



# Capital Strategy

2010 - 2015

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# DUDLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL CAPITAL STRATEGY 2010 - 2015

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## Introduction

- 1 Dudley has a strong reputation for being an outward-looking Council, working with its diverse communities, customers and other partners to identify and work together on local priorities to improve quality of life. We have recognised that tackling crosscutting issues such as regeneration, social exclusion and sustainable development needs a joined-up approach across Council services, and between the Council and its partners. Our key priorities and targets are set out in the Dudley Borough Community Strategy. This Strategy sets out a vision for our community over a 15-year period. It agrees the most important areas for us to work together with our partners, and sets out what we need to do to achieve that vision.
2. At the heart of the Community Strategy is our aim of working together to achieve Stronger Communities. The strength of our community, including its future success requires that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to and achieve their full potential. The Community Strategy outlines six priorities through which progress towards a Fairer Society will be led. These are:
  - **Creating a prosperous borough**
  - **Promoting a sense of well-being and good health for everyone**
  - **Celebrating our heritage and local cultural life**
  - **Safeguarding and improving the environment**
  - **Promoting individual and community learning**
  - **Making Dudley a safe and peaceful place in which to live**
3. We recognise that these six priorities do not stand in isolation. Success in one area often depends on success in one or more of the others, but by highlighting them as key issues, the Community Strategy provides a clear signpost to the areas that we intend to concentrate upon.
4. Within the framework of the Community Strategy, the Council has also adopted a 3 Year Council Plan, which focuses the overall strategic direction of the authority on a clear set of priorities for deployment of resources. The Council Plan contains six key themes, which meet the aspirations of the council's overall vision Local People Matter. It clearly sets out the key priorities, objectives and targets for each theme and its local impact. These themes are:
  - **Caring Matters**
  - **Environment Matters**
  - **Learning Matters**
  - **Regeneration Matters**
  - **Safety Matters**
  - **Quality Service Matters**
5. The Capital Strategy is one of the means by which the priorities of the Community Strategy and Council Plan will be achieved. We recognise that to accomplish our goals, best possible use needs to be made of existing public sector assets, while resources available for new investment must be deployed as efficiently and effectively as possible. The Council's Constitution also recognises the importance of the Capital Strategy by making it one of the key documents which can be revised only by the Full Council.

6. The Capital Strategy itself was developed, and is reviewed annually, by a working group of senior officers including representatives of all Directorates, with input from Directors, and Cabinet & Select Committee members, prior to consideration by the Full Council.
- 6a. *"The Capital Strategy and its priorities recognise current and anticipated demographic changes, including in particular the ageing population in Dudley and its impact on the pattern of demands on services in the future."*

### **Links to other Strategies and Plans**

7. Under the umbrella of the Community Strategy & Council Plan, the Capital Strategy, like the Best Value Performance Plan is one of the key overarching policy documents of the Council that form a framework for the more operational strategies within particular spending or service areas. These include:
  - Corporate Property Policy, Office Accommodation Strategy, Commercial Property Policy and Directorate Asset Plans.
  - Our approved Local Area Agreement (LAA)
  - Children's Services Asset Management Plan
  - Housing Strategy and Housing Investment Programme (HIP)
  - Children and Young People's Plan
  - Local Transport Plan (LTP) and Transport Asset Management Plan
  - Economic Strategy
  - 5 Year ICT Strategy
  - Directorate Strategic Plans
  - Procurement Strategy
  - 30 Year Waste Strategy
  - Local Development Framework
  - Health Inequalities Strategy
  - Obesity Strategy
  - Strategy for Vulnerable People

The Capital Strategy is consistent with these and other Council plans and policies but should be specifically considered in conjunction with the Corporate Property Policy. The Corporate Property Policy pulls together the Council's various objectives for property and its impact on the wider role of the Council into a coherent framework of values.

