

## Democratic and Legal Services Service Plan 2009/10

### The role of the service

- Provide an efficient, effective and economic service in the support of and delivery of the Council's corporate objectives.
- Provide high quality legal advice and guidance to all internal departments of the Council.
- Provide support, guidance and development opportunities to all Councillors and office holders of the authority
- Provide a high quality and effective service for the administration of elections and the maintenance of the register of electors.

### The service is planning to achieve the following outcomes by March 2012:

- More empowered parishes and towns.
- Independent assurance of the quality of our services in line with the highest standards nationally.
- Improved value for money based on the opinions of our customers and when our performance is compared to other local authorities.
- Value for money savings year on year.
- Working more efficiently, meeting agreed key priorities, and cutting 'red tape' wherever possible.
- A more efficient service as a consequence of the planned Transformation Programme.
- Developed information specific to wards and parishes through our Ward Councillors
- Support local parish councils so that 30% obtained accredited quality status confirming competence and professional management
- Improved development opportunities for Councillors to support them in their community leadership role through the South East Employers Member Development Charter
- Administer smooth and efficient Parliamentary and District & Parish election processes

## What have we achieved in 2008/09?

### Corporate Objective 1 : Putting People First

Providing Quality Services  
Health, Prosperity and Community Safety

- We achieved Charter Mark Status in June 2008
- We secured Lexcel re-accreditation in January 2009
- Increased focus on customer satisfaction

### Corporate Objective 2 : Pride Of Place

Sustainability  
Place Shaping

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### Corporate Objective 3 : Purpose Through Partnership

Improving Performance and Efficiency  
Strong Community Leadership

- Independent assurance of the quality of our services ensuring that these are in line with the highest standards nationally
- Value for money efficiency savings year on year
- Improved value for money based on the opinions of our customers and when our performance is compared to other local authorities
- Working more efficiently, meeting agreed key priorities, and cutting 'red tape' wherever possible
- Greater shared vision and priorities for service delivery with key partners
- More effective three tier working with more empowered parishes and towns
- A stronger community voice in decision making
- Assisted front line services in achieving their own Corporate Plan targets
- Organised 27 Member training courses
- Delivered 5 Local Democracy Week events to young people across the District
- Undertook a canvass and published a revised register of electors in December 2008 and administered a number of by-elections

## What we plan to improve

Target for 2011/12	2008/09 Baseline	2009/10 Milestone	2010/11 Milestone
<b>Corporate Objective 1 : Putting People First</b> Providing Quality Services Health, Prosperity and Community Safety			
We will retain Charter Mark accreditation for Democratic & Legal Services and further improve our service standards as we work towards Customer Service excellence.	Award by June 2008	Retained May 2009	
We will retain Lexcel accreditation as recognition of the quality service provided		Retained February 2010	Retained February 2011
We will continue to work with our communities by engaging local people on the important decisions that affect our local area.		Completed community Governance Review December 2009	
<b>Corporate Objective 2 : Pride Of Place</b> Sustainability Place Shaping			
Assist service departments in achieving their objectives through the provision of quality support services			
<b>Corporate Objective 3 : Purpose Through Partnership</b> Improving Performance and Efficiency Strong Community Leadership			
Deliver 3% cashable efficiency savings year-on-year	3%	3%	3%
Be awarded the Member Development Charter			Achieve award by December 2010
Administer the European, County council and Parliamentary elections		June 2009	June 2010
Continue to support the development of Parish Councils through the Quality Parish Council scheme	12 QPC's	15 QPC's	17 QPC's

## Risk

The key risk to delivery of this Service Plan centre around staffing and maintaining staffing levels and with it the resilience for the service that is required. There is also a potential risk to the service generated by the recession and with it the potential for changing or increasing workloads. In addition, the delivery of the Transformation Programme is likely to require additional or diverted resources from the service area.

## **Other Considerations**

### **Customer Satisfaction**

The Service already achieves high levels of satisfaction, with 100% of customers rating the legal service as either Good or Excellent. Further work is planned to assess of the customer satisfaction levels, for instance a survey of electors is planned for the coming year.

### **Customer Involvement**

The creation of the new Wealden Panel of Residents late in 2008 has provided a strong evidence base for consultation on the Council's plans, services and future policy decisions. There are a range of opportunities for the public to engage with the Council so long as these are communicated well and appropriately to all sections of our communities. To sustain that level of engagement we need to demonstrate that the Council listens to public opinion through feedback to groups and individuals and by publicising how we have listened and what we have changed as a consequence.

### **Access to Services**

A large proportion of the Democratic & Legal Service is provided to an internal customer base. This service plan, together with more detailed performance monitoring standards provides the main structure and direction for the service, with performance standards being reported to customers as and when appropriate.

### **Value for Money**

Through the Transformation Programme we will review all services to determine how we could improve the value for money over the next three years. The following options will be explored:

- Service cessation (where the service is discretionary)
- Reduce the service
- Improve the service by doing it differently
- Shared service with partner / other local authority
- Service provided by others

### **Workforce Priorities**

The Service has recently undergone a restructure, with changes to all three of the service elements. Legal Services reduced its staff structure by 0.5 FTE's and a new Democratic Services Manager was appointed to lead the committee and electoral services teams. Further work, particularly in terms of shared service and business process improvement is now underway across the service to review the way the service is delivered and to seek further efficiencies in service delivery

### **Learning & Development**

The service is committed to continuing professional development for all staff and the pursuit of relevant qualifications by individuals, subject to available resources.

### **Equalities and Diversity**

Equality is embedded in all aspects of the service. We strive to be fair and transparent in the way that we provide our services and ensure that they are accessible to all in our

communities. This is reflected in our Customer Charters and in the Council's Statement of Values. Our Action Plan is the outcome of our Equality Impact Assessment.

