

A unitary council for Northumberland

Blueprint Design

Whole Council Blueprint Design

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Introduction

The creation of the new unitary council for Northumberland requires a wide ranging programme of work that aligns the vision, values, operating principles, strategies, objectives, tactics, systems, structure, people, process and performance measures to deliver the desired transformation. It is a complex process that starts with the blueprint.

The blueprint design will comprise two parts:-

- A blueprint design for the whole council – **“The Whole Council Blueprint Design”**
- A blueprint design for each of the main component parts of the council – **“The Component Level Design”**.

The Component Level Designs will incorporate a business case element which will detail the cost of delivering the blueprint design along with details of expected financial and non-financial benefits. Prior to the completion of the Component Level Design, an Integrated Impact Assessment will be carried out, addressing equality and diversity agenda.

This blueprint design process will, therefore, be in two phases:-

- The Whole Council Blueprint Design
- The Component Level Design

This document is the whole council blueprint design. It provides the link between the bid submission and the detailed design stage and;

- Is based on the principles and design elements set out in the Northumberland County Councils submission for unitary status – “One Future – One Council” and elements of best practice from the districts bid.
- Sets the context and high level design framework within which the component level design and detailed design activity will take place.
- Sets out the target (end state) design for the new council

Background

The whole council design is set in the context of creating a whole new council as set out in the successful bid for unitary status. It is also being undertaken in a complex landscape of national, regional and local policy initiatives. This environment presents both major opportunities and challenges for the design. There are a number of important features the whole council design must address.

The new unitary council for Northumberland will translate the aspirations set out in the governments white paper – “Strong and Prosperous Communities” into reality. It will be enabled by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The approach will transform public services and democratic engagement responding to the governments challenge to deliver more efficient and responsive public services but above all it will ensure the social, economic, and environmental well being of the county.

To do this it will adopt an entirely new approach to managing local government in Northumberland. The money and resources released by having one rather than seven councils will be spent on service delivery instead of bureaucracy.

The new approach will provide much stronger strategic and community leadership providing a voice and influence within the sub-region and region ensuring resources reach both urban and rural communities. It will also provide visible political accountability at the local level.

Services will be organised in the most accessible and cost effective way. Ongoing annual savings of £17m will be released and reinvested in modern public services within the medium term financial strategy set with reference to the lowest council tax threshold in the districts for the year 2008/2009 .

A new route map for integrated service delivery with public, private, voluntary and community sector partners will be set out at an early stage. There will be tangible improvements to all of the councils services.

The new council will adopt new ways of working that recognise the diversity of the natural communities that exist and make these the basis of how services are designed and delivered as locally as possible. Services will be customised to local needs.

To strengthen strategic leadership the council will adopt a new approach to cabinet government with a leader elected for a four year term who will appoint a cabinet.

The new council will have the capacity to increase performance across the full range of services in line with the governments new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and recently published National Indicators for local government. Local priorities will be determined through a strengthened partnership process led by the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) and signed up to by the council, partners and government through the Local Area Agreement (LAA) process.

Objectives

The purpose of this document is to:-

- Set out in an understandable, well-structured and comprehensive way the whole council blueprint design for decision by the Implementation Executive.
- Ensure the design is true to the principles of the bid submission.
- Ensure that the design of the new council is consistent, cohesive and integrated at every stage.
- Be used in a practical way to guide the component level design and thereafter by design teams engaged in more detailed work.
- Enable the review of planned benefits following implementation.

Part A – The Transformation

Vision

The vision is to create a **world-class council** with an excellent reputation which is founded on consistently high levels of performance and strong influence at both national and regional levels.

It is a **new council** that is:-

- Absolutely customer focused
- Modern with a new look and style
- Ambitious, confident, forward looking and continuously finding better ways of working
- Consistently delivering what customers and stakeholders want

The **aim** is to achieve what residents want and to get the best for all of Northumberland's communities both now and in the future by:-

- Putting communities at the heart of local democracy
- Raising standards of service and living
- Ensuring everyone gets fair treatment and equal opportunity
- Making the best possible use of taxpayers money
- Giving residents a real say in what matters
- Working effectively with partners to achieve shared goals
- Putting sustainability at the centre of all that we do and ensuring the county's resilience to climate change

This means being:-

- Efficient, effective and accountable
- A provider of excellent services
- An excellent community leader
- An employer of choice with a reputation of excellence
- A socially responsible organisation

The vision is one of **transformation** not merely integration and transition. A 'step' change in performance will be achieved by:-

- Effective leadership at all levels
- Involving everyone
- Designing from first principles
- Seizing opportunities and managing risks
- Developing capability and delivering improvements at all levels
- Establishing a strong value and performance culture built on effective project and team working and an appetite for continuous learning and innovation
- Creating the organisational agility to stay out in front in an ever changing, complex and fast paced world.

It will be necessary to **embrace new ways of working**:-

- Lean and efficient administration
- Support service integration
- Flexible working and new work styles
- Devolved decision making and decentralised delivery
- Streamlined partnerships

This will also include 'going local':-

- Working effectively at the right level and creating an environment for productive dialogue between the layers of "natural communities":-
 - Provision of strategic services, core corporate services and resource allocation at the **"County" level**
 - **"Area" communities** - area committees and partnerships linked to the management and scrutiny of Area services and issues
 - **"Belonging" communities** – accredited community forums acting as information sharing and consultative mechanisms, identifying local priorities and delivering delegated services in association with town and parish councils, development trusts etc.
 - **"Neighbourhood"** working and community capacity building

Our vision will be driven by a set of core **values**:

- Providing the best & continuing to improve
- Embracing equality & valuing difference
- Working with others & taking personal responsibility
- Being honest, fair, polite and caring
- Taking pride in the past and building a better future
- Recognising our successes & learning from our mistakes

These values are indicative at this stage - further work is to be done with members and employees on the core values of the new council which will underpin its culture and ethos.

Once finalised, the natural community boundaries will be appended to this Blueprint.

Design Principles

The design is based on delivering the kind of transformational change set out in the bid submission and making a significant contribution to the priorities of Northumberland as set out in the community strategy. It is, therefore, founded on:-

- A strong desire to place the Customer, innovation & continuous improvement at the heart of everything we do;
- An assessment of the present and predicted future operating context of the organisation
- 'A holistic view of the organisation; strategy, structures, people, culture, systems, processes, performance measures, customers and management
- Providing strong and effective strategic and community leadership through clearly linked political, organisational and partnership management arrangements
- Devolving responsibility and accountability for decisions and resources to the lowest effective level
- Establishing vertically and laterally integrated operations at three principal levels; County, Area and Belonging
- Cost-effective customer access to services, service delivery and administration and support services i.e. 'front, middle and back office' conceptual model
- Standard 'end to end' business processes
- A single customer service 'door' providing access to all services which maximises service delivery at the first point of contact in line with customer expectations.
- A focus on providing a consistently high quality service to our customers irrespective of who the customer is, what service they require, or how they choose to interact with the new Authority
- Ensuring 'universal' services are provided to the same quality standard across the county
- Giving communities real influence over local priorities and service delivery at Area and Belonging levels
- Providing genuine choice for those requiring person-centred learning, help or support
- Enabling staff to work flexibly from modern office accommodation and other remote locations including 'touch down centres at Local community level

- Integrated partnership working at County, Area and Belonging levels to enable the delivery of community priorities and outcomes set out in the community strategy and local area agreement
- Co-locating services with partners
- A resource model that is both enabled and constrained by the medium term financial strategy
- Delivering cashable efficiencies of £17m pa by April 2012/13

Resourcing

The County Council and the six District Councils are currently preparing their 2008-09 budgets which will determine the council tax for each area for the next financial year and will be the starting point for the production of the consolidated budget for the new unitary authority for 2009-10, which in turn will inform the **medium term financial strategy**.

It is estimated that the new unitary authority will produce ongoing net revenue savings increasing to £17 million by 2012-13. Improvements in the area of procurement and property rationalisation will also contribute to the overall financial position.

With effect from April 2009 the level of council tax will be the same for all council taxpayers in Northumberland. It is intended to equalise council tax in 2009/10 at the lowest district level in 2008/09 plus inflation. This will benefit residents in 5 out of the 6 district areas.

As progress is made programme and project benefits will need to be critically weighed against emerging costs and risks to ensure that any investment produces sufficient value and is affordable within the overall Programme business case. Any investment made in order to allow transition will be recovered fully in a payback period of less than 3 years.

The benefits management strategy will ensure that all benefits are profiled, tracked and, finally, embedded in the new organisation. It will also enable decisions to be made on adjusting investment and resource priorities to deliver the end goals.

Benefits/KPI's

The vision has set out the '**end state**' for the change programme. It has done this by setting out the high level outcomes i.e. **capabilities** the new council must achieve to deliver desired **benefits** to a range of stakeholders:-

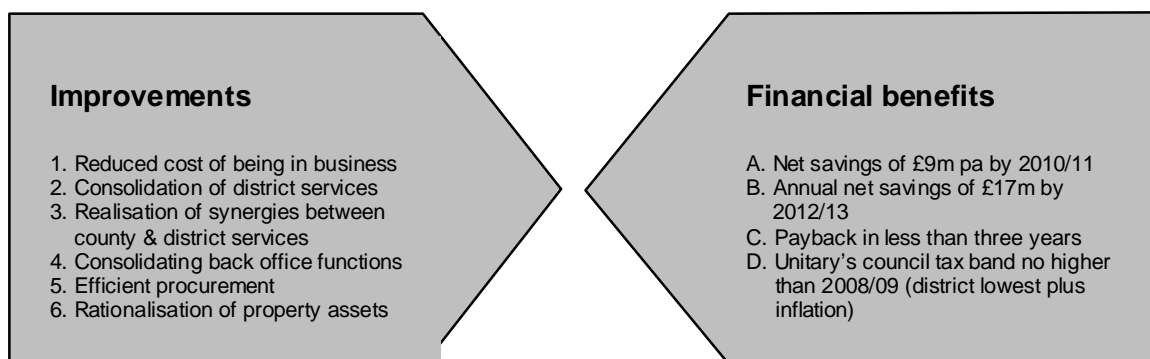
- Efficient, effective, accountable
- Excellent services
- Excellent employer
- Excellent Community Leader
- Excellent reputation
- Includes corporate social responsibility

It is important for the whole council design to have a constant focus on the intended benefits (measurable improvements) if it is to deliver value and remain aligned to the end goals.

As progress is made programme and project benefits will need to be critically weighed against emerging costs and risks to ensure the investment produces sufficient value and is affordable within the overall business case.

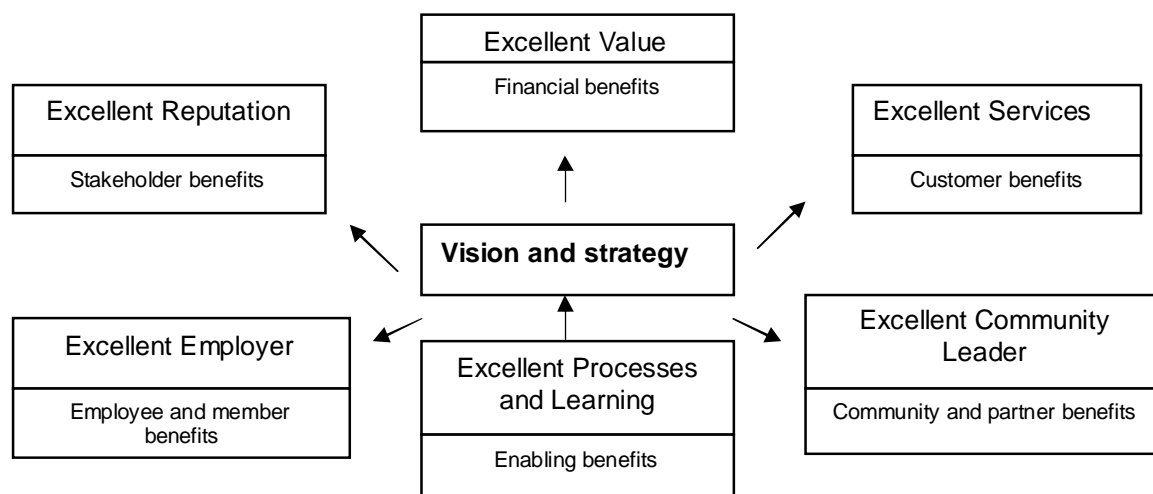
The **benefits management strategy** will ensure benefits are profiled, tracked and, finally, embedded in the new organisation. It will also enable decisions to be made on adjusting investment and resource priorities to deliver the end goals. It should also provide the opportunity to redeploy resources freed up through the efficiencies being delivered and to minimise unwanted side effects (dis-benefits).

The starting point is to identify the **high level benefits** the new council will deliver. Key points from the bid submission on the financial benefits are summarised below:-



Alongside the '**financial**' benefits are the equally important '**non-financial**' benefits. These are derived from the high level capabilities of future "target" organisation. The

following diagram provides a framework for the development of a **strategic benefits 'scorecard'**.



For each of the six dimension of the 'benefits' 'scorecard' metrics (measures, Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) baselines and targets) will be put in place. Although the emphasis must be on tangible benefits, intangible and enabling benefits will also be important.

