

# LPS Business Plan 2009–11



Land & Property Services.



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# Chief Executive's Foreword

I am pleased to present Land & Property Services' (LPS) Business Plan for 2009–11.

The period since the new Land & Property Services agency was formed in April 2008 has been demanding in terms of merging the four organisations against a background of unprecedented change and reform of the rating system.

Two of the former legacy organisations, the Valuation and Lands Agency and Rate Collection Agency were already at the heart of these reforms. The reforms not only involved major IT replacement projects in both business areas, but also required LPS to respond to a rapidly evolving and changing political scene. We have faced considerable challenges over the past year, specifically in relation to rating issues. The difficulties the new organisation inherited were highlighted in the recent Public Accounts Committee Report relating to the 2006-07 Statement of Rate Levy and Collection. We are now working to implement our response to the recent recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee and significant work has already been completed along with firm plans for improvement activity throughout 2009 and beyond.

In addition, we have responded to a Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit Review with an Action Plan that we have designed, and it has contributed significantly to our Business Plan for 2009–10. We will continue to review our performance and we look forward to building on the experience from our inaugural year to deliver an effective service that meets the expectations of our many and varied



stakeholders. We are at an early stage in the development of our organisation and our focus for this year is to stabilise our infrastructure so that we can deliver a sustainable programme of improvement for the future. Key to the stabilisation process is the continued development and delivery of our programme of change that will help drive and support a single culture in LPS.

Part of our improvement plan includes a review of our Vision and Mission. Our overarching objective will continue to be to work towards an integrated process of registration, mapping, valuation and rate collection in order to provide a comprehensive, competent and effective service for the citizen. However, the focus in the short term needs to be concentrated on the efficient collection of rate revenues and the establishment of effective relationships with our stakeholders; delivered via the provision of an improved set of products and services and a significant emphasis on good communication.

Whilst there is a lot of work still to do, we are now starting to draw together the legacy bodies to deliver an improved service to stakeholders. This includes the following:

- We have agreed our Customer Transformation Strategy and the Customer Team are now working on the implementation plan, which will be delivered by 31 March 2010. The Customer Strategy is aligned with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Customer Care Principles and addresses areas such as correspondence, telephony, customer-service training for staff and working closely with NI Direct. Key in this transformation strategy is developing our relationship with Local Councils and to achieve this, we set up a Strategic Steering Group in September 2008 and we are actively developing this relationship.
- As a result of this developing relationship with Local Councils, we are receiving more survey and valuation related information. This assists both valuation and rating activities and improves the accuracy and timeliness of property information.
- In Registration, excellent progress has been made on the introduction of E-Registration. We are now receiving more than 5% of all applications electronically, exceeding our Ministerial Target of 2%.
- We have centralised survey activity for both mapping and valuation, thereby releasing valuers to spend more time on valuation activities rather than data collection, and we have more work in hand to review this process, with the review to be rolled out early in the financial year. Indeed we are


actively integrating our mapping functionality to support valuation with the Non Domestic Revaluation 2010 and with current work.

- We have improved and embedded the standard Pointer® address dataset within our operational systems and established stronger links with Local Councils and Royal Mail, thus helping to ensure the quality of the address based information within the rating process as well as improved data flows between our various systems.
- We have taken the lead in developing the Geographic Information Strategy for Northern Ireland and in the implementation of the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE) Directive in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland remains ahead of the rest of the UK in terms of the development of spatial data infrastructures.
- We have developed GeoHub NI®, one of the first systems of its kind in Western Europe, to enable other users to explore the potential of using Geographic Information in their own areas of operation.

Much of the work we have done this year will provide the building blocks to move forward with the implementation of our strategy of providing a joined up set of land and property services to the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the LPS staff for their hard work and contribution to the significant achievements we have made over the past year. It has been a challenging year with a lot of emphasis focused, by necessity, on the rating area of our business. It has been a difficult period of change and challenge but I have been encouraged throughout the past year by the desire shown by our people to use the merger as an opportunity to innovate and for the continued focus on improving our performance and service delivery and to engage with the initiatives that underpin our future.

I am very aware of the considerable challenges we face, especially in today's difficult economic climate. However, I firmly believe that the commitment of our people, the focus on innovation and improvement initiatives and the development of our leadership will provide a solid platform for our organisation to grow together and flourish in the future.



John Wilkinson

July 2009

# Introduction to Land & Property Services

Land & Property Services (LPS) is an executive Agency of the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), Northern Ireland.

