

## 4.0 Operating Environment

### 4.1 Policy Framework

**The objectives for the next five years have been framed in the context of a broad policy framework which largely dictates the focus of the Council's activities as follows:**

#### **NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2000 - 2006**

This seven year investment programme for Ireland provided for an unprecedented level of investment in both economic and social infrastructure together with a major investment also in education and training. Since its implementation, a full analysis of progress and recommendations on how funding should be reallocated for the remaining life of the Plan was conducted by means of the Mid Term Evaluation in 2003.

*Limerick County Council is conscious of its key role in the delivery of local infrastructure and social supports under the various Operational Programmes within the framework of the existing Plan and any successor to it. An additional challenge however lies in the capacity to finance the operation and maintenance of this new infrastructure into the future.*

#### **NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY 2002 – 2020 AND MID-WEST REGION: Regional Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines May 2004**

This 20 year planning framework for the entire country builds upon

the National Development Plan's initiatives and represents a new approach to planning for the future development of the country at national, regional and local level. It aims to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development between regions through the identification and enhancement of a number of strategically placed cities and towns as "engines of growth" or "gateways".

*This national spatial approach has been translated into the Mid West Regional Planning Guidelines which in turn have provided the regional framework for the County Development Plan currently being prepared by Limerick County Council. Local development policy, in setting out a framework for the development of the County, therefore recognises and supports the new spatial planning entity of the Limerick/Shannon/Ennis Gateway/Hub as put forward in the National Spatial Strategy and the Regional Planning Guidelines.*

#### **STATEMENT OF STRATEGY 2003 – 2005 (DEHLG)**

This document sets out a three year framework for action by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government across the entire range of its functions and as such sets out the national mandate for local authorities.

*As a local authority, Limerick County Council will continue to work closely with the Department on implementing at local level*

government priorities as set out in the Strategy in the areas of environment, heritage, planning, housing, local government and local infrastructure and services. The overriding challenge in the pursuit of this agenda will be the achievement of sustainable development and improvement in the quality of life of the people of County Limerick.

### REGIONAL LINKS

At a regional level, Limerick County Council co-operates with adjoining local authorities, Limerick City, Clare, Kerry and North Tipperary in the planning, co-ordination and delivery of services with a cross boundary dimension. Of notable significance has been Limerick County Council's role as lead authority in the Mid West National Road Design Office and the Regional Waste Management Plan.

*The role of the Mid West Regional Authority and the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly in promoting co-ordination of services across the region is recognised and supported by Limerick County Council on an ongoing basis.*

### COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD STRATEGY

Limerick County Development Board's ten year strategy for the Economic, Social and Cultural Development of County Limerick "Working Together for a Better Future 2002 – 2011" was published in April 2002. This strategy is the guiding framework for the development of all public policies and services in County Limerick until 2011.

As a lead agency on the CDB, Limerick County Council has been cognisant of its commitments under the Strategy in setting out its objectives for this Corporate Plan.





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## 4.2 Critical Success Factors

Within this policy framework there are a number of factors which Limerick County Council considers critical to its success in meeting its objectives. Specifically, the following challenges have been identified:

- a) The Characteristics of the County
- b) Widened Remit of Local Government
- c) Impact of Policy and Legislation
- d) Availability of Resources
- e) Customer Expectations

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COUNTY

As mentioned earlier, County Limerick is predominantly a rural county with 71% of its population residing in settlements of less than 1,500. In direct contrast to this, approximately one quarter of the total population is concentrated in the environs of Limerick City and so is largely urbanised. The utilisation of resources and the delivery of infrastructure in a manner which will prevent rural decline and ensure balanced development throughout the county will pose a constant challenge to Limerick County Council during the lifetime of this Corporate Plan.

### WIDENED REMIT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

An expansion of the role of local authorities in recent times from being largely one of service providers to the much broader remit of local governance requires Limerick County Council to position itself as leader of the community and at the centre of representative and

participative democracy. In addition to this, it is additionally charged with responsibilities as a local regulator and as an agent for Central Government in the provision of many local services.

Adapting to this new role of community leadership brings the challenge of securing the buy-in and co-operation of other agencies delivering public services locally. The engagement of all players in the community and the generation of an integrated/partnership approach to the delivery of services is crucial to the achievement of many of the Council's objectives.

### IMPACT OF POLICY AND LEGISLATION

As a local authority, Limerick County Council is greatly influenced by legislation with many of its functions derived from statute. Responsibilities continue to increase at a significant rate with the enactment of new legislation which has consequential resource implications in such areas as pollution control, waste management, housing provision, anti-poverty measures, corporate governance and requirements in relation to the Irish language. The corporate objectives therefore must be pursued in a manner which is consistent with current legislation and policy and adaptable to future legislative changes and policy revisions and which will afford priority at all times to the Council's statutory responsibilities.

### AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

It is crucial that Limerick County Council maximises all existing resources during the lifetime of the Plan and in the face of increased demand for quality services and additional legislative responsibilities that the appropriate additional resources are provided. Furthermore, the provision of a strong and adequate

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source of funding to meet locally identified priorities and needs is necessary if the Council is to rise to the challenges posed by its new widened role and responsibilities in the community. Current restrictions on the employment of additional staff may have implications for the extent and standard of service which can be provided to the people of County Limerick. Failure to address any shortcomings in the current system of financing local government as may be identified in the Government review currently underway may also impede progress.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF OUR CUSTOMERS**

While customer service has always been high on the agenda of Limerick County Council, the recent economic boom has led to increased demand from the public for more and better quality services. This expectation is driven also by Government policy to develop a more transparent and accountable public service providing information on its services, customers rights and entitlements and procedures for complaint and redress.

It follows therefore that the corporate objectives for Limerick County Council should address local needs and priorities as identified by its customers, the people of County Limerick. While this Plan largely assumes the type and standard of service expected by the Council's customers, an extensive survey of the customer base may signal a change of direction in some of the services over the life of the Plan and, if so, this will be reflected in the relevant operational plans.