8. The Council's Procurement Strategy is also fundamental to Capital Investment processes, and sets out how best value will be achieved in this and all other areas of procurement activity.
9. The Council now has five year Directorate Asset Plans in place for each Directorate. Reviewed annually these documents consider the needs and aspirations of all services in the context of current and future accommodation needs. They are consistent with strategic plans and policies and inform the capital programming process.
10. As these and other policy or strategy documents are developed or revised, they will show clearly how they contribute to the Capital Strategy. The cross-departmental management framework established to develop the Capital Strategy will ensure that the necessary consistency and feedback into service strategies is achieved.

## **Key Capital Investment Priorities**

11. Key Capital Investment priorities and how they contribute to the Council Plan themes (recognising that many priorities contribute to multiple themes), are as follows.

### **Caring Matters**

#### ***Children's Services - Children's Social Services***

12. Maintaining and developing an asset base which allows the directorate to modernise and improve social care services, further securing high quality and relevance. Priorities are:
  - development of integrated services in the context of the Children's Act and the Children's Plan – Building Brighter Futures
  - development of a Children's Resource Centre focussing on outcomes for looked after children which will also support the implementation of the outcomes of "Every Child Matters."

The recently published National Service Framework (NSF) for children will need a sub-regional and/or local focus to increase capacity to meet placement need, especially for more specialist settings, e.g. Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services. The Directorate is investigating and leasing additional staff accommodation to alleviate the pressure on existing accommodation caused amongst other things by new initiatives in Children's Services, presently being delivered with the aid of central government funding.

#### ***Adult, Community & Housing - Adult & Community***

13. Maintaining and developing an asset base which allows the directorate to modernise and improve social care services, further securing high quality and relevance. The changing policy environment for the most vulnerable groups in contact with the Directorate focuses on promoting independence and providing community-based and person-centred solutions. The need for capital to be used to support this focus drives our capital strategy.

In addition, there is a clear expectation locally and from the Government that services need to be seamless and, wherever appropriate and in the best interests of Dudley citizens, integrated with health care services.

These four goals - community based, person centred, seamless and integrated - also drive our approach to effective partnership working as a vehicle for enhancing limited mainstream capital resources.

For adult social care, developments will be required that meet the aims and ambitions of the Community Services White Paper "Our Health, Our Care, Our Say". Aspects of this include continued close working with the local PCTs and linkage with other solutions such as Extra Care Housing.

Current investment priorities are therefore:

- People with Disabilities: work is continuing with partners in the NHS in using the 'flexibilities' of the Health Act 2006 to secure progress on our shared agenda.
- Older People: our residential home provision must comply with care standards and be appropriate to the needs of residents. Continued investment to comply with the various legislative requirements will continue for the foreseeable future.
- Extra Care Housing: engaging with the Council's strategic partner Midland Heart to deliver up to five schemes, with one facility being provided in each of the five townships of the Borough - the first two facilities in Russells Hall Dudley and Whitehouse St., Coseley commenced in 2009.
- Day Services: most people with a learning disability will receive their day opportunities in the community and for people with very high dependency, improved centre facilities are required.
- ICT: is continuing to be developed so that it further enhances service delivery for all the vulnerable groups, e.g. through closer working with health services, and ICT-supported assessment processes.
- General Accommodation: improving accommodation for staff and where possible integrating these facilities with relevant partners. For example, the Stourbridge Local Improvement Finance Trust (LIFT) facility opened in October 2007 and will house the Community Team for Learning Disability. Building work on the Brierley Hill LIFT facility commenced in June 2007 with completion on target for February 2010. This facility will provide accommodation for the Older People/Physical Disability Team and the District Housing Office which will be co-located with PCT staff. The Council has also now signed up to the Strategic Partnering Agreement for LIFT on a non-exclusive basis and is exploring and developing options for further LIFT facilities within the borough,

Prioritisation of resources between schemes is informed by legislative requirements, as well as property and service related data related to schemes under consideration.

