Oxfordshire County Council
Change Management Board

Second Annual Report
November 2007

They say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.
Andy Warhol

Foreword

This report is considerably longer than the first annual report of the Change Management Board produced last year. We make no apologies for that. This has been a year of solid and successful delivery of change across the organisation.

In addition, this is not a report which just looks backwards. We see the Change Programme as a key part of our ability to deliver world-class public services, not just services which are rated as excellent.

Some of that ambition can be seen in the work already underway to develop radical proposals for the ways in which the council works with the people it serves and how this can be best supported through better management of our knowledge resources.

Increasingly, this demands that the council works across services and as one team. The floods in the county during the summer showed how we can do this at a time of crisis. The Charter Mark programme is a good example of how this is becoming embedded in our everyday culture.

The obvious signs of this are the increasing numbers of services which now have Charter Mark. This includes our first award for a whole directorate - Community Safety - and our first for an internal service - ICT. Equally important, however, is the almost tangible way in which Charter Mark has caught the imagination of our staff as a programme which appeals to our desire to give of our best in serving the people of Oxfordshire and ensures that we operate as one team across our services with high, common standards.

Our Change Programme does not, of course, operate in isolation of the increasingly complex partnership arrangements we have in place to achieve many of our ambitions. One of our original change objectives was to ensure that partnerships pass the cost-benefit test and provide measurably better service to customers, or lever in extra resources which would not be available to one organisation working alone. Our work leading the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Improvement Partnership is a good example of how we are delivering on this.

We commend this report to you.

Councillor John Howell OBE
Chairman, Change Management Board
Cabinet Member for Change Management

Joanna Simons
Deputy Chairman, Change Management Board
Chief Executive

The Change Management Board

What is the Change Management Board?

1. The Change Management Board was set up following the election in May 2005 and the appointment of a Cabinet Member for Change Management, Councillor John Howell.

Who sits on the Change Management Board?

2. The board consists of the council's management team and three Cabinet members:

- Councillor John Howell, Cabinet Member for Change Management (Chairman)
- Councillor David Robertson, Deputy Leader of the Council
- Councillor Charles Shouler, Cabinet Member for Finance
- Joanna Simons, Chief Executive (Deputy Chairman)
- Stephen Capaldi, Assistant Chief Executive
- Sue Scane, Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer
- Janet Tomlinson, Director for Children, Young People & Families
- John Jackson, Director for Social & Community Services
- Richard Dudding, Director for Environment & Economy
- John Parry, Director for Community Safety and Shared Services

How often does the board meet?

3. The board has met approximately every six weeks since September 2005.

What does the board do?

4. The board's remit is to define and drive the council's Change Programme. Its terms of reference were agreed at Cabinet in November 2005.

5. The setting up of the board means that, for the first time in its history, the council's major programmes are being managed and monitored corporately by a top-level body comprising Cabinet members and the council's management team.

6. The work of the board is supported by a small Corporate Change Unit which also promotes best practice in project management, change management and business process re-engineering.

What is the Change Programme?

7. In 2005, the council formally adopted

- **Low Taxes, Real Choice, Value for Money** as its objectives and
- **Customer Focus, Honesty, One Team, Involvement, Can-do** and **Efficient and Effective** (CHOICE) as its values.

8. In 2007, it adopted four priorities: **World-class Economy, Climate Change, Thriving Communities** and **Better Public Services**.

9. The aim of the Change Programme is simple: to deliver the organisational and behavioural changes that are necessary for the council to:

- *achieve* its **objectives**
- *focus* on its **priorities**
- *live* its **values**

 - for the benefit of the people of Oxfordshire.

How does the board deliver the Change Programme?

10. A large part of any change programme is delivered through a series of projects and programmes. Unless these are effectively managed, the wider programme will fail. At each meeting the Change Management Board receives progress reports from a portfolio of key programmes. During the last year these have been:

- Better Offices Programme
- Charter Mark Programme
- Organisational Development Programme
- Oxfordshire Highways
- Shared Services Programme
- Time to Change Programme

11. The first phase of the Organisational Development Programme was brought to a close during the year and will be replaced by a new programme with the working title 'Shaping Up'.

12. All these programmes contribute to the behavioural change agenda as well as delivering specific service benefits.

13. An assessment process is in place to determine which programmes should be considered for inclusion in the board's portfolio and rigorous portfolio management disciplines are enforced by the board to ensure that the programmes that report to it remain on track in terms of quality, cost and timescale.

14. A number of other functions which do not report directly to the board are nevertheless crucial in supporting its work and are kept under review. These include:

   - Service and Resource Planning
   - Balanced Scorecard
   - Fundamental Service Reviews
   - Communications
   - Establishment Review

15. The board also continues to take steps to strengthen and enforce project management disciplines more widely across the council. A project management policy, requiring the use of the Project Management Framework for all projects, was approved by the Cabinet in May 2007.

16. The Project Management Framework has been updated with the addition of new sections on projects in partnership, programme management and change management. A new interactive project budget profile has also been added to the framework so that project and programme budgets can be clearly identified and monitored.

17. Over 150 members of staff took part in project management training between October 2006 and July 2007 and over 70 managers have attended briefing sessions on using the Budget Profile. Cabinet members have also taken part in training.

