

Introduction

1.1 Foreword



Eddie Wade, Cathaoirleach

It is my pleasure as Cathaoirleach of Limerick County Council to welcome this Corporate Plan which sets out the corporate objectives and strategies for the Council for the next five years.

Limerick County Council has seen much change over the lifetime of the last Corporate Plan with the embedding of new democratic and executive structures as part of the Better Local Government reform programme.

The effectiveness of the Strategic Policy Committee process in strengthening local democracy, both representative and participative was particularly evident during the period in question and this mechanism for facilitating the input of the wider community in policy decisions which impact on them is a welcome move.

Limerick County Council is a major player in the development of the County and this is reflected in its position as lead agency on the County Development Board. One of the challenges identified in this Plan is how the Council will adapt to its new role of community

leadership and the engagement of stakeholders is identified as crucial to this process.

I have no doubt that the Council will endeavour by every means possible to facilitate consultation and encourage co-operation and involvement of all sectors of the community in formulating and implementing its policies during the lifetime of this Corporate Plan.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the Corporate Policy Group who, alongside the County Manager, have steered the process of drafting this Plan and to extend this compliment to all those who had an input into the process.

I look forward to working towards the strategic vision put forward in this Plan which reflects the broad spectrum of our role as a modern outward looking local authority seeking to improve the quality of life of the people that we serve now and into the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Eddie Wade'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Eddie Wade, Cathaoirleach

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Edmond Gleeson, County Manager

This Corporate Plan represents the third such Plan produced by Limerick County Council and covers the period 2004 - 2009. It aims to continue the process of business planning introduced into the public service by the advent of Strategic Management in 1997 and sets out a framework for action by the Council over the next five years.

The concept of strategic planning is now an integral feature of the business that is Limerick County Council and reflects the huge contribution being made by the Council into the economic, social, cultural and community life of the people of County Limerick.

This Plan sets out a number of key objectives which give equal emphasis to our new role in the areas of social inclusion, community participation and quality of life and to our traditional services such as Housing, Transportation, Water, Environment and Planning which we have always provided.

Crucial to the success of this Plan will be the availability of the necessary resources to implement the objectives as set out and in this regard I look forward to the outcome of the Government review currently underway into the future financing of local government. It is imperative that any such review take account of the much widened remit of local government as it is today and the heightened expectation among the community for quality services to meet locally identified priorities.

I acknowledge the enormous contribution of the staff of Limerick County Council which will be required over the lifetime of this Plan in an environment where recruitment is restricted and the

development of a culture of performance measurement and management is high on the agenda. It will however be a priority of this organisation to ensure that all staff and councillors are afforded equality and dignity in the workplace at all times.

The Plan anticipates a number of challenges which may lie ahead in the pursuit of the corporate objectives and which may impede progress or result in a change of focus and so I propose to implement a process of continuous monitoring and review of progress over the life of the Plan.

I wish to thank the members, staff and all other stakeholders for their input during the extensive consultation process which led to the production of this Corporate Plan and I look forward to continued participation with all sectors of the community during its implementation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ned Gleeson', written over a horizontal line.

Ned Gleeson, County Manager



1.2 Progress on the Corporate Plan 2001-2004

During the lifetime of the last Corporate Plan which covered the period 2001 – 2004, much has been achieved towards the fulfilment of five high level corporate objectives which focused on:

- Improving Service Delivery
- Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Improved Communications
- Sustainable Development
- Local Governance

These objectives largely reflected the core principles of the Better Local Government reform programme which was at implementation stage at the time of preparation of the last Corporate Plan, while the concept of sustainable development is at the heart of all Government policy. With Better Local Government now fully implemented, it is expected that the objectives and values above are inherent in all the activities of the Council and the manner in which it goes about its business. Particularly, the objective of promoting Limerick County Council as the core unit of local governance was met during the period in question through the effective operation of its five Strategic Policy Committees.

In reflecting on progress against the last Corporate Plan, it is essential to do so in the context of the phenomenal upsurge of activity across the wide range of Council services which resulted from the economic boom. In the absence of additional resources to respond to this increased activity, Limerick County Council considers that it has maintained satisfactory standards of service delivery in all its mainstream functions.

The following are considered to be the main highlights of the past four years:

NEW HEADQUARTERS AND OFFICE ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME

An ambitious programme of office development continued during the period in question with 2003 marking the end of an era for Limerick County Council as it moved from its city centre location which had been its home for over a century to a new state-of-the-art headquarters at Dooradoyle, County Limerick. County Hall which is an impressive combination of award winning architecture and energy saving design has brought about radical improvements in the working environment of elected members and staff and in the ability to respond to customers needs. The objective to provide a modern network of offices for customers and staff was advanced further in 2004 by progressing plans for a further expansion of the headquarters campus at Dooradoyle and the improvement of the Rathkeale and Kilmallock Area Offices.

LOCAL ELECTIONS

Held on 11th June 2004, the local elections brought about a significant change in the membership of Limerick County Council. The outcome of the elections together with the abolition of the dual mandate in 2003 had the effect of 10 new members taking up office at the Annual Meeting on the 25th June, 2004.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Continuing advances in major public infrastructure provision have been made during the lifetime of the last Plan. Of particular significance was the opening of the Patrickswell to Limerick dual carriageway, the Limerick Southern Ring Road Phase 1 and the Croom Bypass. The Limerick Southern Ring Road Phase II and the N7 Limerick to Nenagh were both brought to CPO stage. Design work

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was advanced for the N24 Pallasgreen to Bansha scheme, the N20 Mallow to Croom scheme and the N21 Adare Bypass. Numerous pavement improvement and pavement strengthening projects were carried out around the County. In Water Services, the upgraded Castleconnell Sewerage Scheme was commissioned as was the new Fedamore Sewage Treatment Plant. The Civil Works for the Croagh Sewerage Scheme were also completed. In the City Environs the Limerick Main Drainage scheme provided a trunk sewerage network to discharge to the new treatment plant at Bunlicky, while at the same time major elements of the Southern Ring Watermain were also completed. As an adjunct to its major capital programme, the Council invested heavily in water conservation with very significant results in overall water usage.

