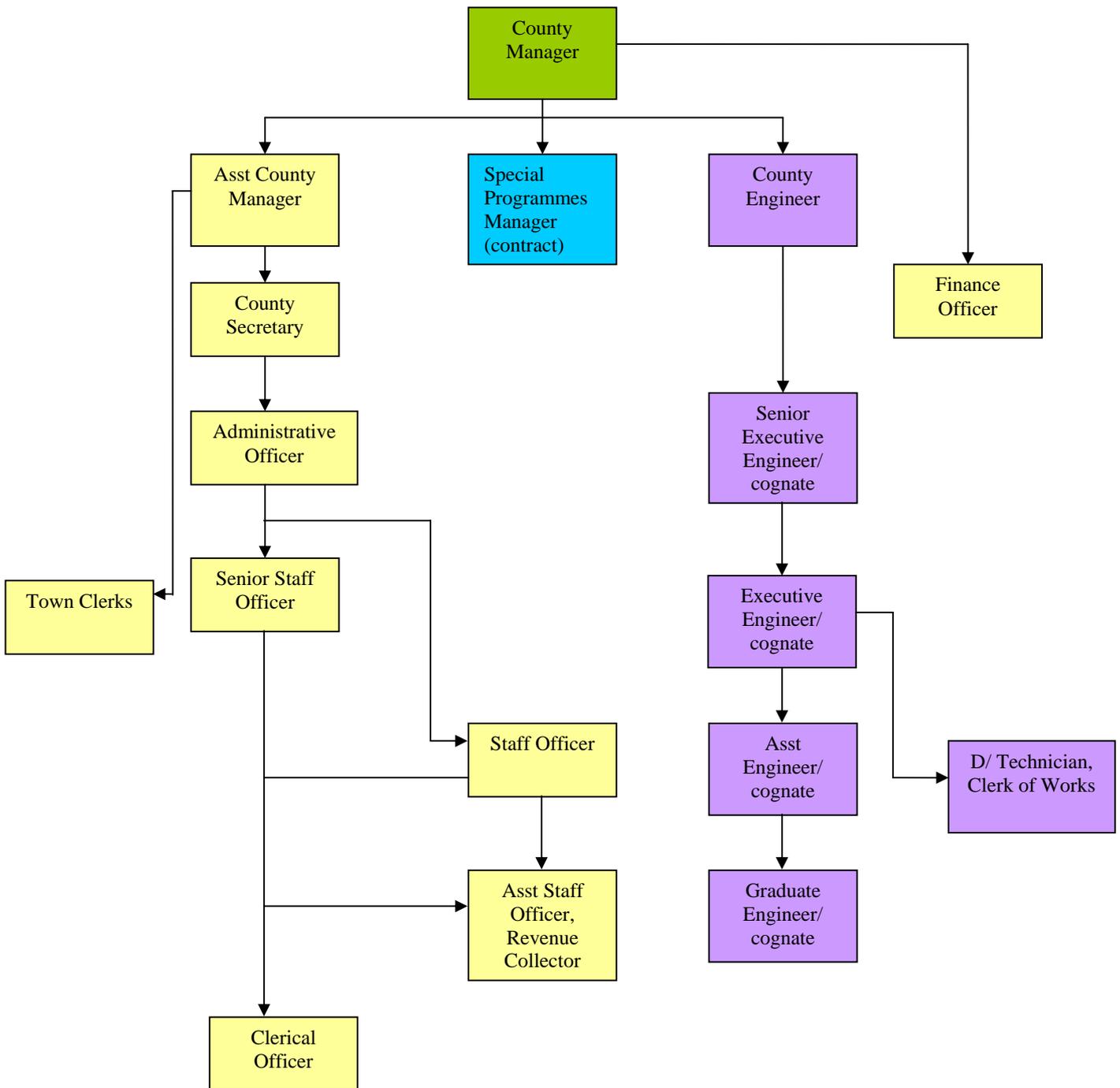


Appendix 2

DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL – PRE BLG STRUCTURE (Dual structure)