The Council's vision for social care provision is based on a mixed economy of care, and decisions on capital expenditure are taken in this context.

## **Environment Matters**

### ***Adult, Community & Housing - Housing***

14. Ensuring everyone has access to a home that is warm, dry and affordable in a secure environment and that homes are compatible with people's needs. Following a rigorous appraisal of the options available to finance a modern housing service by the Council and its stakeholders, in July 2005 Government Office West Midlands signed off the Housing Option Appraisal report which recommended the 'Stay with the Council' option. This provided a clear endorsement that the key investment priorities for Housing up to 2010/11 were to provide a repair service to maintain and improve the Council's housing stock to ensure that Government Decent Homes standards and targets are met.

Significant Housing investment priorities for the next 5 years are:

- Providing a Decent Homes Delivery plan to outline how investment will be maintained to achieve the Government's Decent Homes target of making all homes decent by 2010;

- Maintaining responsive repairs at their current levels to ensure that current service standards can be met and ensuring that a future backlog of routine repairs will not develop;
- Undertaking all required cyclical statutory responsibilities such as servicing of gas appliances, water hygiene testing, warden call equipment and alarms, and lift servicing;
- Maintaining current levels of cyclical maintenance such as external painting of properties, communal decorations to high rise and sheltered accommodation;
- Improving energy efficiency, combating climate change and reducing fuel poverty, targeting those homes with poor energy performance;
- Maintaining current waiting times for adaptations for persons with disabilities;
- Maintaining community safety and environmental budgets at current levels;
- Maintaining other environmental and social programmes to reflect the priorities of the Council Plan and the views of Area Housing Panels, e.g. replacement of Warden Call systems with modern equipment compatible with Telecare technology;
- Maximising potential resources to reduce the impact of climate change through accessing Carbon Emission Reduction Target (CERT) and Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) funding;
- Maximising the use of grant and loan assistance to improve and repair non decent homes in the private sector;
- To sustain our improved performance in providing Disabled Facilities Grants;
- Continued direction of Homes and Communities Agency funding towards schemes that support regeneration and sustainable priorities and continuing to maximise available and appropriate resources to ensure that local needs determined from the Housing Needs Survey are met;;
- Working in partnership with the Council's strategic partner Midland Heart for the delivery of 5 Extra Care Housing Schemes across the borough of Dudley with one facility in each of the five principal townships.

### ***Urban Environment - Culture & Leisure***

15. Safeguarding existing culture and heritage facilities, and developing new ones where appropriate. Key investment priorities over the next 5 years are:
- Provision of additional cremators, and renewal of existing at Gornal Wood and Stourbridge Crematoria, and provision of mercury abatement equipment at Gornal Wood.;
  - On-going upgrading of facilities and security of Parks and nature reserves;
  - Undertake a revision of the Borough's Playing Pitch Strategy;
  - On-going restoration of the Leasowes, including the provision of a new visitor centre;
  - Addressing access issues in all our public leisure facilities to ensure that the Council fulfils its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act;
  - Preparation of indoor sports facilities strategy in response to work undertaken on Borough facility improvement exercise;
  - Implementation of Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve 'Ripples Through Time' project following successful HLF Stage 2 submission;
  - Submission of Stage 2 HLF bid for Priory Park and Ruin;
  - Implementation of Healthy Towns project;
  - Conduct Stage 2 of glass feasibility study and implementation of recommendations.