**LPS has seven main functions:**

- Collect and recover rates on behalf of Central Government and Local Councils.
- Maintain a domestic rating assessment system.
- Maintain a non domestic rating assessment system.
- Deliver a valuation, estate management and property data service to the public sector.
- Record legal interests in land, provide a registration service and maintain an accurate register of land ownership, maps and related information in Northern Ireland.
- Provide a land information service for conveyancing purposes.
- Collect and manage spatial data in Northern Ireland and disseminate for use throughout public and private sectors.

The Chief Executive of LPS is responsible to the Minister of Finance and Personnel for the Agency's performance and operations in accordance with its Framework document and its Business Plan. The Chief Executive is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Agency and makes periodic reports to the Minister on the Agency's performance and progress.

The Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance and Personnel is the sponsor for the Agency and provides support and advice to the Chief Executive and advises the Minister on the strategic direction of the Agency, the Corporate and Business Plan, the Agency's Key Performance Targets and the resources needed to achieve them.

The Agency is managed by a seven member Board.

<b>John Wilkinson</b> *† Chief Executive Land & Property Services					
<b>Patricia Montgomery</b> † Director of Customer and Business Improvement	<b>Iain Greenway</b> † Director of Operations	<b>Trevor Steenson</b> † Acting Director of Data, Information and Systems	<b>Alan Brontë</b> † Director of Valuation	<b>Stephen Boyd</b> † Director of Finance and Corporate Services	<b>Wilfie Hamilton</b> † Chair of Audit Risk Committee Independent Board Member

The Board is supported by three main committees:

- Audit Risk Committee.
- Management Committee.
- Business Improvement and Modernisation Committee.

\* John Wilkinson is also the Agency Accounting Officer for Land & Property Services.

† LPS Management Board member.  
Chief Executive is the Management Board Chair.

# Business Planning Context

The Agency's business planning is set in the context of the Department's Corporate Plan 2008–11, the Department's Operational Plan 2009–10, the Executive's Programme for Government 2008–11 and the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008–18.

LPS business planning is carried out in parallel with the Department and takes into consideration the findings and action plans resulting from the Department of Finance and Personnel's response to the recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee along with the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit Review.



# Vision, Mission, Strategic Objectives and Values

The current **Vision** of Land & Property Services is:

“To transform land and property services and information for the public good”.

The current **Mission** is:

“To support the regeneration and economic development of Northern Ireland by providing an integrated set of land and property related services for its citizens and government”.

The current **Strategic Objectives** are to:

- Deliver effective and efficient high quality and customer-centric services, information and advice.
- Collect, maintain, integrate and analyse data.
- Continuously improve our processes and be innovative in the way we deliver our services.

The Agency is involved in other strategic objectives including active participation in the roll-out of shared services and implementing the Department's Sustainability Action Plan.

## Values

The NICS Code of Ethics sets out the core values for the Civil Service and the standards of behaviour expected of all civil servants. Our LPS values are based on these core values and guide our everyday behaviour:

- Clear direction and leadership.
- Customer focus.
- Respect for people.
- Open communication.
- Working to deliver best value.
- Development of positive working relationships with others.
- Commitment to the highest ethical standards of public services.
- Valuing and harnessing the diversity of our staff.
- Professionalism in all that we do.

# LPS Vision of the Future

The current Vision and Mission statements were agreed at the outset of the new LPS organisation. We now consider the time is right to review these statements and the process will be completed by March 2010.

LPS delivers services to the public sector and the citizens of Northern Ireland across a wide range of property related areas, in many cases fulfilling statutory obligations. While this focus will continue, increasingly our aim will be to improve service delivery from the customer perspective whilst increasing efficiency on behalf of the taxpayer.

## LPS Route Map 2009–11

LPS has developed a Route Map to illustrate our value proposition, core competencies and enablers. The value proposition is outward looking and captures the value that the Agency will add to the Northern Ireland economy. The core competencies are what support the key roles of the Agency, while the enablers illustrate what the Agency has to be good at in order to achieve its Vision.

### (1.0) Vision:

Transform land and property services and information for the public good

### (1.1) Mission:

To support the regeneration and economic development of Northern Ireland by providing an integrated set of land and property related services for its citizens and government.

