



# Corporate Plan 2010-2014



**WESTMEATH**  
LOCAL AUTHORITIES  
ÚDARÁIS ÁITIÚLA NA h-IARMHÍ



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# Foreword

The publication of the Westmeath County Council Corporate Plan for the period 2010-2014 comes at a time of unprecedented challenges for Ireland, its people and its institutions. The country finds itself in the midst of an economic crisis, occasioned by a global economic downturn accompanied by significant national challenges brought about the collapse of the construction sector, and the associated collapse of our banking system. By national level, this financial crisis requires significant reductions in public expenditure to stabilise our debt GDP ratio, which in turn has a direct impact on the financing and functions of local government, which as presently structured, are heavily dependent on centralised funding from the state.

The contraction of funding from central sources is further exacerbated by declining local economic activity and credit restrictions. In this latter context, the revenue generating capacity of local government has diminished significantly where revenues are activity based, particularly in the planning area, while it faces a significant challenge to collect local taxes and charges in a difficult business environment.

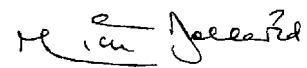
These challenges which are likely to persist for the duration of this Corporate Plan make it all the more important that Westmeath County Council adopts a strategic planning approach to its activities. The Plan as presented assumes the continued operation of Westmeath County Council as the primary unit of local government within the county, operating within the existing local government structure. The Council is conscious of the pending publication of a White Paper on Local Government, which may recommend alterations to the functions and form of Local Government throughout

the country. Notwithstanding this potential development, the Corporate Plan, and in particular, its core values and strategic objectives are pertinent to the operations of Westmeath County Council for the foreseeable future.

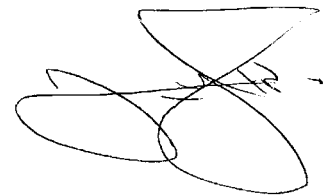
The Plan, which has been presented and structured in a format which is easily understood, provides the roadmap for the policy orientation of the Council over the next 5 years. The Plan has been prepared, following extensive consultation and review by the Corporate Policy Group. It will be the primary influence for the preparation of Annual Operational Plans, and Budgets, through which the Council will seek to give effect to its objectives. The Plan includes a framework for the implementation, monitoring and review of the objectives. This process which will include the publication of an Annual Report, will ensure that the Plan remains focused, flexible and responsive in an ever changing and uncertain economic environment.

The Elected Members and Staff are fully committed to the implementation of the Plan, notwithstanding the challenging economic environment, and look forward to working with the various statutory, voluntary and community bodies with whom the Council shares a common interest in the development of County Westmeath.

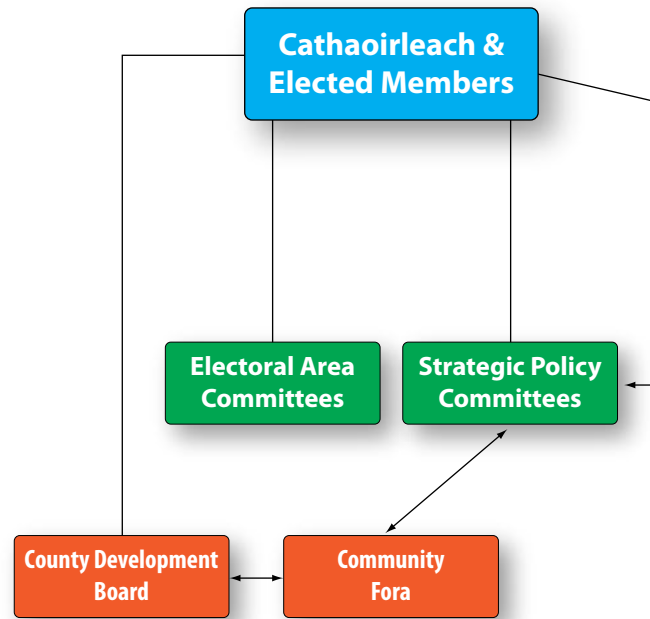
**Cllr Michael Dollard**  
**Cathaoirleach**