An *indicative* high-level benefits/KPI scorecard is set out below. It will be refined following a comprehensive benefits mapping exercise after which a full benefits realisation strategy will be put in place to guide the programme:-

Benefits scorecard

Corporate capability	Strategic benefit (financial & non financial) (examples of benefit)	Key performance indicator (examples of measure)
Excellent value	1. Meets transition costs and delivers ongoing efficiency savings for investment in front line services	Net annual saving based on 2008/09 budget Payback of transition costs
	2. Council tax increases kept within inflation	Council tax levels
	3. Consistently provides value for money	Annual VFM assessment (audit)
	4. Top performing council	Comprehensive Area Assessment rating (CAA)
	5. High levels of resident satisfaction with the	% Satisfaction

Corporate capability	Strategic benefit (financial & non financial) (examples of benefit)	Key performance indicator (examples of measure)
	whole council	
Excellent services	1. Fast and convenient access to services	% Council services delivered at first point of contact
	2. Provides services fairly to all sections of the community	Equality standard
	3. Responsive to the needs and customer preferences for services	% Satisfaction with key services
	4. Performs well across all services to national indicators	Quartile performance
Excellent community leader	1. Improving the 'well-being' of communities by delivering community strategy priorities	Local Area Agreement
	2. Communities engaged in influencing and tackling local priorities issues	Local Communities strategy milestones
	3. Partners engaged and committed to partnership working	Partnership 'health check' and improvement plans at County and Area levels
Excellent employer	1. High levels of morale and a motivated workforce	Composite measures from staff survey
	2. High levels of member satisfaction	Composite measures from member survey
	3. A healthy workforce	Sickness and attendance
	4. A competent workforce	Personal development plans
Excellent reputation	1. High national and regional profile	Awards won
	2. Local democracy reignited	Election turnout
	3. Create investor/funder confidence in the county	External investment and funding attracted per annum

Corporate capability	Strategic benefit (financial & non financial) (examples of benefit)	Key performance indicator (examples of measure)
Excellent processes & learning	1. Continuous improvement <i>(people, processes and performance)</i>	Corporate Improvement Plan <i>(i.e. Transformation Programme - milestones after vesting day; April 2009)</i>

Part B: The Approach

Services

The local authority will be organised to deliver its vision and priorities. To do this it will bring together similar services and disciplines in clusters in a way that maximises:-

- Sharing and pooling of “common” knowledge, skills and expertise
- Capability to produce joined-up, sophisticated responses to tackle complex cross-cutting issues and strategic challenges
- Effective integration and delivery of the customer service (front office), specialist professional and ‘core’ corporate (middle office) and support services (back office) model
- Economies of scale and efficiencies by minimising the level of duplication.

This approach will be built around three themed strategic directorates, as follows:-

People

This directorate will focus on enabling children and young people to reach their full potential. This will include providing a good education and tailored support to our most vulnerable – children and young people, including those who are likely to be an offender or a victim of crime or accident. Its aim will be to ensure that everyone can reach their full potential.

Place

This directorate will focus on providing quality environments and convenient access to services that enrich the quality of all our residents’ lives. Its aim will be to ensure that our neighbourhoods and surroundings are safe, green and clean, that our network of customer and cultural services is easy to reach and use, and that our forward planning and regeneration strategies maximise the potential for our communities to thrive and prosper.

Performance

This Directorate will focus on ensuring that the council fulfils its corporate and community leadership functions effectively. Its aim will be to provide appropriate support to staff, managers, and elected members to properly undertake their jobs, and to effectively manage the Council's finances, assets and democratic processes. It will also lead the local authority's engagement with communities and partner organisations. The specific service groupings within each of these Directorates are illustrated below.

Notwithstanding the focus of these directorates and service clusters, the local authority will function in a way that facilitates joined-up working that will involve collaboration across the directorates and between service clusters as required.

People	Place	Performance
<p>School & Family Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years and childcare • School improvement • Family support • Youth service and adult education • Play <p>Special Needs & Community Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special educational needs • Inclusion (Ed Psy, disability) • Community support • Children's health services • YOT <p>Community safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Safety • Fire and rescue • Emergency planning • Crime and drugs 	<p>Local Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaning, refuse collection & recycling, disposal • FM (schools, buildings) and grounds maintenance • Trading standards and environmental health • Animal health and welfare • Building control • Development control • Environmental crime/street enforcement • Event coordination & safety • Events promotion • Housing management • Housing improvement grants • Licensing • Markets • Public conveniences <p>Customer and Library Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries • Contact Centre and One stop shops • Client – FM <p>Strategic Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and housing strategy • Housing enabling/options • Private housing sector/decent homes • Street naming, numbering and nameplates • Highways and transport • Car parks • Concessionary travel • Regeneration (inc leisure, tourism and culture) • TICs • Land drainage • Leisure facilities • Museums and arts 	<p>Policy and Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy and research, Member support, inc scrutiny • LSP lead • Community development • Community engagement <p>Business Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate performance • Committees, FOI • Communications • Human Resources • Training and OD • Corporate governance • Corporate health and safety • Civil registration • Coroner • Electoral registration • Elections management • Insurances <p>Corporate Support Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance, including procurement • Transactional HR • IT • Revenues and benefits • Asset management • Legal • Land charges

Reflecting the joint arrangements with the NHS, Adult Care Services will not sit within the People/Place/Performance structure.

<p>Adult Care Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult social services • Health services • Public health (joint appointment with Care Trust) • Disabled adaptations grants
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Integrated Service Delivery – Lateral Working

So, for example, whilst an older person who is starting to feel concerned about their ability to continue living independently will be primarily supported by services sitting within the People directorate, a range of other services – depending on the circumstances of the individual – may need to respond to enhance the quality of life of that individual. These may include the housing management service (to undertake repairs or minor adaptations), the concessionary travel or housing benefit services (to ensure the individual is claiming benefits they are entitled to receive), or the community development leisure or library services (to take up a new interest or actively engage in local community activity).

Equally, a proposal to construct a new enterprise incubator to support fledgling businesses led by the Regeneration division of the Place directorate will require the inputs of other services within the local authority to fully maximise the benefit of such a facility. This will include the advice of the land use planning and community engagement teams to ensure that the most appropriate location is found; the input of asset management, development control and building control staff to ensure that the building is designed as efficiently and effectively as possible; the expertise of the legal arm of the authority to ensure that the tenancy arrangements are manageable and consistent with the proposed use of the building; and a link through to the School and Family Support Unit to ensure that enterprising behaviour is being nurtured and encouraged among young people.

Operating environment

The local authority will continually scan and respond to prevailing demographic trends, continued economic globalisation and emerging international or national and policy.

Future Customer Base

Whilst the number of residents of Northumberland is unlikely to change dramatically over the next few years, the composition of the population will continue to alter and change.

Our older population (over 50 year olds) will continue to grow due to a combination of a lengthening life expectancy (i.e. our residents will live longer) and an in-migration of older people attracted to the county to run a business, bring up a family, or retire. In sharp contrast, our younger people (aged between 20 and 29 years old) are leaving the county in more significant numbers. A number of inter-related factors account for this trend: including an inability to get on the housing ladder; the search for a better paid or more secure job; or a desire to go on to further or higher education. This ageing process is further compounded by a negative natural change – i.e. the numbers being born are not keeping pace with the numbers dying.

However, there are early signs that a further population dynamic will increasingly grow in significance – that of migrant workers from Eastern Europe arriving in the county to take up lower wage jobs in tourism, food processing and manufacturing. This influx will expand the diversity of the county's residents.

The local authority will build these population trends and their implications into the ongoing design and delivery of its services and in fulfilling its community leadership role in creating sustainable communities.

Future Community Expectations

Resident's expectations of access to services have been transformed in recent years. This is not only because services can be more readily accessed over the Internet or via a call centre, but in other ways such as getting money from a cash machine and being able to find out straight away about the availability of goods in shops and when new deliveries will arrive. These everyday experiences influence the expectations of public services.

By providing a single customer service "door" to all services – whether that initial access is made by face to face contact, postal correspondence, by telephone, texting or emailing, or through an interactive website – the volume of customer enquiries is likely to substantially increase and significantly exceed the sum of those currently received by the existing local authorities.

Moreover, as the natural community concept is progressively implemented – particularly through the network of community forums at Belonging Community level – the sophistication and depth of the community’s engagement in shaping and influencing the delivery of public services will increasingly be enhanced.

The local authority will build the management of this customer expectation and the implications of responding positively to all customer and community-based interface promptly and effectively into the ongoing design and delivery of its services.

Future Policy Drivers

Northumberland does not operate in a self-contained bubble – many of the influences on the quality of life of its residents are dictated externally by international and national policy.

Within this context, five strategic policy drivers are going to be key determinants in how services are delivered in Northumberland in the medium term.

The first is climate change and in particular the need to reduce carbon-based emissions and adapt to global warming. The challenges this will present will include securing future energy supplies; managing water resources; managing the waste we produce; reducing the need to travel; and planning for extreme weather events (particularly flooding and coastal erosion).

The second is increasing economic competitiveness and productivity. Northumberland forms part of a region that is performing relatively poorly in relation to economic growth compared to other parts of the country and, within a European context, which is peripheral to the principal economic markets. The challenge is to strive to enhance the county economic position by affording residents with access to quality jobs and educational opportunities within the wider Tyne and Wear city region context.

Related to this is the third driver, that of ensuring equality of opportunity of all. Life in Northumberland is not the same for every resident – disadvantage and discrimination represent serious and significant impediments to a proportion of the population to living the life they aspire to. An ongoing challenge will be our ability to narrow the gap by providing differential and tailored support to these more vulnerable communities.

The fourth relates to promoting community cohesion and building social capital. The cultural diversity of Northumberland is less pronounced than more urban parts of the county. Nevertheless, the need to create communities where people from all sorts of different backgrounds respect each other and live harmoniously together remains a fundamental driver.

Finally, the way we live our lives and the satisfaction we gain from those lifestyles will be a key determinant in future service delivery. The incidence of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease continues nationally to grow and as such, national policy will increasingly be seeking to alter public behaviour in relation to our diet, physical exercise, and attitude to smoking and alcohol. Increasing weight will also be afforded to our “happiness” with the numbers suffering from depression or anxiety becoming as significant to our well-being as our physical health.

The local authority will build these strategic policy drivers and their implications into the ongoing design and delivery of its services and in fulfilling its community leadership role in creating sustainable communities.

Delivery principles

This section sets out the guiding principles on how services will be delivered by the new council. In addition to setting out potential options for delivery for design teams to consider, it also lists the potential triggers that should prompt a review of existing delivery mechanisms. It is based upon the principles and design elements set out in the bid submission. Any such reviews will take place during the Component Level Design – the plan for completing the Component Level Designs will be developed following completion of the Whole Council Design.

Mixed Economy

The design blueprint supports a mixed economy approach to service delivery. It recognises that services can be provided in a number of ways, the most effective way being decided on merit in any particular instance. The mixed economy comprises providers from both the private, public and third sectors. The alternative routes to service delivery given below are neither exclusive nor exhaustive and may apply to all or part of a service:

- 'In-house'
- Form a Joint Venture or a Partnership following competition from external bidders.
- Contract-out a service after competition from external bidders
- Tender a service with an in-house team bidding against the private sector.
- Join with another public, private or third sector organisation to provide a service jointly
- Join with another public or third sector organisation to pool budget and commission the service from a third party
- Transfer the service to the community, trust, charity, parish council, service user group or other body (e.g. RSL)
- Competitively dispose or sell-off a service and its assets to another service provider.

Triggers

Triggers are a set of circumstances that either individually or collectively should prompt a review of delivery arrangements during the detailed design stages. Again the following list is neither exclusive nor exhaustive:

- The presence of multiple procurement arrangements across the seven councils. Notable examples are housing, leisure and information technology.
- The need or opportunity to access capacity, resources or expertise to achieve or accelerate transformation and/or reduce the risk of non-achievement.
- The presence of a strong and competitive market (although market making may be considered)
- Evidence that the service is under performing or providing poor or mediocre value for money
- Evidence from best in class unitary councils that alternative service delivery arrangements have improved performance or value for money
- The opportunity to devolve all or parts of the service to Belonging communities.

Key Considerations

- Large scale procurement can be both costly and lengthy and this needs to be factored into the implementation phase at an early stage.
- Early involvement of staff and unions is critical. Some employees may face further upheaval following the transfer to the new council.
- Options must be evaluated against whole life benefit and cost implications including the impact on the council's social, environmental and economic objectives and the alignment with the council's culture and the community's expectations.
- Moving towards a more customer focussed organisation will require cultural change within the organisation, not just at the customer-facing layer, but throughout the new organisation. In order to effect this

change, the required cultural/organisational values which will place the customer at the heart of everything that is done will be clearly defined and articulated from early in the component level design stage, to ensure that all appropriate aspects of design are focused on their realisation.

The design is separate to the above service delivery options which may be considered by the new council from time to time through rigorous application of its procurement policy and full options appraisal.

Description of components

There are five key operational components central to the design of the new council:-

- County level
- Area level
- Belonging level
- Customer services
- Support services

County

Generally having low visibility, the County level will be the democratic 'back-office' and provider of support services which are shared across the organisation. It will lead the creation of countywide partnerships and will support service delivery at the Area and Belonging levels.

