



The Year in Review

Lord Mayor Peter Adamson

First of all I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Darwin for re-electing me as the Lord Mayor of this magnificent city. This is a job I do not take lightly and as I have a passion for this city, I give you my commitment that I will be devoting my full efforts to the job ahead.

The end of another financial year is an opportunity to look back on what has been achieved and use that base to build for the future. In a nutshell, we are in a solid position. Our finances are sound, in fact our situation is stronger than most other councils in the country.

If I could sum up our efforts it would be to give the people of Darwin first class services at the best possible price. We continue to offer these services while making sure that in real dollars there is no increase in rates. Other councils in the Territory have been pressured to raise their rates, and indeed in some parts of Australia the average rate increase has been more than five percent. However, we have been able to keep rate increases to the CPI meaning, in real dollars, there has been no increase.

As a result of our sound financial position last year we were able to commit to the biggest upgrade to the standard of our parks in the history of Darwin. A criticism of the past was that some of our smaller suburban parks didn't appear to get the same regular attention that many of the bigger more popular parks receive. As a result of this feedback approval was given for an additional half a million dollars for more watering and mowing of our suburban parks. We have also continued our upgrade of suburban playground equipment and in the financial year just gone we began work on the third of four regional playgrounds. The Anula playground is designed to be somewhat of a hub for the surrounding suburbs. Other regional playgrounds at the Jingili Water Gardens and Lake Alexander continue to be extremely popular. Another similar sized playground is planned for this financial year.

During the financial year we began a review of our animal by-laws. Currently most of our regulations deal only with dogs. We plan to expand our by-laws to include all animals and we intend to develop a strategy to better deal with dog noise and behaviour problems. Like most council in Australia we receive more complaints about animal behaviour than any other issue. The review, which began last year, will look at our current legislation, as well as the use of education programs to hopefully better deal with this issue.

We have continued with our major program to repair and construct footpaths throughout the suburbs. For years many of our footpaths have been in a bad condition due largely to issues such as tree roots. We are spending about a million dollars a year to finally get on top of this problem.

We have also maintained our roads program that continues to provide Darwin with one of the best suburban road networks in the country.

The year also saw the approval for an upgrade to The Gardens Amphitheatre. This wonderful venue will have the stage area expanded and updated. When this is completed the Darwin Symphony Orchestra will make the Amphitheatre its home.

The financial year also saw us focusing on the future of our three swimming pools and four public libraries. Our aim is to further enhance these already popular assets to better serve the needs of the community.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many volunteers who continue to assist with the running of the city. We have a large number of members of the public who sit on a number of important advisory committees. I would also like to thank Allan McGill and the staff of the Darwin City Council. Our staff deals with a vast array of issues, some of which at times can be extremely difficult. I thank you all for your efforts.

To the Aldermen of the Darwin City Council I also extend my thanks for your cooperation. Our sole purpose is to represent and serve the people of Darwin and I look forward to continuing to have a productive association with all elected members.

Finally to the people of Darwin. We have a city of which we can be justly proud. But we can all do better. I give my commitment to continue working on improving on the services we deliver. If you have an issue or an idea on the things we should be doing please give me a call or contact one of your Ward Aldermen.

I hope you find this annual report informative. Over the pages ahead we have attempted to outline a summary of the many services that we provide.

Happy reading!

Peter Adamson
Lord Mayor

Chief Executive Officer Allan McGill

The 2003/04 financial year was the fourth and final year of the 18th Darwin City Council and saw projects from the Council's Action Plan completed.

Following the 2000 elections the 18th Council prepared an Action Plan for its term of office and all items were fully actioned and completed or were by nature ongoing.

The following comments on the year in review are provided under the 6 focus areas from the Council's Action Plan.