**Daniel McLoughlin**  
**County Manager**



# Introduction to Westmeath County Council

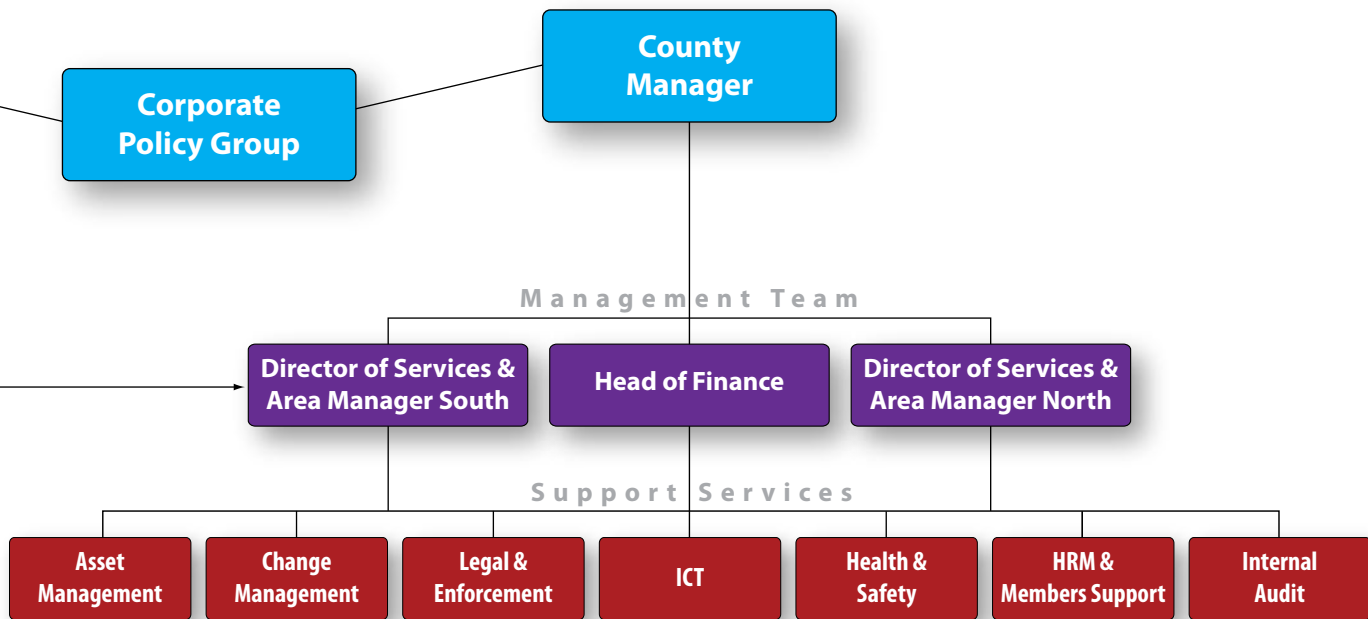


Westmeath County Council in common with all other county authorities, was established under the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898. It is the primary unit of local government in the county, and has its administrative headquarters in Mullingar. The Elected Council consists of 23 Members who are democratically elected for a period of 5 years. The most recent local elections took place in June 2009.

The Council is mandated to deliver a diverse range of functions and services which can be broadly described under the headings of economic development, community development, the provision of physical and social infrastructure, recreation and amenity services, and the enforcement of the planning and environmental regulatory framework.

The responsibilities and functions of the Council are divided between the Elected Members and the Executive. The Elected Members exercise their authority by way of Reserved Functions, and do so in public session at each of its monthly Council Meetings. The Reserved Functions of the Elected Members are primarily of a policy nature, the most important of which include the adoption of the County Development Plan, the Annual Budget, the adoption of a 3 year Multi-Annual Capital Programme, the adoption of an Annual Housing Programme, the making of Bye-Laws, and the preparation of the Corporate Plan. The day to day operational decisions which derive from the implementation of the aforementioned policies are a matter for the Council Executive. Typically such executive functions include all staff matters, individual planning decisions, the award of grants and loans, the allocation of houses, and the management of the Council's assets etc.