Change and Outcomes 2006-07

18. In November 2006, in the first annual report of the Change Management Board, we set out the council's Change Programme in terms of seven key changes which were required to deliver the council's objectives and values.
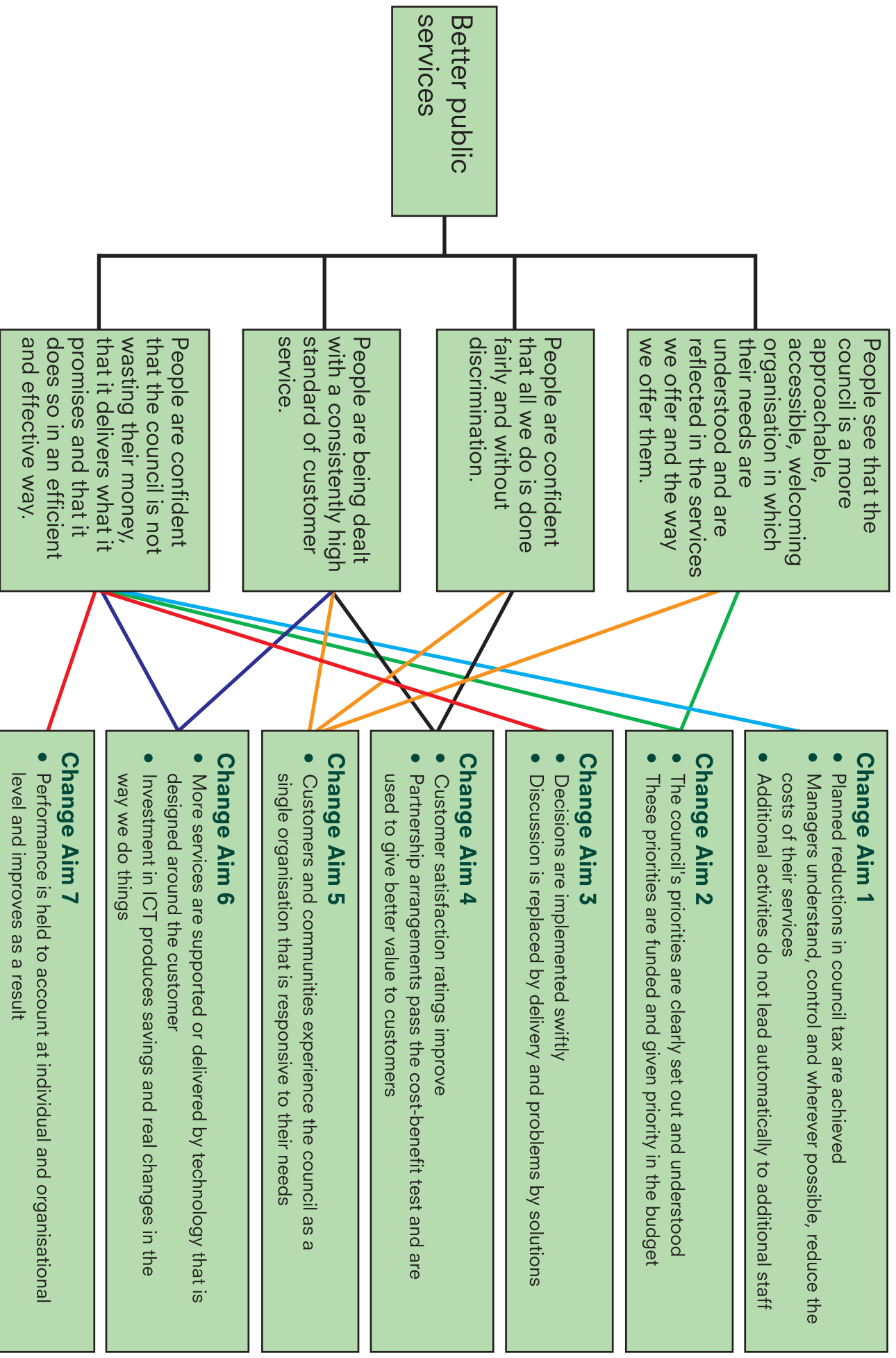
19. The Seven Key Changes for Success are:

    1. to become an efficient organisation that continually introduces more economical ways to do things for the benefit of our customers

    2. to become an organisation which prioritises, is able to make hard choices and says no when necessary

    3. to become an organisation which accepts when decisions have been made and gets on with the business of implementing them

    4. to become an organisation centred on customers and their experience

    5. to become an organisation which acts as one team for the benefit of its customers

    6. to become an organisation which makes effective use of technology for the benefit of its customers

    7. to become an organisation which leads by example, expects and rewards high performance and does not tolerate poor performance.

20. While (as the 2006 report made clear) the delivery of the seven key changes requires a long-term approach, it also showed that significant progress had already been made by November 2006 in delivering crucial elements of the programme.

21. The report was widely welcomed at all levels in Oxfordshire across many different sectors. It was warmly praised by external observers including regulators and has featured in local government media as a good example of managing change in the public sector. The programme played a key role in the ranking of the council by the Audit Commission as a 4-star 'Excellent' authority.

22. Many of the actions required to deliver the programme could be described as inward-facing rather than having a direct impact on the people of the county. They provide the necessary management systems and processes to underpin the council's commitment to better outcomes for the public and better front line services. However, the programme has also had a direct impact on how the council is perceived.

23. Two anecdotal examples illustrate this. First, at a dinner for Oxfordshire business leaders in early 2007 there was a widely-held, unprompted view that the council had changed radically for the better since 2005 in terms of its understanding of people's needs and its accessibility. Second, press coverage of our Shared Services Centre has illustrated both (a) that there is public understanding of the link between the large savings made as a result of centralising support functions and the pressure this takes off front line services and, (b) that the public has been supportive of this.

24. In the intervening year, the council has faced considerable external change. A succession of White Papers, the challenge of the unitary bid from Oxford City Council, the second round of Local Area Agreements, the emphasis from central government on enhanced two-tier working, and the weight placed on partnership working through the Sustainable Communities Strategy has broadened the context in which the Change Programme needs to operate.

25. The programme has proved extremely robust in the face of this and has continued to deliver. It has also been able to demonstrate the way in which its outcomes mesh with the wider public outcomes required in the delivery of improved public services.

26. The table opposite illustrates how the specific outcomes from each of the seven key changes nest in this wider scheme and contribute to the overall priority of better public services.

27. The Change Programme is all about focus and this report shows how it has delivered improved focus in each of the seven key change areas during 2006/07.

Better public services

People see that the council is a more approachable, accessible, welcoming organisation in which their needs are understood and are reflected in the services we offer and the way we offer them.

