

## 3.0 Processes and timeframes

This section considers the following:

- is the long-term council community plan a continuous process or a triennially produced document (or some combination of both)
- the tasks that need to be conducted in an LTCCP and their sequencing (Tool B is a useful tool for this purpose) and
- project planning an LTCCP (which is supported by the template plan in Tool C).

### 3.1 The LTCCP - A triennial document or a continuous process?

An LTCCP document is produced once every three years but the LTCCP process is a continuous process in that:

- local authorities monitor and review progress against objectives through the performance management process, and through the annual planning process
- there is the LTCCP amendment mechanism available for making formal change to the LTCCP in between the formal documents
- the information base that underpins the development of an LTCCP does not remain static, and the future is different from that envisaged in the forecasting assumptions. In the ideal world, the information base would be updated regularly, with an update immediately prior to document preparation as the bare minimum
- issues arise in between times that require addressing, for example who would have foreseen that the impact of climate change would manifest itself in the timeframes contemplated in 2006
- the LTCCP document and prescribed consultative processes are statutory minima for some key issues (especially where significant change is proposed), initial consultation could be undertaken before the formal LTCCP process starts (in fact some functional legislation may require it). The issue of pre-consultation consultation has arisen in a number of authorities. While a business as usual LTCCP may be able to get away with a single wave of consultation, as per the legislation, a plan that involved substantial change to levels of service, might be better handled by going to consultation twice, once to determine the mix of changes required at a high level and again to consider the full implications including finance, rate rises and so on.

Long-term planning should not be left until 12 months before the date of adoption. This concept of the continuous plan is one of the four cardinal virtues of long-term planning underpinning the development of the Guides in the 2009 and Beyond suite.

### 3.2 Starting the LTCCP project

Few local authorities should have to start the 2009 LTCCP process from scratch. Many local authorities completed their 2006 LTCCP process with a debriefing exercise to capture the organisation's learning from the process and note any thoughts as to what aspects of both the process and the content could be improved in subsequent years. The results of that process should be recorded somewhere within the organisation. The first step in the process should be to review that information to identify the priority areas and prepare initial thoughts about the process.

In 2005 and 2006 much time and effort went into the preparation of the base of underpinning information. At an early point in the process this information will require review to ensure that it is current and complete, and that systems are in place to update this information as changes are made throughout the remainder of the project.

While some may be tempted to wait to start the LTCCP process until after each triennial election, activities such as:

- establishing a project team (especially the sponsor and manager)
- assessing organisational readiness for the LTCCP process
- developing some initial thoughts on likely scope (for example what key issues are likely to be the focus of attention) and processes (including an environmental scan and reviewing forecasting assumptions)
- review progress against the last LTCCP
- reviewing your information base
- developing planning tools and systems (for example reporting templates, the information system and so on)

need not be bound to the triennial election.

### 3.3 The project plan

The biggest single step your local authority can take towards a successful LTCCP process is to plan the processes that underpin the development of the LTCCP.

Tool C (page 29) provides a template project plan, adhering to this should ensure that all of the key information necessary to plan a project is included in your plan. Readers are encouraged to adapt the template to their own and their local authority's own governance and management arrangements.

#### Establishing the project structure and team

The project structure should be established by the management team (especially the appointment of a project sponsor, project manager, and members of the project team). The one obvious exception to this will be any oversight/governance arrangements that the elected members wish to put in place.

Further discussion of the skills, background of project sponsors, project managers and project team members, can be found in Section 4 and Tool D (page 37). An important point to consider, is to structure the membership of the core team and of the supporting cast in such a way as to promote the different arms of your local authority talking to each other and thus integrating the information.

#### Preparing a base project plan

The project team's first task is to prepare a base plan. This represents a preliminary or starter plan to:

- get key timeframes/milestones into elected member and staff schedules
- provide a foundation for more comprehensive planning, in particular the division of the overall project into tasks (see Tool B) the development of mini-project plans for each, and the integration of information
- provide a basis for work-shopping with elected members (especially around the key issues for resolution during the LTCCP).

The base project plan should contain the following:

- a statement of the issues that are, or are likely to be of particular importance during the process (for example, is a particular policy in need of review, has some major service delivery issue been identified?)
- timelines for the development of particular plans (for example, communications, consultation and quality assurance)
- identification of the key decision making points and how these integrate with meeting schedules
- the overall timeframe for development of the LTCCP
- likely risks and threats
- a resource budget
- processes for monitoring
- accountabilities in terms of the Chief Executives' responsibility to provide advice to elected members. In other words what the elected members can expect during the process and by when.

The base plan should be discussed and agreed by the Chief Executive and senior managers, and then work-shopped with elected members. That first workshop with elected members should focus on the scope issues, and the processes the elected members wish to follow for governance of the project. Ideally that workshop would be held as soon as possible after the beginning of the triennium.

## Preparing the comprehensive project plan

The comprehensive project plan will serve as the final document for the organisation. For each of the tasks identified in the base plan – the comprehensive plan will:

- define the project scope
- specify the project deliverables
- assign roles and responsibilities
- identify key milestones and set deadlines
- specify project risks and strategies for mitigation or avoidance.

We encourage you to refine Tool C for use in your own local authority.