### (2.1)

Deliver effective and efficient high quality and customer-centric services, information and advice

### (2.2)

Collect, maintain, integrate and analyse data

### (2.3)

Continuously improve our processes and be innovative in the way we deliver our services

### (3.1)

Join up our data and IT infrastructure

### (3.2)

Develop partnerships with key stakeholders

### (3.3)

Objectively advise Government

### (3.4)

Build a strong LPS brand

### (3.5)

Involve and motivate all staff

### (3.6)

Develop our knowledge, skills, and expertise

### (3.7)

Lead and manage corporately

### (3.8)

Communicate clearly and interactively

### (3.9)

Shape LPS Culture and Values

### (R1)

Strategic Financial Management

### (R2)

Organisational Structure and Governance

### (R3)

Human Resource Management

### (R4)

Legal Framework

# LPS Balanced Scorecard

In setting our targets for the 2009–10, LPS has used the Balanced Scorecard methodology. The Balanced Scorecard has drawn a clear focus on outcomes and effective leadership and management. In keeping with the scorecard methodology, LPS targets are set against the following four headings:

- Results.
- Customers.
- Internal Processes.
- Organisation and People.

Progress has been made in the last year with the formation of LPS. Operational performance has improved during the year which is down to the efforts of our staff.

The year ahead will focus on consolidating our performance and clearing all frontline backlogs. LPS has agreed 7 key targets with the Minister for 2009–10, which are reflected in the Scorecard.

### **Rate Collection**

To maximise the collectable rates that are collected or discharged, including:

- (a) To collect or discharge 98% of the collectable rate by 31 March 2010, based on rates assessed at April 2009.
- (b) To secure or action through the court process by 31 March 2010, 75% of all outstanding debt at 31 March 2009.

### **Non Domestic Revaluation**

To deliver an accurate non domestic revaluation on time, including:

- (a) To provide valuations for Estimated Penny Product (EPP) purposes by 30 September 2009.
- (b) To publish the new Valuation List by 31 December 2009.

### **Improved Customer Service**

To deliver an improved service to customers, including:

- (a) To increase the customer satisfaction index score from 76% to 78%.

### **Providing a Timely and Quality Service to Customers**

To improve the timeliness of service provision by:

- (a) Valuing 100% of new houses notified at 31 March 2009 by 31 March 2010.
- (b) Processing 100% of pre 1 January 2007 registration casework by 31 March 2010.
- (c) Providing up-to-date mapping, by surveying 90% of residential properties, recorded in the STAR planning system for six months or more, by 31 March 2010.

### **Improvement and Innovation**

To provide effective and efficient end-to-end processes by:

- (a) Automating, as part of Data Spine development, one internal and two local authority processes by 30 September 2009.
- (b) Sharing business intelligence data from three core LPS systems through the Data Spine, by 30 September 2009.
- (c) Having in place Geographic Information (GI) Strategy governance structure by 30 September 2009.
- (d) Agreeing a framework for the rationalisation of end-to-end rating processes by 30 June 2009.
- (e) Implementing priority actions arising from the framework by 31 March 2010.

### **Human Resource Management**

To develop enhanced processes for human resource and workforce planning by:

- (a) Publishing an LPS HR Strategy by 31 December 2009.

### **Developing Knowledge, Skills and Expertise**

To ensure that staff are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to deliver LPS objectives by:

- (a) Delivering the 2009–10 Training Plan by 31 March 2010.

## 1. Results (R)

Ref.	Lead Directorate/ Owner	Link to LPS Route Map	Directorate Objective	Measure of Success	Key Performance Target		Link to Draft DFP Operational Plan 2009–10
					2009–10	2010–11	
R 1	Operations Iain Greenway	(1.1) LPS Vision (1.2) Mission	To maximise the collectable rates that are collected or discharged	a) % of the collectable rate collected or discharged by 31 March 2010, based on rates assessed at April 2009	98%	98%	R2
				b) % of outstanding debt at 31 March 2009 secured or actioned through the court process by 31 March 2010	75%	N/A	
				c) Cash value of rates collected	£985.6m	N/A	
R 2	Valuation Alan Brontë	(2.2) Collect, maintain, integrate and analyse data	To deliver an accurate Non Domestic Revaluation on time	Achievement of key project milestones in the Non Domestic Revaluation 2010 Project	Valuations for EPP purposes to be available by 30 September 2009	N/A	R1
					Publication of new List by 31 December 2009		