People are confident that all we do is done fairly and without discrimination.

People are being dealt with a consistently high standard of customer service.

People are confident that the council is not wasting their money, that it delivers what it promises and that it does so in an efficient and effective way.

Change Aim 1
- Planned reductions in council tax are achieved
- Managers understand, control and wherever possible, reduce the costs of their services
- Additional activities do not lead automatically to additional staff

Change Aim 2
- The council's priorities are clearly set out and understood
- These priorities are funded and given priority in the budget

Change Aim 3
- Decisions are implemented swiftly
- Discussion is replaced by delivery and problems by solutions

Change Aim 4
- Customer satisfaction ratings improve
- Partnership arrangements pass the cost-benefit test and are used to give better value to customers

Change Aim 5
- Customers and communities experience the council as a single organisation that is responsive to their needs

Change Aim 6
- More services are supported or delivered by technology that is designed around the customer
- Investment in ICT produces savings and real changes in the way we do things

Change Aim 7
- Performance is held to account at individual and organisational level and improves as a result

Change Aim 1: Efficiency and Economy

AIM

We need to be an efficient organisation that continually introduces more economical ways to do things for the benefit of our customers

OUTCOMES

Planned reductions in the rate of council tax rises are achieved

Managers understand, control and, wherever possible, reduce the costs of their service

Additional activities do not lead automatically to additional staff

ACTIONS

Put unit costs, outputs, performance levels and benchmarking information in business plans

Achieve required efficiency savings

Set realistic targets for improving performance and reducing costs, and deliver on them

Use fundamental reviews to challenge accepted ways of doing things and produce more efficient alternatives

Work with partners to improve services and reduce costs

Reducing the rate of increase in council tax

28. The council's budget in April 2007 reduced the rise in council tax to 4%. This was two years ahead of the schedule in the Medium-term Financial Plan and for the second year running represented the lowest rise in council tax of any shire county in the South East.

Achieving efficiency savings

29. We have developed an efficiency strategy that recognises the significant challenge involved in balancing our Medium-term Financial Plan, continuing to reduce council tax increases and maintaining continuous improvement in our overall level of efficiency. Our target is to achieve savings of £5m for each year up to and including 2008/09, and £4m a year after that. These targets have so far been achieved.

Fire officers and Trading Standards officers are now working together on petroleum enforcement to avoid dual inspections and achieve efficiency savings.

Focusing responsibility for budgets

30. To improve understanding within the council of what we mean by value for money we have adopted a value for money strategy with three main strands:

- year-on-year efficiency improvement
- a programme of fundamental reviews
- benchmarking so we can learn from others

31. A key outcome for Change Aim 1 is for managers to understand, control and wherever possible, reduce the costs of their service. Of the 466 managers who have budget responsibilities, 415 have now been formally trained in managing their budgets and 53% of these are now using SAP to manage their budgets, either independently or with some support from finance specialists. Work will now be undertaken to monitor the effect on budgets.

A sharper focus for business plans

32. In their 2007/08 business plans, service managers were required to clearly identify their service activities, the output from these activities, and the outcomes that would be achieved. They were also required to include the performance indicators and unit costs relevant to these activities.

33. For 2008/09 business plans, this process has been developed further to include unit cost information in relation to outputs, a more structured approach to benchmarking and enhancing the balanced scorecard.

34. This tighter focus has fed through to the Star Chambers which are a key building block in the council's budget planning process. These are based on business plans so councillors now have in front of them information about priorities, unit costs and value for money when considering budget decisions.

35. To support this approach we have appointed a benchmarking specialist with responsibility for developing the use of benchmarking within the county council.

Fundamental service reviews

36. Fundamental reviews of all services are being undertaken over a five-year period.

> **A Fundamental Service Review of Home Support in Social & Community Services was completed in December 2006. Outcomes include:**
>
> - **sickness rates have reduced from 5.5% to 4.4%**
> - **the use of parking permits for home support workers in Oxford City has contributed to reduced travel time between visits**
> - **new terms and conditions were successfully negotiated with UNISON to bring sick pay and other conditions in line with the terms and conditions of other county council employees**
> - **a new planning and programming software system is being implemented to assist the Home Support Managers to programme their visits more efficiently and effectively.**

37. A Fundamental Service Review of ICT Services was undertaken between January and July 2007 and is described in more detail later in this report.

38. A number of reviews including Facilities Management, Cultural Services, Day Services and Transport are currently taking place and a review of Care Management is about to start.

Focusing on staff numbers

39. The establishment review process is now in its second year. Three areas have been identified for further development:

- trend data on the balance between teaching and non-teaching staff will be monitored
- vacancies held for longer than six months will have to be justified by directorates
- the balance between full-time and part-time workers will be monitored to ensure that the best interests of the council and the taxpayer are being served.

40. The position at 30 June 2007 showed the following reductions in numbers from the previous quarter (31 March 2007):

- establishment down by 203 posts (3.7% reduction)
- vacancies down by 185 (24% reduction)
- FTE employed down by 47 (1% reduction).

(These figures all exclude the school bloc and are expressed in full-time equivalents.)

Change Aim 2:
Prioritisation and Hard Choices

AIM

We need to be an organisation that prioritises, is able to make hard choices and says no when necessary

ACTIONS

Speed up the integration of service and resource planning to support effective decision-making

Ensure the budget process starts with the whole council and its priorities

Involve Cabinet members fully in policy and budget choices from the start

Reject proposals for additional activities and staff if they do not contribute to the council's objectives

OUTCOMES

The council's priorities are clearly set out and understood

These priorities are funded and given priority in the budget

Focusing on priorities

41. During the year the Cabinet agreed four priorities to inform the council's longer-term planning:

    - world-class economy
    - climate change
    - thriving communities
    - better public services

42. Cabinet members have also undertaken an exercise to focus on their priorities for the next two years. They have recognised that more joining up between portfolios is required to ensure that the really big issues facing us, such as the dramatic rise in numbers of elderly people living in Oxfordshire, are adequately addressed.