Area

The Area level could be described as the 'front end of democracy'. It is there to enable the best method of service delivery at the Belonging level through direct provision as well as working with partners. It is the focus for the development of Belonging level partnerships. The delivery of all Belonging services is managed at this level. The Area Committee will be accountable for service delivery across its area including services devolved to community forums. Development control and other regulatory functions will be carried out at this level by appropriate committees.

Belonging

Community forums will be established in each of the Belonging communities. The structure and constitution of each will reflect local circumstances. The aim is to be as inclusive and engaging as possible with communities and partners. It is envisaged that elected members will play an active community leadership role within these forums. Locality officers and service managers will support the development and work of community forums. Subject to 'accreditation' by the council community forums may be delegated responsibility to deliver some local services and through appropriate mechanisms may delegate such work to town or parish councils, development trusts etc. The accreditation process and the mechanisms through which the town/parish councils etc, will interact with the community forums will be defined in detail during the next stage of the Design process – Component Level Design.

Customer services

Fast and convenient access to all council and agreed partner services will be provided through a range of channels i.e. 'face to face', telephone, internet, email, physical-mail, SMS. Each Belonging community will have its own 'front of house' tailored to both the geographic context and local needs. In terms of serving our Customers, the primary aim of the Customer Services function will be to enable as much service as possible that will improve the customer experience to be delivered from the front office.

Corporate Support services

Support 'back office' services include: Finance, human resources/ payroll, ICT, legal, procurement, asset management etc – i.e. those services which are shared by the People/Place/Performance Directorates. They largely consist of business independent 'end to end' processes that support the organisation in delivering its objectives. It may be appropriate for selected non-support services to sit within this function - Revenues & Benefits being an example. The integration of services in this way will deliver significant financial benefits and support the investment in 'front-line' services.

'Front, middle and back office' model

The overarching aim is to create a customer centric council with a lean and efficient administration that works closely with its communities through partnerships and by devolving decision making and decentralising services.

This challenges the design to ensure a whole council capability of working effectively at three principal geographic levels i.e. operational layers - identified in the vision statement, County, Area, Belonging as well as establishing an integrated customer service operation and aligned support services supporting the whole organisation. To achieve this aim the 'front, middle and back office' concept is helpful. The 'front, middle and back office' concept is set out in detail in Appendix B - it is fundamental to the design of the new council and provides the opportunity to create a modern customer centric organisation across the very diverse and dispersed communities within the county.

Customer experience

The time constraints within which this Whole Council Design has been developed has prevented direct customer consultation from taking place, however officers from the legacy authorities with significant experience of delivering Customer Services within the region have developed the initial vision for how the customer experience will be transformed as we move forward.

The value of consulting with the Customer base is recognised, and provision will be made for this during subsequent phases of the Programme. Such consultation is likely to be one of the many factors which influence the design vision outlined below as the Programme evolves.

Our aim is for all customers of the new unitary authority to benefit from the following experience:-

- Customers will know which services the council has responsibility for
- Customer will know how, when and where to access services.
- Customers will know what delivery standards they can expect for each service provided and will know how the council is performing against those standards
- Customers will receive a high quality service through all access channels, at all stages delivered by knowledgeable staff (including partners, third party service providers and suppliers) and supported by robust systems
- Customers will be treated and recognised as individuals, with personal needs and expectations, seeking to make personal choices. Multiple-service requests will be handled as single transactions from a customer point of view.
- Customers will know when their service request has been closed and be given the opportunity to comment on whether their expectations have been met
- Customers will drive improvements - every transaction will be captured, service delivery monitored, customer feedback analysed. This data will be used within the council's performance management framework to support service planning and shape forward strategy.
- Customers, at a Belonging community level, will be consulted regarding service delivery within the Belonging area.

- Customers will be championed by an elected member who has portfolio responsibility for being ‘the voice of the customer’
- All Customers, be they individuals or businesses will receive a fair and equitable service irrespective of location, channel through which they choose to interact with the Authority, or nature of the interaction.

A review and re-engineering of all customer facing processes, and their supporting internal processes, will be undertaken to ensure customer access and service delivery match customer expectations. In line with the front, middle and back office - whole council design, all customer service processes will be defined end-to-end and ownership and delivery of key elements within the entire customer experience will be identified, monitored and kept under review.

The new council and service delivery partners will receive regular feedback on customers:-

- Customer profiling, volumes, access channels and segmentation
- Customer expectations and how expectations are changing
- Customer perceptions of the council and its services
- We will know the services particular groups don't use but may need

This intelligence will be used to improve customer access and experience.

Access to Services

Access to council services will be simple for all individuals, residents, visitors, groups, companies or communities looking to do business with the county irrespective of location or preferred contact method. We will facilitate those customers who wish to access our services, but who do not wish to have to use ICT in order to do so. Likewise, we recognise that service accessibility is not just about giving our customers physical access to services, but also ensuring that social inclusion is taken into account – often it is those customers who are most socially disadvantaged, that are most in need of our services.

In considering how to achieve excellent customer access and satisfaction we need to put the customer at the centre of everything we do. Customer expectations are increasing all the time and they want to access services at times as well as in places and in ways that suit their needs.

By 2010, we will aim for a high proportion of transactions to be completed at first point of contact. All contact and service requests will be captured on a single CRM system. The CRM system will feed into our central customer intelligence data-source. Combining citizen level data with data relating to service performance, demand for service, satisfaction at service and

community level, customer intelligence will inform decisions at all levels within the organisation and externally with partners and communities.

The core access channels required to be in place for April 2010 are detailed below. We will continually look to develop new access channels as customer expectations, demand and technology develop.

Physical Access

A three tier approach to physical access will be developed underpinned by distinct customer contact branding; providing a common look, feel and agreed service standards. Full one stop shop service points will be located in major conurbations and will be supported by mediated service delivery (second tier), for example utilising libraries or through other public buildings located in the community. In terms of the third tier provision self-service solutions driven by community needs and capacity will be customised and designed in consultation with end users to reflect individual and community requirements. The need to minimise travel in a large rural county is imperative with consideration given to taking the service to the customer rather than the other way around. The aim being to deliver a core of common services to a consistent standard at all access points that supports our commitment to providing a physical access point within all Belonging communities.

It is recognised that in developing an access strategy we cannot lose sight of any of customers or communities. Utilising customer intelligence we will proactively take services and information to those parts of the community that are isolated or hard to reach by virtue of location, personal circumstances or ethnicity.

Tier 1: Physical Access Points - One Stop Shops

By 2010 a customer accessing the Northumberland Tier 1 Physical Access Points - One Stop Shops will:

- Be aware of the location
- Be aware of all services provided by the council and partner organisations.
- Be aware of opening hours
- Instantly identify the access point as a Northumberland Customer Access Point
- Find the building easily accessible irrespective of any disability or impairment

- Find the environment is such to ensure an atmosphere projecting the professional approach taken to the delivery of services.
- Be recognised as an individual and supported by on-site staff to ensure individual needs are met.
- Observe high standards in terms of physical layout, decoration, displays, information, staff appearance etc. with adequate provision to cater for customers waiting to be served
- Be greeted and assisted by staff who have achieved required a level of competence in customer service skills, technical knowledge of a range of council services and use of technology.
- Be given the time and opportunity to ensure their request is fully understood by the council and receive a complete response that is fully understood by the customer
- Be able to conduct their business in a secure and safe environment
- Recognise that the necessary steps have been taken to ensure services can be offered to all irrespective of circumstance and situation.
- Be able to access the Tier 1 access points during normal working hours, and other times as set in consultation with the customer and based on evidence of customer demand.
- Be able to request and receive any service, or information, within the shop with an expectation that 85% of all appropriate enquiries will be dealt with at the first point of contact - the on-site staff will have access to key knowledge repository providing accurate and up to date information.
- For service requests not completed on-site, receive details of what can be expected from whom and by when, receive a unique reference, where appropriate, receive contact details for the service delivery team or partner – the on-site staff will record all details onto the CRM system.
- Be able to access information on any of the council services or those of its partners through leaflet distribution points or electronic access through the web site via self-serve.
- Be able to make payments
- Be able to connect through video conferencing to back office professionals to resolve more detailed enquiries.

- Be able to arrange individual appointments at home for customers unable, due to disability / career responsibilities.
- Be able to arrange individual appointments at a Northumberland Customer Access Point.
- The ability to select preferred method of confirmation of appointments or request reference number e.g. SMS / Email.
- Be able to utilise private meeting / discussion facilities for face to face, telephone or video conference dialogue.
- Be able to arrange individual appointments for partner agencies.
- Be able to discuss any existing service request without having to repeat details - the on-site staff will have access to customer record
- Be able to rely on the on-site staff to act as advocates on their behalf
- Be able to give feedback on any aspect of council service and be given open access to the corporate complaint process.

Tier 2: Physical Access Points

The one-stop shop network will be supported by a network of second tier access points. The locations of these points will be developed utilising demographic and population data supplied by InfoNet and, where appropriate, in consultation with the Belonging communities. Second tier access points will provide a core service (e.g. Library), deliver a range of other services in line with the one-stop shop model and provide mediated access to all other council services.

By 2010, a customer within a Belonging community, where there is a second tier customer access point, will:

- Be aware of the location
- Be aware of the core service offering, the other services offered and that, with support, they can be given access to information and all other services provided by the council and partner organisations.
- Be aware of opening hours
- Recognise the location as a council customer access point
- Find the building easily accessible

- Be recognised as an individual and supported by on-site staff to ensure individual needs are met.
- Observe high standards in terms of physical layout, decoration, displays, information, staff appearance etc.
- Be greeted and assisted by staff who have achieved a required level of competence in customer service skills, technical knowledge of a range of council services and use of technology.
- Be given the time and opportunity to ensure their request is fully understood by the council and receive a complete response that is fully understood by the customer
- Be able to complete a range of transactions; obtain accurate and up to date information regarding all council services; with the support of on-site staff, speak to or make an appointment to progress all other service requests; utilise self-service facilities; comment on council service provided; with support of on-site staff, speak to or arrange an appointment to speak to partner organisations from the public and/or voluntary sector.
- Be able to utilise private meeting / discussion facilities for face to face, telephone or video conference dialogue.
- Be able to make payments.
- Be able to discuss any existing service request without having to repeat details - the on-site staff will have access to customer record
- For requests not completed on-site, receive details of what can be expected from whom and by when, receive a unique reference, where appropriate, receive contact details for the service delivery team or partner – the on-site staff will record all details onto the CRM system.
- The ability to select preferred method of confirmation of appointments or request reference number e.g. SMS / Email.
- Be able to rely on the on-site staff to act as advocates on their behalf
- Be able to give feedback on any aspect of council service and be given open access to the corporate complaint process.

Tier 3: Physical Access

A flexible approach to a third tier of physical access is required to ensure we deliver on our commitment to providing customer access points within all our Belonging communities. Being truly committed to broad meaningful

engagement with our communities will require work to be undertaken by 2010 and will include consultation on where and how they would like to contact the council at a Belonging or neighbourhood level. By 2010 the ongoing dialogue will have ensured the relevance and value for money in respect of how accessing services at this level will be structured.

By 2010 at this level customers will:

- Be aware of the agreed location and opening times within the community
- Be aware of the facilities available
- Be assisted in utilising the facilities
- Recognise the facility as a Northumberland Customer Access Point
- Have simple access to the technology in place supported by use of trained individuals on site or clear step by step instructions including how to access help / guidance
- Be able to utilise self serve facilities to access core services either by phone or electronically
- Where agreed be given access to expanded use of mobile and peripatetic service delivery.

Telephone

To ensure all customers within all communities can access services around the clock, a contact centre approach will be developed to support 24/7 telephone access. Customers will request services and information through a single contact number. The contact centre will be supported by a robust infrastructure and call centre technology. The contact centre will handle both phone and electronic service requests with highly trained and valued staff able to provide a knowledgeable and fast resolution to enquiries. Interactions and response rates will be monitored and used to improve service delivery.

By 2010, a customer contacting the council by telephone will:

- Know the single number to utilise to access all services
- Know the specific number to utilise in relation to an existing service request or specific to that customer's needs, e.g. business to business call

- Have their call answered promptly (<20 seconds), 24 hours per day, 7 days per week (target resolution times will be confirmed during the subsequent Design stages of this programme)
- Recognise the call taker as representing the Northumberland Council brand through providing a polite, professional, welcoming and helpful greeting
- Be able to speak to a member of staff who has achieved a required level of competence in customer service skills, technical knowledge of a range of council services and use of technology.
- Be recognised as an individual, with the necessary steps being taken to ensure services can be offered to all irrespective of circumstance and situation, and listened to to ensure all individual needs are met.
- Be given the time and opportunity to ensure their request (s) is fully understood by the council and receive a complete response that is fully understood by the customer
- Be able to request and receive any service, or information, with an expectation that 85% of all enquiries will be dealt with at the first point of contact – call taking staff will have access to key knowledge repository providing accurate and up to date information.
- For service requests not completed at first point of contact, receive details of what can be expected from whom and by when, receive a unique reference (details can be tracked via any access channel), where appropriate, receive contact details for the service delivery team or partner – the on-site staff will record all details onto the CRM system.
- Be able to make payments
- Be able to arrange individual appointments at home for customers unable, due to disability / career responsibilities.
- Be able to arrange individual appointments at council premises.
- Be able to select preferred method of confirmation of appointments or request reference number e.g. SMS / Email.
- Be able to arrange individual appointments for partner agencies.
- Be able to discuss any existing service request without having to repeat details - the call taking staff will have access to customer record
- Be able to rely on the call taking staff to act as advocates on their behalf

- Be able to give feedback on any aspect of council service and be given open access to the corporate complaint process.
- Customers will also be given service delivery expectation targets
- Transaction details will be confirmed to include restating of transaction number and customers offered additional services.