## 2. Customers (C)

Ref.	Lead Directorate/ Owner	Link to LPS Route Map	Directorate Objective	Measure of Success	Key Performance Target		Link to Draft DFP Operational Plan 2009–10
					2009–10	2010–11	
C1	CBI Patricia Montgomery	(2.1) Deliver effective and efficient high quality and customer-centric services, information and advice (2.3) Continuously improve our processes and be innovative in the way we deliver our services	To deliver an improved service to LPS customers	To increase the Customer Satisfaction Index score from 76% to 78%	2% points increase	2% points increase	C1
C2	Valuation Alan Brontë	(2.1) Deliver effective and efficient high quality and customer-centric services, information and advice (2.3) Continuously improve our processes and be innovative in the way we deliver our services	To maintain up-to-date valuation lists by reducing backlogs	a) % of new houses notified before end March 2009 to be valued by 31st March 2010	100%	100%	C1
	Operations Iain Greenway		To improve the timeliness of Registration activity	b) % of pre 1 January 2007 casework processed by 31 March 2010	100%	N/A	
	DIS Trevor Steenson		To provide up-to-date mapping	c) % of residential properties, recorded in the STAR planning system for 6 months or more, surveyed by 31 March 2010	90%	95%	



### 3. Internal Processes (IP)

Ref.	Lead Directorate/ Owner	Link to LPS Route Map	Directorate Objective	Measure of Success	Key Performance Target		Link to Draft DFP Operational Plan 2009–10
					2009–10	2010–11	
IP 1	Corporate Services Stephen Boyd	(R1) Strategic Financial Management  (R2) Organisational Structure and Governance	To provide budgetary control for LPS management and Management Board	Consolidate & refine the LPS Financial Operating Model	By 31 March 2010	N/A	R2
IP 2	Corporate Services Stephen Boyd	(R1) Strategic Financial Management  (R2) Organisational Structure and Governance	To operate within expenditure budget	LPS delivers its scorecard objectives within its budget % tolerance at year end	1.5%	1.5%	R2, IP1
IP 3	a) DIS Trevor Steenson b) CBI Patricia Montgomery c) CBI Patricia Montgomery	(2.3) Continuously improve our processes and be innovative in the way we deliver our services	a) Take forward the implementation plan for the Data Spine	Address Management processes automated	Strategy for automating 1 internal and 2 Local Authority processes automated by 30 September 2009	Implement automation of 1 internal and 2 Local Authority processes by 30 November 2010	R1, C1, C2, C3
				Sharing of 'business intelligence' (BI) data across LPS	Strategy for sharing BI data from 3 LPS core systems through the Data Spine by 30 September 2009	Implement the sharing of BI data from 3 LPS core systems through the Data Spine by 30 November 2010	
			b) GI Strategy	Governance Structures in place	By 30 September 2009	Continue implementation of the Strategy	
			c) To review the end to end rating process to ensure provision of an effective and efficient service to customers and government	Agree the frame- work to rationalise the end to end rat- ing process in LPS and implement key objectives identified in that framework	Framework agreed by 30 June 2009  Implement priority actions arising from the framework by 31 March 2010	Complete implementation of key actions arising from the framework by 31 March 2011	

### 4. Organisation and People (OP)

Ref.	Lead Directorate/ Owner	Link to LPS Route Map	Directorate Objective	Measure of Success	Key Performance Target		Link to Draft DFP Operational Plan 2009–10
					2009–10	2010–11	
OP 1	Corporate Services Stephen Boyd	(R3) Human Resource Management	To develop enhanced processes for human resource and workforce planning	HR Strategy published	By 31 Dec 2009	N/A	R3
OP 2	Corporate Services Stephen Boyd	(3.6) Develop our knowledge, skills and expertise  (R3) Human Resource Management	That staff are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to deliver LPS objectives	Delivery of 2009–10 Training Plan	By 31 March 2010	Delivery of 2010–11 Training Plan by 31 March 2011	OP5
OP 3	Corporate Services Stephen Boyd	(R3) Human Resource Management	To reduce the level of sick absence within LPS in accordance with DFP targets	Average number of days sick absence per employee at 31 March 2010	<= 8.4	<= 8.4	R3, OP4

# LPS Directorates

## **Customer and Business Improvement Directorate**

A thorough understanding of, and involvement with, our customers is a key strategic objective for Land & Property Services.

The Customer and Business Improvement (CBI) Directorate has primary responsibility for this function. Ministerial targets in this regard are managed through 2 core areas within the CBI Directorate: Customer Experience and Business Improvement.

### **Customer Experience**

The management of our relationship with key stakeholders continues to be a priority for Land & Property Services and is provided by a range of teams within the Directorate.