## Organisational Structure



The Local Authority is assisted in its policy deliberations by four Strategic Policy Committees in the areas of Environmental Policy, Transportation and Planning Policy, Housing Social and Cultural Development, and Economic and Community Development. The membership of the Strategic Policy Committees is drawn from the Council Members and sectoral representatives of the social partners. The chairs of the Strategic Policy Committees, together with the Cathaoirleach of the Council, and the County Manager, form the Corporate Policy Group, which has statutory functions including the preparation of the Annual Budget, and the preparation and ongoing monitoring of the Corporate Plan. In addition, the Corporate Policy Group provides general advice and guidance to the full Council Membership on policy matters as required.

The Council also has structured links with the community and voluntary sector through the operation of the Community Fora and chairs the County Development Board which is a statutory body established by the Government in 2000 to address the need for greater co-ordination and integration of service provision at local level. The Board is made up of Members drawn from the local government sector, state agencies, local development agencies, and social partners.

# Structure of Corporate Plan



The Corporate Plan is presented in a structure and format designed to be easily understood. This is critical in the context of those in the public domain seeking to understand the role and function of Westmeath County Council including the consumers of our services, our stakeholders and our staff.

The Plan is in the first instance, predicated on the organisation’s Mission Statement which reflects the ultimate goal of Westmeath County Council. The achievement of this overriding objective can in turn only be realised through the delivery of a number of interrelated strategic objectives. In striving to achieve these objectives, Westmeath County Council conducts its day to day operations in the context of core values, which permeate the entire organisation and its activities. These values are set out as quality customer service, operational efficiency, sustainability, social inclusion, adaptability and democratic accountability and transparency.

Each of the strategic objectives are underpinned by a series of strategies which will form the basis of annual operational plans. These plans in turn will inform the Team Plans of the various staff units within the organisation, which are brought together collectively under the various Directorates.

Finally, these Team Plans will form the basis of individual Personal Development Plans, thereby creating a direct relationship between individual staff responsibility and overall organisational objectives.

The Directors in carrying out their functions, have access to the various corporate support services, including Human Resources, ICT, Health and Safety, Corporate Services, Legal and Enforcement, Asset Management, and the Change Management Unit.

The Plan concludes with a diagrammatic overview of the implementation, monitoring and review process, including the preparation of an Annual Action Plan, bi-annual monitoring by the various Directorates and the Corporate Policy Group, and the preparation of the Annual Report and Review, which is fundamental to ensuring that the Plan remains relevant and focused on the challenges ahead.

## Mission Statement

**“To lead the Economic, Social and Cultural Development of County Westmeath, and to deliver quality services”**

# Core Values

**There are a number of fundamental principles which, irrespective of the work area involved, underpin all of the activities of Westmeath County Council. In the pursuit of the various objectives and strategies set out in the Plan, the Members and Staff of Westmeath County Council will, in their everyday activities, be guided by the following core values.**



## Quality Customer Service

Westmeath County Council is committed to dealing with its customers with the utmost courtesy and impartiality in open, accessible customer friendly environments in all of our offices, while at the same time offering a choice of access options through flexible opening hours, a range of locations and access to services via the Internet.

## Operational Efficiency

Westmeath County Council is committed to the management and deployment of resources in a manner that maximises operational efficiency and value for money. All of our activities are grounded in sound financial management practices, and are the subject of ongoing assessment through our internal audit procedures, and statutory external audit.

## Transparency and Democratic Accountability

As the only democratically mandated organisation within the county, Westmeath County Council is acutely conscious of the need to uphold that democratic mandate through ongoing open and transparent communication and dialogue with its citizens, including transparency in decision making. This will be achieved through formal and informal communication processes, voluntary and statutory networks, use of the print media and the internet, and the continuing conduct of business in open publicly accessible meetings.