Web Site

By 2010 customers will be able to access a reliable and easy to use single 'Northumberland Council' web site, developed with the customer experience in mind. Electronic transactions will be handled by the contact centre. The web site will:

- Allowing on-line service transactions, access to information, make on-line payments
- On-line council services will be 'two clicks' from the site's home page
- Customers will be able to set up their own account enabling tracking of service requests, personalisation and the ability to further localise information, e.g. information specific to their Belonging community
- Customers will find the site easy to navigate using terminology that is understood
- Information will be current and accurate
- All on-line service requests will be acknowledged with details of what can be expected from whom and by when, receive a unique reference, where appropriate, receive contact details for the service delivery team or partner – request details will be captured within the CRM system.
- Customers will be able to view current performance data against standards relating to all services
- Customers will be able to view current web site performance including resilience, performance, accessibility and usage
- Look, feel and layout of all pages will be consistent. All pages will include current contact details relating to the specific service area or information accessed

- Utilising monitoring tools the site will constantly evolve to meet the changing needs and expectations of customers whilst complying to accessibility standards
- Utilising monitoring tools we will ensure the site is in the upper quartile of all local authority sites in terms of accessibility, load speed / performance and resilience / reliability
- 24/7 voice support will be provided by the council's 24/7 contact centre
- Deep links will enable customers to access other public service sites
- Deep links will enable customer to access sites applicable to their ethnicity and community
- The site will be an effective communications and marketing tool
- The site, coupled with the internal Intranet, will enable consistency of service and information delivery by all staff and members.

Mail / E-Mail / Fax

Customers will be able to write to the new authority. Mail will arrive at a single point where it can be scanned, sorted and distributed. All written service requests will be added to the single CRM system. By 2010, a customer will:

- Know the general address for correspondence
- Know the specific address to utilise if in relations to an existing service request or specific to that customer's needs, e.g. escalated complaint
- Receive a prompt response in line with service standards (5 days for mail, 2 days for e-mail, target resolution times will be confirmed during the component level design)
- Recognise the response and the writer as representing the Northumberland Council brand through providing a professional, thorough, clear, easy to understand response, that answers all aspects of the written enquiry/request and invites further discussion via a channel of the customer's choice
- Receive a response from a member of staff who has achieved a required level of competence in customer service skills and technical knowledge

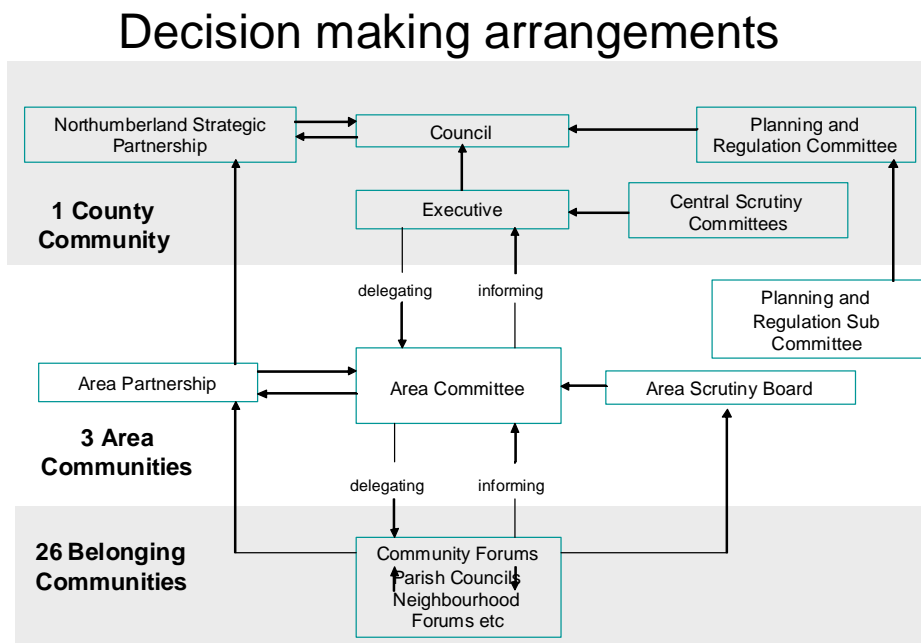
- Receive a response that recognises individual needs
- For service requests not dealt with within standard, receive an acknowledgement that details what can be expected from whom and by when, receive a unique reference (details can be tracked via any access channel), where appropriate, receive contact details for the service delivery team or partner

Part C: Governance

Decision-making arrangements

The diagram below illustrates the decision-making arrangements for the local authority from both the representative democracy (Political Management) and the participative democracy (Partnerships) perspectives.

The detail of how this model will work is outlined in the next two sections of the Blueprint.



Political Management

The basic structure is three tiers of County, Area and Belonging Communities within an Executive and Leader Model and three Area Based Committees delivering or managing agenda local services. An Executive will operate with a number of portfolios' (6 members) which will include clear responsibilities and accountabilities for both cross-cutting themes and service functions.

1. Council

Full Council will comprise 67 members. Council will select a Leader (for a 4 year term of office). It will be responsible for providing overall strategic direction for the Council. Principally this will involve approval of the medium term and annual budget and for the authority's policies (the budget and policy framework). It is envisaged that the Council and the Executive will work collaboratively on budget and policy matters.

Through the Constitution Council will delegate responsibility for a range of functions to the Executive. If, however, the Executive takes a decision which is outside the budget and policy framework, Full Council will have powers to revoke the decision or delay its implementation subject to detailed review by an appropriate scrutiny body appointed by the Council. Decisions within this framework will be the responsibility of the Executive; Council will not have powers to revoke such decisions but may subsequently change the policy to which the decision relates.

Full Council will retain responsibility for regulatory and quasi-judicial functions. These will be undertaken by regulatory committees. It will principally relate to strategic planning and development control.

The Chairman of the Council will continue to have responsibility for civic and ceremonial matters.

A different style of Council meeting is envisaged. It will be the main place for the frontline councillors' strategic and policy setting role and debate on key issues will be encouraged. The focus will be on:

- Discussions and setting policy
- Holding the Executive to account

Ratification of decisions will continue to be a function of Council but will be given less emphasis under revised arrangements. Opportunities will be provided to enable the public and partners to engage in Council meetings. Meetings will also be held outside of County Hall in appropriate venues across the county.

2. The Executive

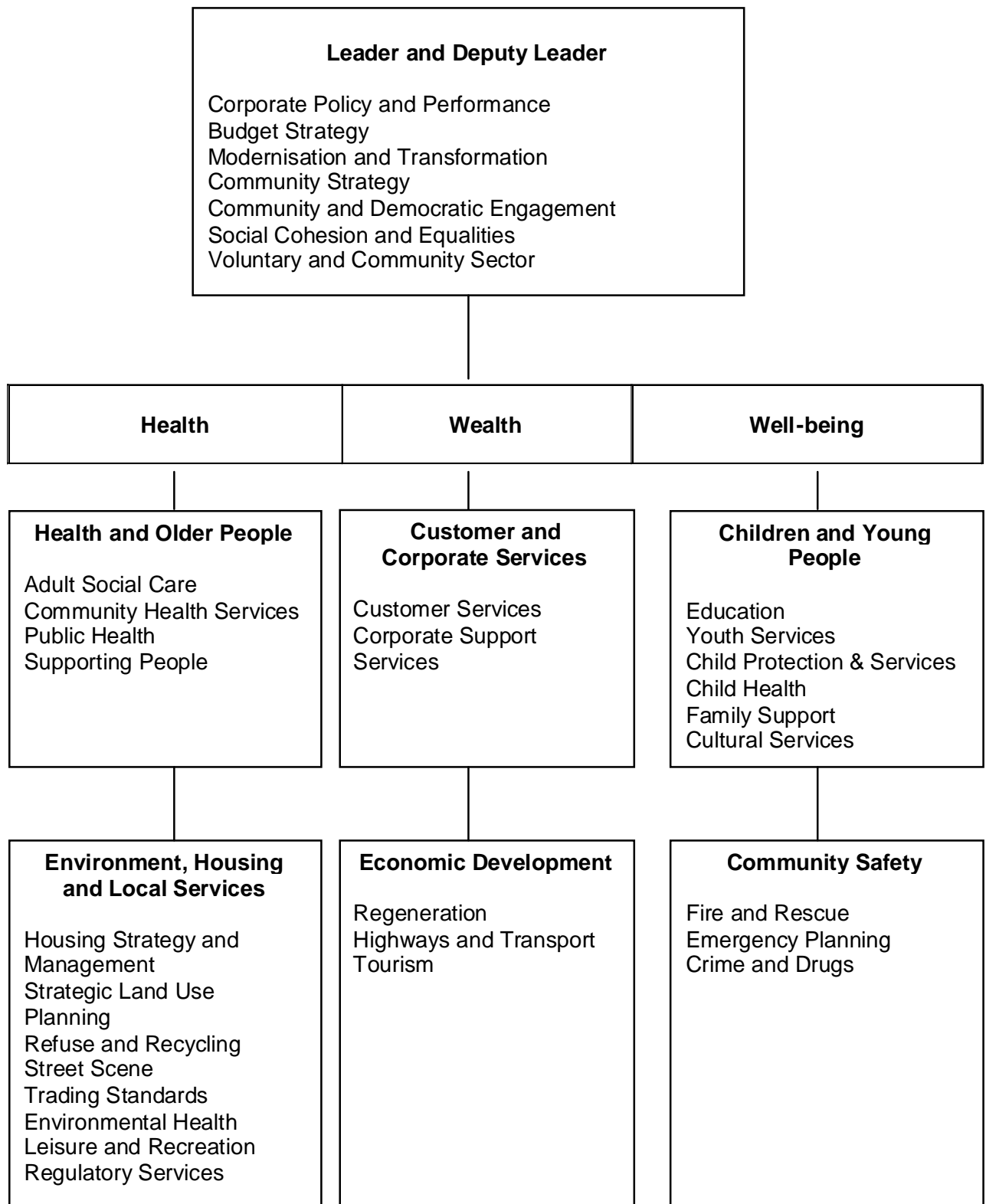
The Executive will comprise 8 members (including the Leader and Deputy). It will meet monthly and in public. The Executive will be responsible for implementing Council policy and achieving the council's key priorities. It will focus on key strategic matters and seek to delegate operational matters to area committees or officers. It will work in an open and transparent way.

The key functions of the Executive will be:

- To identify and progress priorities within the policy framework
- To align resources with priorities and ensure co-ordinated financial and service planning
- To ensure the council remains focussed on its agreed priorities
- To represent the needs of Northumbeland's communities to government
- To ensure that the council's commitment to provide fair and accessible services are being met

The Council's executive arrangements will provide a clear balance of delegation with a structure that works effectively such that decisions are made efficiently and effectively.

The proposed make-up of the portfolio is:



The allocation of portfolio responsibilities is being reviewed and further information will be made available at the meeting of the Implementation Executive on 21 January 2008.

The delegated powers and responsibilities of the Executive will be set out in the Constitution. Executive members will be selected by the Leader and will have personal responsibility and be accountable for operational decisions and matters within their portfolio. The Executive will have collective responsibility for corporate decisions including proposing and implementing the budget. This means that the leader and executive members will collectively be subject to a vote of no confidence should this arise during the term of office. If it were successful a new leader will be selected, who in turn would appoint their executive.

The Executive will be responsible for proposing the budget and major statements of policy and for implementing the Council's policies within the budget set by the Council. The Executive's powers will also include authority to purchase and dispose of property, to enter into partnerships and to represent the Council on outside bodies. It may also delegate responsibility for certain functions to Area/Belonging community level but the Executive will remain ultimately accountable for these functions. Where functions are delegated Executive members will be expected to provide ongoing support and advice to the body delivering the service.

The Executive will have a key role as a focus for community engagement and consultation and for community leadership on major strategic issues. Executive Members will be required to adopt a high public profile and to champion their areas of responsibility. They will be expected to ensure high levels of performance across all services and to be available and accessible to non-executive members.

3. Scrutiny

1. Overview

Scrutiny will:

- Be member-led with executive members taking full responsibility for the brief they hold
- Provide opportunities for local residents, and community organisations to get engaged in the scrutiny process;
- Raise the profile of scrutiny and the community leadership role of non-executive members in representing the views and interests of all sections of the community;

- Clearly identify who is responsible for decisions and require them to publicly justify their decisions.

Scrutiny is to be timely and effective, focussed on important issues, to avoid duplication, and not to make unreasonable demands on the council's resources. We also want to ensure that the underlying ethos of scrutiny is one of constructive working with the Executive. The scrutiny function should also:

- Demonstrate it is effectively providing a critical friend challenge to the Executive irrespective of political party loyalty;
- Ensure such challenge is evidence based and build a consensus around recommendations for future action;
- Ensure the call in process is operationally reasonable and understood by both members and officers; it should not be used for political mischief making;
- Provide for effective member and public engagement in inclusive policy making and decision making.

The role of scrutiny will also extend not only to council activities, but to the wider public services and partnerships.