The primary focus for the Customer Experience team during 2009–10 will be on the development of both strategies and capabilities that foster positive relationships with our stakeholders. This will be achieved through a managed programme of initiatives including customer insight and market intelligence, stakeholder engagement activity and product and service development; all supported by strong internal and external communications.

During 2009–10, the Customer Experience Team expects to prioritise resources towards the achievement of a number of critical corporate objectives that will be the catalysts for our future growth and success. These objectives include:

- An examination of Stakeholder expectations.
- The establishment of a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Implementation Plan.
- The increase of revenue income and promotion of the use of spatial data.
- An increase in customer satisfaction index scores via the implementation of a customer transformation plan.
- The establishment and implementation of effective internal and external communication strategies.

### **Business Improvement**

Driving change and integration throughout LPS and developing forward operating models are two critical components of our future success. The project management of these two important aspects of our environment, along with the management of our physical resources, are the responsibility of the Business Improvement area within the CBI Directorate.

During 2009–10, the Business Improvement Team will critically review key business areas within LPS, with the objective of restructuring business processes to support efficiency savings and ensure a managed and effective end to end process.

### **Data, Information and Systems Directorate**

Timely and accurate land and property data underpins much of the work of the LPS directorates.

The Data, Information and Systems (DIS) Directorate has primary responsibility for the maintenance of the national mapping database for Northern Ireland; the provision of data for valuation, rating and collection processes; the maintenance of LPS digital information; and the management of LPS IT systems.

### **National Mapping and provision of Data**

During 2009–10 DIS will continue to develop its role as the main collector of the core data that underpins the work of the LPS directorates as well as continuing its function of maintaining the topographic data for Northern Ireland.

Up-to-date and accurate topographic mapping data is essential to internal users as it provides the base for valuation, land registration and spatial address activities. It is also important to a wide range of external users who reference their business data to LPS mapping.

DIS will continue to update the mapping in line with its map revision policy; however, particular focus this year will be on surveying the remaining single rural properties that are not yet in the mapping database.

Mapping data is also used in the LPS Operations and Valuation Directorates, whilst the Pointer Address database is used in valuation, rating and registration activities. The base mapping at 1:1250 & 1:2500 scales will continue to be collected and maintained by surveyors working from Belfast and a number of regional offices together with a team who use aerial photography and digital photogrammetry techniques to update the mapping.

DIS also collects data and information that directly supports the work of the Valuation Directorate. This work includes property inspection and pattern assessment of domestic property.

The Directorate has responsibility for driving the Geographic Information Strategy for Northern Ireland 2009–2019 and for the implementation of the INSPIRE Directive\* within Northern Ireland.

### **Data Management**

Effective data management is one of the bigger challenges for LPS as its data holdings include those of the legacy Agencies. At present, LPS business data is dispersed across a number of different systems. During 2009–10, DIS will develop a 'Data Spine' to enable this data to be centrally managed and maintained. One of the first priorities will be to place the Pointer Address at the heart of the land and property life cycle to ensure that addresses and address related information are consistent across LPS.

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\* The INSPIRE Directive is a piece of European legislation aimed at the creation of a European spatial information infrastructure within the European Union. Although this legislation is in support of European policy on the environment, it is likely to have wider implications in terms of the way that spatial information, at least from public bodies, is made available and accessible in Europe.

INSPIRE will deliver integrated spatial information services which will allow users to identify and access spatial or geographic information from a wide range of sources from local to European-wide. Some degree of interoperability using data from different sources is expected.

The full text of the Directive 2007/2/EC is available at: [http://www.ecgis.org/inspire/directive/L\\_10820070425en00010014.pdf](http://www.ecgis.org/inspire/directive/L_10820070425en00010014.pdf)

In a similar way, the management of the various systems will be brought together into a single governance framework which will help to ensure LPS gets value for money from its IT investment and on-going IT systems maintenance.

The DIS survey teams will continue to build upon their traditional topographic surveying role by becoming increasingly involved in collecting and maintaining the survey-related data needed by the other directorates either directly, on the ground, or by collating and integrating data provided by third parties.

Looking forward to 2010–11, DIS will take forward positional improvement of its large-scale data and begin to develop a new data model to better meet the needs of spatial data users both internally and externally. Data collection and information management will be much more closely aligned to the LPS end-to-end business process and the Data Spine will enable LPS data to be more effectively and efficiently deployed across the organisation. A number of the business systems are due for review and DIS will work with the various business areas to ensure that as these systems are developed or replaced they align with the LPS IT Strategy and meet the long-term strategic needs of the Agency.