## ***Urban Environment - Environment***

16. Promoting and providing effective and efficient waste management and transport to all sections of the community and user groups in a positive, safe and sustainable manner. Key priorities are:
- Improvements to waste infrastructure and implementation of a 30 year strategy;
  - Transition to domestic wheeled bin service;
  - Additional pollution control equipment at Lister Road Waste to Energy plant;
  - Implementation of Asset Management Plan at Lister Road depot;
  - Continued investment in the vehicle fleet, exploring options that will reduce carbon emissions;
  - Identification and remediation of Contaminated Land in line with the Council's Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy, in order to meet our legal obligations under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

## **Learning Matters**

### ***Children's Services -Schools***

17. Providing high quality accommodation with stimulating learning environments for school pupils and members of the community to ensure educational standards continue to rise. Over the next five years the priorities will be to maximise external investment in the infrastructure from Building Schools for the Future (BSF), Primary Capital Programme and other funding and to ensure that overall patterns of investment from all sources are both "joined-up" and take account of Council priorities. In this broad context, the key investment priorities over the next five years will be:
- To address the backlog of urgent repairs and maintenance identified by condition surveys for all schools.
  - To address issues identified by schools regarding the unsuitability of teaching areas - including the replacement of mobile classroom accommodation in a number of schools and the enhancement of existing provision to make it more appropriate for quality teaching and learning.
  - To address the issues of surplus capacity in the both the primary and secondary sectors in line with projects arising from the review of primary and secondary school places.
  - To explore potential for further PFI projects to replace those school buildings with the most urgent need, as identified by the principles of Asset Management Planning, including condition and suitability of existing provision and assessment of sufficiency of pupil places, and in particular to develop proposals for the BSF secondary school replacement and refurbishment programme.
  - To continue effective bidding for external funding especially Targeted Capital Funding (TCF) to replace those school buildings with the most urgent need as identified by the principles of Asset Management Planning.
  - To develop the infrastructure required to deliver the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Strategy, particularly with regard to co-location of services to ensure easy access for children, young people and families.
  - The development of integrated Children's Centres in the context of the overall Sure Start programme.

- To continue addressing issues regarding access for disabled persons to all buildings.
- To explore the use of innovative methods of procurement and building that will deliver cost-effective and high quality buildings for education and lifelong learning.
- To address effectively issues relating to health and safety, including fire risk, asbestos, legionella and site security.

### ***Adult, Community & Housing - Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning***

#### 18. Key priorities are:

- Provision of a modern Archives and Local History Service further exploring partnership arrangements for a joint facility at the site of the Black Country Living Museum;
- Continuing the library modernisation programme to improve and modernise the Libraries building stock to create an excellent modern library service with bright, light flexible libraries acting as a focus for their community with modern ICT such as Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and self issue terminals. Following the successful opening of the borough's first Library Links at Dudley Wood Neighbourhood Learning Centre, the new Children's Centre at Highgate, and in Quarry Bank's Community Centre, options are also being explored for providing a Library Link for Pensnett where there are currently no library facilities. Having completed the refurbishment of Wordsley Library, the programme also completes the extension and refurbishment of Kingswinford Library in partnership with the Learning & Skills Council to improve adult learning. Improvements to the library service in Brierley Hill are also planned with, subject to funding, a new library facility in Brierley Hill to be delivered in partnership with Stourbridge College.

## **Regeneration Matters**

### ***Urban Environment - Transport***

#### 19. Implementing schemes that will support sustainable economic development, offer genuine choice in transport modes, and protect the environment. Key investment priorities set out by the Department for Transport seek to address safety, air quality, accessibility and congestion. Schemes to be delivered in the West Midlands that address these priorities have been agreed with DfT and feature in the 2005 West Midlands Local Transport Plan (LTP), including:

- The Burnt Tree island improvement;
- Continued Local Safety, Pedestrian Crossing, Cycleway, Road Maintenance, Minor Highway Improvement, and Bridge Strengthening programmes;
- Completion of strengthening works to structures on the Primary Route Network;
- Continued programme of renewing and upgrading street lighting, illuminated traffic sign and traffic signal installations;
- Examination of options for demand management and measures to enhance network efficiency including a Quick Wins Programme and engagement with the West Midlands Urban Traffic Control major scheme;
- Consideration of highway improvements associated with potential Priority Investment Corridor designation for the A458;



and supporting:

- Extending Midland Metro from Wednesbury to Stourbridge;
- Refurbishment / replacement of Dudley and Stourbridge Bus Stations;
- Investment in high quality public transport Including consideration of public transport access to Brierley Hill;
- Re-establishment of the Walsall to Stourbridge line for rail freight.

