

## INTRODUCTION

In February 2000, the Town Council published their Best Value Performance Plan with copies being distributed to all residential properties within the Parish of Shildon.

The document set out certain aims and objectives for the year 2000/2001 but unlike principal local authorities, the Town Council was not to have its performance judged by reference to national performance indicators or benchmark standards. Instead, we were required to set our own challenges and prepare realistic local indicators to be assessed by the Audit Commission, year on year.

The overall conclusion of the Audit Commission as published in July 2000 was that: - "Shildon was one of the first town councils to produce a Best Value Performance Plan, and the Plan was published in advance of Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) guidance for 'Best Value' town and parish councils."

Our overall conclusion is that Shildon Town Council has prepared a Plan which complies in most respects with the statutory requirements and government guidance issued by the DETR. A significant amount of work has also been undertaken by the Council in relation to Best Value since the Plan was published in terms of:

- agreeing a service review programme
- undertaking detailed reviews
- developing performance indicators and targets, However, much remains to be done to fully implement the requirements of Best Value."

The Audit Commission took the view that the Council's published Plan complies in all significant respects with statutory requirements, except that:

- the plan does not contain a summary of the Councils' objectives in relation to the exercise of its functions
- the plan does not include a timetable for carrying out Best Value reviews of all its services

and functions of a five-year **period**.

The Town Council takes the view:

- the plan identified incremental and interdependent policies on the continuous improvement to services
- the work carried out by the Town Council in not only identifying and dealing with the second year of the Performance Plan in respect of the Shildon Civic Hall exceeded all requirements of legislation, as this was completed 12 months before its due date.

The Town Council had also agreed in February 2000 the five year programme of review as set

down by the DETR would be accomplished within three years.

ISSUE	RECCOMENDATION	SHILDON TOWN COUNCIL'S RESPONSE
<p>The BVPP primarily describes what the council currently does, rather than what its overall aims/objectives are, as these had not been formally approved by the Council at the time the BVPP was drafted.</p>	<p>The Council needs to set out its objectives (ideally based on consultation with the public) in relation to the exercise of its functions.</p>	<p>This has now been developed and will be approved by Members on 18 July 2000</p>
<p>A summary of services currently provided by the Town Council is included on BVPP pages 2-6.</p>	<p>Section on 'Direct Works' would be clearer if it contained 1,2 sentences saying what Direct Works actually did (i.e. grass cutting, grave digging, general repairs and maintenance).</p>	<p>The main areas of work' will be included next year, but not an exhaustive list.</p>
<p>Page 1 refers to the 'four C<sub>is</sub> the service review and the requirement to review all services within five years, but does not give a formal timetable with start and finish dates (order of reviews had not been agreed by Members at the time the plan was drafted).</p> <p>The outcome of service reviews will need to be included in next year's plan.</p>	<p>The Council's BVPP should include clearer information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the specific areas to be reviewed</li> <li>b) expected start and finish dates for each review.</li> </ul>	<p>Areas to be reviewed, and the order of reviews, have now been decided and will be included in next year's Plan.</p>
<p>There are no national PFS or targets for town and parish councils, but each council is expected to develop local indicators and targets for its own key areas of activity. Section in BVPP on pages 6-7 is headed 'Local indicators ' but in reality this is just a list of general areas where Pi's/targets might be developed for the future. PI's are currently being identified for Direct Works</p>	<p>The use of Pi's and targets needs to be developed, to-ether with more systematic reporting of performance to Members. Monitoring procedures also need to be established to ensure that targets are being achieved.</p>	<p>The Town Council is working at a national level with the Audit Commission and NALC to agree standard pi's for Best Value town and parish councils, hopefully by Autumn 2000.</p>

and Civic Hall activities		
The Council's Best Value Sub-committee has considered in some detail how it will carry out reviews but is not in favour of a formal methodology on the basis that each review will be different.	The Council needs to ensure that each service review is sufficiently challenging and asks not only 'how can we do this better' but also 'should we be doing this at all?'	Each service review will consider the following questions: a) how have we improved? b) how has this improvement been achieved? c) how do we need to continue in the future? and will consider options for the future, depending on P1, s.
Points 1-5 in 'general' section on BVPP page 8 highlight how the Council might improve performance, but don't set £ or % targets.	Expected efficiency saving or improvements should be quantified as: a) each service review is completed b) performance targets are set.	Service reviews are now identifying improvements to the way we do things, but these will not always be quantified as cash savings. Good housekeeping is the overall objective, rather than specific cost reductions.
BVPP contains information on SRB and capital projects but could provide more information on revenue income and expenditure.	The Council may wish to reconsider the BVPP format and layout for the future, especially in terms of the level of detail of financial	Each service review will identify and include a breakdown of the budget with 2001/02 and compare this with 2000/01, i.e. 'where does the money come from?' and 'where does it go to?'
Little has been done to date on making comparisons with others although recently contact was made with Durham County Council regarding Comparative data on grass Cutting and participation in The Durham County Partnership and pilot Best Value schemes	The use of comparative data and participation in local networks needs to be developed.	Refer to R4 re action on Pi's at national level. Once standard Pi's have been established then comparisons will be made.
In common with most town and parish councils, an overall system of performance management is not yet in place. A system needs to be developed which is appropriate for the Council size and scope of activities.	Performance management needs to be developed through: a) Members setting out Council's main aims and objectives b) use and regular reporting of Pi's and targets c) service <u>review process</u> .	Appropriate systems will be explored as Best Value develops. The system put in place will depend upon which Pi's and comparators are decided upon.