### **Sustainability**

Democratic Services is continuing to review and increase the level of electronic send outs of committee papers which will help reduce the number of paper copies produced by the service. We are also reviewing the way we work with Parish Councils with a view to increasing electronic communication.

### **Rural impact**

The service supports front line service delivery and community leaders in ensuring that rural issues are fully represented and considered.

### **Communication**

We will continue to use, support and encourage plain English across the organisation. We will also seek to use more sustainable methods of communication, e.g. electronic and web based communications, where appropriate.

### **Health and safety**

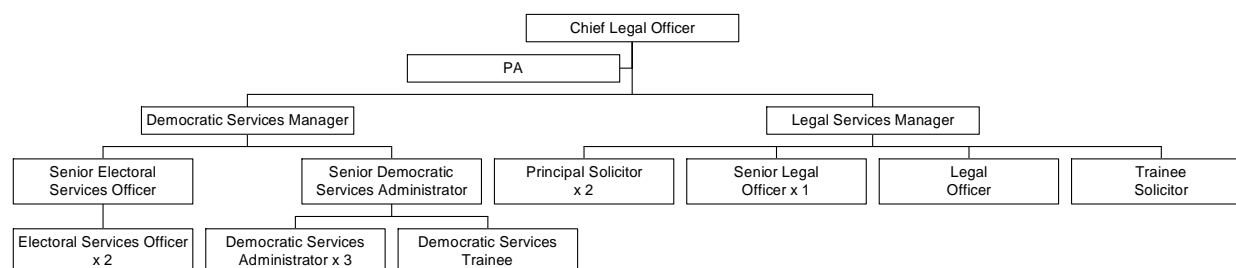
Health and safety remains a key consideration in the way we provide local services and in the way the service is run. Working practices take proper account of the health and safety of our employees and work in ways which minimise the risks to lone workers and of violent incidents associated with the various roles we undertake.

### **Standards**

We will retain Chartermark and Lexcel accreditations. Through our shared services and business improvement projects we will seek to achieve even greater efficiencies in the way we work and either maintain or improve the standards of the service.

## Resources and budget

### Staff Organisation Chart (16.5 FTE)



### Budget

2008/09 £(000)		2009/10 £(000)	2010/11 £(000)	2011/12 £(000)
231,650	Committee Services	225,670	225,670	225,670
90,590	Electoral Registration	177,870	178,770	179,270
5,150	Electoral Reviews	5,150	5,150	5,150
5,000	District Elections	5,000	5,000	105,000
339,800	Members Allowances	345,680	345,680	345,680
5,700	Civic Expenses	5,700	5,700	5,700
11,000	Chairman's Allowances	11,000	11,000	11,000
260,550	Members Information Services	289,100	289,100	304,100
383,140	Legal Services	376,690	372,940	373,190
<b>1,432,580</b>	<b>Total Net Expenditure</b>	<b>1,441,860</b>	<b>1,439,010</b>	<b>1,554,760</b>

### Performance indicator targets

The National Indicator Set was introduced from 1 April 2008. In 2008/09 we gathered baseline data which has been used to set targets for 2009/10 and beyond.

PI No.	Description	2008/09 Actual	2009/10 Target	2010/11 Target
NI 4	% of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality	28%	32%	35%
	<b>Legal Services</b>			
	% of first draft s106 agreements issued within 10 working days of full instructions	92%	85%	90%
	% of housing possession proceedings issued within 10 working days of full instructions	100%	85%	90%
	% of insolvency proceedings issued within 10 working days of full instructions	100%	85%	90%
	% of enforcement notices issued within 10 working days of full instructions	91%	85%	90%
	<b>Member Services</b>			
	% of members expenses claim forms processes within 10 working days	100%	100%	100%
	Percentage of Parish Councils with QPC status	26%	33%	36%
	Percentage of members attending at least 3 training Courses. No. of training courses.	27	87.5%	90%
	<b>Electoral Services</b>			
	Total annual canvass return	62,484	62,500	63,000
	Number of nil change notifications by phone / e-mail	25,298	17,500	18,000
	Number of errors on the electoral register	7	25	15

## **How this Service Plan will be monitored**

The Council's performance management framework is critical to monitoring and reporting the achievements of the Service and as a catalyst for improvement when targets are not achieved.

In the same way that targets cascade down to individual appraisals, the achievement of those targets is managed at individual, team or service level. Day to day management is used to identify good performance and also those areas where delivery is slower or below the standard expected. There is an underlying principle of "no surprises".

At the end of each quarter, performance against key targets is collated and reported to a directorate management meeting. Based on the above system, management should already be aware and have taken appropriate action to improve a situation subject to the availability of appropriate resources. This quarterly meeting and information review should allow the Corporate Director to balance the outcomes from each of the service areas for which they are responsible and take appropriate action within their directorate.

A quarterly report is prepared by each directorate which is then collated by the Policy Officer with responsibility for Performance Management. This report then forms an appendix to a Cabinet report, with Portfolio Holders commenting on performance for their respective portfolios and recommending any improvement to Cabinet. The Cabinet report is circulated to all Members. Cabinet recommendations are then implemented by officers.

In the Scrutiny cycle following Cabinet's consideration of performance, the three Scrutiny Committees review the decisions of Cabinet and scrutinise the actions taken to improve performance and whether these have been effective.

At the year end, provisional outturn figures are prepared and considered by Cabinet. These must then undergo a process of data quality checks internally and external validation by the Audit Commission prior to final publication around June 2010.

## **Other key reference documents for the service**

Constitution  
Annual Governance Statement  
Professional codes of conduct

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