## Sustainability

Westmeath County Council is consistently reminded of the basic requirement of ensuring sustainability is at the heart of all of its decisions. This includes sustainability in financial, environmental and socio-economic terms, and will continue to be embraced by Westmeath County Council. This is fundamental to its decision making in areas such as quality of life, climate change, the allocation of resources, energy efficiency etc.

## Adaptability

The requirement for adaptability can manifest itself in the context of changed economic circumstances, reform programmes, sharp variations in resource allocation, adjustments in consumer demand patterns, new legislation and climate change. Westmeath County Council will continue to review its operating environment in the context of strategic planning, and risk management analysis with a view to ensuring that it remains open to change, and capable of adaptation as the need arises.

# Our Operating Environment

**The operating environment for the local government sector of which Westmeath County Council is a part can be described as dynamic, uncertain, regulated, political, and above all else, subject to change. A simple analysis of economic trends and their impact on the daily functions of local government is a timely reminder of this dynamic operating environment. While recent trends suggest that it is very difficult to predict the future, it is important in examining our future strategy to identify the factors which are likely to impact on the organisations capacity to deliver on its objectives.**

## External Environment

External factors insofar as they can be predicted include legal, financial, political, technological, environmental, and demographic factors, all of which present challenges in the immediate future.

### • Legal

The legal and regulatory framework within which local government operates has become increasingly complex in recent years, and has particular implications for both the level of resources required and the future allocation of resources. Legal responsibilities emanating from both E.U. and national government will have first call on greatly reduced financial resources, which in turn will impact on general service provision.

### • Financial

The dependence of the local government system on centralised funding leaves it vulnerable to sharp reductions in revenue allocation in an economic climate where austerity measures are required.

### • Political

As an agent of government, local authorities have ongoing responsibility for the implementation of government policy in a range of diverse areas such as the National Spatial Strategy, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, Regional Waste Management Plans, Regional Planning Guidelines, Smarter Travel, National Climate

Change, and various other regional and national policy initiatives and programmes. This policy implementation role gives rise to a relationship with central government which extends beyond our parent Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government.

### • Socio Economic

Changing economic circumstances, demographic profiles and patterns, variations in emigration trends etc. all have a significant impact on resource allocation, consumer demand patterns, and the variations in policy response. Given the more recent turbulent variations in socio-economic data, it is evident that there will be a clear requirement for ongoing adaptation to the changed circumstances we are currently experiencing.

### • Technological

The technological advances which have been experienced over the period of the last Corporate Plan clearly underline the necessity for an understanding and awareness of the potential for further enhancements in service delivery through technological advancement. This awareness will in turn inform the immediacy and duration of decision making in this area.

## Internal Environment

Critical to the delivery of this Corporate Plan is organisation capacity in terms of staff resources, organisational structure, work environment, training programmes, technology, work processes etc.

### • Human Resource Management

The Plan sets out the clear linkages between individual staff responsibility and the achievement of organisational goals. In simple terms, the Plan will not be achieved without the understanding and support of the staff and members of the organisation. Notwithstanding the constraints imposed by the ongoing embargo on recruitment, Westmeath County Council remains committed to the training, support and encouragement of its staff, and in so doing will fully implement the PMDS process to ensure improved

performance, greater job satisfaction, and more focused training programmes for both staff and elected members.

#### • **ICT**

The continuous improvement in service delivery will be driven by the staff resources of the Council, who in turn will require the technical assistance and advanced capability provided by technological improvements. The Council, in this context, will continue to invest in ICT systems, and opportunities to enhance and support our Human Resource function.

#### • **Performance Measurement and Service Indicators**

The continuing reduction in resource availability makes it more difficult to participate in service indicator reporting in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, the use of service indicators, whether nationally or locally determined, provide an important framework for the benchmarking of performance across a range of areas. At best these indicators will show signs of improvement, or may show signs of under-resourcing. Westmeath County Council is committed to the continuous examination of its performance in the context of service indicators, both national and local, which will be published so as to facilitate a greater understanding and openness in relation to the workings of the Council.