43. The introduction of balanced scorecards at corporate, directorate and service level, has allowed us to declutter our performance management by focusing on key management information. With the government using over 1,000 measures to assess our performance, having a streamlined and focused approach helps us to remain focused on our priorities.

Funding our priorities

44. There is growing evidence that the organisation is becoming more confident and sophisticated at aligning resources to priorities. Money released through the Efficiency Savings Programme has been used to provide additional support for carers and to develop services for students with special needs aged 16+.

45. Hard decisions about funding priorities have been made in a number of services.

> **Changes to capital funding for the Local Transport Plan process meant tough choices about our priorities to ensure that all schemes included in our capital programme made a sufficient contribution to solving identified transport problems. This resulted in a reduction in large-scale cycling measures, ceasing the implementation of 'home zones', dropping a previous commitment to personalised travel planning and reducing spending on small local schemes such as pedestrian crossings which cannot show a clear road safety benefit. These were tough, but necessary, choices to ensure we focus on projects which can produce the biggest impact.**

46. In response to demographic pressures, Social & Community Services has embarked on a significant shift away from high-cost, intensive social care towards home-based preventative services. For example, over the last three years 300 people have moved out of residential care into supported living.

47. A similar shift in resources towards preventative services has taken place in Community Safety.

48. The council has established a change fund to provide specific support to change projects which support its aims. Over the past year, the fund has been used to resource a number of initiatives including:

- the development of frameworks for programme management and partnership projects
- the initial scoping study for the 21st Century Customer Programme
- the review of consultation.

Change Aim 3:
an Implementation Culture

AIM

We need to be an organisation that accepts when decisions have been made and gets on with the business of implementing them

ACTIONS

De-clutter the organisation so that we can hear important messages clearly and channel energies into priorities

Talk less, do more

Hold fewer and shorter meetings

Reduce email traffic

OUTCOMES

Decisions are implemented swiftly

Discussion is replaced by delivery and problems by solutions

Focusing on delivery

49. Following the decision by the council in 2006 to set up a shared services centre, the centre opened for business at Chiltern House in Cowley in January 2007, with an official opening ceremony held in May. The programme is on track to achieve predicted gross savings of £27m over an eight-year period.

50. The following services are already operating from the Shared Services Centre:

- Learning and development
- Health and safety
- Accounts payable
- Pensions
- Payroll
- Recruitment
- Workforce information
- Pay and employment information
- Data management
- Employment advisory service
- Insurance
- Money management

51. A total of 360 staff will eventually be located at the centre. Management accounting and financial accounting are due to move in January 2008 and the final team to move, Income, will transfer to Chiltern House in April 2008.
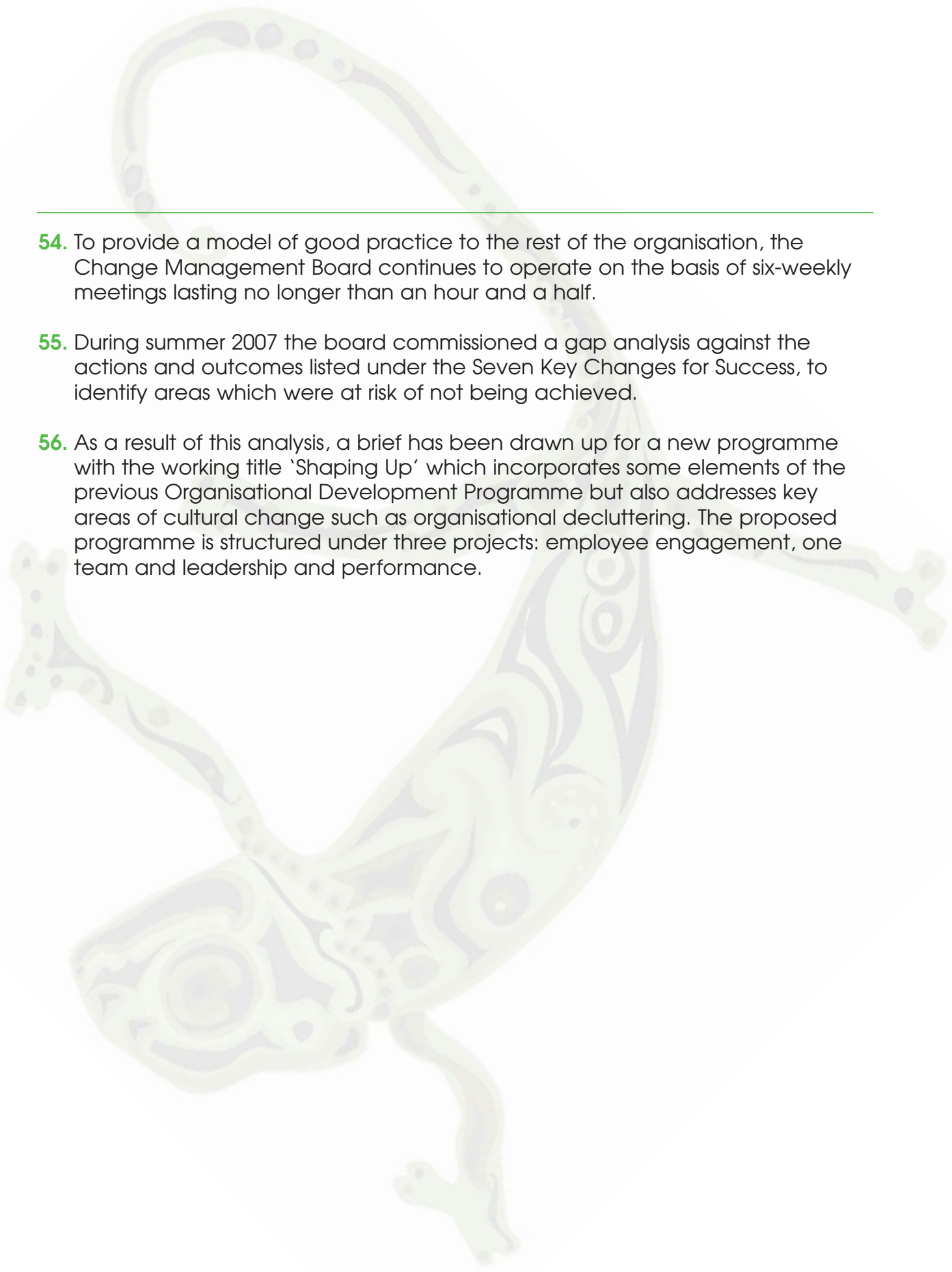
The Shared Services Centre is moving as many staff personal files as possible to electronic storage - helping to improve efficiency, make more effective use of technology and reduce our carbon footprint.