### **Managing Business IT Systems**

The Directorate has responsibility for managing the business IT systems that are deployed throughout the Agency. Activities in 2009–10 include systems development, working closely with users in each of the other Directorates business areas, management of support contracts and the provision of a help desk facility to users.

### **Operations Directorate**

The Operations Directorate within LPS is responsible for two vital functions that contribute to the wellbeing of Northern Ireland's economy: the registration of title to land and the collection of rate revenue (with the associated awarding of a range of benefits).

#### **Registration**

The ability to hold secure title to land is widely recognised as a fundamental basis for economic development. The registration activity in Operations is therefore a key part of LPS' work. It encompasses the recording of data in three registers: the Land Register, the Register of Deeds, and the Statutory Charges Register. Over time, all land will become registered in the Land Register and the Register of Deeds will be closed.

The process of registration is managed through the use of the landweb direct® system, and includes the scanning of all documentation on receipt and use of the scanned documents within the process. Over recent years, we have been encouraging E-Registration, where documents are submitted electronically by solicitors and other customers. The initiative has been supported by the provision of training, and we have set a target that at least 15% of cases in 2009–10 will be submitted electronically. A further stage of E-Registration is to remove the need for physical signatures and physical documents. We will therefore be working in 2009–10 to prepare legislation for the dematerialisation of Land Certificates.

An unavoidable facet of Registration work is the complexity of elements of the underlying statute and common law, as developed through case law. This means that some cases involve much legal argument before they can be concluded. We have set a target that, in 2009–10, all casework dating from before 1 January 2007 will be completed, where it is within our control to achieve this. We will also work closely with public sector bodies to encourage the voluntary registration of their land holdings. This will provide them with more secure title to their land, and will also further populate the Land Register, which is a vital component of Northern Ireland's spatial data infrastructure.

#### **Revenue and Benefits**

The work of Revenues and Benefits is equally vital to Northern Ireland's development. The Directorate is responsible for collecting approximately £1 billion of rate income each year, which is used by Local Councils and the Executive to fund a range of services. The rating system in Northern Ireland is in the process of fundamental reform to create a modern rating system which meets the province's needs. Many of the reforms are now in place, and LPS has implemented a new computer system to enable us to manage the new system effectively. Operations Directorate includes a Development & Improvement branch, which manages the implementation of the systems and training required for the reformed rating system, and also takes forward a number of business improvement projects. During 2009–10, these projects will include a thorough review and adjustment of some of our work processes, to progress the implementation of scanning of all correspondence received in Revenues & Benefits, and to broaden the range of payment methods available.

The Directorate works closely with Local Councils, and with colleagues in the Department of Finance & Personnel, and provides a range of financial information and projections. These include Penny Product figures to guide Local Councils in the setting of the level of district rates. An Operational Finance unit is responsible for this important work, and a significant finance review project is also underway to move the reporting of rate income from a cash to an accruals accounting basis, and to deliver a number of improvements to the financial element of the rating system. This work is central to LPS' implementation of the recent recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee regarding the Statement of Rate Levy and Collection. Connected to this is a key focus in 2009–10 to purge, cleanse and refresh the data within the rating systems, to ensure that all bills are correctly issued with correct adjustments applied. One aspect of this is to complete the current exercise to inspect all properties recorded as vacant, and issue appropriate bills where properties are found to be occupied. A strategy is also being put in place, based on broader sharing of data with other public bodies, to enable effective maintenance of the data in the rating system.

The Revenue & Benefits area is responsible for billing and collection of rating income, and application of a range of associated benefits and reliefs. These now include Lone Pensioner Allowance, as well as Housing Benefit, Rate Relief and Disabled Persons Allowance. In the prevailing economic circumstances, it is important that we process applications for benefits and reliefs promptly, and this remains a key focus of the Directorate. In addition, a Take up Team is in place to ensure that all who are entitled to the various benefits and reliefs are aware of them and are supported in claiming them.