#### • **Operational Efficiency**

Significant resource adjustments, changing demand patterns, alteration of functions etc. necessitate ongoing assessment of structures, and resource allocation to ensure that the organisation is maximising its potential. The Council is committed to ongoing examination and continuous review of internal systems, structures and processes, to ensure that the organisation is best placed to deliver on its mandate, and that the scarce staff resource is distributed in a manner that maximises efficiency and distributes the workload evenly.

# Our Strategic Objectives

**The strategic objectives as set out endeavour to encapsulate the high level goals of the organisation.**

**The attainment of these objectives requires a range of strategies which are set out in each case. While it is envisaged that the overall thrust of the objectives will remain consistent throughout the Plan period, the strategies will be subject to constant review and revision where necessary.**

**Organisational Capacity** – to maximise organisational capacity, through the continuous review of operational efficiency, human resource, financial and risk management practices.

**Quality Customer Service** – to place quality customer service at the centre of everything we do.

**Social Inclusion and Community Participation** – to facilitate the broadest possible participation by our citizens in the development of their communities and their county, including participation in the formation, development and implementation of policies and programmes.

**Infrastructural Capacity** – to ensure that our physical and social infrastructure is sufficiently developed to support economic development and quality of life into the future.

**Economic Development** – to maximise the continued, sustainable and balanced economic development of our county.

**Environmental Quality** – to improve, protect, and promote our natural environment, in the interests of present and future generations.

# 1 Organisational Capacity

***“To maximise organisational capacity through the continuous review of operational efficiency, human resource, financial and risk management practices”***



## Supporting Strategies

- Implement an organisation wide Health and Safety Management System.
- Ensure that budgetary and financial management practices are consistently reviewed to ensure best practice, and fit for purpose in the context of recognised governance procedures.
- To facilitate and promote the implementation of organisation wide ICT initiatives which support efficiency and customer service.
- Maximise organisation performance in the context of the National Service Indicators, and put in place additional Local Service Indicators to assist in performance review on an annual basis.
- Maintain an Internal Audit function and fulfil any audit requirements arising therefrom, together with requirements arising out of any statutory audit, or recommendations of the Audit Committee.
- Constantly review and have regard to the Risk Management System currently in place.
- Put in place and implement a proactive Human Resource Management Strategy, and attain the Excellence Through People quality award.
- Ensure the ongoing training and support of the Elected Members of Westmeath County Council.
- Implement an organisation wide Internal and External Communications Strategy.
- Facilitate and support the representational role of the Elected Members, including the increased use of technology in this regard.
- Ensure that appropriate debt collection management, and income maximisation policies and structures are in place.
- Continue the organisation wide business process re-engineering exercise, and implement findings and recommendations arising therefrom.
- Fully explore and maximise opportunities that may arise through increased use of shared services, and improved procurement procedures.
- Ensure that the property and assets of Westmeath County Council are managed in a manner which maximises their present and future potential.
- Prepare an organisation wide Sustainable Energy Strategy.
- Implement locally, decisions arising from the Efficiency Review Group Report, the proposed White Paper on Local Government, and other decisions as necessary arising from adjustment to the Local Government Funding Model.
- To continuously review organisation structures to reflect staff reductions, reductions in funding, variations in customer demand, and to generally reflect changing economic circumstances, and reinforce strategic priorities.

## 2 Quality Customer Service

***“To place quality customer service at the centre of everything we do”***



### Supporting Strategies

- Implement our Customer Services Action Plan and conduct Customer Satisfaction Surveys, at appropriate intervals.
- Continue to develop and enhance working relationships with our customers, state agencies, local development agencies, and the community and voluntary sector.
- Maximise the use of Area Offices, Libraries, and other Council buildings for the dissemination of information on Council services, and public services generally.
- Expand and develop the range of Service Indicators, and publicise targets and performance against these indicators.
- Maximise the potential of ICT to improve service access quality and delivery, including the Council's Website, e-payment options, on-line planning, library access, and access to information generally.
- Actively support and participate in community initiatives such as Tidy Towns, Pride of Place, playground provision schemes etc.
- Ensure that appropriate staff training programmes geared towards quality customer service are in place.
- Continue to support community based services, such as the Dog Warden Scheme, the Community Warden Service, the Veterinary Service, Water Safety, Fire Prevention, Road Safety, and Civil Defence.
- Plan for the protection of our Citizens, through the Emergency Planning Framework, and Incident Response Plans for water services, adverse weather, and flooding.
- Implement and continuously review the County Disability Plan.
- Continue to maintain a Housing Advice Centre.
- Continue to operate a Customer Contact Management System, and augment this with an improved telephone answering service, and publish statistics in relation to both on annual basis.