Previously, each directorate HR team held paper personal files for each member of staff in their own directorate. The centre will now be using the Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS) to hold such files electronically.

52. Highways projects are highly visible and affect large numbers of people. Completion on or before schedule and with minimum disruption, has a positive effect on the council's reputation.

53. A number of key highways projects have recently been completed on time and to budget. The successful Headington 'hamburger' roundabout in Oxford received a bronze award in the 2007 National Considerate Constructors Awards. Roadworks at the Plain in Oxford have also been completed ahead of schedule and careful attention to consultation with local residents has meant that the council has been perceived as helpful and responsive.

"The site was professionally organised and was set up with good procedures, not only for induction, but also keeping a high level of performance. This meant being proactive with engagement with the local community, ensuring good site teamwork on phasing the work and careful monitoring of any delays to the roadworks. Good communication was maintained at all levels to keep traffic flowing with rescue services, traffic spotters and good contact with the local community through extensive consultation prior to the project start."

Award citation for the Headington 'hamburger' roundabout

54. To provide a model of good practice to the rest of the organisation, the Change Management Board continues to operate on the basis of six-weekly meetings lasting no longer than an hour and a half.

55. During summer 2007 the board commissioned a gap analysis against the actions and outcomes listed under the Seven Key Changes for Success, to identify areas which were at risk of not being achieved.

56. As a result of this analysis, a brief has been drawn up for a new programme with the working title 'Shaping Up' which incorporates some elements of the previous Organisational Development Programme but also addresses key areas of cultural change such as organisational decluttering. The proposed programme is structured under three projects: employee engagement, one team and leadership and performance.

Change Aim 4: Customer Focus

AIM

We need to be an organisation centred on customers and their experience

ACTIONS

Achieve the Charter Mark award

Use the results of consultation

Appropriately and effectively to help set priorities and improve customers' experience of the council

Make local government a seamless experience for the customer, whoever is providing the service

OUTCOMES

Customer satisfaction ratings improve

Partnership arrangements pass the cost-benefit test and are used to give better value to customers

Focusing on customers

57. The council's commitment to becoming a Charter Mark authority is central to its focus on customer service. A further seven services have gained a Charter Mark since the board's last annual report:

- Adult Placement Service, Social & Community Services - December 2006
- Registration Service, Social & Community Services - March 2007
- ICT, Corporate Core - March 2007
- Gypsy and Travellers Service, Community Safety - April 2007
- Safer Communities Unit, Community Safety - April 2007
- Access Team, Social & Community Services - August 2007
- Civil Enforcement (Transport), Environment & Economy - October 2007

58. A total of 26 county council services now hold a Charter Mark. This year Community Safety became the first of the council's directorates to be awarded a Charter Mark for the whole directorate.

59. The Gypsy and Travellers Service, which also gained a Charter Mark during the past year, is the first service of its kind in the country to do so.

The newly formed Access Team in Social & Community Services was one of the services to gain a Charter Mark during the year. The service was launched in October 2006 to act as a single point of contact for social care in Oxfordshire, as part of our aim to improve the accessibility of services to customers. A comprehensive information, signposting and assessment service for social care in Oxfordshire can now be accessed via a single telephone number and email address. The assessor remarked on the quality of customer service and the strength of the team's commitment to supporting customers. The report noted that "satisfaction levels are high and customers comment favourably on the helpfulness and friendliness of staff".

60. 'Putting Customers First', a customer service manual and guide to our customer values and standards, has been issued to all teams within the council. The council continues to monitor adherence to these standards using mystery shopping. Mystery shoppers pose as customers and make enquiries and requests by email, phone, letter or in person. They then report back on their experience.

61. Results from the latest round of mystery shopping were reported in September 2007 and show a general improvement against almost all our customer service standards. For example, mystery shoppers now feel we are providing a good quality response to phone calls in 94% of cases (up from 84%) and to letters in 90% of cases (up from 60%).

62. A scoping study has been completed for a potentially far-reaching programme with the working title '21st Century Customer'. If adopted, this programme will transform the way the council relates to its customers and result in measurably high levels of customer satisfaction, together with an enhanced profile for the council.

63. The programme is based on a joined-up view of customer and place and the aim is to provide world-class customer service, with a focus on people and communities where we can make a real difference. This will involve looking at how customers access us (and how we access them), and how council services can be joined up to provide a holistic view of the customer and their needs.

64. We have recently commissioned an external review of our consultation arrangements to improve standards across the council. In recognition of the close relationship between consultation and customer service, a new unit has been created, called Customer First, to bring together customer service development with consultation and marketing and to focus on ensuring that we really listen to our customers' views and use them to deliver what our customers want.

65. Accordingly, the new unit includes an 'Ask Oxfordshire' team, which has been set up to improve the way we reach out to customers, listen to their voices and learn from their experiences. It brings together a range of functions including consultation, mystery shopping and acting on comments and suggestions from customers. Ask Oxfordshire will explore innovative ways to encourage customer engagement, share customer feedback and celebrate the council's successes.