2. The Levels of Scrutiny

We propose that scrutiny will operate at 3 levels reflecting the natural communities framework:

Level 1:

At county wide or strategic level, overview and scrutiny will focus on:

- The strategic decisions and activities of the Council and key partner agencies where their actions impact on the new council's responsibilities;
- Monitoring the overall performance of the Council in meeting national targets;
- Advising the Executive on the effectiveness of current policies and identifying potential policy changes or developments.

For this purpose we propose establishing three overview and scrutiny committees related to the corporate functions of the council which are:

- **People** (children's services, adult services, health, fire, community safety);

- **Places** (planning, economic development & regeneration, housing, culture, customer, library & local services); and
- **Performance** (policy, performance, corporate support services).

Level 2:

In each of the three Area communities we propose the establishment of an Area Scrutiny Committee responsible for monitoring local service delivery. The remit of the Area Scrutiny Committee will extend to the activities of partner agencies. It will receive Councillor Calls for Action and local petitions and advise the Area Committee of its deliberations.

Level 3:

At Belonging level, there will be opportunity for citizens, voluntary and community organisations to engage in scrutiny of council and partner activities through the community forum and their frontline councillor.

3. Operation and Expectation

Membership of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) will include a range of partner and community interests, but with Councillors comprising a majority membership of the committees. The new constitution will provide for each political group being allocated the chairmanship of a committee.

Belonging residents will be encouraged to apply to sit on scrutiny committees as co-optees. The application will ask them to state particular interests/concerns and a database of interested residents will be maintained from which individuals will be selected and invited to attend meetings. We will endeavour to ensure that people are invited to meetings considering issues of particular interest to them. Members of the public will be invited to attend each meeting. Each committee will also have the support of independent 'experts' to advise on specific issues. The NSP will convene a 'Northumberland assembly' each year where communities have their say.

The Committees will monitor executive decisions but emphasis will be given to 'select' in-depth scrutiny of issues and allow all interests to be heard. The committees will look at key strategic issues, such as council's response to alternative energy, or council's response to its role in social cohesion.

At area level scrutiny relating to the activities of the Council and key partners will:

- Consider and advise on the local impact of executive decisions either following a request by the Chairman's Group or in response to locally

generated demands;

- Oversee and advise on the impact of decisions taken by the area partnership and area co-ordination group;
- Monitor service delivery and investment in the area (including the LAA); and
- Receive and progress concerns raised at Belonging community level. This may involve liaison with the area partnership or with co-ordination group to identify a local solution or alternatively matters could be referred to a central scrutiny committee.

Each Area Community will have its separate Area Scrutiny Committee. This will comprise local councillors, partner and community representatives. The Area Scrutiny Committees will be required to engage with the local community and to provide opportunities for concerns to be raised publicly (i.e. each meeting will make provision for public question time). The style of meetings will be that of a public forum rather than a traditional council committee. Members of the public will be encouraged to interact and express a view on all issues under consideration.

At Belonging level, although there is no provision for the formal scrutiny of council or partner activities, frontline councillors will have a key role to ensure that local concerns and issues inform the scrutiny process. These will normally relate to service delivery, but may extend to the wider well-being of the area. It will be their responsibility to ensure such matters, be they raised by residents, the Community Forum (where this exists), parish councils or Belonging organisations are:

- Resolved locally through discussions with service managers and/or partners;
- Referred to either the area or central executive or appropriate scrutiny body; and
- Considered through community calls for action, where necessary, e.g. around issues such as car parking in market towns, the condition of rural roads.

4. Area & Belonging Committees

At Area Community level we will establish:

An Area Partnership comprising councillors drawn from the area, key partners and community organisations. The role of the area partnership will be to:

Develop strategies for the Area area – e.g. on culture and young people

- Determine community safety priorities
- Consider and help develop strategies for the community management of assets
- Receive the plans and proposals from the Belonging communities
- Stimulate community action in any parts of the Belonging communities where there is no developed infrastructure
- Deliver delegated aspects of the LAA and put in place an Area Implementation Framework

The area partnership will be part of the NSP infrastructure.

An **Area Committee** comprising councillors from within the area. The Area Committee will be given delegated responsibility for a range of services e.g.

- Leisure centres and swimming pools
- Libraries
- Refuse collection and recycling
- Street cleaning
- Highways, parks and grounds maintenance
- Planning and building control
- Car parks
- Environmental health and trading standards
- Licensing

Management of these services will be overseen by the area committee. Members will be supported by a 'lead' strategic director for the area, area service managers and Locality Officers.

Councillor representatives will be expected to interface with other local members to ensure local concerns are brought to the attention of the area partnership and to the Cabinet as needed. A key purpose of the area committee is to allow residents and communities to engage with the Council. Emphasis should be given to an informal style of meeting which encourages interaction with the public.

Each area will also have an Area Scrutiny Board as well as Planning, Development Control & Licensing Committees for development control and licensing functions.

At Belonging level there is no prescription for new formal structures but where there is local support however, we will encourage the establishment of a community forum and will assist with its administration. Such forums will be primarily owned by the local community. Potential functions of a community forum are:

- Identifying and taking forward local issues and concerns
- Local consultation
- Developing and monitoring a neighbourhood charter
- Monitoring local services and liaison with service providers
- Organising petitions and 'community calls for action'
- Advising on the use of 'community chest' funds
- Providing a service access point/advice services

The Community Forum will identify local priorities and facilitate their achievement through partnerships working at the Belonging level. The Forum will also facilitate and co-ordinate the delivery of local services through parish councils, community organisations and development trusts.

Partnerships

The local authority will establish strong, effective and credible strategic leadership within the county through partnership working. The approach will ensure the creation of strong, safe and prosperous communities across Northumberland and/will thereby achieve positive outcomes for its people and places.

The rationale for the local authority doing this in partnership is founded on the following:

- Focuses activity on long term outcomes and providing tangible community benefits;
- Provides a basis for identifying short-term priorities and aligning or pooling resources to deliver those;
- Encourages interagency working thereby enhancing the potential to deliver integrated and joined-up solutions and services;
- Promotes community development and empowerment;
- Allows lessons from good (and poor) practice to be learned and shared;
- Affords the opportunity to explore and test new or innovative ways of working;
- Provides a unified and stronger voice for influencing regional and national policy;

- Offers greater potential to attract additional resources from external sources;
- Facilitates change;
- Reduces duplication and bureaucracy thereby providing good value for money;
- Allows risk to be shared; and
- Strengthens Belonging accountability.

County level

At this level, the partnership ambition will be facilitated and coordinated through a single Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

The role of the LSP will be to:

- exercise a **leadership and governing role** through identifying and articulating the needs and aspirations of local communities and reconciling or arbitrating between competing interests;
- **influence and actively participate in defining sub-regional, regional and national policy** so that it best reflects the interests of the county's people and places;
- have **oversight of and aim to coordinate community consultation and engagement** activities of individual partners and where appropriate combine them – this will include stimulating and supporting community action through the network of Community Forums;
- produce a **Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS)** based on data and evidence at different geographical layers and from our communities and residents, to establish a shared local vision and priorities for action;
- produce a **Local Area Agreement (LAA)** based on the priorities identified in the county SCS;
- have **oversight of the planning and alignment of resources** in the county (where relevant to the delivery of the SCS and LAA) in order to achieve more effective commissioning and ultimately better outcomes; and
- **review and performance manage progress** against the priorities and targets agreed in the LAA and ensure delivery arrangements are in place.

Within this remit, however, the LSP will not be the ultimate decision-maker on such activity. All target-setting, and consequent financial, commissioning or

contractual commitments proposed by the LSP, will be formalised through the local authority – or, if appropriate, one of the other LSP partners.

The local authority will initiate and maintain momentum in the LSP by ensuring that the following key principles are pursued:

- That the LSP collectively develops clear and transparent lines of accountability and responsibility between its partners;
- That the LSP structure is driven by and reflects local circumstances through the application of the natural communities' concept to its ways of working;
- That the LSP structure includes some form of board and/or executive, which is able to take strategic decisions underpinned by countywide thematic partnerships;
- That representatives from the local third sector and private business sector form part of the formal membership of the LSP and relevant sub-groups, and have equal status to their equivalents from the public sector; and
- That the LSP takes account of all of the community including the diverse range of minority community interests and has clear mechanisms for engaging residents as appropriate in influencing the decisions and actions of the LSP.

The local authority will do this by forging strong links between its democratic accountability and the LSP. This will involve:

- The Council Leader chairing the LSP Board;
- The portfolio holders within the Executive sitting (not necessarily chairing) on the relevant LSP thematic partnerships;
- The elected members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees regularly challenging the LSP to demonstrate how the collective activity of the local authority and its partners is improving the quality of all Northumberland residents regardless of their background or where they live.

Area Level

At this level, the partnership ambition will be facilitated and coordinated through three Area Partnerships that form part of the countywide LSP.

The role of the Area Partnerships will be to:

- **Actively promote concerns and opportunities emerging from the constituent Community Action Plans** at Local Community level, particularly those issues that are common to several CAPs;
- **Produce an “Area Implementation Framework”** that specifically focuses on tailoring the delivery of the emerging Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement priorities and targets to the varying needs of the Area Communities with a view to “narrowing the gap” with the county average as appropriate;
- **Support and help develop programmes of cultural activity** that celebrate the distinctiveness of the Area Community;
- **Stimulate community action within the Belonging Communities**, particularly where there is limited or underdeveloped community infrastructure;
- **Challenge and scrutinise the decisions of the LSP Board** in best reflecting the needs and aspirations of the communities within the Area Community.

The local authority will initiate and maintain momentum on the Area Partnerships by ensuring that the following key principles are pursued:

That the lines of accountability between the LSP Board and Executive, the countywide thematic partnerships and the three Area Partnerships are clearly defined;

That the operation of the Area Partnerships recognises that certain issues will cut across more than one Area Community.

The local authority will do this by forging strong links between its democratic accountability and the Area Partnerships. This will primarily involve the elected members of three Area Committees being represented on the relevant Area Partnership to ensure that there is an effective join up between the delivery of local authority services and the wider quality of life agenda at the Area Community level.

Belonging level

At this level, the partnership ambition will be facilitated and coordinated through a network of community forums for each of the county's Belonging communities.

The role of these Community Forums will be to:

- **Enable their constituent communities and residents to articulate their shared concerns, needs and aspirations** from the perspective of their particular part of the county – this will include assisting with the gathering of facts and opinions from those residents;
- **Produce a Community Action Plan** that defines the common issues, priorities and required action emerging from constituent parish or neighbourhood plans for improving the well-being of those communities and residents within the broad context of the countywide SCS and LAA;
- **Inform & Influence “community chest funds”** delegated to elected members, to best reflect the priority interventions emerging from the Community Action Plan;
- **Engage and involve their constituent communities and residents in shaping and influencing** the development of public sector policy and the delivery of public services to best meet their shared concerns, needs and aspirations – this will include assisting the local authority and other public sector organisations in designing consultation processes for seeking the input of all residents;
- **Progressively commission and facilitate the appropriate devolvement or procurement of public service delivery** (including the management of viable community-based assets). This will involve the delegation of services to parish councils, development trusts, social enterprises, constituted voluntary or community groups, and/or consortia of these organisations – with over time, the forums becoming constituted legal entities, accredited by the council for the delegation and delivery of appropriate council services.
- **Contribute to the scrutiny processes of the Council and the inspection regimes of the Government** in assessing whether the local authority and its partners working through the LSP are achieving positive outcomes for their constituent communities and residents.

The Community Forums will provide a joint vehicle for constructive interaction and productive dialogue and interaction between:

- The elected members of the local authority and its constituent parish/town councils;

- the community advocates, leaders and organisations within a Belonging community;
- communities and residents with the public sector organisations that deliver services to them (and their scrutiny and inspection regimes); and
- the collective interests of the Belonging community with the work of the countywide LSP.

However, this remit will not be an exclusive one – the local authority will continue (through both elected members and officers) to encourage and respond to direct feedback from parish councils, voluntary and community sector organisations, community advocates, and local residents on particular and topical issues, concerns, and opportunities.

The local authority will initiate and maintain momentum in the network of Community Forums by ensuring that the following key principles are pursued:

- That each Community Forum operates in an inclusive way offering an open door to all those who wish to express a view or get involved and non-threatening opportunities for those who are less willing to come forward to contribute;
- That each Community Forum builds into their governance a locally-agreed and equitable approach to defining their representation within any such consultative arrangements that emerge from the local authority, its partners or the LSP; and
- That, notwithstanding the above, the structure of the Community Forums is driven by and reflects local circumstances – the local authority will not impose a standardised model of how a Community Forum should or should not work unless the community forum seeks to deliver council services in which case it will need to be accredited by the council.

The local authority will do this by forging strong links between its democratic accountability and the network of Community Forums. This will involve:

- The elected members of the Area Committees holding an annual “summit” with each of its constituent Community Forums to exchange respective views, activity and performance;
- The elected members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees including representatives from Community Forums as relevant in challenging whether the collective activity of the local authority and its partners through the countywide LSP is improving the quality of life in their area; and

- Each elected member of the local authority attending and participating in general Community Forum meetings at least on a quarterly basis.

Part D: Organisational structure

High level organisational design

This section sets out the whole council management structure linking this to the 3 layers (County, Area and Belonging) and to political management i.e. The high-level management structure will require further work alongside the Component Level Design as clearer service arrangements and requirements emerge. The organisational arrangements outlined below are, therefore, only indicative at this stage in the design process.