Governance

Audit Committee

Throughout the year the Committee completed a number of audit reviews resulting in the introduction of new procedures and systems to enhance existing arrangements and minimise any exposure to risks. They included:

- IT Security
- Accounting Policies and Procedures Manual
- Human Resources Management
- Strategic Planning
- Cash Handling
- Investments

The Audit Committee has made a valuable contribution to raising performance standards. The audit program has a further two years of activity. Council has been totally supportive of the Committee and its activities.

Office of Local Government Investigation into the Council

In late July 2003, the Director of Local Government delivered a report on his findings into a number of matters. The report was the result of an investigation into several complaints from Aldermen of the Council and the public regarding the extension of the Chief Executive Officer's contract of employment, the extent of confidential business considered by the Council, the Central Business District Promotion Levy and Tendering Procedures.

The Report made recommendations for changes to some procedures but did not find any dishonest, illegal or irregular activity or behaviour.

The Council's legal advisers provided a response to the Report that concluded that the investigation was flawed in terms of process and that the findings were generally not supported by evidence contained in the report.

Notwithstanding this advice, the Council responded to the various recommendations and made changes where appropriate.

Council Elections

Returning Officer

In the lead up to the May 2004 Council Elections, various options for the appointment of a Returning Officer were considered. Put briefly the options were:

- appoint the Chief Executive Officer
- appoint the NT Electoral Officer
- appoint Private Enterprise
- appoint the Australian Electoral Commission or another Commission from one of the States.

Of these the use of Council staff was not favoured and the Australian Electoral Commission and other State Electoral Commissions were not disposed to providing the service.

Quotations were obtained from a private sector company, Secure Vote, which specialises in elections and the NT Electoral Office. Following lengthy consideration the Council chose to appoint the NT Electoral Office although Secure Vote offered an attractive proposal.

2004 Elections

The elections were held on Saturday 29 May 2004 with 12 of the sitting members contesting the election. There was a pleasing response to the election with a high number of candidates nominating:

Lord Mayor	7 Candidates	1 Vacancy
Chan Ward	8 Candidates	3 Vacancies
Lyons Ward	9 Candidates	3 Vacancies
Richardson Ward	6 Candidates	3 Vacancies
Waters Ward	7 Candidates	3 Vacancies

Of the 13 vacancies eight were filled by incumbent members of the Council and five were filled by new members.

The voter turnout was on average for Local Government elections with around 75% of enrolled voters actually casting a vote.

Lord Mayor	76% voted with 6.0% informal
Chan Ward	74% voted with 6.4% informal
Lyons Ward	71% voted with 8.8% informal
Richardson Ward	78% voted with 6.0% informal
Waters Ward	80% voted with 8.5% informal
Average (75%)	Average (7.1%)

In 2000 the Lord Mayoral election attracted exactly the same turnout, ie 76% voted with an informal vote of 6%.

The election results were declared on Monday 7 June 2004 and the new Council was sworn in at a special ceremony on Tuesday 8 June 2004.

A series of post election briefings and training sessions were scheduled for the weeks following the election to assist Members to become aware of issues and understand their roles and responsibilities.

Corporate

Financial Accounting

As a result of the Audit Committee a number of changes were made in the financial management and accounting area. They included the completion of a Procedures Manual and a revised Policy on how to invest Council's funds.

In addition the Finance Division introduced comprehensive monthly management reports on a full range of matters. These reports have assisted senior managers identify variations of budget items higher or lower than 10%, staff leave entitlements and other operational matters which previously had been unavailable or difficult to identify.

Legislation

During the year the Northern Territory Government introduced amendments to the Local Government Act and those amendments came into force on 1 June 2004. Although some of these amendments were needed and were the product of several years consultation, there were others that were new and had not been the subject of any consultation. The Council is seeking to have further changes to the Act.

Financial Planning

The Council now has a 10 Year Financial Plan that is based on certain assumptions regarding forecast expenditure and income and is supported by other long term plans for capital works, asset management and maintenance.