During the period of the Capital Strategy there will be a need to engage with Centro as the Integrated Transport Authority in development of LTP3 (2011-16) that seeks to support regeneration and growth and deliver transport infrastructure in a challenging financial environment taking on board the Government's approach to delivering a sustainable transport system.

### ***Urban Environment - Regeneration***

20. Using the Council's enabling role to stimulate economic regeneration. Key investment priorities over the next 5 years are:

- Support to the development of the Strata vision and the Wrens Nest National Nature Reserve as a heritage destination through a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the identification of other appropriate funding sources;
- Seeking resources from DEFRA to enable replacement of the Mines Drainage system at Pensnett;
- Support for New Heritage Regeneration Ltd, the Arms Length Company (ALC) remitted to deliver Borough wide regeneration, with the first priority the delivery of the Dudley Area Development Framework (ADF);
- Development and delivery of the Joint Core Strategy
- Development and delivery of Area Action Plans for the regeneration of Brierley Hill, Halesowen and Stourbridge town centres;
- Maximising use of regeneration funding such as European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and resources through Advantage West Midlands (AWM), for the Council and its partners' regeneration initiatives;
- Working with partner organisations to bring forward brownfield sites for development and open space purposes;
- Redevelopment of the Castle Hill site in Dudley to transform the area into a major visitor attraction;
- Development of the South Black Country Innovation and Enterprise Centre to attract knowledge based businesses and jobs to the Borough;
- Developing the inward investment offer to secure new businesses and employment opportunities in the Borough
- Seeking funding from Advantage West Midlands for improvement to the public realm in High Street and the Western Gateway to Brierley Hill at Church Hill;
- Delivery of a programme of regeneration in the Borough's Local Centres.

### **Safety Matters**

#### ***Chief Executive's – Community Safety***

21. Key priority is:

- Investment in projects directly contributing to the local Community Safety Strategy.

## **Quality Services Matter**

### ***Chief Executive's***

22. Key priority is:

- Development of Customer/Citizen Access to Services. This will also give the Council an opportunity to rationalise its property usage via disposal and consolidation of properties, redevelopment of property and acquisition of new properties. These efficiencies will need to be identified at a Corporate and Directorate level.

### ***Finance, ICT & Procurement***

23. Key priority is further capital investment in ICT. In particular, over the next 5 years, we expect to:

- Develop ICT infrastructure to support transformation of Council Services around the needs of the citizen, including: home working; mobile working; improved information management; development of more self-service delivery opportunities; single citizen's index; better integration of information systems.
- Renew critical components of the existing infrastructure to ensure the continued reliability of ICT applications across the council, including the Microsoft Server Platform; Microsoft SQL Server; and Microsoft Office Systems.

### ***Law, Property & Human Resources***

24. Key priorities are:

- Using the recently established Limited Liability Partnership, PSP Dudley LLP to support the work of its arms length regeneration company. The LLP reflects a long term strategic partnership with the private sector and will develop sites that deliver community benefit;
- Establishing a clear Estate Strategy that addresses existing accommodation problems and reflects the Council's vision following the transformation of support services;
- Proactive management of the Council's land and buildings assets, and prioritisation of the annual Repair & Maintenance resource allocation in line with the Council's Repairs & Maintenance Policy;
- A programme of Access works to ensure that the Council meets its Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) obligations.