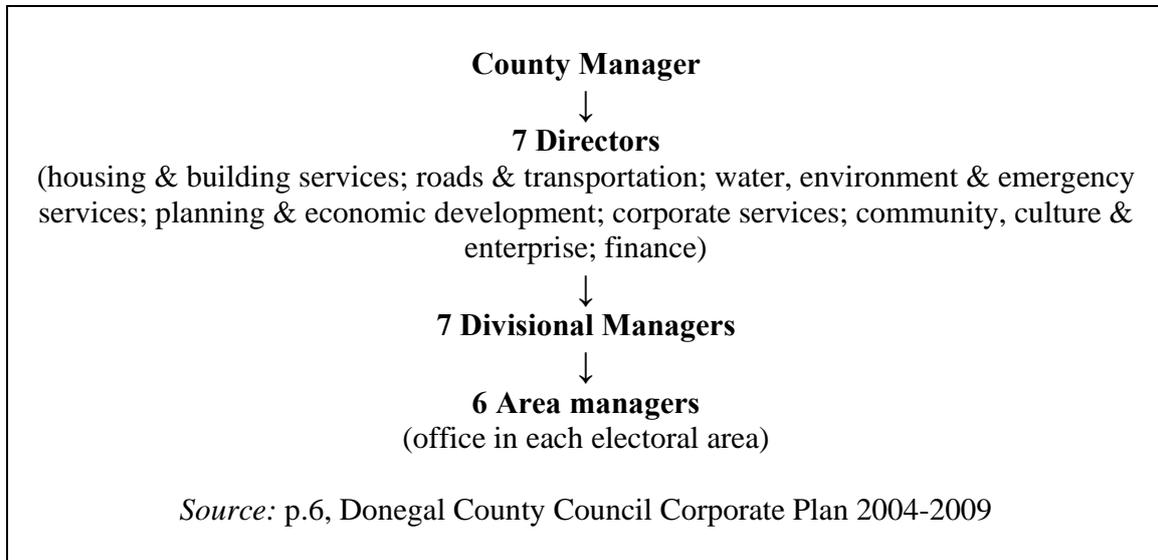
**Donegal County Council Management structure linked to
national pay grades and
New structure (post reform)**

**Attachment 1: DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL – PRE BLG STRUCTURE
(Dual structure)**



Source: Donegal County Council (2002)

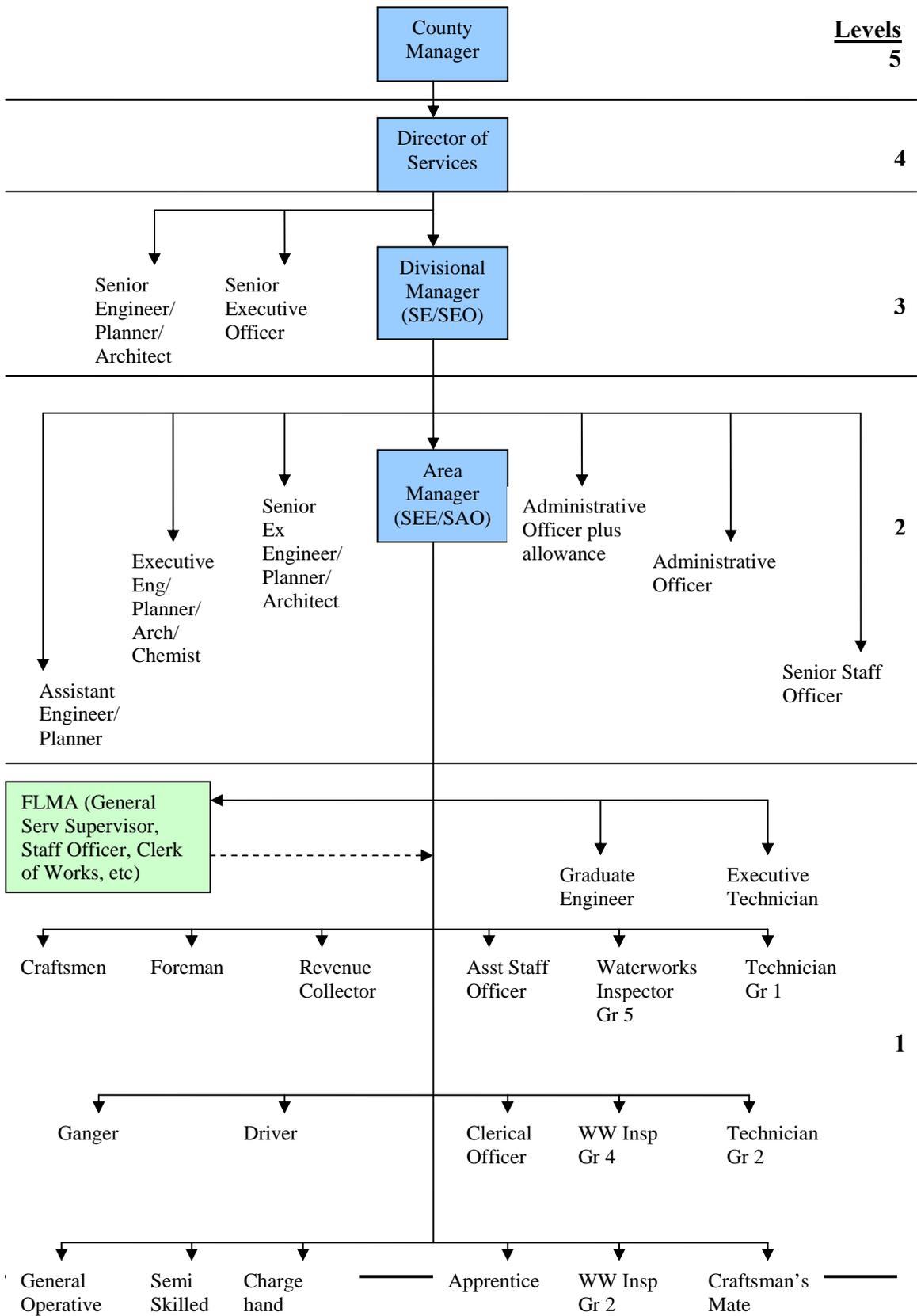
- **Management structure of Donegal County Council (post reform)**