Economic

Capital City Forum

Another Capital City (CBD) Forum, jointly organised by the Council and the Northern Territory Government was held on 29 April 2004. The Forum once again attracted a good level of interest and highlighted ongoing issues of concern. The outcomes of the Forum have been referred to the Capital City Committee for consideration.

The Capital City Committee was formed following the 2002 Forum and consists of:

- Council
- NT Government
- Lord Mayor
- Chief Minister
- 2 Aldermen
- Minister for Planning
- Minister for Local Government



Infrastructure

Asset Management

The ongoing program of managing Council assets, many of which are infrastructure, is seen as critical if the Council is to fully understand the future financial impact of its assets. A great deal of effort is being put into this project and I am confident the outcome will be a professional and invaluable component of the Council's forward planning platform.

Walkways

Prior to the May 2004 elections the Council received a report on the walkways throughout the City. The report assessed each walkway based on certain criteria and classified each into groups that were needed for the future or could possibly be closed. The Council referred this matter for consideration by the 19th Council.

The problem of walkways has been an issue for many years and the completion of this report provides a basis from which to further consider the matter.

Parks and Reserves Maintenance

The Council made a Policy commitment to upgrade the levels of maintenance of its parks and reserves. The Council has provided an extra \$500,000 to improve the service levels overall.

Environment

Environmental Master Plan

The adoption of a framework for an Environmental Master Plan and an environmental management system has focussed the Council's interests on environmental matters.

Although the Council has been pro-active on many environmental matters the Environmental Master Plan will now provide a formal framework for the recognition of what is already being done and fill the gaps that need attention.

Community

Aquatic Facilities

A comprehensive consultation process was commenced regarding the future of the Council's three public swimming centres. Concepts, options and issues will be the subject of the consultation, which will then allow the Council to further consider the future development of the aquatic facilities.

Amphitheatre

Funds for the upgrading of the Amphitheatre were approved and plans for this project commenced. The Darwin Symphony Orchestra is likely to make the Amphitheatre its 'home base' in Darwin and make greater use of the venue.

Animal Management

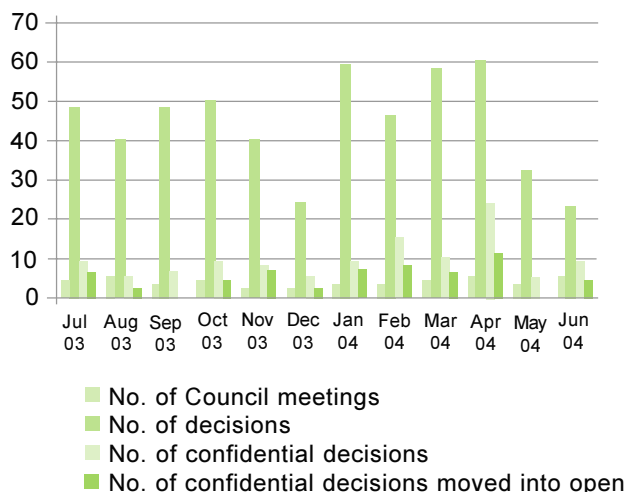
The often contentious and a frequently emotional issues surrounding dogs continues to be a problem for the community and the Council has made a commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of the by-laws, issues and concerns during the 2004/05 financial year. In summary 2003/04 saw the completion of important projects that are critical for future planning, the general election of Council which saw democracy at work at the elections in May and the introduction of improved management systems.

Much of this has been achieved by the wonderful efforts of very committed staff and I take this opportunity to thank them sincerely for their dedication and professionalism.