## Budgets (2000101 and 2001102)

Details of budgets for financial years 2000/01 and 2001/02 showing income and expenditure appear below:

	2000/2001		2001/2002	
	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure
Administration	7924	173469	13034	161070
Burke Street Offices		2478		
Parks and Open Spaces	2698	119047	2390	967
Park Sports Pavillion	450	5273	450	4045
Jubilee Field Pavillion	450	4444	450	3850
Cemetery	6945	49540	7025	40553
Allotments	778	1255	763	390
Amenity Lighting		3927		1165
Highways		11139		8815
Public Conveniences		9442		6740
Coarse Fishing Area		625		105
Miscellaneous		2745		2870
Business Studies Centre		3800		2045
Shildon Skill Centre		4057	1372	
Recreation	400	13855	300	12225
Transport Subsidy		1000		
Temp Office Accom	895	1421	840	
LGA 1972, Section 137		23150		22681
Town Centre Redevelopment		9000		9000
SRB BID 2001/2002 (YR 5)		27636		27228
Building Maintenance				12500
Cemetery (Extension)		7500		
Loans and Leases				104700
Civic Hall	217811	283380	222202	272775
	<b>238351</b>	<b>758183</b>	<b>248826</b>	<b>789494</b>

Over the past three years, income and expenditure changes have mainly been due to national pay awards, inflation, and financial support of the Single Regeneration of Shildon both for existing and new schemes.

During the year the Town Council renegotiated its loan debt with the Coop Bank plc and in so doing was able to raise an additional £250,000 to support the major redevelopment and extension of the Hackworth Park without any increase in the normal repayments of debt. The scheme is also to be partly funded through the Single Regeneration Budget and hopefully with grant aid through the Heritage Lottery (£500,000) and the Coalfields Community Campaign (£200,000) although the latter is subject to a further application for funding later in the year because of the heavy initial demand from other local authorities and other organisations.

Separately, the Town Council is proceeding with the provision of a Skateboard Park in the Hackworth Park hopefully with grant aid through Sport England. We are shortly to move towards the preparation of an Action Plan (having successfully found our way through the initial vetting procedure). It is at that time Sports England will take a final decision, possibly by the middle of the year which will allow the scheme to proceed. The cost will be in the region of £80,000 and any charge to be met by the Shildon Town Council will be provided by a contribution from the proceeds of sale of the Natter Hut and other properties in the pipeline. This will not be a direct cost to the ratepayer in financial year 2001/02 and no provision has been so included in the budget. There will be a cost associated with maintenance, repair, upkeep and inspection in later years, much of which will be covered by savings in other work areas.

## **HAVE WE IMPROVED?**

We believe we continue to improve on a year to year basis. Changes have been implemented in working practices in the Direct Works Section and at the Shildon Civic Hall the two main review areas dealt with in the first year of the Best Value programme.

An additional part time member of staff has been recruited with the Direct Works Section to deal mainly with problems of damage, litter and broken glass in the Hackworth Park, particularly in the area of the children's play equipment and the Resthouse. The member of staff (together with others) is to be given special training to deal with the daily, weekly, and monthly inspection and repair of the proposed Skateboard Park equipment and the children's play equipment.

At the Shildon Civic Hall we continue to introduce new menus and service in order to meet the increasing competition from other catering establishments and at the same time improve our trading position on a year to year basis.

The publication of the Rural White Paper has been thoroughly welcomed by the Town Council even bringing as it does a new working environment for Parish and Town councils, most of which (we have only recently been informed) is to be implemented by 1 11 April 2001. This will bring with it much more responsibility to meet the needs and demands of the community both in terms of new types of service but also (possibly) taking over some devolved powers from principal local authorities.

The mix of Best Value and new responsibilities will keep all of us busy for an exceedingly long period of time.

## **DIRECTWORKS**

Employees of Direct Works Section receive a weekly bonus payment based on levels of achievement and the removal of demarcation lines. This means an employee can be asked and required to carry out a range of tasks and jobs that lie within the normal range of work with local government.

These include:

- Grass cutting
- Ditch digging and cleaning
- Litter collection
- Burials and related matters
- Painting and decorating
- Minor building repairs
- Maintaining shrub areas and tree surgery
- Planting and maintenance of roundabouts
- Maintenance of bowling green
- Supervision of bowling green and tennis courts
- Inspection and recording of matters of health and safety (including condition of headstones in cemeteries, play equipment etc) where there are specific responsibilities placed on the Town Council Committee of Cemeteries including closed burial grounds. Also All Saint's Churchyard on a rechargeable basis less financial support provided by the Town Council.
- Installation and removal of Christmas Decorations.

This is not an exhaustive list but is given to illuminate the range of work carried out by employees of Direct works to provide flexibility and to control costs

It needs to be mentioned employees of Direct Works also give time freely and without payment in a variety of ways throughout the year and particularly at Christmas because of their work related support of the local community.

## **ACCOUNTING SYSTEMS**

We are presently examining the introduction of new methods of accounting following on the publication of the Rural White Paper and the introduction of Best Value.

## **CONSULTATION**

The Town Council continues to use questionnaires, newspapers and the media generally to promote discussion and invite comment from the public on a number of projects including:

- Hackworth Park (Improvements) - Heritage Lottery Fund
- Hackworth Park (Extension) Phase 1 Play Equipment
- Shildon Recreation Ground - Coalfields Regeneration
- Skate Board Park - Sports England and Local Community Organisations
- Hackworth Park (Extension) Phase 11 : Building Entrances
- Hackworth Park Resthouse - Restoration and Extension

Groundwork Trust (East Durham) on behalf of the Town Council has also consulted with locals, schools, children and parents on the type and extent of the new play equipment to be located in the Hackworth Park.

In all of these matters the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act have been taken into account.

## **CRIME AND DISORDER**

The Town Council continues to work closely with the local police in attempting to deal with problems of crime and social disorder on the town and now takes part in the work of the Shildon Community Safety Committee.