See diagrams on the following page:

Donegal County Council Management structure linked to national
pay grades and

Source: Donegal County Council (2002)



Appendix 3

Background of Donegal County Council

Strategic Policy Committees and Corporate Policy Group

Implementation and Monitoring of the Corporate Plan

Background

Donegal County Council as the Local Authority for County Donegal (exclusive of four Town Council areas) provides an extensive range of services in the County. These services range from Planning Control, to the provision of Social Housing, to the upkeep and improvement of Roads, to Pollution Control, to Fire Services, Library Services and Sanitary Services.

Over the last number of years the Council has endeavoured to bring services closer to local communities with the opening of Public Service Centres in Dungloe, Donegal Town, Carndonagh, Letterkenny and Milford. Most Council services are now provided through each of these Centres representing a significant improvement in quality and convenience for customers.

The Council plays a proactive role in the development of the County. In conjunction with Donegal County Development Board, the Council assists in consolidating and, where possible, growing the economic welfare of County Donegal in an effort to make the County a better place in which to live, work, relax and invest.

Donegal County Council is made up of 29 elected members. Members are elected according to the system of proportional representation, generally for a period of five years. The Chairman of the Council is elected from the membership at the Annual General Meeting of the Council.

The wide range of functions performed by the elected members are called “*Reserved Functions*” which in broad terms are the functions relating to the policy making powers of the Council and include:

- adoption of Annual Budget.
- making or varying of the Development Plan.
- adoption of scheme of letting priorities for Local Authority Housing.
- making, amending and revoking bye-laws.
- approval to the borrowing of money.

The Council makes its decisions by “Resolution” at its formal meetings.

The operational role of Donegal County Council is performed by the County Manager and his staff who are responsible for the day to day operation of the Council. The functions performed by the County Manager are called “*Executive Functions*” and include:

- the letting of houses

- the decision on applications for planning permission
- the control of staff
- the regulatory and control functions of the Authority
- the overall implementation of Council Policy

The County Manager makes decisions that are consistent with the policy that has been made by the elected members.

(Source: <http://www.donegalcoco.ie/council/>)

As part of the national programme of Local Government Reform a number of initiatives were introduced to strengthen and enhance local democracy and widen participation in the Local Government process including: **Strategic Policy Committees and The Corporate Policy Group**

Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) provide the elected members with an opportunity for an early and more in-depth input into the Councils policy development process in partnership with various sectoral, local development and community interests.

Donegal County Council has established five SPCs reflecting the key functional areas of the Council:

- Housing
- Roads and Transportation
- Planning and Economic Development
- Water, Environment and Emergency
- Community, Culture and Corporate

Each elected member serves on at least one SPC. Two thirds of the membership of SPCs is made up of elected members (County Council or Town Council), with the remainder consisting of representatives of ‘sectoral interests’ - comprising community, business, trade union, farming, development and environmental interests.

