

**SHILDON TOWN COUNCIL**

**PERFORMANCE PLAN 2006  
AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS  
2005/06**

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## **Introduction**

The Local Government Act 1999 placed, with effect from April 2000, a duty of Best Value on local authorities.

Parish and Town Councils with a budget in excess of £500,000 were, under the provisions of the Act, subject to Best Value and therefore, since April 2000, Shildon Town Council has been required to satisfy the duty of Best Value.

Meeting this duty requires a Best Value authority to consult local people, review all of its functions periodically, measure its performance and produce a performance plan which will be audited by an independent auditor. The authority is required to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way they exercise their functions having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The central purpose of Best Value is to make a real and positive difference to the services which local people receive from their authority and consequently the engagement of all elected Members is pivotal. Elected Members need to be involved not only in the processes associated with Best value but in owning the outcomes which the processes are designed to deliver.

This is the sixth Performance Plan produced by the Town Council but it is important to recognise that the Plan is not an end in its own right. It is simply a means to an end and is less important than either the planning process which underlies it or the planned improvements that result.

## **Statement of Responsibility**

Shildon Town Council is responsible for the preparation of this Performance Plan and for the information and assessments set out in it and the assumptions and estimates on which they are based. The Council is also responsible for setting in place appropriate performance management and internal control, systems from which the information and assessments included in the Plan have been derived. The Council is satisfied that the information and assessments included in the Plan are in all material respects accurate and complete and that the Plan is realistic and achievable.

## The Town Council

Shildon Town Council was formed on local government reorganisation in 1974.

The Council has 17 elected Members, details of whom can be found in Appendix 3, and elects a Town Mayor each year. All of the Members are elected for a four-year term of office and the last elections were held in May 2003. The Council is based in the Council Offices in Civic Hall Square with the Direct Works section located in the depot at Harker Street.

The main responsibilities of the Council are as follows:

- Civic Hall
- Parks and open spaces including Hackworth Park
- West Road cemetery
- 3 play areas
- Skatepark
- Tennis courts, bowling green and 3 football pitches
- 11 allotment sites
- Operation of public toilets at Hackworth Park, Cheapside and Furnace Pit
- 25 bus shelters
- Christmas illuminations
- Provision of grant aid scheme
- Community events during the year
- Partnership working with Shildon Community Safety Group, CAB and the Shildon Centre
- Support for CCTV system

## Response to previous audit and inspection report

The Audit Commission determined that the Performance Plan 2005 complied in all significant respects with the relevant legislation and statutory guidance. The Commission has previously concluded that the Council takes its Best Value responsibilities seriously and achieves a balance between its statutory duty and a realistic approach given its limited resources.

For 2005 the Commission concluded that there were no matters identified which required a report to the Council and there were no recommendations to make on procedures relating to the Plan.

The Commission did however provide feedback on their findings as follows:

- Progress on agreed recommendations and development of performance information has been limited due to the priority given to the attainment of Quality Status and the development of the Parish Plan.
- The Statement on Contracts was not included in the Plan as no contracts involving the transfer of staff were awarded during the year.
- A limited number of local performance indicators are included in the Performance Plan. Details of performance against targets is not linked to performance indicators in the Plan or routinely monitored and reported to Members. Comparison with other similar councils has historically been difficult. It is recognised that the Council is to engage with the Best Value Town Council Group with a view to developing better comparative information.
- The Council did not complete any best value reviews during the year as priority has been given to the development of the Parish Plan. Nevertheless the preparation of a three-year business plan for the Civic Hall and a review of allotment provision are planned for 2005/06.

## Corporate aims and objectives

The Audit Commission has previously expressed a view that the overall vision of the Town Council is unclear and consequently it is not easy to determine whether or not the Council's strategic objectives and priorities for improvement are drawn from its vision.

However it is clear that the Town Council's primary aim is to, together with others, improve the quality of life for the people of, and visitors to, the town. The Town Council also has given a commitment to strive for continuous improvement in the level of services provided based upon outcomes.

Whilst the above sit comfortably with the principles of Best Value it is acknowledged that greater clarity needs to be introduced and consequently, bearing in mind the need to work together with others to deliver the primary aim, the Council has agreed to the development of a Parish Plan to produce a vision for the town for the future.