# 3 Social Inclusion and Community Participation

***“To facilitate the broadest possible participation by citizens in the development of their communities and their county, including participation in the formation, development and implementation of policies and programmes”***



## Supporting Strategies

- Support and recognise community achievement through such initiatives as the Community Grants Scheme, the Cathaoirleachs Awards, and the Pride of Place Scheme.
- Support community involvement and participation through the County Fora, and the involvement and inclusion of community representation on the Strategic Policy Committees and the County Development Board.
- Maximise the use of Council facilities, such as Libraries, Area Offices, Fire Stations etc. for the dissemination of information.
- Ensure that all policies and programmes of Westmeath County Council are subject to, and supported by, community consultation.
- Maximise opportunities for engagement with the youth of the county through initiatives such as the Junior County Council, Comhairle na nOg, the Green Schools Programme, the Environmental Awareness and Road Safety Awareness Programmes conducted through our schools.
- Maximise the engagement of our youth in Sports Programmes through the continued operation of the F.A.I. and G.A.A. Sports Development Officers Programme.
- Support the operation of Joint Policing Committees.
- Maximise community participation in the Civil Defence.
- Develop Partnership Programmes with local communities in the context of aesthetic improvement, estate management, Tidy Town achievement, playground provision, and the promotion of shared responsibility generally.
- Use the Council’s website and other social networking tools such as Twitter and Facebook to maximise opportunities for engagement with our Communities.
- Update and implement the County Social Inclusion Strategy.

## 4 Infrastructural Capacity

***“To ensure that our physical and social infrastructure is sufficiently developed to support economic development, and quality of life into the future”***



### Supporting Strategies

- Implement the Water Services Investment Programme, insofar as resources permit in order to ensure that water services capacity keeps ahead of and supports economic growth.
- Ensure that existing water services infrastructure and capacity is adequately managed, including the ongoing implementation of a Water Conservation Programme.
- To continue to implement the Rural Water Programme.
- Put in place a fully costed Three Year Capital Programme.
- Implement the Housing Strategy
- Put in place and implement a Multi-Annual Roadworks Programme.
- Ensure that the Council’s social infrastructure, including its libraries, arts facilities, and sport and recreation facilities are sufficient to meet the needs of our current and future population, and support quality of life.
- Maximise the potential of the county’s natural amenities, including its lakes through supporting Development Programmes.
- Work with the National Roads Authority on the implementation of a comprehensive programme for the improvement and maintenance of our national road network within the county.
- Support the development and enhancement of transportation initiatives for rural areas, and work with all transport providers in this regard.
- Promote and support the development and maintenance of walking and cycling routes within the county in conjunction with voluntary groups and organisations.
- Continue to improve our Fire Station infrastructure, in line with the Emergency Operations Plan.
- Improve the quality of our fire fighting appliances and equipment as necessary.
- Enhance and augment amenity areas throughout the county.
- Facilitate and support the availability of Broadband throughout the county.
- Ensure through the development management process that there is a suitable range of housing stock for all our citizens.