## **Planning, Prioritisation and Implementation**

25. All capital investment and disposal decisions are consistent with the aspirations outlined within this and the Council's other key strategic plans and policies. The Council has a rolling three year capital programme setting out its detailed capital investment plans, which is driven by this Capital Strategy and is based on forecast resource availability in terms of:
- Government grants and Supported Capital Expenditure allocations (SCEs);
  - Revenue resources available for direct capital investment and to fund unsupported capital expenditure under the "Prudential Borrowing" regime;
  - Resources likely to be available from property disposals as a result of property reviews;
  - Other grants and contributions from public and private sector partners.
26. All projects included in the Capital Programme are justified against criteria set out within the Council's Financial Regulations as follows:
- a) contributes towards the delivery of the Council's strategic objectives e.g. Community Strategy and Council Plans;
  - b) contributes towards the achievement of a specific priority/objective (s) as set out in a Directorate Service Plan, and/or arises from agreed capital strategies e.g. HIP, LTP and/or assists the Council to meet its statutory objectives or respond to new legislative requirements and /or contributes to the achievements of "Best Value";
  - c) can be supported by a coherent funding strategy, which will minimise the use of the Council's own resources;
  - d) has a clear and well thought out brief which defines the objectives of the project and specifies any issues which are time critical; is otherwise achievable within the financial year concerned;
  - e) has been fully evaluated against alternative methods of achieving the same objectives, and alternative funding sources.
27. In theory, it would be possible to treat the overall SCE (and non-ringfenced capital grants) as a corporate resource in the true spirit of the Single Capital Pot, and devise a methodology for prioritising all capital "bids" against the resources available. In reality however, this would pose major problems, not least the difficulty in devising a prioritisation methodology which could fairly compare and score bids for schemes of all magnitudes and degrees of complexity across the whole range of Council services. In addition, it would probably be seen as unacceptable, both internally and from the viewpoint of Government departments, not to spend capital resources for the purposes they were notionally allocated.
28. Therefore, the Council has resolved that for the time being each SCE (together with non-ringfenced grants) be earmarked to the relevant service, but with a particular emphasis on demonstrating appropriate prioritisation *within* service programmes, and *within* spend headings. As stated in the Financial Management Regime, it is the responsibility of the relevant Directors to make sure that such prioritisation is robust and stands up to scrutiny. Prioritisation should include formal scoring mechanisms or other objective methods wherever possible and appropriate.
29. The Council has also resolved that for the time being, Housing capital receipts should be earmarked to be spent on Housing capital schemes.

30. In addition to prioritising new capital schemes the Council also challenges retention of its existing property. This enables the Council to explore opportunities for more efficient and effective use of assets in light of changing service needs arising from Best Value reviews, property performance and the annual review of each Directorate's Asset Plan. Should there be no operational, commercial or social need for property retention, surplus assets are released through disposal.
31. Revenue implications of the Capital Programme (debt charges and other costs) are fully taken into account in the Council's annual revenue budget and medium term financial strategy. In particular, pressures and priorities that can be met by (unsupported) capital investment are considered alongside other revenue pressures in the light of overall revenue resource availability.
32. Ongoing review of the Council's activities in pursuance of Best Value - and in line with the "Gershon" agenda will also identify "Invest to Save" type initiatives which can generate long term net efficiencies from upfront capital investment - e.g. energy efficiency projects. The flexibility provided by the Prudential Borrowing regime will be used to implement such projects.
33. In addition to its Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, the Council has an established procurement process in place that is clearly set out within its Procurement Strategy. By improving the effectiveness of its procurement activities the Council is able to focus valuable resources where they have maximum impact. The Procurement Toolkit and Forward Procurement Plan continue to be developed to support the procurement function and all key targets against the National Procurement Strategy have been met providing a solid base to manage major contracts.
34. Detailed guidelines for the management of capital projects are set out in the Council's Project Management Toolkit.
35. Reviews of areas of activity with particular relevance to capital investment and asset management form part of the Council's Best Value Review programme.
36. The Strategy not only covers all aspects of Capital expenditure within the Council, but also those areas where the Council works in partnership - using its own resources as "matchfunding" to maximise the overall resources available for its own and its partners' priorities. It will also clearly inform the bidding for and management of additional capital resources (e.g. for Central Government, Europe and the National Lottery), together with sources of funding not under the strict definition of Capital - such as leasing, the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), and other partnerships. A Corporate External Funding Group, which includes a representative of the Dudley Community Partnership, has been established to progress the Council's approach to bidding for external funding.