It is envisaged that the Parish Plan will provide not only a focus for service providers for the future but will also enable the Council to redevelop its own strategic objectives and priorities in the light of the priorities identified in the completed Plan.

Work on the development of the Parish Plan is continuing and a community launch event was held in May 2006. The community appraisal required to inform the Plan will be undertaken in partnership with Sedgefield Borough Council based on a specification agreed by the Steering Group specifically for Shildon. The consequence of the above is that the timescales are very much dependent upon progress made by the Borough Council. The current timeframe for the appraisal and development of the Plan is as follows:

Tenders requested from prospective consultants	June 2006
Award of contract	July 2006
Household appraisal questionnaires	Sept 2006
Final draft appraisal	Feb 2007

## Review programme

Best value authorities are required to periodically review all of the services they provide. The purpose of the reviews is to consider new approaches to service delivery and to set performance targets that will deliver continuous improvement. In reviewing its functions an authority is required to:

- **Challenge** why, how and by whom a service is being provided
- **Compare** with the performance of others across a range of relevant indicators, taking into account the views of both service users and potential suppliers
- **Consult** local people and key partners in the setting of priorities and performance targets
- **Compete** openly and fairly, wherever practicable, as a means of securing efficient and effective services

For the purpose of determining its review programme the Town Council grouped its services into three logical areas:

- Direct Works
- Civic Hall
- Central Services

The Direct Works and the Civic Hall reviews were undertaken in 2001/02 with the Central Services review being scheduled for 2003/04. This review has not yet been undertaken as a consequence of a new Council being elected, the appointment of a new Town Clerk and the determination that the attainment of Quality Town Council status was to be a priority. Therefore it proposed that this review will be rescheduled to be undertaken following the attainment of Quality status. It is anticipated that the application for Quality status will be made in 2006/07 following the introduction of a regular parish newsletter.

Nevertheless the following were proposed for 2005/06 to be undertaken with due regard to the principles of Best Value:

- The preparation of a 3-year Business Plan for the Civic Hall – a first draft has been completed
- Review of allotment provision – this has been delayed due to staff shortages and will be commenced in 2006/07

## Direct Works

As has been referred to previously the Best Value review of Direct Works was undertaken in 2001/02 following which the implementation of the recommendations has been consistently monitored.

In addition the following specific performance targets were introduced for 2005/06 and remain applicable for 2006/07:

<b>Target</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
To continue to review working practice at Hackworth Park in accordance with the provisions of the Park management Plan	Ongoing
To continue to maintain and improve the appearance of roundabouts on approaches to the town with floral displays	Ongoing
To continue to preserve a multi-skilled workforce and working practice	Achieved
To continue to work in partnership with the Borough Council to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of environmental services	Ongoing

In addition the following specific targets have been introduced for 2006/07:

- To submit an application for support from the Local Improvement Programme for the introduction of a comprehensive CCTV system throughout Hackworth Park
- To seek funding for the refurbishment of the tennis courts in Hackworth Park

### Key Performance Information 2005/06

a)	No. of interments	34
	No..of ashes interred	14
	Cost of cemetery per head	£3.61
b)	No. of football fields provided and maintained	3
	No. of football fields occupied	3
c)	No. of public conveniences provided and maintained	3
	Cost of public conveniences per head	£0.58

d)	No. of bus shelters provided and maintained	25
	Cost of bus shelters per head	£0.46
e)	No. of parks provided and maintained	1
	Cost of parks and open spaces per head	£13.73
f)	No. of allotment sites provided	11

## Civic Hall

Performance against the targets set for 2005/06 has been as follows.

<b>Targets</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
To continue to improve the trading position of the Civic Hall	<p>The restaurant menu was reviewed and revised with effect from November 2005</p> <p>The main hall was redecorated to improve the attractiveness of the venue</p> <p>New uniforms were issued to all staff</p> <p>Overall trading performance for 2005/06 was below that estimated</p>
To conduct a customer satisfaction survey of users of the Civic Hall	A limited survey has been undertaken

The performance targets for 2006/07 are:

- Continue to take all steps to improve the trading position
- Further develop the 3-year business plan
- Undertake a further user satisfaction survey
- Undertake a full fire risk assessment of the premises etc

### Key Performance Information 2005/06

i) Income generation

	<u>Budget</u> <u>2005/06</u> £	<u>Actual</u> <u>2005/06</u> £
Bar sales	126,190	122,444
Food sales	140,070	143,785
ii) Overall trading position	(44,630)	(56,351)

ii) Satisfaction Survey

Was the server attentive and available	100%
Was the server helpful and courteous	100%

Excellent/Good

Quality of the meal	94%
Variety of the menu	94%
Value for money	100%
Facility organisation	86%
Cleanliness	94%

## Central Services

As has been referred to previously in this Plan the review of Central Services has not been undertaken to date for a variety of reasons and will be rescheduled following the attainment of Quality Status.