The work of rate collection has been challenging in recent years, given the changes to the rating system and the implementation of a new IT system. We have also experienced significant staff changes. We intend 2009–10 (and indeed 2010–11) to be a period of consolidation, removing the remaining backlogs in our activity, cleansing the data within our systems and ensuring that a bill is issued for each property, promptly and correct first time. We are making significant progress in this regard already. A further challenge facing us is the collection of all money for which bills are issued. General economic circumstances are making it harder for people to pay their bills. We understand this, and always seek to agree a mutually-agreeable payment arrangement where people are finding difficulty paying. However, in the absence of

such an arrangement, we will continue to seek payment of monies due, and a key focus in 2009–10 will be to further reduce the amount of unpaid rate bills. Coupled with these elements, we will continue to work to improve our levels of customer service and to reduce the cost of our activity per pound of rates collected. Key work underpinning these improvements will be implementing a new organisational structure for Revenues & Benefits, and working closely with our colleagues in NI Direct to ensure that each of the more than 450,000 phone calls a year from rate payers are handled professionally and the necessary information or system updates are made in a timely manner.

We expect 2009–10 to be the year in which all of the work on building a new rating system and consolidating registration systems comes to fruition and the consolidation of our work is clear. To achieve this, we will continue to review and improve our processes, cleanse our data, and develop our staff so that they are fully equipped to work with all aspects of Northern Ireland's rating and registration systems.

## **Valuation Directorate**

The Valuation Directorate has a statutory responsibility for valuations of domestic and non domestic rating. All valuations are published and maintained in Valuation Lists. General valuation services are also provided to public sector clients. The Central Advisory Unit located within Valuation Directorate administers government policy in relation to the public sector estate in Northern Ireland.

### **Domestic Rating**

The revaluation to Capital Values which was introduced in 2007 was a major component of the Rating Reform Programme. All requests from ratepayers for a review of a valuation that were received prior to 1 April 2007 were completed by 30 November 2007; all reviews received in 2007–08 were completed by the end September 2008. Although a low number of challenges are now at appeal or Valuation Tribunal stage, the domestic post revaluation challenge is now part of normal business. The economic conditions, however, are likely to keep appeals at a higher than normal level over the next 3 years.

The ongoing challenge is to ensure that new and altered domestic properties are assessed accurately and early to avoid backdating of rate bills. Given the revaluation effort, work in hand was above normal levels. The number of domestic alteration cases in hand has been reduced from 37,500 cases at 1 April 2008 to 26,700 at 31 March 2009 with the



completion of some 18,000 cases in-year. This was achieved through a special project which pioneered the use of aerial photography and other in-house systems together with a traditional approach.

The number of new houses to be valued has also been reduced during 2008–09 from 8,600 to 5,200 through the completion of 13,600 new house valuations. Responding to the challenges will be assisted by the downturn in the housing markets. Forecast work volumes assume new houses notified will fall from just over 13,000 in 2008–09 to 8,000 this coming year 2009–10, reflecting new houses already commenced before the recession.

Significant process efficiencies and staff productivity gains have been achieved within the domestic alteration project and it is assumed that these will continue to yield benefits this coming year.

### **Non Domestic Rating**

Revaluations are required to maintain equity in the rating system. Without them, unfair relativities in rates paid reduce public confidence in the rating system. The normal cycle for revaluations in GB has been every 5 years. In Northern Ireland a Non Domestic Revaluation took effect in April 1997 after a lapse of 20 years, and was followed 6 years later with one taking effect from 1 April 2003. Work is in the final stages for the next revaluation which is due for publication in December 2009 and will come into effect from 1 April 2010. The key challenge will be to ensure that values are ready for Penny Product modelling by 30 September 2009. This work will dominate the work plans for the first half of this year, with a major effort then in the second half to reduce 'normal' work in hand, dealing with new and altered non domestic properties and outstanding challenge cases.

The revaluation will see revised Net Annual Values (NAVs) assessed on some 72,500 non domestic properties. Commercial premises such as shops, offices, factories and warehouses are numerically the largest non domestic element. However, other properties covered by this revaluation include schools, hospitals, pubs, hotels and utilities such as electricity, gas and water. These assessments which are based on values at 1 April 2008 will be used in calculating rate bills for 1 April 2010.

Work to value new and altered properties, and deal with application for derating and exemption are ongoing. At the commencement of the year there were almost 5,000 cases in hand – some 500 new properties, 3,000 altered and over 1,000 applications. Plans are in place to use all available resources including specialist staff to target reductions in this case load to acceptable levels by year end.

### **Client Services and Central Advisory Unit**

In recent years this work stream has absorbed a lot of pressures arising from non domestic and domestic revaluations. This has meant re-focusing on priority and core services. The principle services provided to the public sector include:

- Compensation in connection with roads, regeneration, health, education and housing schemes, closing and demolition orders, areas of special scientific interest.
- Valuation of economic appraisals, capital assessment, rental assessments.
- Acquisition by agreement including site searching, office procurement and open market purchase.
- Disposal of surplus lands.
- Appraisal of regeneration and redevelopment proposals.