- A Whole Council structure
- A County level structure
- An Area level structure
- A Belonging level structure

Guiding Principles:

The following principles guide the organisation structure design:-

- **Subsidiarity** - making decisions and managing the commissioning and delivery of services at the lowest cost - effective level.
- **Clarity of Accountability** - between and within all levels and functional groupings is essential.
- **Form Follows Function** – the structure should reflect the functional groupings of services and key design principles.
- **Integrated Service Delivery** – at all levels and within all functional groupings and area management arrangements should seek to maximise integration between like functions and cross functional working.
- **Outcomes not Tasks** – structures and jobs should be designed in such a way so as to focus on the key deliverables and not lists of specific tasks. Think flexibility, think multi-disciplinary, think generic, think customer service.

An Integrated Themed, Functional and Spatial Approach

The high-level organisational design model reflects the core elements of the bid submission. Inherent within the proposed service cluster groupings is a high degree of organisational transformation. The development of the support services and customer services components are in themselves a radical departure from existing organisational arrangements.

Further work needs to be done during the component design phase to define the high-level whole council management structure. This work will be based on the principle of 'form' following 'function'. However, at this stage the following high-level arrangements are proposed:

At Whole Council Level

A small, strategic **Executive Management Team** comprising the **Chief Executive** (Head of Paid Service) and three **Executive Directors** for the three broad theme areas of People, Place and Performance. These three streams are designed to focus on the overarching corporate responsibilities of the new authority as opposed to more traditional service based designs.

In addition to their responsibility for one of the main functional groups, each Executive Director will also have responsibility for the strategic oversight and coordination of all service provision within one of the Area Communities. This will ensure that at the highest managerial level within the organisation there is shared ownership of both functional and locality issues. It will also mean that the three Area Committees have a clearly identified Executive Director level link. It is likely that the Executive Director of people will be the designated Director of Children's Services as required by law.

Also operation at the Whole Council level it is anticipated that there will be a number of 'Cluster' Directors. The exact number will need to be finalised but there is likely to be one for each cluster with possibly more than one in the Children's Services Cluster given its scope and scale.

The **Cluster Directors** will provide strategic leadership and advice on all matters relevant to their specific cluster. They will also set the broad policy framework for their cluster grouping and will be expected to coordinate the various functions within their cluster groupings for the corporate benefit of the organisation and customers. They will also be expected to contribute to the overall corporate management of the new authority.

The Director of Adult Services is a statutory role and is responsible to both the Care Trust and Local Authority Executive Boards. Adult Services functions are managed by Northumberland Care Trust on behalf of the local authority.

At County Level

The **Cluster Directors** will function at the County level in relation to their specific cluster roles in setting policy and strategic direction. They will manage a number of Heads of Service who will be responsible for specific service areas.

Heads of Service will be necessary these posts will function at County level in relation to overall policy and performance issues. The precise number of such posts needs to be determined. They will also be responsible for ensuring effective service delivery at the Area and Local Community level. Examples of Early Years and Planning are shown in Figure 2 to illustrate how this would work. This is designed to provide a clear link between policy/strategy and service delivery within service groupings.

The nature of functional groups within the Performance and Partnerships group mean that most of these services will be provided at the County level to enable the most cost effective delivery of specialist support services across all functions of the authority.

At Area and Belonging Community Level.

Service Managers in the People and Place theme areas will report into Heads of Services and will be responsible for the delivery of services at the Area and Belonging Community level.

It is expected that within cluster grouping there will be maximum integration of service at the Area and Belonging levels in order to provide cost effective and seamless service delivery to customers.

Locality officers will provide a key link between the community forums at Belonging level and Area level service and decision-making arrangements to ensure that services meet the needs of the distinct communities within Northumberland

In addition to the formal management arrangements, there will be inter-disciplinary and project working to address cross cutting themes on a needs basis.

Staff Experience:

This section sets out the experience the new council wants to provide to its staff. This includes:

- What the council plans to do as an “Employer of Choice”
- What physical experience staff will have of the workplace environment
- What changes to office support are planned
- What changes are planned around flexible / remote / mobile working
- What the council plans to do around the management of knowledge, information, documents and records to modernise the workplace

What the Council plans to do as an “Employer of Choice”

As the single largest employer within Northumberland, the new unitary council will inevitably want to set an example to others and be seen as an ‘excellent employer’ or ‘an employer of choice’. The new unitary council will also want to discharge its wider social responsibility to provide support and opportunities to a range of groups within its community e.g. work experience for young people, generally supporting the local economy.

The overarching objective for the new council as an employer is:-

‘To develop a modern, flexible and responsive workforce and organisational framework to support the council’s pursuit of excellence, the best possible customer service and value for money and to be seen as an excellent employers of choice’.

The core principles and values which underpin the type and style of employer which the new single unitary council aims to be include:

Employee Relations

The new council will:

- Develop frameworks and a culture of involving and listening to employees and their representatives through formal and informal mechanisms in order to promote effective employee relations, improve job satisfaction and secure the workforce's commitment to the organisation's objectives and priorities.
- Provide and maintain a comprehensive and modern set of HR strategies, policies and procedures to support and underpin the council's aim of being an excellent employer.
- Promote and support effective relationships with recognised trade unions.

Performance Management

The new council will:

- Embed a culture of performance management at all levels in the organisation.
- Ensure that individual contribution is linked to the achievement of corporate objectives.
- Ensure that all employees have their performance formally appraised at least twice a year.
- Implement policies and procedures to deal effectively with capability, discipline and sickness management issues at an early stage.
- Provide a culture which supports the achievement of excellence and encourages innovation and creativity.
- Create a 'no blame' culture to encourage sensible risk taking and innovation.
- Provide flexible jobs which empower employees at all levels to be accountable for their actions and management arrangements which facilitate delegation to the lowest sensible level and support effective team and project working.

Pay and Rewards

The new council will:

- Establish fair, transparent and equal pay proof pay and grading systems
- Be sensitive to local, regional and national market conditions as appropriate
- Seek to maximise flexibility in pay and benefits structures to support greater multi-disciplinary working
- Seek to link pay and reward to performance and contribution wherever possible

Workforce Planning and Development

The new council will:

- Develop corporate and service specific Workforce Plans to identify key skills and competency requirements.
- Invest in staff development and training at all levels to enable any skills and competency requirements to be addressed.
- Ensure a culture of continuous development, supporting individual employees to invest in their own learning and realise their potential.
- Provide direct and indirect support to employees to develop and acquire new skills, competencies and experience to enable them to progress their careers in a wide range of jobs/occupations.
- Pursue the attainment of IIP accreditation across all services as a key priority.

Work-life Balance and Well Being

The new council will:

- Provide a wide range of flexible working options to enable employees to achieve the best possible fit between work and non work. This will include: full time; part time; job share; term time only working.
- Actively promote and support home and agile working.

- Provide direct support to employees in difficulties via the Welfare Service.
- Provide Occupational Health support to managers and employees including the promotion of healthy life styles and basic health surveillance.
- Provide a supportive management culture which identifies and addresses the causes of work related stress.
- Provide safe and healthy workplaces and systems of working and promote employee welfare and well being in the best interests of employees and the council.

Equality and Diversity

The new council will:

- Work towards attracting, developing and retaining a balanced workforce with the right skills, experience and attitudes which is representative of the community we serve.
- Promote and develop fair and consistent employment policies and practices which ensure all employees and customers are treated in a fair and equitable manner.
- Actively promote its duties and responsibilities as an employer under its Race, Disability and Gender Equality schemes and take positive action where necessary to address any identified problem areas.

The physical workplace and new ways of working

The new council will build on the plans already in train to rationalise and modernise the existing property portfolio and to develop modern, fit for purpose office accommodation for staff and the public.

A key component of this strategy is to support and encourage new and more flexible ways of working which will utilise existing and emerging technologies to reduce reliance and demand on office accommodation through a greater use of remote working including; mobile and home working. Staff will be encouraged to work in different ways for their benefit and to help the organisation.

Offices will be built or refurbished to high standards and will incorporate a range of modern facilities. Offices will be largely open plan providing opportunities for a range of workstyles and new technology to minimise reliance on paper based systems.

Staff can expect:

- Access to timely accurate information to perform their role.
- Less reliance on paper.
- To be able to move around the organisation and communities and continue to have access to standardised processes and ICT environments.
- Training and support to give you the confidence to use the information to its best effect.
- The systems to monitor analyse and project financial positions.
- Gain and contribute to knowledge management.
- Improved new ways of working. More efficient and effective business processes to support your services

The necessary infrastructure to enable this to happen will be put in place including a corporate electronic document management system and a number of 'touchdown centres' spread across the county to enable staff to access the full suite of council IT services and systems without having to travel back to their main administrative base.

Part E: Support infrastructure

ICT infrastructure

It should be noted that the Component Level Design stage will set out the requirements which the ICT Organisation will have to meet in order to realise the Design. As the Component Level Design is not yet complete, these requirements have not been specified, and as such, the level of detail surrounding the ICT infrastructure at this stage is necessarily limited.

The Council's success is dependant upon a modern ICT infrastructure to support effective communication across our organisation and is key to delivering efficient services at the County, Area and Belonging Levels. Features that the infrastructure will deliver for our customers are: -

Citizens and Communities can expect: -

- Transactional services including electronic voting.
- Access to information.
- Services tailored to communities with a design based on need.
- Consistent services.
- A quick response.
- Choice of access method (phone, web, face to face, letter, email).
- Confidence in our security and treatment of confidential data.

Young People, particularly students have specific needs and the can expect:

-

- Secure network access.
- Integrated curriculum provision.
- Modern systems and technology.
- Skills to use their ICT services.
- Support.
- Access to content to aid learning.

Staff can expect: -

- Access to timely accurate information to perform their role.
- Less reliance on paper.
- The ability to move around the organisation and communities and continue to have access to standardised processes and ICT environments.
- Training and support developing confidence to use the information to its best effect.

- The systems to monitor analyse and project financial positions.
- Gain and contribute to knowledge management.
- Engage with a wide variety of support services.
- Improved new ways of working. More efficient and effective business processes to support our services.
- Access to new ways of working (technologies and systems).

Business and Partners can expect: -

- Secure sharing of information.
- Access to support services.
- Integration of systems.
- Support for Small to Medium Enterprises.
- Joined up working, sharing capacity and costs.
- Brokering increased network capacity in the region.

Families can expect: -

- Access to information and services from within your community.
- The Council to improve connectivity across your community.
- Secure network access.
- Improved access to the knowledge economy.

Members can expect: -

- Skills to use their ICT kit and services.
- Equipment
- Access
- Support
- Access to information and communication to aid decision making

Infrastructure and Channels

Service delivery will be reliant upon an integrated infrastructure supporting services to customer across whichever means they choose to engage the council.

A front/middle/back office configuration will be deployed. Services will be delivered across the council using “universal” computing. The key ICT service access points for citizens at a Belonging community level are highlighted in yellow in the following diagram: -

