



# *Shildon Town Council*

**BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

**REVIEW : YEAR 2**

**2001/2002**

## **Introduction**

The Town Council is pleased to announce that in June 2001 it was granted the sum of £324,500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to be used towards the cost of restoration of the Hackworth Park, and, in particular, the improvement of the Rest House, Bandstand and Water Fountain and the reconstruction of the dwarf boundary wall, entrance gates and pillars

The moneys will also go towards the cost of re-constructing footpaths and the extension of the existing planting and tree belts, and other horticultural features throughout the area.

In March 2002, the Heritage Lottery Fund made available an additional sum of £28,300 in order that the re-constructed Rest House meets the requirements laid down by the Disability Discrimination Act, in order to make it suitable for use by the disabled and handicapped.

It is anticipated that all of the work and improvements to the existing Hackworth Park will be completed by the early part of 2004. In the meantime, work is nearing completion on the construction of dwarf walls and railings and main entrance gates and pillars, and is presently being completed by J.W.S. Landscapes. This should help revive memories of the Park pre-war and set the scene for the next major development.

In February 2002, Sport England awarded the sum of £76,576 towards the cost of providing a Skate Park, which is to be located centrally within the original Hackworth Park. Work has already started on site due to be finished in the early part of July, after which there will be an official opening sometime later that month. A public announcement of the date will be issued later.

All of these additional funds made available by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Sport England, when added to moneys made available under the Single Regeneration Budget (£250,000) and directly by the Town Council (£250,000), will come close to £1M, and has been accomplished without any increase in the general level of rates.

Street entertainment is now provided in the town centre during early summer and is free to local people and visitors and has proved to be highly successful.

Christmas 2001 saw the Town Council in conjunction with the Butterwick Hospice provide a series of entertainment including an "Angels and Kings" procession by young children through the town centre a Carol Service in the open air and a visit by Santa Claus. A sum in excess of £100 was raised by collection for the Hospice.

## **Hackworth Park**

A local group called “Friends of the Hackworth Park” has been formed, comprising of representatives from several local community organisations, who will assist the Town Council in identifying standards of management and maintenance in the Hackworth Park.

The Group will also have the opportunity to put forward their views and recommendations on the furnishing and decoration of the Rest House and of its later use by themselves and other community groups.

## **Skate Park**

Young people have indicated they will be willing to form a “Friends of the Skate Park” Group to assist in its management and promotion, and to ensure all local people, whatever their age, race, nationality or colour, are able to enjoy the facility. The Group will assist the Town Council in meeting these objectives and to encourage a wider participation and support throughout the town and the rest of the district area.

It is anticipated that young people will be invited to take part in a local competition to name the Skate Park, and this will be identified on site by an appropriate notice board.

The work on providing the new Skate Park, having been put out to tender, is now being carried out by Hellens Limited, at a cost of £89,569.00. The Town Council is meeting the difference in cost between the grant aid awarded by Sports England and the total cost of the project.

## Audit Commission Action Plan

In June 2001, the Audit Commission set out an Action Plan, and this, and the Town Council's response, is set out below:-

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Shildon Town Council's Response</b>
<p>This year's B.V.P.P. leaflets do not adequately reflect all of the Best Value work undertaken by the Council during the year. Also there is scope to review the format and layout, particularly in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Producing one document rather than two</li><li>• Ensuring that this document is clearly labelled as the Council's Best Value Performance Plan.</li></ul>	<p>The Council should review the format, content and layout of its B.V.P.P. before producing next year's document.</p>	<p>The Town Council is aware that the progress that it has made and the introduction of Best Value has reached a level well in advance of the programme target of five years. Perhaps one of the original authorities to introduce a bonus scheme based on achievement, the introduction of non-demarcation lines of working within the Direct Works Section and the involvement of staff in a meaningful way in the daily running of the Town Council. There are many other areas of which the Town Council can be proud, not least the setting up of one of the largest training organisations in the north east, i.e. Shildon and Darlington Training Limited and being the originator of the Shildon and Sedgfield Development Agency. Members believe that this is part of the ongoing process and good management and not necessarily something that needs to be promoted beyond its meaning.</p> <p>However, the Town Council does accept that it should be more descriptive in the way it promotes its best practice over the years and currently.</p>