The SPCs provide members (elected and sectoral) with the opportunity to develop a greater role in the strategic development of the Council, however, the final decision remains with the full elected Council. (Source: <http://www.donegalcoco.ie/council/>)

The Corporate Policy Group

The chairpersons of each SPC and the Cathaoirleach of the County Council make up the Corporate Policy Group (CPG). The County Manager also participates and supports the work of the CPG.

The role of the CPG is a strategic one. It is intended to link and co-ordinate the work of the different SPCs; and to provide a forum where policy positions affecting the whole council can be discussed and agreed for submission to the full council. The CPG gives an increased focus to the policy role of councillors and enhances the democratic overview of council affairs. The manager in the preparation of both the Corporate Plan and the draft local authority budget must consult the CPG. Its members represent the Elected Council on the County Development Board. (Source: <http://www.donegalcoco.ie/council/>)

Source: Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009

Implementation and Monitoring of the Corporate Plan

Funding

The annual cost estimates for implementing the Corporate Plan are included in the Revenue and Capital Budgets adopted by the Council each year. The 2005 Budget contains the revenue and capital provision to achieve the milestones set for the implementation of the Corporate Plan in 2005. The Budget also contains the multi-annual plans and programmes which will form the basis for estimating the financial requirements of implementing the Plan over the next five years. The pace of implementation will be decided annually in the context of:

- a) Annual revenue budget, including the yield from various sources of income (Local Government Fund, rates, water/service charges, miscellaneous receipts, etc);
- b) Annual capital allocations;
- c) Proceeds of Development Contribution Schemes;
- d) Grant aid from various funds (e.g., Interreg III, Peace III, IFI, etc).

Policy-making and Role of Elected Members / Representative Bodies

The priority which is afforded to each corporate objective, the sequence in which they are implemented through the business plans of each Directorate, and the policies within which they are implemented will be determined by the elected members through the meetings of the full Council. The Council will be assisted and advised in this work by the Corporate Policy Group, the Strategic Policy Committees and the County Development board and its various sub-structures. At the operational level, it will also be assisted by each of the Electoral Area Committees as appropriate, in ensuring that strategic projects are implemented through annual work programmes in each Electoral Area.

The annual cycle of Budget preparation and adoption will enable the elected members, management and staff to systematically review progress on the implementation of strategies, to check that the assumptions upon which this Plan has been prepared are still valid, and to determine whether any significant changes are needed to the strategic direction of the Plan, having regard to prevailing circumstances.

Progress on the implementation of the work programmes at Electoral Area level will be regularly reviewed by the relevant Area Committee and at County level by the Strategic Policy Committees.

Reporting templates will be developed to ensure consistency of approach. These templates will include a range of performance measures, including the forty-two national Service Indicators as prescribed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The templates will also form the basis through which progress can be monitored on the achievement of the objectives as set out in An Straiteis. They will also help to set the agenda for periodic meetings with the Oireachtas members. Progress on the implementation of the Plan will be outlined in the Annual Report each year. The findings of the CDB review, which is being carried out in 2005, will also feed into ongoing discussions concerning the implementation of the Corporate Plan.

Role of Management / Executive

The principal aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan will be pursued by the County Manager as part of his annual plan / performance related programme. In turn, the strategic objectives within each Directorate will form a key element of each Director's work programme /performance related scheme as agreed with the County Manager.

The implementation of the Plan will be cascaded down through the organization into the work assignments of every member of staff through the nationally agreed Performance Management Development System, setting out the objectives and standards against which performance will be assessed. This will enable every staff member to link their personal contribution to the achievement of the organisation's objectives. It will also facilitate a more focussed approach to the continued investment in staff training and development.

The objectives of this Plan cannot be achieved without the participation and support of all staff. Strengthening the management systems as outlined above is an essential element of ensuring that every employee is enabled and empowered to play his or her part. In addition, the further development of our Partnership structures and systems will provide an effective channel for management, staff and their representative organisations to tackle the significant challenges which lie ahead.

The implementation of PMDS will be underpinned by the development and roll-out of a systematic approach to the improvement of organizational performance. This approach, which encompasses organisation structure, systems and work processes, will enable

performance to be realistically tracked, reported and benchmarked. It will set a strategic context for further investment and development of information systems as a key tool for the delivery of better quality services to our customers and in the management of work programmes. (p.46,48, Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009)

Source: Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2004-2009