# 5 Economic Development

***“To maximise the continued, sustainable and balanced economic development of our county”***



## Supporting Strategies

- To put in place an appropriate forward planning framework for the county, including a County Development Plan centred on a core strategy, local area plans, village plans, and unserved settlement statements for unserved areas.
- Ensure the implementation of the Regional Planning Guidelines.
- Work in conjunction with Offaly County Council, the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government, and the various state agencies in the development of the Midland Gateway.
- Ensure that infrastructural capacity, both physical and social, is adequately addressed in the supporting strategic objective on infrastructural capacity.
- Review and implement a County Housing Strategy.
- Review and implement a County Retail Strategy.
- Work closely with I.D.A. Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the County Enterprise Board, the County Development Board, and the Business Community to ensure that existing industry is supported, and that all avenues for job creation are fully exploited.
- Working closely with Failte Ireland and the Westmeath County Tourism Committee establishing initiatives to support tourism within the county, and the region generally.
- Implement the County Heritage Plan.
- Implement the Smarter Travel Policy and in so doing explore opportunities to reduced car based travel and promote cycling among all ages, particularly the school going population.
- Liaise with the Chambers of Commerce and the business community generally, to ensure that the county’s retail function is appropriately supported and marketed.
- In conjunction with the County Development Board and with the support of the relevant education authorities, ensure that educational opportunities for the county’s population are fully maximised.
- Ensure that the aesthetic presentation of the county is proactively managed, in a manner that best presents the county to potential investors at all levels.
- Co-ordinate the implementation of the County Development Board strategy to support economic growth and development and prioritise objectives that will encourage investment and job creation in the county.
- Ensure that the organisational capacity of Westmeath County Council, and in particular, its development management structures, remains responsive to the needs and requirements of those doing business within the county.

# 6 Environmental Quality

***“To improve, protect and promote our natural environment in the interests of present and future generations”***



## Supporting Strategies

- Implement the Nitrates and Water Framework Directives, and in so doing, progress the implementation of the River Basin Management Plans.
- Support the economic development objective of improving the aesthetic appearance of our county through the elimination of dereliction, street cleaning, litter management and environmental protection generally.
- Review and thereafter implement the regional waste management plan.
- Put in place a Climate Change Adaptation Policy in keeping with the National Climate Change Strategy.
- To continue the proactive implementation of the Waste Enforcement Programme.
- To ensure, through the planning and development management process, that our designated areas are adequately protected.
- Ensure through the implementation of supporting legislation and regulations that our natural environment, including our rivers and lakes are adequately protected from environmental damage.
- Put in place Flood Management Plans and Programmes, in accordance with national and E.U. policy.
- Promote environmental awareness and best practice, through education and awareness programmes.
- Incorporate the principle of sustainability and environmental considerations into all policy making.