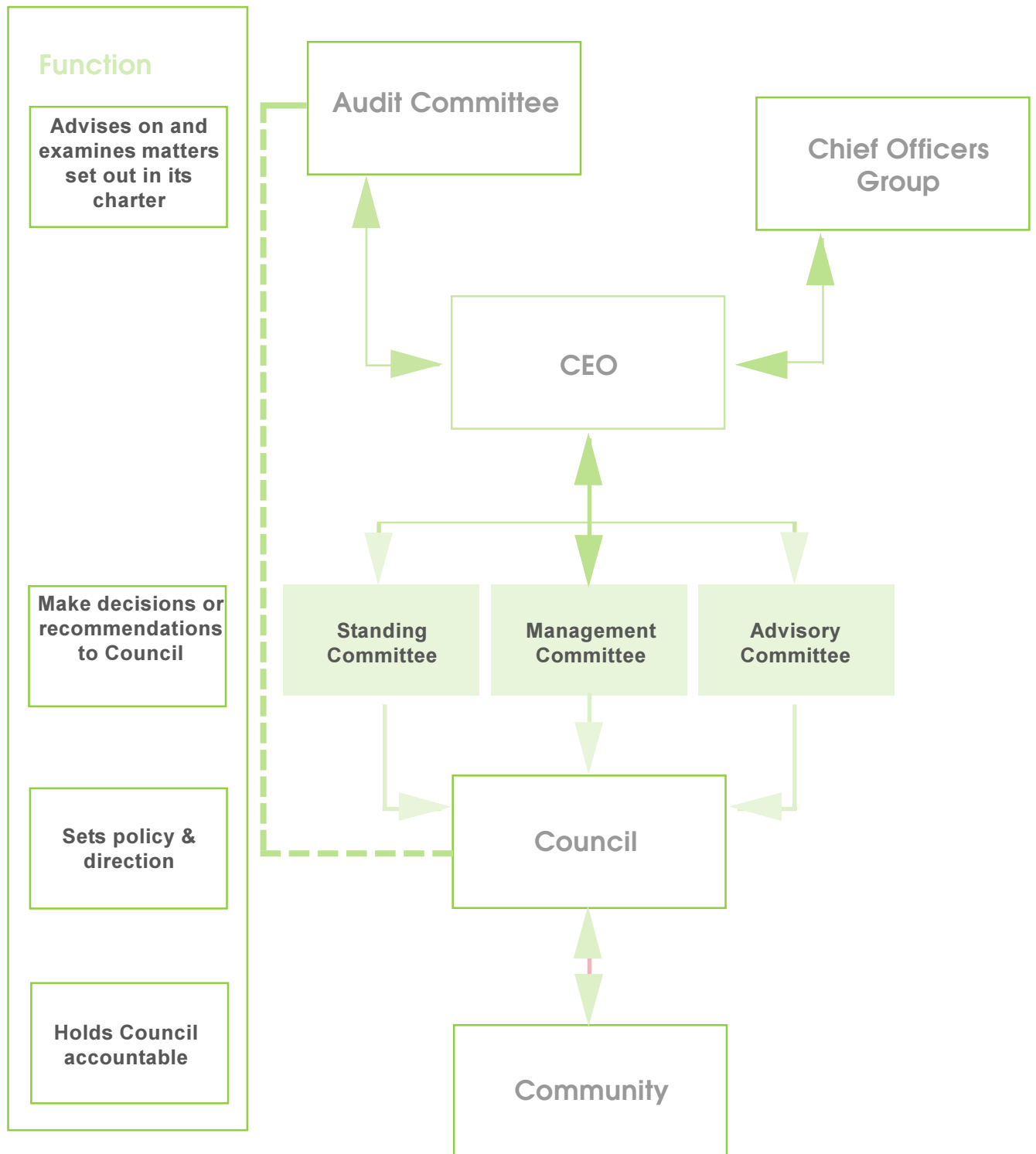
One of the challenges facing the Council, however, is the difficulty in attracting and retaining staff in professional positions such as engineers, accountants and librarians. The problem is recognised and the challenge is yet to be met.

The Council continues to maintain a strong financial position with good cash reserves, no debts and a planned approach to future works. 2003/04 was a productive and satisfying year with the Council well placed for the future.