Key challenges for the year and further ahead include:

- Demand for asset valuations will increase further as local councils, further education colleges, universities and the health sector make the transition to International Financial Reporting Standards.
- Major road schemes are being planned and this will require work in acquisition and negotiation of compensation.
- Under the direction of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) the Capital Realisation Taskforce has reconvened to review progress on the effective asset management in the public sector and the realisation of capital receipts from the sale of surplus and other lands. Further recommendations cover best practice guidance and property data for planning and performance management purposes. LPS will continue to have a role here particularly rolling out the Office of Government Commerce's (OGC) electronic Property Information Mapping Systems (ePIMS) and preparing Property Asset Management Guidelines and Strategy for NI.



## Finance and Corporate Services Directorate

The Finance and Corporate Services Directorate is responsible for supporting the organisation in the delivery of our objectives. The support that Finance and Corporate Services provide includes Human Resources (HR) management, staff learning and development, corporate finance and corporate support, as well as leading the organisation in the promotion of corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

### Human Resources

The success of the organisation is underpinned by the performance of our people, and as such, our people are considered critical to the success of the organisation.

Human Resources provides support for and development of managers and their teams. This includes:

- Development of staff to provide the knowledge and skills required for them to perform effectively
- Providing support for dealing with individual staff issues
- Ensuring compliance with HR legislation and NICS policy
- Implementing NICS HR policy
- Liaising with the Department on matters relating to recruitment and progression of staff
- Liaison with Unions through the Local Whitley process.

Maintaining a positive working relationship with the Agency Trade Union Side through meaningful and timely consultation and negotiation is vital to the success of the organisation. This is not just the responsibility of HR but of all line managers within the Agency.

Managing sickness absence will continue to be a priority and Ministerial Targets have been set to reduce sickness absence within the NICS. LPS will work closely with the Department to help meet the Departmental Targets of less than or equal to 8.4 days per person in 2009–10.

### Learning and Development

The development of staff is vital to the success of LPS. LPS promotes and encourages the development of staff to help every individual attain the knowledge and skills needed to perform to the highest standard of performance required to do their job so that they fully contribute to the achievement of the Agency's objectives.

## Corporate and Social Responsibility

The Agency will continue to demonstrate its commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility by promoting and participating in appropriate activities. The Agency already works closely with Business in the Community to identify suitable activities and will maintain this relationship over the coming year. We encourage staff throughout the Agency taking part in volunteer projects, to the benefit of all involved as well as the community and the environment.

The Agency is committed to embedding the principles of sustainable development in all our work. LPS will be working with the Department in delivering the Department's sustainable Development strategy.

### Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance is responsible for the effective financial management of LPS and ensuring, through its budgeting and forecasting processes, its financial management activities and its interface with senior managers and parent Department, that LPS financial position remains healthy, and that the application of its income results in a long term sustainable organisation.

The Agency faces a significant efficiency challenge in having to deliver 5% cash releasing savings in the incoming years.

### Corporate Support

All Management Board information is coordinated by Corporate Support. Key activities include the collection, organisation and provision of management information in support of the board's activities, co-ordination of business planning, production of the LPS Business Plan and Annual Report and providing secretarial support to the Audit Risk Management Committee.

### Plans for 2009–10

During 2009–10 the Agency aims to have the right number of staff with the right skills to deliver our services. So that we adopt a consistent, strategic and comprehensive approach we are developing an HR and Training Strategy for the Agency.

Resources and efficiency are still major issues for the Agency. To help us address these challenges we will develop an Efficiency Strategy and a funding model for the Agency. The Agency's reduced budget allocation for 2009–10 will require that we target and manage our resources efficiently and effectively. This is a responsibility of all managers and staff throughout the Agency.

# Projected Expenditure Plans

	Income	Resource Expenditure	Non Cash Expenditure	Capital Expenditure
	£'000's	£'000's	£'000's	£'000's
LPS (excluding Registration) Projected Spend	(18,958)	38,149	3,226	1,000
Baseline Budget	(18,958)	33,067	3,226	1,000
Registration Projected Spend	(10,000)	8,500	(151)	Nil
Baseline Budget	(15,050)	12,760	(151)	Nil

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