# Implementation Monitoring and Review



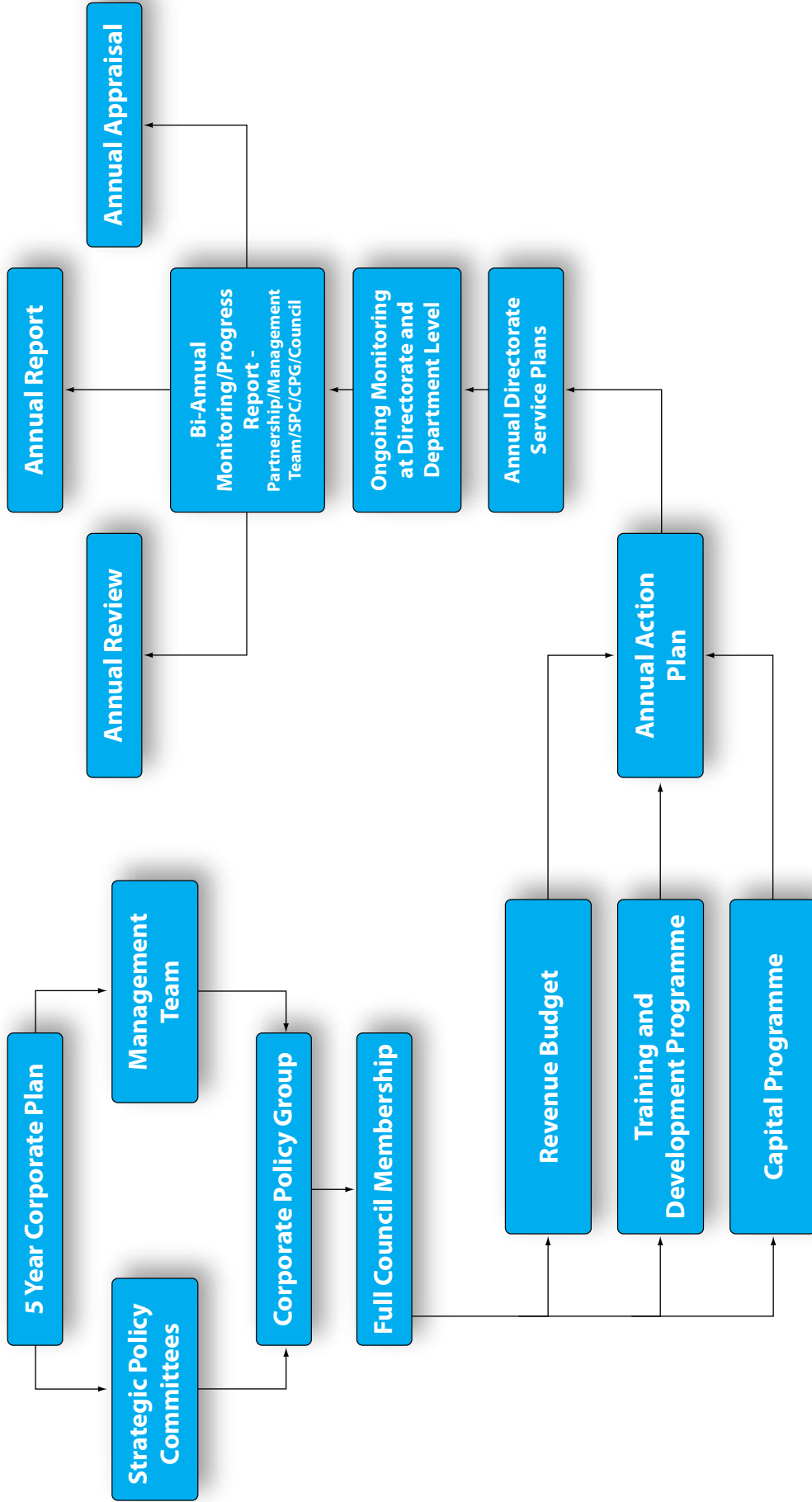
The Corporate Plan reflects current demands, challenges and priorities, and is an assessment of what is realisable over the next five years. It is inevitable, particularly in the current economic environment, that new demands and challenges will arise which cannot at this time be anticipated, and that priorities may change as a result. It is also inevitable that there will be changes in the external environment and within the organisation itself which may help or hinder our ability to achieve our objectives. Therefore, it is critical that there is a strategic management process involving ongoing monitoring and review of the Plan.

The monitoring and review framework set out diagrammatically involves on an annual basis both the Management Team and the Strategic Policy Committees identifying priorities from the overall Plan for action during the following year. These will be approved by the Corporate Policy Group in the context of the Budget preparation. Final approval will rest with the full Council, and the necessary financial commitments made in the Revenue Budget and the Capital Programme.

The resultant Action Plan for the year will then be broken down between the various supporting Directorates and Departments, who will draw up a Service Action Plan of their activities to facilitate ease of monitoring. The Service Plan will act as a baseline for the preparation of Team Plans and individual Personal Development Plans, thereby ensuring individual buy in at staff level, and also ensuring the interconnection between individual work programmes and overall organisational strategy.

Ongoing monitoring and review by the Directorates on a monthly basis will be supplemented by bi-annual review by the Corporate Policy Group. On an annual basis, there will be an Annual Report and Review to determine the continued validity of the strategies, with a view to making any necessary adjustments. The content of the annual review and annual appraisal will be incorporated into the Annual Report for publication each year. This Annual Report, on the implementation of the Corporate Plan, will be brought before the full Council at its January monthly meeting.

Implementation, Monitoring and Review Process



Notes:



# Corporate Plan 2010-2014

**WESTMEATH**  
LOCAL AUTHORITIES  
ÚDARÁIS ÁITIÚLA NA h-IARMHÍ