The environmental agenda continued to expand during the past four years with the Council extending its network of bring banks throughout the County and locating two new Civic Amenity Sites at Kilmallock and Newcastlewest. The process of extending the landfill at Gortadroma also commenced during this period and a review of the Regional Waste Management Plan got underway in 2004.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE TOWNS AND VILLAGES

The Council carried out a range of improvements to various smaller water and sewerage schemes around the county under its Small Capital Schemes Programme; many of these schemes concentrated on capacity improvements. The Council also launched its Small Towns and Villages Initiative to provide for a partnership approach with developers to overcome deficiencies in Water Services Infrastructure in certain towns and villages. In the area of group water schemes, the Council continued to support the efforts of local communities in the provision of community run water schemes.

An urban renewal scheme was completed in the town of Abbeyfeale in 2003 and a new scheme was commenced in Croom town centre.

COUNTY DEVELOPMENT BOARD STRATEGY

Published in 2002, this ten year strategy entitled "Working Together for a Better Future" provides a framework for the economic, social and cultural development of County Limerick until 2011. The role of Limerick County Council was pivotal to the preparation of the Strategy and, as a lead agency on the County Development Board, the Council is key to the implementation of the Strategy and the achievement of a shared vision for the County as follows:

"Limerick County will be an attractive place for people to live and work with access to quality services where the collaborative focus of communities and service providers can facilitate a good quality of life"

THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The County Community and Voluntary Forum was set up in 2001 and is the mechanism through which both Limerick County Council and the CDB consult with the wider community and voluntary sector. The Forum's Mission Statement is to "represent the views of the community and voluntary groups by influencing policy and decision making for the benefit of the people of County Limerick through effective communication and consultation between the County Development Board, Strategic Policy Committees, Area Committees, other relevant bodies, this forum and especially local community and voluntary groups".

HOUSING

During the period of the last corporate strategy there have been many significant developments in relation to the provision of social and affordable accommodation by the Council. These include the adoption of a Housing Strategy, review of the Traveller Accommodation Programme and the preparation and receipt of departmental approval of an Action Plan for Housing 2004-2008. A dedicated service for homeless persons was established and affordable housing is now being provided. There was an increase of 30% in the Council's housing stock and a major refurbishment programme of existing houses was undertaken.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The I.T. infrastructure was enhanced which enabled the rollout of additional systems such as G.I.S, Document Management, Intranet, Internet, etc. This not only facilitated staff in carrying out their business but by extending these systems to Councillors, remote offices and customer service points in the network of area offices also served to enhance communications and improve access to services. This was further complemented by the availability of a wide range of information and forms on the Council's web site.

HR POLICIES AND STAFF SUPPORT

During the lifetime of the last Corporate Plan, comprehensive staff support/welfare structures were put in place in order to assist staff in a greater work/life balance. The HR Department has also assisted in the management of change throughout the organisation in line with Better Local Government, the National Agreement (Sustaining Progress) and Local Agreements in partnership with staff representatives. The following Human Resources policies have

been developed and implemented;- Staff Support, Training & Development, Equality/Disability, Work/Life Balance, Grievance & Disciplinary and Code of Ethics & Conduct.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

All modules of the Agresso on-line financial management system were introduced and the Council moved to a system of full accrual accounting. The production of an end-of-year balance sheet and the identification and valuation of all assets has resulted in increased efficiency and effectiveness.

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1.3 How the Corporate Plan 2004-2009 was prepared

In producing this Plan, Limerick County Council has had regard to the statutory requirements of the Local Government Act 2001, concerning the format, content and process and to all relevant circulars and guidance documents issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The Corporate Plan will be the guiding framework for the preparation and implementation of a series of annual operational plans for each Directorate over the life of the Plan. It is the culmination of an extensive process of internal and external consultation with all relevant stakeholders and so reflects the vision and expectations of the elected members, staff, partner agencies and bodies engaged in the provision of local services and the wider community and voluntary sector.

The process was steered by the Corporate Policy Group on the basis of a draft framework and consultation schedule which was approved by the full Council.

The model used for consultation with staff was based on a diagonal slice of the organisation involving staff from varying grades, disciplines and departments across the organisation who met at regular intervals during the process. This was supplemented by communication with all office-based staff via Intranet and a number of clinics at area offices for outdoor employees.

In conducting the external consultation, copies of the draft Plan were circulated to members of the following groups:

- Strategic Policy Committees (SPC's)
- Limerick County Development Board (CDB)

- Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Working Group
- The County Community and Voluntary Forum
- Workplace Partnership

Presentations were also made at the SPC, SIM and CDB meetings, all of which have community and voluntary sector representation.

This Plan was prepared with a strong focus on the traditional functions of the Council with the objective of ensuring that the essential services for which it is responsible continue to be provided in a manner which meets the growing needs and expectations of present and future generations. Limerick County Council is conscious also however of its new role and responsibilities in the promotion of inclusiveness, quality of life and community activity and participation and its objectives in this regard have been incorporated into the Plan.

Finally, this Plan has been framed in the context of all existing strategies and Plans and in this regard the mission statement and objectives are closely aligned with those of the County Development Board Strategy and the County Development Plan currently at draft stage.