

PLAN MAKING

One of the strengths of the RMA is that it includes very specific processes for the formulation of all policy statements and plans that are created at the regional and city/district levels. These are detailed in the First Schedule to the act. Its second strength in this area is with regard to the actual format of plans, although this was somewhat diluted in 2005 when elements of the original plan format, particularly issues, were made voluntary. However, so far most plans have retained issues as a part of their structure, although some will choose to abandon some of the less useful elements, such as the principal reasons for adopting, which are now well covered by S32 reports.

PLAN FORMATS

Box 2.1 details the basic structure or format for a district or regional plan. The highlighted elements are those parts of the plan that were still compulsory elements after the 2005 amendment to the RMA, with the others becoming optional.

This standardised format was not hugely different to the one that already existed under the previous legislation, though its application to all plans was new. However, despite a common starting point provided by this prescribed format, district plans in particular, as well as regional plans, are enormously variable. Technology has made them more accessible, and few councils would not now have their plans available online or in a downloadable format.

THE PLAN FORMULATION PROCESS

A basic step-by-step guide to formulating a plan was detailed in the First Schedule. It has commonly taken anything from three to eight years to complete a plan to the point at which it becomes operative. In the MFE's *Annual Survey of Local Authorities 1998/99*, it was estimated that on average a regional plan cost \$1.05 million and a district plan \$2.35 million to prepare, take through the processes and become operative (Ministry for the Environment 1999a: 25), although it should be stressed that larger authorities with more complex problems probably faced bills in the vicinity of \$3–5 million. Moreover these figures are now a decade old, suggesting that second-generation plans will be more expensive to produce. The steps in plan formulation are detailed in the following sections.

STEP 1: CONSULTATION

Plan writing commences with public consultation. Given the provision that a local