> **The Shared Services Centre has initiated a programme of continuous improvement based on customer feedback, service level agreements and regular visits by shared services staff to their customers in the organisation.**

Focusing our partnerships for better customer service

66. The Change Programme requires partnerships to pass the cost-benefit test and provide measurably better service to customers, or lever in extra resources which would not be available to one organisation working alone. An example of a partnership project which has clearly added value is Oxfordshire's high profile campaign to help victims of domestic abuse. The campaign is the result of a partnership between the council's Safer Communities Unit, the Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust and Thames Valley Police, and was commended for its strong partnership working when it won a prestigious regional award.

67. The council is the lead authority in the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire (MKOB) Improvement Partnership which has been awarded £1m of government funding over two years. The 12 authorities in the Partnership are working together on a number of projects that will lead to real service improvements by learning from each other and by achieving cost reduction from economies of scale.

> **"The MKOB Improvement Partnership is moving forwards in terms of delivering its agreed projects and agreeing future priorities in a very effective and collaborative way. Co-ordinated programmes are being delivered across all the local authorities in the partnership. MKOB is ahead of some of the other sub-regions, having had two challenge events with members and officers on progress and an event to agree priorities for 2008/11."**
>
> Marianne Abley, Regional Associate, Improvement and Development Agency

68. The MKOB Improvement Partnership is recognised within the region as being a high-performing and effective partnership. Projects being undertaken by the partnership include work on community engagement, service improvement, performance management and future skills needs.

69. The council has guided the restructuring of the Oxfordshire Partnership (our local strategic partnership) to ensure that local stakeholders are more involved, and that it is fit for the purpose of developing the long-term vision for Oxfordshire (the Sustainable Community Strategy) and a new larger Local Area Agreement with the government.

70. The council's Closer to Communities Strategy was adopted in September 2007 and focuses our local area working on shaping service delivery, including:
   - developing children's centres to work with families, local schools and other agencies
   - supporting local community-led planning; for example, market town health checks and parish plans
   - providing leadership in major development and regeneration areas; for example, working with Bicester Town Council, the local business community and Cherwell District Council to develop a partnership to drive change and regeneration.

Oxfordshire Highways is a partnering arrangement with two private sector contractors to deliver maintenance and improvement work on roads and footpaths in the county. By bringing together complementary skills, we are producing improved scheme reliability, cashable efficiency savings, better customer service and a reduced environmental impact.

Focusing on all our customers

71. Charter Mark stresses the importance of focusing on all customers, not just the most visible or the most vocal.

Our Social Inclusion Reference Group is a key forum for engaging with representatives of black and minority ethnic and other minority communities. We have transformed the group from a passive forum to an active forum which proactively gathers views and seeks input from representatives. For example, the group has been actively involved in determining what practical outcomes our revised Race Equality Scheme should achieve and was formally consulted on the emerging Sustainable Communities Strategy.

72. The council has been scoping the needs of ethnic minority communities in Banbury as part of its consultation on the new location of Banbury Library.

73. It has also launched a targeted recruitment campaign to increase the numbers of carers from different ethnic groups to ensure that children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have the opportunity of finding a carer from the same cultural background.

Customer focus means responding to the needs of all our customers, including those disadvantaged by disability. The Shaw Trust, a leading disability charity, has recently assessed our website and has declared it as having good overall accessibility. They are soon to award us their accreditation.

Staff at the trust thoroughly tested our site using all sorts of assistive technologies such as screen readers that read sites aloud, voice recognition software and alternative pointing devices for those who can't use a mouse. The site passed the charity's initial tests but their detailed report gave us lots more to work on to make our website work even better for as many people as possible. Among their recommendations are:

- **provide text alternatives for any sound or video files we use on our website**
- **improve the clarity of language we use throughout our web pages**
- **ensure any web forms are clearly laid out and that form fields and buttons are explicitly labelled.**

By implementing these improvements we hope to gain the Shaw Trust's highest level of accessibility accreditation when the site is re-tested.

74. Reception resource packs are now available at main county council buildings for visitors with disabilities who need assistance in accessing our services. Packs include equipment such as magnifiers, easy-grip pens, large button phone with induction coupler, portable sound amplifiers and useful information, including contact details of our interpreter services and local blue badge parking.

Change Aim 5: One Team

AIM

We need to be an organisation that acts as one team for the benefit of its customers

OUTCOMES

Customers and communities experience the council as a single organisation that is responsive to their needs

ACTIONS

Develop planning, budgeting, communication and technology systems which start with the whole council

Use plain English as the common language of the council and its customers

Enforce common standards and working practices across the organisation

Create a development programme for fast track generalist managers based on regular, planned career moves within the organisation

Working as one team

Our response to the most significant and dramatic floods for a century in the summer of 2007 was a prime example of the council operating as one team, bringing together teams from across the organisation, and other agencies, to support those people affected. We were commended for our swift, co-ordinated and comprehensive response.

75. An important challenge for the Change Programme is breaking down the silo culture of the council which has, in the past, resulted in fragmentation and inefficiency.

76. Corporate programmes such as Charter Mark and Investors in People, which involve all services working towards a common standard, have been crucial in this, as has the alignment of the council's internal communications and the increasing use of corporate frameworks such as the Project Management Framework.

77. At the same time, a crucial element of the Shared Services Programme has been the introduction of common systems and processes in finance, HR and procurement.

78. The council has made a long-term commitment to use the international standard SAP software system for its financial, procurement and human resources systems. SAP is widely used across the world for business administration and the council decided in 2002 that it would eventually replace, or be integrated with, all its other business systems.

79. A pilot project started in 2003 to explore the use of the system in schools. Ten schools, representing all types of establishment, were involved in the pilot project.

80. Following a positive evaluation report, the Cabinet agreed in September 2007 to roll out SAP to all the council's schools in two phases (April 2008 for secondary schools and most children's centres and April 2009 for other schools).

Communicating as one team

81. In November 2006, a new email protocol was launched to help reduce the number of unnecessary and poorly communicated emails across the council.

82. In December 2006 (National Plain English Day), a corporate style guide was launched to encourage clear and consistent communications across the council and help all staff to adopt a common approach to producing documents, reports and publications.