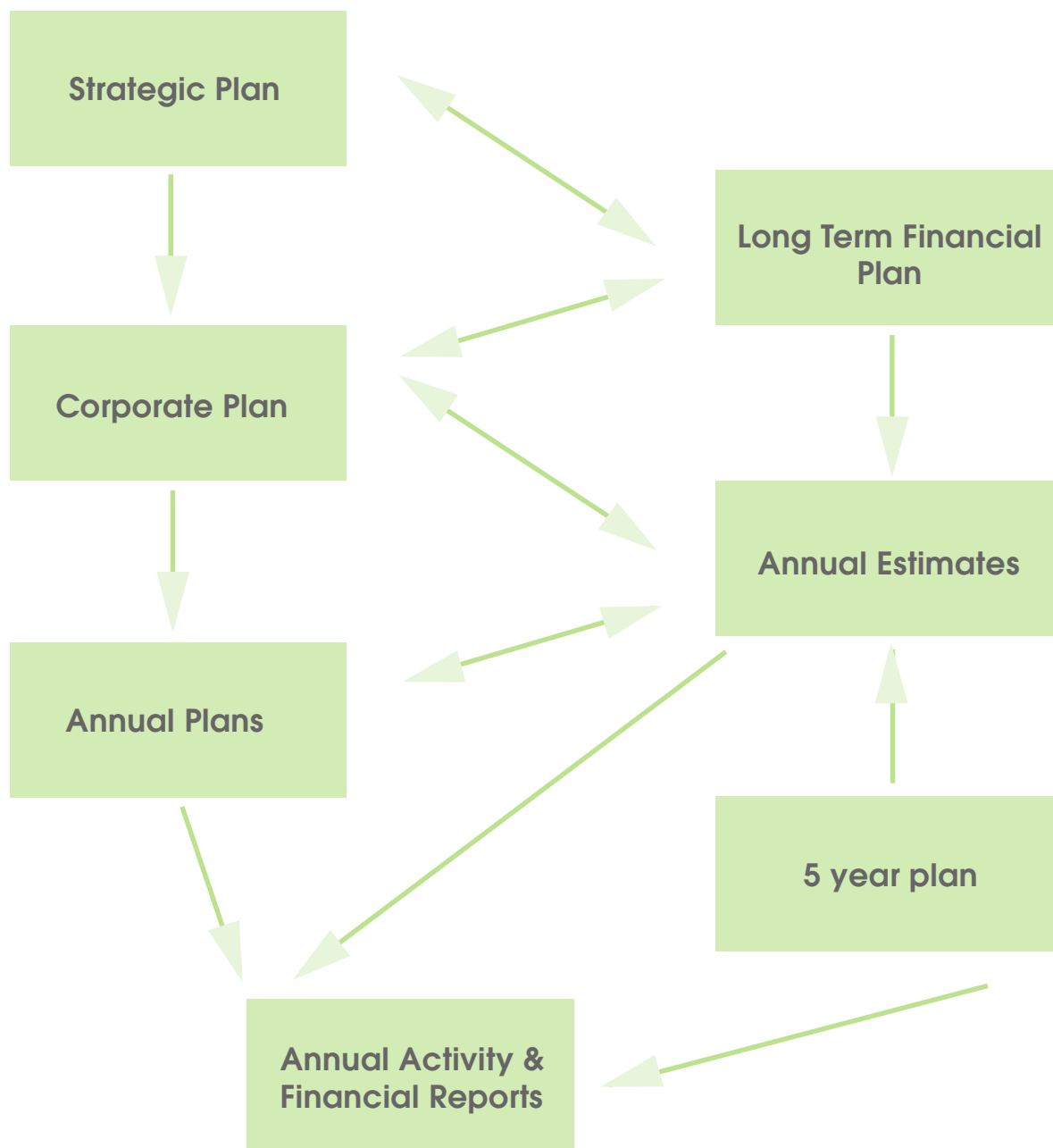
Council Decisions 2003/04



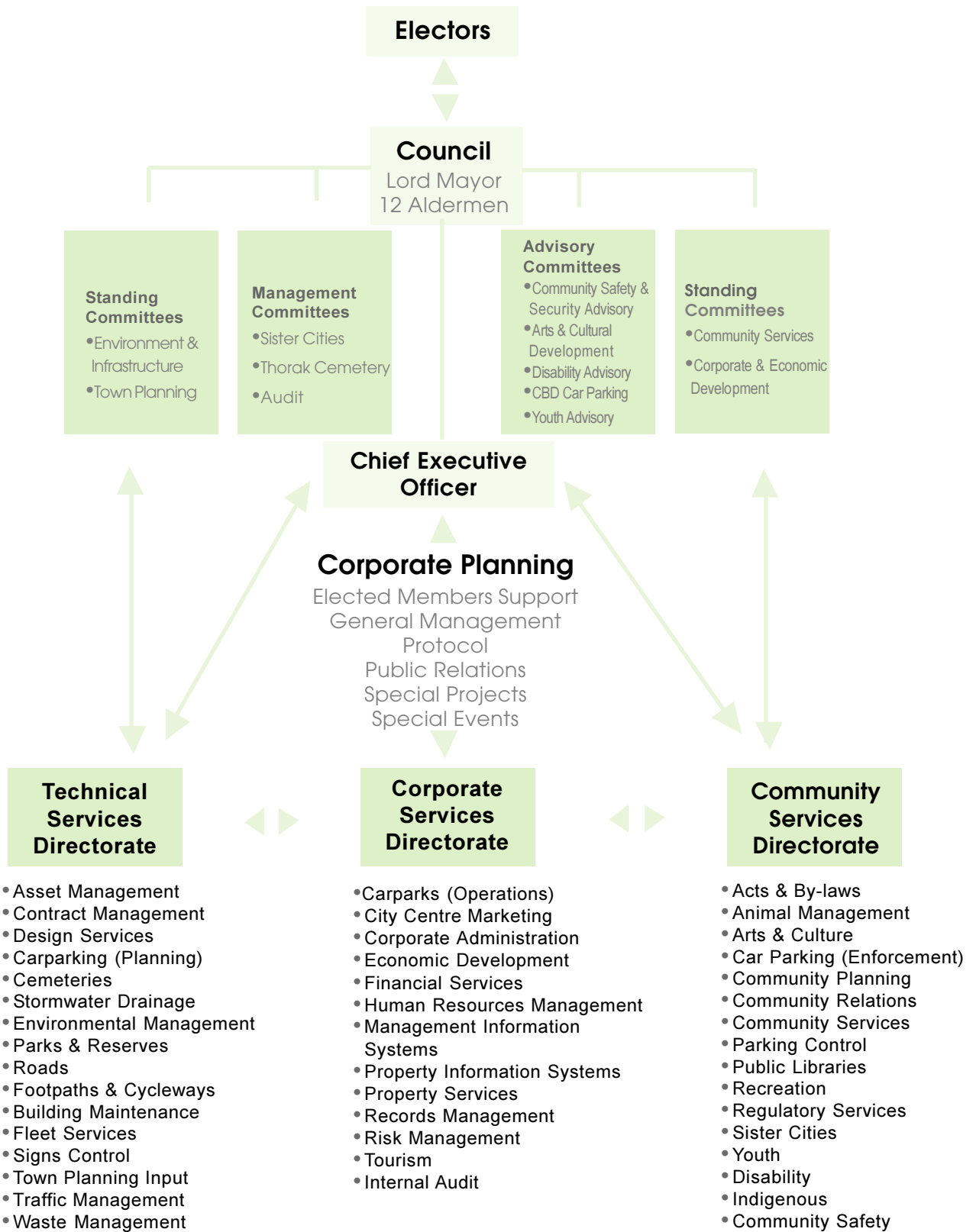
Darwin City Council Governance Structure



Darwin City Council Planning Framework



Darwin City Council Organisational Structure



Council's Decision Making Flow Chart