Development of a timeline should start with the key end dates and then work backwards. But, when developing the schedule of project deliverables it is important to plan for contingencies. LTCCP processes have many interdependencies and can very easily be placed behind schedule by slippage in one of the projects (especially relating to levels of service and the preparation of asset/activity management plans). This makes it particularly important that the project team takes people with them as the project plan is developed by:

- explaining the process and why the sequencing of steps is important
- securing agreement, to the extent that it is practicable, to the key deadlines rather than just imposing them
- liaising with the Chief Executive and senior management team to ensure that delivery into the LTCCP is one of the specific objectives that goes into the performance agreements of the relevant staff;
- once the plan is developed it may be helpful to get time set aside in people's schedules for the purpose of working on their contribution.

The LTCCP project requires contributions from parties other than the local authority (for example, financial and performance information from Council Controlled Organisations and, contributions from parties to the community outcomes process). These parties need to be

involved in the development of the comprehensive project plan. Time should be allowed for several iterations, especially with the audit process (where both the audit service provider and the Office of the Auditor-General will have some role in the process).

## Monitoring

The experience of 2006 was that most local authorities had project plans in place but there was significant slippage in timelines. The lessons from this are that there is a need for the correct sequencing of tasks, but also the project plan must allow for monitoring of the progress of the plan. Monitoring allows the early identification of areas of risk and allows time for the preparation of contingency plans so that issues can be dealt with before they delay progress of the remainder of the project.

Monitoring progress is a responsibility for the entire project team, not just the project manager (although the project manager still has the responsibility for reporting progress to the project sponsor and/or senior management). Monitoring should be frequent enough that issues can be identified at an early point, but not so regular or so formal that it becomes onerous. In 2006, those local authorities that were able to adhere to their project plans found that weekly meetings of the project team, and reports to project sponsors and senior management were a good monitoring and control tool.

The project manager and (particularly) the project sponsor need to be vested with sufficient authority to take action to ensure the project stays on track. From time to time this may include the need to direct others. If they are unable to do so for reasons of protocol, turf, rank, or other barriers, their role as project manager becomes compromised and project slippage becomes more likely.

## Review

After adoption it is useful to conduct a formal debriefing to capture the organisation's learning from the process, not just the things that could be improved but the things that went well. The Local Government Act 2002 has been written with continuous improvement in mind and debriefing is an important step, for future LTCCP processes and for the rest of the organisation too.

Ongoing review of the progress against the LTCCP objectives is important not just from the point of view of performance management, but because it is also an early warning signal of the likely need for amendment. Formal processes for review should be established during the LTCCP project (they are inherent in the development of a performance management framework and so on) and the necessary resourcing to review the LTCCP, either incorporated into the plan or into some other formal process.

## 3.4 Elected members

Another crucial factor in the success of a long-term planning process is the involvement of elected members. This is, after all, their plan, they are the ones whom the public hold accountable for the decisions that are encapsulated in the plan.

Some of the techniques that worked successfully in the 2006 long-term planning processes included:

- a political co-sponsor for the project
- a political steering group (which may or may not be a duly constituted committee of council such as a strategy committee)
- workshops of various forms, for example some conducted topic-based workshops
- formal retreats, typically for the high level strategic thinking discussions.

Whatever techniques you use for involving your elected members in the process:

- remember this is a political process, build time into your project plans to allow for delays in the decision-making process for whatever reason (whether it be as simple as a request for further information or a major stoush)
- try to avoid situations where aspects of the LTCCP are compartmentalised (i.e. some activity plans go to a particular committee and others go elsewhere or much later in time), it undermines the concept of the LTCCP as an integrated document
- try to avoid situations where some members are outside the tent or seen to be, in particular with steering groups
- document the decisions, the reasons for the decisions and the process by which they were reached as you go (this is an important protection against legal challenge), and ensure that elected members are supplied with a written record of every decision they make, proceedings of workshops and so on (this minimises the risk of one or more claiming "they didn't know about .... "

There may be times when it is necessary to make a call on which part of the LTCCP development process falls to management and which to the governance side of your local authority. In simple terms, the role of the governance arm is to set priorities and policy. The role of the management arm is to provide technical advice and execute policy.

Even from this very basic viewpoint, there are parts of developing an LTCCP which must be driven largely by the elected representatives, and other parts in which their involvement is not only likely to be unhelpful, but may also negate the whole point of technical advice from the administration. The choice – or mix of the two, naturally depends on local conditions but it is helpful to keep in mind that the two sides do have different roles to play in day to day local government, and that the LTCCP is no exception to that.

#### **Things to remember: Processes and timeframes**

- 4. It's never too early to start an LTCCP project. Activities such as reviewing the underlying information and developing tools and templates need not be bound to the triennial election. To that extent the process, as opposed to the physical production of a document, is a three year process**
- 5. Sequencing the tasks in the right order is all important**
- 6. The LTCCP project plan needs to include some allowances for contingencies and slippage**
- 7. It is important that elected members be involved with the identification of key issues for consideration in the LTCCP, and comfortable with the general process. A base draft of the project plan should be work-shopped with members**
- 8. Involve all internal and external parties who have to contribute to the project in the development of the comprehensive project plan**
- 9. Regular monitoring is the key control tool for keeping the project on track**
- 10. Don't forget to set aside the resource to undertake the necessary review of the LTCCP both in terms of organisational reflections on the process, and monitoring of the progress and consequences of the plan.**