In this chapter I want to explore the notion of planning. Rather than go into the background of social policies and how these affect an organisation's plans as a whole, I shall be emphasising 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' processes. For readers who are interested in how local government is financed, how the probation service links with central government, what is involved in joint financing between health authorities and the social services, how the voluntary sector is funded and so on it is worth consulting the policy literature; that by Webb and Wistow (1987) is a good basic guide, although it has to be said that the situation is changing all the time. The new system of local government finance in 1990 and plans for the health service are examples of how constant updating and study on the part of social workers is required.

In this chapter the purpose of the agency will be explored, together with how this is conveyed through its mission statement. From there broad planning goals and strategies become policies which are, in essence, the agency's standing plans. The differences between strategic and operational planning are outlined and include the ubiquitous topic of budgeting. Ideally budgets are based on plans for the maintenance of existing services and the development of new ones; in recent times the budget has reigned supreme, dictating what actually can be done. Front-line managers are increasingly expected to control their own devolved
budgets as decentralised models of service delivery become the norm. I comment later, however, on how much real control people are allowed.

In relation to developing new programmes of care I examine the area of needs assessments. It is pointless planning services from a position of ignorance. Sometimes when being interviewed for a job I have been asked for my ‘vision’ of what the agency will become, and indeed on commencing my present position I was immediately pressurised to produce a development plan. While so-called reactive planning is frowned upon, the reality is that it could prove unhelpful to look too far ahead: in the personal social services it would seem to be even more unwarranted to be proactive in programme planning if the needs of the particular community have not been surveyed. In addition, because managers are given static resources (usually in the shape of the numbers of staff employed) and because demands are variable and come in ‘fits and starts’, the idea of needs assessments have to be tempered with workload management systems and planned priorities. These will be reviewed before examples are presented to show how two projects were developed within existing services. Since workers may be asked to submit project proposals, brief guidelines on how to do this are also included.

Planning

Conceivably, it could be said that the planning and development of services are the critical components of administration. Plans are the means by which an organisation’s goals, pursued through its policies, are translated into action. On occasion the personal social services are accused of a lack of planning. There may be several reasons why this may be inevitable and these will be listed later. In the next chapter we will be examining a specific way of planning, management by objectives (MBO), but here I want to analyse who does the planning and what are the steps involved.

If the personal social services wish to promote decentralisation of their operations – for instance, by restructuring around patch-based teams – then logically they should delegate the function of planning local services to the area staff. In order that policy remains coherent and services comparable across the organisa-