## **Links to Partners**

37. The Council will continue to work with a wide range of partners at an operational level to carry out and/or facilitate capital projects to enable the successful implementation of the Community Strategy actions. These are too numerous to list completely, but include:
- Dudley Community Partnership, and its “theme partnerships”;
  - Town Centre Partnerships;
  - Neighbouring Authorities - including Police & Fire Authorities, and Centro;
  - Local Hospital and Primary Care Trusts;
  - Infracare (Dudley LIFT);
  - Government Office for the West Midlands;
  - Advantage West Midlands;
  - Westfield and other Private Sector Developers;
  - School Governing Bodies;
  - Colleges of Further Education;
  - Skills Funding Agency;
  - Local Housing Associations and Registered Social Landlords;
  - Tenant and Residents' Associations;
  - Non-statutory care providers;
  - Business Link West Midlands;
  - Black Country Chamber of Commerce;
  - Job Centre Plus;
  - PSP Dudley LLP.

## **Consultation**

38. The new Community Strategy is the outcome of a range of consultative activities which set out a range of issues and choices facing the Borough, and generated a great deal of positive public comment from individuals, groups and agencies. The Council Plan is also subject to public consultation.
39. As the Capital Strategy is one of the means by which the Community Strategy and Council Plan priorities are implemented, any changes to the Community and Council Plans arising from the above consultation will feed through into the Capital Strategy where appropriate.
40. This is supplemented by detailed stakeholder consultation on particular aspects of the Strategy where appropriate.

## **Performance Management and Innovation**

41. The Council will continue to improve the management of its capital investment activities, and adopt innovative solutions whenever possible.
42. In particular, in pursuance of Best Value (and more recently the “Gershon” agenda), the Council has already:

- established improvement teams to review performance management, project management, process management, people management, planning and leadership. This resulted in a number of improvements being made such as the Corporate Project Management Toolkit. This provides structured guidance in the management of simple and complex capital projects from inception to post completion review. Use of the guide is complemented by a formal training programme and a project directory;
- taken a lead in introducing a West Midland Capital Programme Management System to improve governance and aid strategic management of the Local Transport Plan 2 (LTP2) Capital Programme - also introducing generic risk registers for better identification of project risks;
- taken advantage of the Project Support Framework introduced by the Highways Agency to procure consultancy support for highway schemes;
- put in place an Early Contractor Involvement partnership to deliver highway improvement schemes within the LTP2 period;
- in collaboration with the Black Country Authorities, supported the establishment of a Black Country Minor Works Contract to deliver on and off highway related projects across the sub region;
- adopted the Construction Best Practice Programme national key performance indicators;
- in addition to adopting the 5 high level national indicators for property management, developed local indicators aimed at measuring the performance of individual and groups of properties;
- committed itself to sharing the results of performance measurement and benchmarking with stakeholders;
- developed a "Capital Investment and Disposal Guide" which provides an overview of the capital investment and disposal process and sets out guidance to be followed by officers when planning for and undertaking capital investment, and when disposing of surplus assets. A complementary External Funding Code of Practice sets out the key procedures to be followed when bidding for external funding for capital and other projects;
- established a Procurement Strategy Group comprised of 'procurement champions' from each Directorate, and supported by a Procurement Support Group, to address in particular issues such as Business Transformation and Shared Services;
- recognised the need for Sustainable Procurement and greater emphasis on Value for Money and Whole Life matters in the award of contracts, considering economic, social and environmental issues in the decision making process.