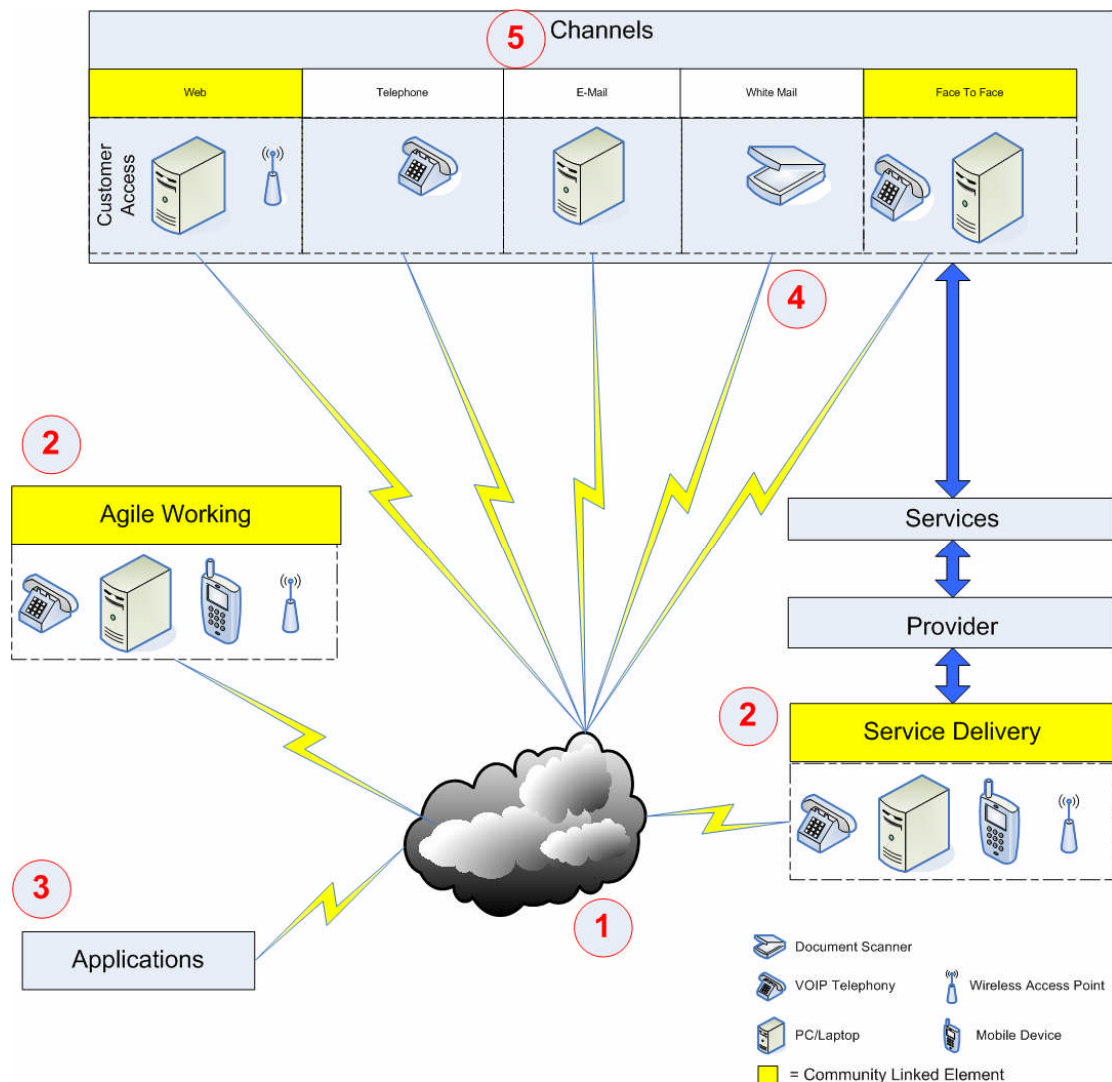


Figure 1 - Infrastructure And Channels

1. A high speed network with a Gigabit core, connections to the Wide Area Network(WAN) delivered through a mixed technology of fibre and wireless delivering very high speed communications optimising access to services
2. Home and mobile working allowing staff and partners to minimise travelling, delivering services to the community from within the community and using technology to overcome distance barriers.
3. Fully integrated services based around an Enterprise Resource Planning System reducing administrative burden, if necessary sacrificing functional richness for operational efficiency and integration.
4. No circulation of physical mail, all documents scanned and distributed electronically.
5. Transactional Services; web enabled, supporting a Front/Back Office configuration offering a choice of access method (Phone, web, face-to-face, letter, e-mail).

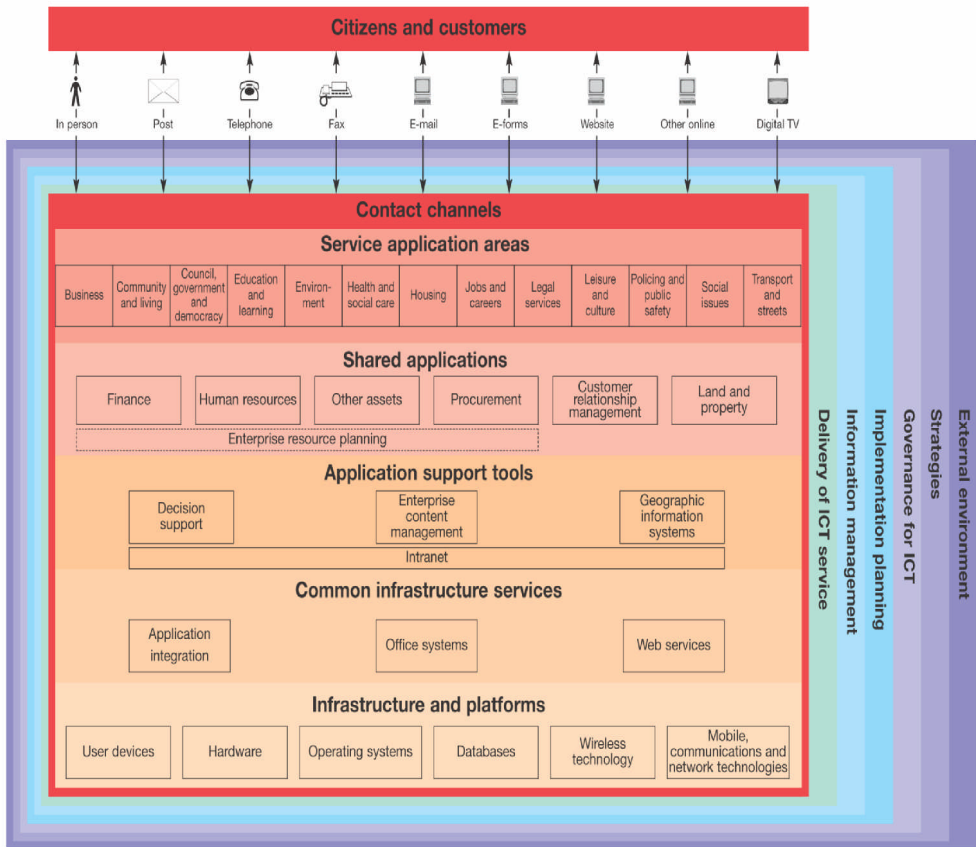
Technology Architecture

There will be a number of supporting technologies delivering the outcomes listed above, whilst not exhaustive this provides a very good starting point to consider when commissioning services.

Technology Catalogue

- Workflow
- Electronic Document Management
- Customer Relationship Management
- Content Management.
- Internet connectivity
- Integration
- Specific line of business applications
- Geographical Information System
- Authentication
- Video Conferencing
- Collaborative Workspaces
- Personalised portals (intranet)
- Convergence (voice and data)
- Video Conferencing
- Wireless technologies
- Mobile and agile working
- Smart phones
- Virtualisation
- Managed Print Service
- Desk Top Refresh
- No physical mail (scanning service)
- Enterprise Resource Planning system
- North-net – connecting partners
- Touch Down centres
- Remote working – hot zones
- Web enabled services across all channels
- PDAs, tablets, etc.
- Community Access
- Aggregation of capacity for SME's
- Workflow designed across customer experience

Key to integrated services is an acceptance of an overarching technical architecture. It is reliant upon the ultimate service design, which is yet to be defined, however the architecture should follow the outline shown below.



Property and other infrastructure

Strategic approach to planning the asset requirements of the unitary Council

Set out below are the key stages to identify and deliver a strategic asset plan to support the delivery of the unitary council

Objectives:

1. The purpose and objectives of holding assets in service delivery:

Effective asset management will be central to the delivery of the new council's strategic objectives and we should start with a clear vision of the role assets are to play in support of their achievement. They should recognise the need for the following:

- The efficient, effective and sustainable use of land and buildings
 - That the opportunity cost of holding land and buildings is minimised and the value of the council's assets protected.
 - That property assets contribute to the process of service improvement
 - That innovative accommodation solutions to service needs are sought
 - That the council's property assets are 'fit for purpose'
 - That financial returns from assets are maximised in an appropriate manner in the context of securing the council's wider objectives
2. The key principles underpinning future asset management are based on achieving the vision and strategic capabilities and objectives of the new council:-
 - Workwell ie:
 - Consolidation
 - Rationalisation
 - Value for money
 - Sustainability
 - Fit for purpose

- Community involvement
- Sound investment decisions
- Modern work styles and practices promoted

Key actions

- Implement the strategic framework outlined below
- Identify targets and opportunities for rationalisation and consolidation
- Implement marketing strategy

Strategic Asset Framework

Background:

In order to deliver a strategic asset framework the principles of Workwell will need to be embraced by the new Council. This exercise represents a significant undertaking, and the importance of both informing and involving Members and staff is recognised as critical because of the significant cultural change involved.

Set out below are outline proposals for a strategic asset framework demonstrating how assets could support service delivery at the three community levels. Until component design work is complete the property requirements to support the new organisation will not be fully known.

1. Belonging Community level:

Access to services in the Belonging communities.

Accessibility to the council's services for the county's Belonging communities is a paramount underpinning principle. How access will be provided to which services will need to be defined on a community by community basis.

Defining the framework for a future asset plan to support each Belonging community will require consideration of the following questions:

- What form of delivery mechanism is required?
- What will the outlet deliver?
- Where does it need to be to serve the community?
- How will the public access the service?
- What are the use components and what size will it need to be?
- How do we ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from the asset?

- How does the asset help deliver the objectives of the Council?
- How does the asset contribute to the 'Workwell' agenda?
- What role can the community play in the delivery of services and the management of facilities?

To assist this process a mapping exercise is underway which will plot the location of existing facilities provided by the county council, the district councils, the care trust, the police, and the voluntary and community sector. Option appraisals will then determine the most appropriate and cost effective solution to meet that communities needs.

2. Area Level:

A key service delivery centre in each Area i.e. South East Northumberland, North & West Northumberland,

These centres will be critical to the success of the launch of the new Council and will be very much at the forefront of public scrutiny.

The services to be delivered through these key centres will be based on the component level blueprint design, but is likely to focus on those activities for which the public require continued access within a key geographic location e.g. registration services, planning and other customer facing local services.

The choice of location for these Area level offices/centres will be subject to full option appraisal to include criteria such as:

- Cost effectiveness/efficiencies
- Supporting regeneration
- Sustainability factors
- Employee experience
- Co-location with partners

It will be appropriate to consider the provision of a main public point of contact in an accessible location, with then back office support functions for each area located conveniently within the locality. There is a need to quantify the scale and location of the front and back office requirements before a property solution can be found.

3. County level:

County Hall

The main administrative base for the unitary council will be County Hall. Proposals to modernise this property and increase it's flexibility of use are central to the design of the new council.

The following design assumptions apply:

- Limited single person offices
- open plan throughout to include use of space efficient furniture
- agile working
- hot desks & breakout areas,
- use of an external storage and retrieval system
- the transfer out of non-office based functions.

The component level design will consider which services are to be relocated to this facility. An early feasibility study is to be progressed.

Support Services.

In order to provide sufficient space to enable the phased building works in County Hall to begin, a significant amount of decant space will be required. The provision of temporary mobiles within the County Hall campus has been considered but would prove costly and possibly difficult to manage particularly regarding car parking provision. There could also be considerable uncertainties from a planning permission perspective.

A new build office unit on the Northumberland Business Park development at Cramlington could be considered to provide this decant space and this accommodation may be most suitable for the support services activities. This would create the necessary decant space in County Hall whilst providing an independent location for corporate support services for the future.

User support and distribution centre (USDC)

In order to maximise the flexibility and efficiency of use of prime office accommodation there is a need to consider suitable alternative provision for non core-office based activities. Many such activities have common business processes and accommodation requirements. The facility would need to provide:

- I. Good/secure storage capacity
- II. Easy load/unload facility
- III. Secure parking
- IV. Good quality open plan office accommodation
- V. Resource preparation and assembly area
- VI. Access to Council IT services and systems

Subject to suitable site availability this facility could be provided as a part of a combined site with consolidated depot functions.

The business case for one such centre in Cramlington is currently being developed for a potential range of consolidated county council functions. Further scope exists now to similarly consider the inclusion of some district council functions. The proposal should allow consolidation into improved accommodation, delivering efficiencies in asset and service delivery, while enabling the rationalisation of a number of assets resulting in reduced revenue costs and the achievement of significant capital receipts.

Associated delivery issues

In order to deliver the efficiencies within this asset strategy there are a number of other supporting and alignment issues:

- **Touchdown centres**

To help establish and enable agile working (and therefore to deliver rationalisation objectives) there is a recognised need to create bases throughout the county where staff can access the full suite of council IT services and systems without having to travel back to their main administrative base.

- **Storage and retrieval systems**

Maximising the efficient use of prime office space is dependant on finding suitable alternative ways of storing paperwork.

- **Training facilities**

Maximising the efficient use of prime office space is dependant on finding suitable alternative ways of accommodating/delivering training.

- **Disposal of assets**

It is imperative that the disposal of assets is managed in the most timely and efficient manner to both maximise the receipt and reduce the councils ongoing revenue liability.

- **Travel Planning**

It is recognised that the intensification of use of County Hall and potentially other assets will bring with it increased problems associated with car parking. This issue will need to be resolved as part of any planning applications required and certainly before additional people start to be located in County Hall.