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Shildon Town Council's Response</b>
<p>Strategic documents need to be produced for all of the Council's main activities and functions. The published B.V.P.P. would also have benefited from a fuller explanation of what the Council is trying to achieve.</p>	<p>The Council should produce strategic documents setting out the main aims and objectives for all of its key activities and functions, and should include summaries of these in its published B.V.P.P. each year.</p>	<p>The Town Council has already identified its main aims and objectives when meeting and carrying out of the tasks given to it by Parliament under the Local Government Act 1972 and other current legislation.</p> <p>The Town Council is also aware that the five year introductory period for Best Value across all of its functions will be met in a much shorter period of three years, but much work remains to be done. Strategy documents have been produced for all of the functions carried out by the Direct Works Section and the Shildon Civic Hall. These have been referred to in detail in B.V.P.P.'s. There remains all of the other functions of the Town Council for which a proper strategic document will be produced by the end of 2002, well inside the reduced period introduced by the Town Council for such reviews.</p>
<p>Members need regular and detailed information so that they can review performance and evaluate the progress being made on Best Value. The Council has made good progress in this respect but there is still scope to develop further.</p>	<p>Members should receive more regular information on the cost and quality of services and activities undertaken by the Direct Works Department.</p>	<p>The Town Council already receives substantial information on the cost and quality of services and activities undertaken by the Direct Works Section. This may be supplemented by information already on hand for management purposes showing weekly aggregate expenditure on salaries and wages for specific functions, i.e. parks and open spaces, cemeteries, etc.</p>

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Shildon Town Council's Response</b>
<p>The Council has undertaken several useful consultation exercises but has not carried out a general survey to assess the public's overall satisfaction with services.</p>	<p>The Council should carry out a general survey to assess the public's overall satisfaction with services.</p>	<p>The Town Council has, over many years, conducted public meetings and consultations with local groups about various policy matters. Surveys are carried out by the Shildon Civic Hall to obtain the public's response to the price and quality of meals, whilst other surveys have been made of schoolchildren and adults on types of play equipment and other services.</p> <p>At some time the Town Council will include within the B.V.P.P. document, annually, a questionnaire to identify levels of public satisfaction.</p>
<p>The Council has made some comparisons with others when undertaking service reviews but has not participated in regional or national Best Value or benchmarking groups.</p>	<p>Making comparisons with others is an important aspect of Best Value and the Council needs to develop this by participation in regional and national Best Value Groups.</p>	<p>The Town Council believes it has been ready to make comparisons with other Local Authorities in terms of the quality and value of services as already described, but that many others are not in a like position. A proper exchange of information is necessary in order to make a true comparison, and is an essential element, which is not yet available generally. When the situation improves then a proper comparison, will be made with others.</p>
<p>The Council has rejected the use of a standard methodology for undertaking service reviews but needs to develop some sort of standardised approach to demonstrate that every service review is undertaken properly.</p>	<p>The Council should ensure that it can demonstrate that all service reviews have been sufficiently challenging and have complied with the requirements of the "4 C's".</p>	<p>The Town Council believes it can demonstrate that all service reviews already undertaken have been sufficiently challenging and will, when the time is appropriate, meet with the requirements of the "4 C's", which it is already able to do so.</p>