Learning as one team

83. We have accelerated the development of 24 managers this year through their participation in a Strategic and Political Awareness Programme. This has enabled them to gain knowledge and experience of the wider strategic agenda, brought them into close contact with senior managers and politicians and given them the chance to experience what it is like to act as a top team. This has been linked to our involvement in the Local Government Chronicle Challenge.

84. We have brought together our learning and development functions (previously directorate-based) into a corporate shared service using improved business processes and information systems. This is already having benefits in terms of providing better data for planning learning and development across the organisation and will enable us to control fully our investment in learning and development. From our benchmarking with other authorities, we believe we are at the leading edge in terms of introducing such a robust corporate approach to learning and development with strong links to the service planning process.

Change Aim 6: Technology

AIM

We need to be an organisation that makes effective use of technology for the benefit of its customers

ACTIONS

Implement a forward-looking, costed ICT development strategy based on planned investment in technology to improve customer experience and achieve economies

OUTCOMES

More services are supported or delivered by technology that is designed around the customer

Investment in ICT produces savings and real changes in the way we do things

Focusing on effective technology

85. A Fundamental Service Review of ICT Services took place between January and July 2007. The aims of the review were:

   - to ensure the service was fit for purpose
   - to ensure that costs were at, or below, the average for similar authorities
   - to ensure that medium-term efficiency savings targets could be made.

86. The review was unique in being conducted jointly on behalf of the Cabinet and a scrutiny committee (Corporate Governance Scrutiny Committee), with the work being overseen by a board of members and senior officers. The evidence collection, analysis and subsequent presentations were carried out by Hedra, an external consultancy which has conducted many similar exercises in both the public and private sectors.

87. The review concluded that ICT Services is fit for purpose and benchmarks extremely well against upper quartile peer organisations. The cost of ICT Services came out as below average when benchmarked against upper quartile peer organisations, and also when compared to 10 other county councils.

88. The review also concluded that ICT Services is able to meet its planned medium-term efficiency savings and there are no obvious areas for additional direct savings within the ICT budget. However, savings may be realised through better use of existing hardware and applications systems resources. The main area of savings would be achieved through improvements to basic IT training, which would reduce hidden user effort and appear as non-cashable savings.

89. The overall conclusions of Hedra were as follows:

"In Hedra's professional opinion, the ICT service at OCC is cost efficient and, in comparison to other county councils, an effective operation. We assess many IT organisations and in comparison with county council peers, OCC has a very capable and technically strong IT team. Hedra believes that the real potential of the IT function has yet to be fully realised by the council."

90. The Fundamental Service Review highlighted a number of areas on which the future development of ICT should be focused. The majority of these represent immediate improvements to the current operational remit of ICT Services or to the way in which ICT Services relates to directorates and other services within the council. Detailed implementation plans exist for these areas, many of which are already being acted on.

91. A number of areas, however, relate to the council as a whole and are best described as 'corporate' issues. The most significant of these is the need to ensure that the council has a robust strategic planning capability and that the real potential of the ICT function can be fully realised by the council.

92. Steps to achieve this had already been introduced prior to the review by the Cabinet Member for Change Management but the opportunity is now being taken to strengthen this further with a strategic planning capability which can take forward the current and future needs of the council as a whole. This will be achieved by means of a tightly focused ICT strategy group which will be responsible for the strategic direction of ICT as a whole within the council, as well as the implementation of the corporate recommendations made by Hedra. It will be supported by steps to identify and prioritise strategic ICT requirements at directorate level.

In March 2007, the Leader of the Council officially opened ICT's new data centre, which is designed to manage the council's servers from a central point and ensure business continuity across the organisation.

The data centre, based at Clarendon House in Oxford, enhances ICT's customer service by standardising the systems that support all front line staff. The technology used to provide these systems is among the most modern available.

The centre will house the 200 servers currently needed to run our ICT systems and provide secure storage for equipment, with space for an extra 300 servers in future.

The centre also supports business continuity plans. State of the art cooling and power solutions, and the addition of a second data centre at Oxford Science Park, help ensure our systems are available whenever needed.

Customer-focused technology

93. In April 2007, ICT Services became the first internal service to gain a Charter Mark. The assessor's report highlighted a number of strengths, including the provision of "an excellent council website" and a service that has "a positive approach to change and improvement".

94. The council's website was used to maximum effect during the floods that hit Oxfordshire in July 2007. The number of visitors to our website during this period soared to 10 times higher than normal levels, with over 30,000 visits per day to the site at the height of the floods. The Daily Telegraph singled out the website as "the best of the websites of all the counties affected", BBC News 24 called it "the most comprehensive site for information relating to the flooding" and Channel 4 News said it was "regularly updated and comprehensive".

95. Also in July this year, the Society for IT Management ranked our website top out of 73 councils surveyed for overall satisfaction and ease of finding specific information. It ranked second best for look and feel and third for value of information.

96. Increasing numbers of services are available online. Since last year's report, residents have become able to:

- join a library online
- book an appointment online to register a birth or death or give notice of a marriage
- look at an online catalogue of occupational therapy equipment, complete a self-assessment form and email it to Social & Community Services.

97. Use of these online services is growing rapidly. The number of visits to the council's online jobs site rose by 66% between August 2006 and August 2007 and visits to the online library catalogue rose by 11%. The heritage search service, which has had many new collections added to it over the past year, had 6,375 visits in August 2007 compared to only 480 in August 2006.

98. To ensure our website is widely available and easily accessible to everyone, the council regularly consults with the public to gain their views on the site by holding practical testing sessions. The latest round of testing in the autumn of 2006, revealed that many people were surprised and impressed by the breadth of content we offer and the ease of use of the site.

99. The most popular features included:
- Heritage search
- Library catalogue
- Countryside walks
- Family history
- Environmental information
- Reporting and applying for things online
- Local clubs and societies
- 'Flooding, fires and fleas' (practical advice for emergencies)
- Council business

100. The following aspects of the website were rated as good:
- Easy to navigate due to good menu structure and effective linking
- Consistently-placed external links and contact details
- Clean and professional look that reflects well on the council
- Variety and sheer amount of content.