Appendix A - Glossary

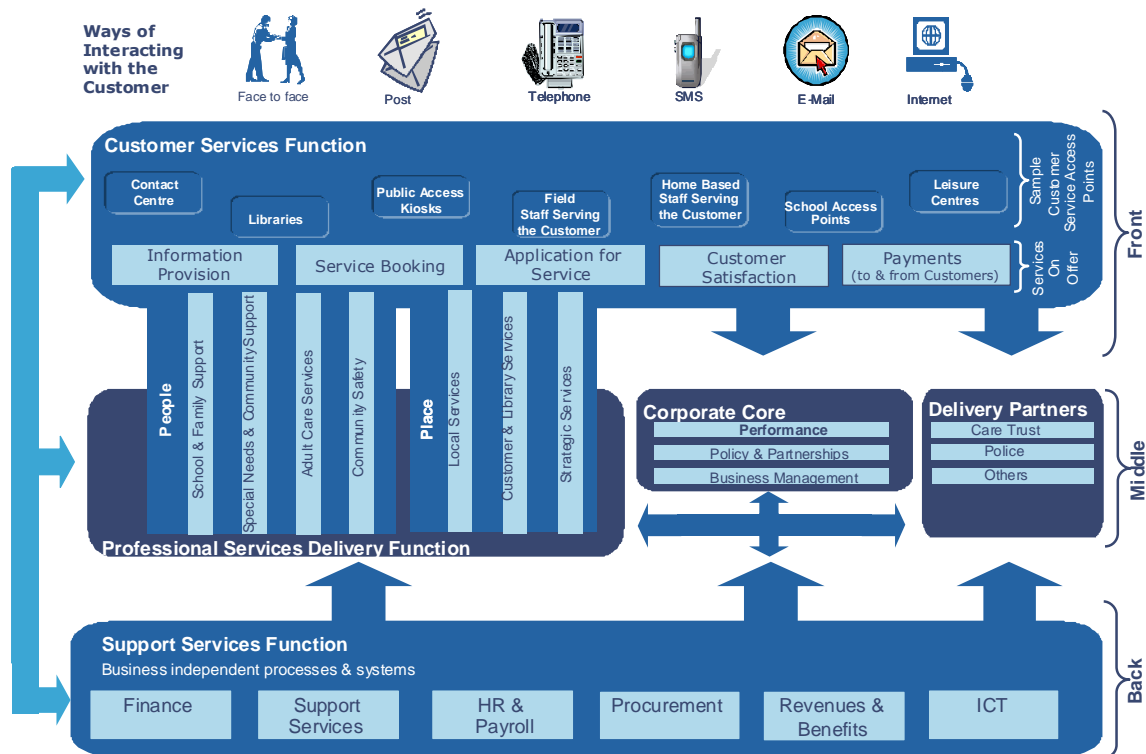
Term	Description
Access Channels	We will enable customers to interact with us in many ways – for example, face to face at a one stop shop, over the telephone, or the web, via email, or traditional mail – these are all access channels.
Benefits Scorecard	A Benefits Scorecard is a concise report featuring a set of measures that relate to the performance of an organisation. By associating each measure with one or more expected values (targets), managers of the organisation can be alerted when organisational performance is failing to meet their expectations.
Back Office	A back office is a part of most organisations where tasks dedicated to running the organisation itself take place. Examples of back-office tasks include IT departments that keep the phones and computers running, accounting, and human resources.
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment - in 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will supersede the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of local government. CAA will continue to provide assurance about how well-run local public services are and how effectively they use taxpayers' money. But it also aims to be more relevant to local people by focusing on issues that are important to their community. It will develop a shared view about the challenges facing an area, such as crime, community cohesion, a sustainable environment or public health issues such as obesity, and will also create a more joined up and proportionate approach to public service regulation.
CAP	Community Action Plan
CRM	Customer Relationship Management – a broadly used term that covers concepts used by organizations' to manage their relationships with customers. Technologies that support this business purpose include the capture, storage and analysis of customer process information. CRM will provide staff with the ability to record, manage and track interactions across the lifecycle of a customer issue or request from initial contact through to resolution.
Enterprise Resource Planning	The term ERP originally implied systems designed to plan the use of enterprise-wide resources. Although the initialism ERP originated in the manufacturing

Term	Description
	<p>environment, today's use of the term ERP systems has much broader scope. ERP systems typically attempt to cover all basic functions of an organisation. Prior to the concept of ERP systems, departments within an organisation (for example, the human resources department, the payroll department, and the finance department) would have their own computer systems. Each system would have to rely on a set of common data to communicate with each other and this provided complications. For instance, a person could not be paid in the payroll system without an employee number. ERP software, among other things, combined the data of formerly separate applications. It standardised processes and reduced the number of software specialties required within larger organisations.</p>
Electronic Document Management	<p>Document management is an IT application (or set of applications) used to track and store electronic documents and/or images of paper documents. Document management has some overlap with the concepts of Content Management Systems which are often used for storing, controlling, versioning, and publishing industry-specific documentation such as news articles, operators' manuals, technical manuals, sales guides, and marketing brochures.</p>
Front Office	<p>Front Office function will provide a single point of contact for all council services, and will be charged with improving and bringing greater consistency to customer service through the use of enabling technology and professionalisation of the customer service organisation. The Front Office will not be a single physical location, but will be a combination of Belonging access points, one stop shops, a telephony-based contact centre and an integrated website.</p>
Implementation Executive	<p>A board composed of elected members – the senior decision making body for the transition process; business case, issue resolution and risk management</p>
LAA	<p>Local Area Agreement – LAAs set out the priorities for a local area agreed between central government and a local area (the local authority and Local Strategic Partnership) and other key partners at the Belonging level. LAAs simplify some central funding, help join up public services more effectively and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances. Through these means, LAAs are helping to devolve decision making, move away from a 'Whitehall knows best' philosophy and reduce bureaucracy.</p>
LSP	<p>Local Strategic Partnership - a single non-statutory, nonexecutive body that:brings together at a local level the different</p>

Term	Description
	parts of the public sector as well as the private, business, community and voluntary sectors, enables different initiatives and services to support each other and work together, operates at a level which enables strategic decisions to be taken, is close enough to individual neighbourhoods to allow actions to be determined at community level; and is aligned with local authority boundaries.
Line of Business Application	Refers to an IT application used within a particular council service area or function.
Middle Office	The Front Office will not be a single physical location - staff within the Middle Office will sit within the People, Place or Performance Directorates, and will be responsible for servicing those Customers who require a greater level of expertise, or more specialised services than those available from within the Front Office.
NSP	Northumberland Strategic Partnership - a broadly based strategic partnership driving the Northumberland Community Strategy and the LAA. NSP is now independently constituted, with the County Council acting as accountable body.
One Stop Shop (OSS)	A one stop shop is anticipated to be a physical location – an “outlet” – for the provision of a wide range of council services that would otherwise be accessible through the customer contact or correspondence. The OSS may also provide facilities – e.g. internet or kiosks – to enable self-service by customers.
Service Level Agreement	A SLA is a formal negotiated agreement between two parties. It transcripts the common understanding about services, priorities, responsibilities, guarantee, etc. with the main purpose to agree on the level of service. For example, it may specify the levels of availability, serviceability, performance, operation or other attributes of the service and even penalties in the case of violation of the SLA.
Service Requests	When a customer requests a service from the Authority, and this request is recorded by the Authority, the term service request is used. Typically the service request will be recorded on a CRM system, will have a unique reference and will contain details of the customer, and the nature of their request.
Segmentation	Customer segmentation is the practice of dividing a customer base into groups of individuals that are similar in specific ways relevant to service targeting/marketing, such as age, gender, interests, spending habits, and so on. Using segmentation allows companies to target groups effectively, and allocate marketing resources to best effect

Term	Description
Sustainable Community Strategy	All councils and LSPs have a community strategy in place. The challenge now is to turn these into sustainable community strategies by developing a stronger focus on integrating social, economic and environmental issues and by tackling the longer-term and global impacts of communities.
SMS	Short Message Service Is a telecommunications protocol that allows the sending of "short" (160 characters or less) text messages, it is available on most digital mobile phones and some personal digital assistants with onboard wireless telecommunications.

Appendix B – Front/Middle/Back Office Model



The term “office” does not imply a physical office building or location – each of the three layers of front, middle and back represent broad organisational functions as follows:

- **Front** – the Front Office function will provide a single point of contact for all council services, and will be charged with improving and bringing greater consistency to customer service through the use of enabling technology and professionalisation of the customer service organisation.

By introducing standardised processes supported by enabling technology, and co-locating customer services staff (where appropriate) the Front Office will aim to reduce inefficiencies in customer handling, and provide high-levels of fulfilment at the first point of customer contact, thereby offloading the Directorates of the more straightforward, transactional functions related to customer services. In applying the model the council will interface with its customers through the ‘front office’ by providing a range of access channels i.e. face to face, email, telephone etc These ‘routes’ into the council and other public agencies will offer fast and convenient access to all of the councils services and those agreed with partners.

- **Middle** – in the event that a Customer cannot be fully served within the Front Office function, their enquiry will be handed over from the Front Office to the relevant area within the Middle Office. Staff within the Middle Office will sit within the People, Place or Performance Directorates, and will be responsible for:
 - a) Servicing those Customers who require a greater level of expertise, or more specialised services than those available from within the Front Office. For example, where customers need to liaise directly with service experts providing Children’s services,
 - b) Providing ‘core’ corporate services.

It is envisaged that a significant proportion of Council services will be processed (albeit not always to completion) within the Front Office function. This “depth” of Front versus Middle Office service fulfilment will vary from service to service. Taking the example of a blue badge application, the depth of Front Office service fulfilment could occur at one of three levels:

- a) The Customer Service Front Office would simply issue an application form for a disabled badge, to the Customer, with the completed form being returned directly to the Middle Office service team for eligibility checking and processing.
- b) A deeper approach would involve the Front Office logging application forms received on the relevant ICT system before “electronically” handing them over to the Middle Office service team for processing.
- c) The third level would involve the Front Office actually processing the blue badge application form and performing the eligibility checking with the decision being communicated to the customer directly by the Front Office staff – i.e. delivering the end to end service from within the Front Office function.

The Middle office may logically include external delivery partners who are integral to service delivery.

- **Back** - The front and middle offices will be supported by a lean and efficient ‘back office’ corporate support services function. The back office will incorporate the corporate support functions such as procurement, finance, ICT, HR etc. In transitioning to the Day 1 operation, and during the early stages of Transformation, this function will be focussed on consolidating & standardising the existing corporate support functions of the seven legacy Authorities.

Such a consolidation will enable subsequent process & systems standardisation, which in turn will support the realisation of benefits. Furthermore, this initial step will better position the Authority to move beyond consolidation and further down the path to traditional corporate support services (for example, operate a shared finance function with a partner Authority) should this be required at a future point. Although such a move would be subject to a comprehensive business case, Private sector

experience suggests that savings can come from a number of areas through a progressive approach to simplification, standardisation, and sharing including:

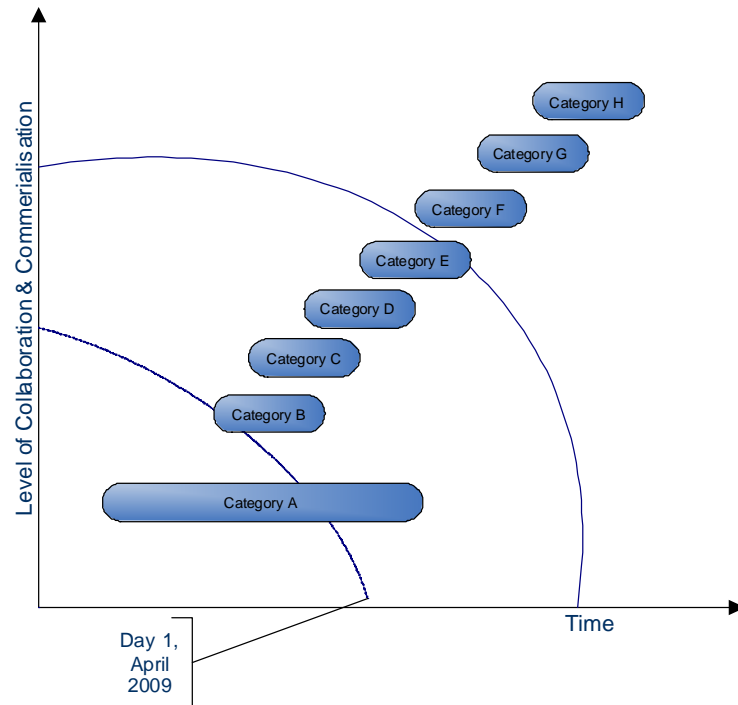
- Reduction of management to staff ratios ;
- Headcount reductions;
- Process re-engineering and standardisation – which in the private sector has yielded savings on ‘baseline costs’ (i.e. pre-transformation) of between 10% and 25%;
- Common ICT and shared platforms – which in the private sector has yielded savings on ‘baseline costs’ (i.e. pre-transformation) of up to 30% on software licensing alone;
- Integrated procurement and Accommodation rationalisation.

Moving beyond consolidation, a spectrum of approaches exist for collaboration and shared delivery of support services – these have been categorised in the following table by reference to increasing levels of collaboration and commercialisation involved.

The categorisation starts with internal co-operation and extends to fully combined operations and then to trading. Collaborative working between local authorities will often be on a shared risk basis but some authorities want to go further and take trading risks and provide services to other authorities on commercial terms for profit, and possibly loss.

Category	Description
A	The consolidation and standardisation of functions from the legacy organisations within the new single local authority e.g. Finance, HR, ICT
B	Collaboration between authorities on strategic approaches
C	Collaboration between bodies for: the better delivery of services e.g. sharing of expertise or cost reduction, improved procurement including joint commissioning and working with other Public Bodies
D	Franchise approaches: Local authorities providing direct support to another
E	Joint service delivery between local authorities
F	Joint service delivery between different types of public body
G	Commercial trading for the profitable exploitation of assets, skills or location to provide new income for the benefit of the initiating authority or authorities
H	Commercial trading in partnership with a private sector partner

Potential Evolution of Corporate Support Services Function



Front, middle and back office functions will need to be designed to work effectively at the three spatial levels; i.e. County, Area and Belonging. A fully integrated ICT infrastructure will underpin the front, middle, back office model.

This coupled with a drive to flexible working and modern office accommodation offering a range of work-styles to staff and members will set new standards of public service provision in Northumberland and put the new council at the forefront modern working nationally. Furthermore, the customer will benefit from the new organisation's increased capacity to deliver services to customers resulting from flexible working practices and channel integration.