Issue	Recommendation	Shildon Town Council's Response
<p>Service reviews undertaken to date have identified a number of changes and improvements for the future. It is important that the Council reaps the benefit of this hard work by ensuring that agreed action is implemented promptly.</p>	<p>The Best Value Sub-Committee should receive regular progress reports on implementation of action agreed following service reviews and consultation.</p>	<p>The Best Value Sub-Committee already receives regular progress reports on the implementation of action following appropriate service reviews and consultation. There are several outstanding matters still to be dealt with mainly concerned with the award of £353,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to further improve the existing Hackworth Park and the possible provision of a skate board park with grant moneys made available by Sport England.</p> <p>There remains the need to identify and negotiate with appropriate local organisations in order to secure the future use of the Hackworth Park Rest House for community purposes and the setting up of a "Friends of the Hackworth Park" Group, none of which is possible at the present time, although all the contractual arrangements with the Heritage Lottery Fund, and possibly Sport England, have been completed and implemented.</p>
<p>A number of P.I.'s and targets have been developed by the Council as part of Best Value Service Reviews and B.V.P.P. leaflets would have benefited from including this type of information.</p>	<p>Published B.V.P.P. leaflets should include the detailed P.I.'s and targets which have been developed as part of Best Value.</p>	<p>As mentioned, the Town Council has developed and prepared local performance indicators and quality standards in July 2000, more than 12 months ago. This information has been provided in detail to the Audit Commission, District Audit, National Association of Local Councils, and from them to the D.E.T.R. (as was). No national response or information has yet been circulated by any or all of these bodies to Best Value Parish and Town Councils. The Town Councils awaits the results with baited breath.</p>

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Shildon Town Council's Response</b>
B.V.P.P.'s should include comparisons with other authorities, so that the reader can put performance in perspective.	The Council's published B.V.P.P. should include comparative data to help put performance in perspective.	As soon as other Best Value Local Authorities are in a position to exchange appropriate comparative data, including local performance indicators, it will then be possible to complete this work finally. As mentioned elsewhere, this information has been available from the Town Council since July 2000.

The responses made by the Town Council have been accepted in their entirety by the Audit Commission.

## **Budgets (2001/2002 and 2002/2003)**

Details of budget for the financial years for 2001/02 and 2002/03 appear below:

	<b><u>Budgeted</u></b>		<b><u>Budgeted</u></b>	
	<b><u>2001/02</u></b>	<b><u>2001/02</u></b>	<b><u>2002/03</u></b>	<b><u>2002/03</u></b>
	<b><u>Income</u></b>	<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>	<b><u>Income</u></b>	<b><u>Expenditure</u></b>
	<b><u>£</u></b>	<b><u>£</u></b>	<b><u>£</u></b>	<b><u>£</u></b>
Administration	13,034	161,070	12,963	163,644
Gardens Guild	-	-	950	
Parks and Open Spaces	2,390	96,737	5,079	128,740
Park Sports Pavilion	450	4,045		
Jubilee Fields Pavilion	450	3,850		
Cemetery	7,025	40,553	7,630	42,925
Allotments	763	390	788	390
Amenity Lighting	-	1,165		1,165
Highways	-	8,815		6,245
Public Conveniences	-	6,740		6,103
Coarse Fishing Area	-	105		80
Miscellaneous	-	2,870		2,735
Business Studies Centre	-	2,045		2,765
Shildon Skill Centre	1,372	-	1,372	
Recreation	300	12,225	190	14,325
Transport Subsidy	-	-		
Temp Office Accommodation	840	-		
L.G.A. 1972 : Section 137	-	22,681		23,125
Town Centre Redevelopment	-	9,000		10,000
S.R.B. Bid 2001/2002 (Yr.5)	-	27,228		25,728
Buildings Maintenance	-	12,500		12,500
Cemetery (Extension)	-	-		
Loans and Leases	-	104,700		100,073
Civic Hall	222,202	272,775	241,079	288,694
	<b><u>£248,826</u></b>	<b><u>£789,494</u></b>	<b><u>£270,051</u></b>	<b><u>£829,237</u></b>

Over the past three years increases in expenditure by the Town Council have been mainly due to national pay awards and inflation, although financial support from the Single Regeneration Budget for existing and new schemes (excluding the present work on the original Hackworth Park and the Skate Park) amount to some £108,000 which has been spread equally over the six year period of the scheme a major part of this expenditure has been in support of other local authorities involved in the redevelopment of the Town Centre. All of this expenditure by the Town Council, as well as all of the work carried out by the Single Regeneration Budget Programme by other Authorities was discussed and agreed at a number of public meetings held at the Shildon Civic Hall, in 1996. It is the belief of the Town Council that this expenditure has radically improved the township of Shildon.