101. As a result of the feedback from this consultation, a number of improvements were made, including the creation of new local news pages. Links on the homepage now take readers to news and information specific to where they live in Oxfordshire.

Change Aim 7:
Leadership and Performance

AIM

We need to be an organisation that leads by example, expects and rewards high performance and does not tolerate poor performance

ACTIONS

Apply the balanced scorecard at service, team and individual level so that effort is directed at the organisation's priorities

Develop appraisal to reward high performance and tackle poor performance

Use competencies that reflect the council's values for the recruitment, appraisal and development of all staff

OUTCOMES

Performance is held to account at individual and organisational level and improves as a result

High performance through balanced scorecards

102. The Corporate Balanced Scorecard has been in place since April 2006 and is now the main tool for monitoring performance and reporting it to CCMT and Cabinet.

103. The scorecard was updated for 2007/08 to reflect changes in some of the corporate priorities and a new format for presenting the information was introduced in the first quarter of 2007/08.

104. For 2007-08, balanced scorecards were introduced as a requirement at directorate and business plan level.

105. Overall, our performance in the last year has improved more quickly than the average for county councils.

A tighter focus for appraisal

106. We have introduced an online appraisal reporting tool to help us ensure that the corporate appraisal process is being used consistently. This requires managers to electronically certify that they have completed their appraisals and, where the management competencies are used, to log the competency ratings. As well as making our appraisal reporting process more robust, this has also established a stronger evidence basis for our learning and development planning.

107. We have introduced overall contribution ratings for 250 managers this year. These are performance ratings that make very clear statements about an individual's performance over the year, acknowledging their contribution to the organisation or, where necessary, being clear about the improvement required. This will be extended to all managers in next year's appraisal process.

108. We have introduced electronic 360° feedback for senior managers, based on our competencies and values. Initially this is being undertaken by members of CCMT and Heads of Service, who have all had one-to-one coaching sessions based on their feedback. Next year this will be extended further.

Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.
John F. Kennedy
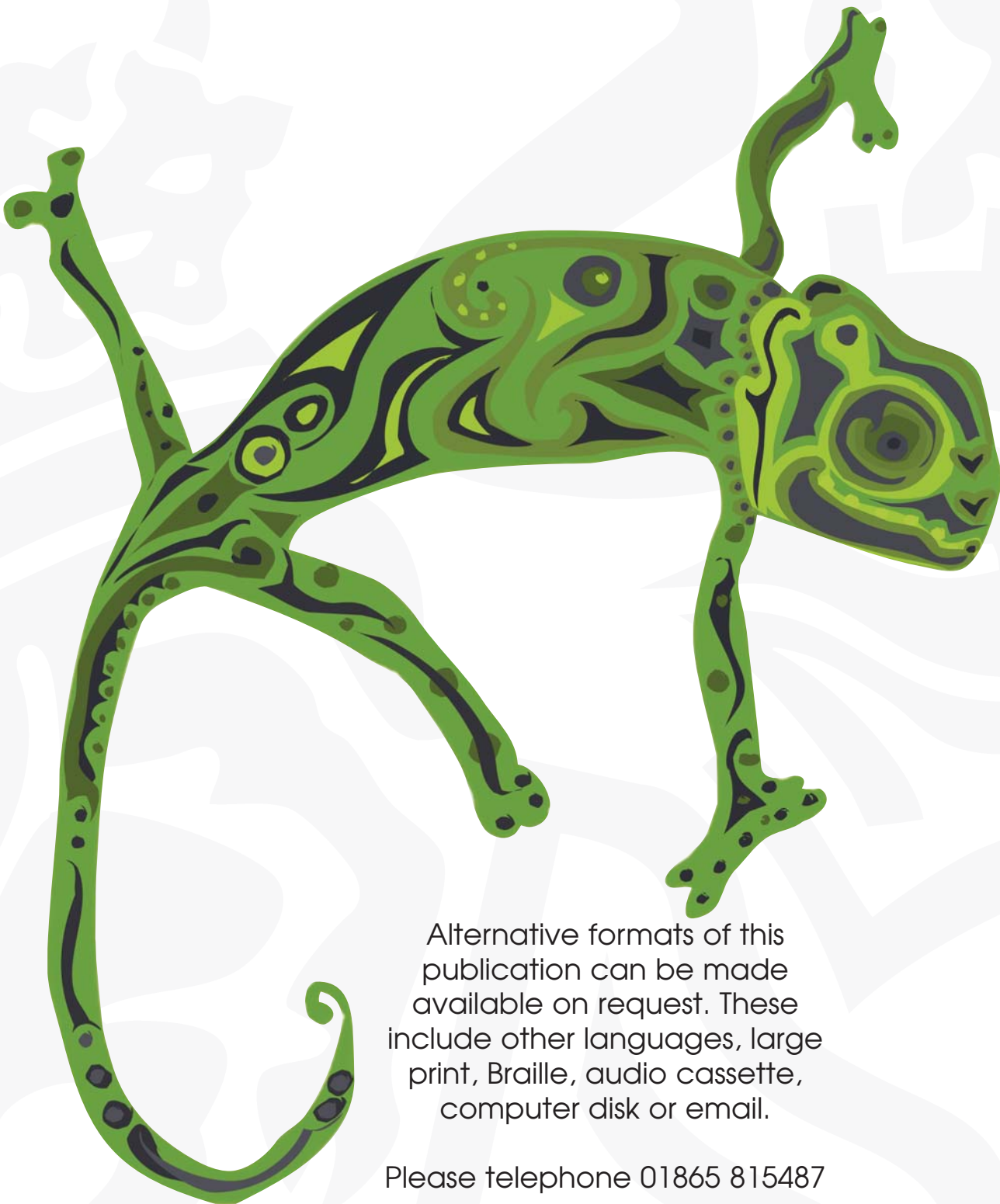
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