Not included within the budget for the financial year 2002/03, is the refurbishment of the public conveniences at Central Parade, Shildon; most of this cost will now be met out of a compensation award negotiated with U.K. (Coal Mining) Limited, for the winning of coal at Eldon Allotments. This will be a real saving to the Town Council and local people.

### **Have we Improved?**

The Town Council reviews, on an annual basis, methods of working of the Direct Works Section and the Shildon Civic Hall and identifies any improvements in working practices and trading procedures.

A range of new horticultural equipment, including tractors, grass cutting equipment and vehicles, is to be purchased for the Direct Works Section. This will allow better use of manpower resources and improve standards.

We believe that the present arrangements within the Direct Works Section, which allows employees the right and opportunity to suggest new working practices and arrangements and the type of equipment in use, will continue to bring real benefits, both in morale and cost benefits in future years.

Trading at the Shildon Civic Hall continues to improve significantly year on year, new menus and pricing to meet increasing competition are monitored on a regular basis. The support of management and other staff at the Shildon Civic Hall is crucial in meeting these objectives.

A full time additional member of staff has been recruited by the Direct Works Section to deal with problems of damage, litter and broken glass in the Hackworth Park. The member of staff (together with others) has been, and will continue to receive special training, in order to deal with the daily, weekly and monthly inspection and repair of Skate Board equipment and children's play equipment.

By arrangement with the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Town Council is preparing a Park Management Plan which will identify, not only the detailed history of the town and the Park itself, but will also take a view on the extent and range of facilities, the problems associated with the area, and the introduction of much higher standards of maintenance and management, when all the work of improvement has been completed in 2004.

This document, which comprises nine volumes, will be a proper historical record of the capital works carried out to ensure proper standards of management and maintenance; and it will also provide a reference point for future management to ensure that such standards can continue to be identified and improved upon.

The Town Council is also preparing a Business Plan for the Park which will identify the management and financial commitments of the Town Council over a rolling programme of ten years.

In parallel, the Town Council is in discussion with its workforce within the Direct Works Section to look at how this Project Management Document can be extended to include all their other work. It is hoped that this will be completed by the early part of 2003.

Central Government has recently published a Consultation Paper on Regional Government. When taken in tandem with the Rural White Paper, this will give the Town Council and other Parish and Town Councils, the opportunity to take on responsibility for many local services which, up to now, have been carried out by principal Local Authorities. It is anticipated that this work will be done on an agency basis with money following the service.

The Town Council has already agreed that it would wish to be classed as a "Quality Town Council" and qualify to carry out all of this agency work as included in the Rural White Paper, details of which will be included in the next Best Value Performance Plan review.

## **Direct Works**

As reported in earlier Best Value Performance Plan Review Documents, employees of the 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 associated with local government. These include:-

- Grass cutting.
- Ditch digging and cleaning.
- Litter collection.
- Burials and related matters.
- Painting and decorating.
- Minor building works.
- 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.

The Town Council has recently agreed, in principle, to carry out the maintenance of the grassed areas forming the new Millennium Green located at Dean Gardens, Shildon. This work will start in April 2003, most of the cost being met out of the normal budget expenditure made possible by the re-allocation of resources and improved working practices.

It should again be mentioned that employees of the Direct Works Section also give their 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**

The Town Council awaits a further announcement by Central Government insofar as this relates to the extension of responsibilities as identified in the Rural White Paper and the Referendum on the introduction of Regional Government.

During the year the Town Council has introduced payments of salaries and wages by Banks Automatic Credit System (B.A.C.S.). It is hoped to introduce this system where appropriate for the payment of outstanding invoices within the next twelve months.

## **Consultation**

In accordance with Best Value principles, the Town Council continues to use questionnaires, newspaper and the media generally to promote discussion and invite comments from the public on a number of projects.

Within this report, reference has been made to the formation of two support groups, i.e. "Friends of the Hackworth Park" and "Friends of the Skate Park". Representation on these bodies is not closed and the Town Council would wish to invite anyone with real interest in contributing towards the life of the community with regard to the Hackworth Park Rest House and the Skate Park to let them know.

Groundwork Trust (East Durham) on behalf of the Town Council also continues to consult with local schools, children and parents on a range of matters, and always the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act have been taken into account.

## **Crime and Disorder**

The Town Council welcomes the reduction in levels of crime across the town and will continue to work closely with the local Police to deal with this and social misbehaviour. With this in mind, the Town Council now takes part in the work of the Shildon Community Safety Committee, as well as having the local Police Sergeant attend monthly meetings of the Town Council to report on crime and related matters.

## **Corporate Health Performance Indicators**

Although not required by current legislation, the Town Council believes that local people should be aware of a range of other detailed information that will give the community an insight into the management of the Town Council and its workforce.

Indicator Code	Description of Indicator	Current Performance 2001/02	Previous Performance 2000/01	Target 2002/03	5 year Improvement Target
BVP18	The percentage of undisputed invoices which were paid in 30 days.	98%	98%	98%	N.A.
BVP111	The percentage of senior management posts filled by women.	40%	40%	N.A.	N.A.
BVP112	The proportion of working days/ shifts lost to sickness absence.	* 2.77%	3.23%	N.A.	N.A.
BVP113	Voluntary leavers as a percentage of staff in post.	Nil	Nil	N.A.	N.A.
BVP114	Early retirements (excluding ill health retirement) as a percentage of the total workforce.	Nil	Nil	N.A.	N.A.
BVP115	Ill health retirements as a percentage of the total workforce.	Nil	Nil	N.A.	N.A.
BVP116	The number of staff declaring that they meet the Disability Discrimination Act disability definition as a percentage of the total workforce.	2.5%	2.5%	N.A.	N.A.
BVP117	Minority ethnic community staff as a percentage of the total workforce.	None	None	N.A.	N.A.

\* National average 6.93% other local authorities.

## **Standard Performance Indicators**

The Town Council has prepared a comprehensive system of local performance indicators for the Direct Works Section, which have been available for competition and comparison purpose since July 2000. We await, with interest, the opportunity to demonstrate our levels of effectiveness

### **General**

The Government's Best Value initiative placed a legal duty on Local Authorities from the 1st April 2000 and on the Town Council a requirement to review all of its functions within a five year period. However, as a result of Statutory Instrument 2002/305, this no longer applies, the aim being to allow Local Authorities to focus the review more effectively on both national and local priorities and areas of weakness. Further guidance on this review relevant to

Parish and Town Councils is expected from the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (D.E.T.R.) shortly.

The purpose of the review is to find better ways of providing services through making step change and deliver continuous improvement.

part of a programme of continued improvement, there will be implemented during the current financial year, the introduction of computer networking, with I.T. facilities being made available within the Council Offices for elected members, supported by a comprehensive library of statutes and regulations which, when taken together, should allow them to take a much wider view of those duties and responsibilities, as well as ensuring that they have access to information which may be unavailable to them in their normal representative role.

The Rural White Paper also requires elected Members and Officers to undergo a system of training, being one of the criteria to be met in order to qualify as a "Quality Town Council". The introduction of the computer networking, both internally within the Council Offices and externally with other Local Authorities, will hopefully bring with it better co-ordination and co-operation and allow the introduction of agency working on behalf of principal Local Authorities.

It is hoped that the extension of communications technology will deliver more efficient and effective services.

A web site has also been established ([w.w.w.shildon.gov.uk](http://www.shildon.gov.uk)) featuring information about the work and responsibilities of the Town Council; identifying elected members; publishing decisions taken at meetings of the Council and its Standing Committees; also the history of the Town of Shildon. The Town Council can be contacted by e-mail ([shildontc@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:shildontc@yahoo.co.uk)) or by fax (01388-775227).