Performance against the targets set for 2005/06 has been as follows.

<b>Target</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
The attainment of Quality Status	Ongoing – submission delayed and will be submitted during 2006/07
Engage in the development of a Parish Plan	Achieved – Steering Group established with representation from the Town Council and is ongoing
Final accounts for 2004/05 approved before 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2005	Achieved and an unqualified approval given
Develop and adopt a formal complaints procedure	Achieved
Introduce public question time at Council meetings	Achieved
Develop a policy for the use of e-mail and the internet	Not achieved
Develop a 'whistleblowing' policy and an Anti-Fraud and Corruption policy	Achieved
Develop a Risk Management Strategy	Not achieved
To continue to promote outdoor events at a reasonable cost including Shildon Carnival, Fun Day and Christmas Procession	Achieved but decision taken to discontinue Shildon Carnival from 2006/07 due to a lack of volunteers
To continue to encourage and work with multi-agency initiatives to combat anti-social behaviour and crime in the town	Achieved
Continue to offer grant aid to local organisations	Achieved
Continue to part fund the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Community Safety Co-ordinator and the Shildon Centre	Achieved

The performance targets for 2006/07 are as follows:

- Continue to engage in the development of the Parish Plan
- Submit application for Quality Status
- Review the democratic arrangements of the Town Council
- Review the organisational structure of the Town Council
- Develop a policy for e-mail and internet usage
- Develop a Risk Management Strategy
- Introduce quarterly parish newsletter
- Undertake registration of all Council owned land
- To continue to promote outdoor events at a reasonable cost including Fun Day and Christmas Procession
- To continue to encourage and work with multi-agency initiatives to combat anti-social behaviour and crime in the town
- To continue to offer grant aid to local organisations
- To continue to part fund the Citizens Advice Bureau, Community Safety Officer and the Shildon Centre

Key Performance Information 2005/06

a) Proportion of working days lost to sickness	5.8
b) No.of organisations supported by grant aid	21
Cost of grant aid	£1,358
c) Cost of CCTV monitoring and maintenance per head	£0.61

## Comparative performance

During the year the Town Council registered with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to become, from 2006/07, a contributor to the service provided by NALC which collates comparative performance data from the 41 Best Value Local Councils and consequently comparative performance data from the following indicators will be considered from the 2007 Plan onwards subject to the practicality of obtaining the relevant performance data locally:

Average cost of interment

Satisfaction with cemetery

Satisfaction with allotments

Satisfaction with recreational grounds

% of planning applications to Borough Council within timescales

% of recommendations to amend or refuse an application by the Borough Council

% of invoices paid within 30 days

No. of working days lost to sickness

Average overall satisfaction rate for all services provided

## Financial Information 2006/07

The Town Council has approved a precept of £545,480 for 2006/07 which represents an increase of £6,830 or 1.27% over 2005/06. This results in a Band D council tax requirement of £196.57 which is an increase of £3.51 or 1.82%.

Details of the approved precept are as follows:

	£
Parks and Open Spaces	183,560
Civic Hall	110,570
Cemetery	55,100
Highways	6,640
Lighting	510
Public Conveniences	8,480
Fishing Area	(10)
Miscellaneous	2,070
Allotments	710
Gardens Guild	(520)
Section 137	12,750
Recreation	14,960
Skill Centre	(1,170)
Town Centre	9,540
Loans and Leases	89,680
Corporate and Democratic Core	72,610
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	565,480
Less Contribution from Reserves	20,000
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Precept 2006/07	545,480
	=====

## Conclusion

The future promises to provide some considerable challenges but also considerable opportunities for the Town Council.

The development of a Parish Plan and a vision for Shildon will provide the Town Council with the opportunity to undertake an informed review of its aims and objectives in order to ensure that the services provided in the future are appropriate to meet, or to contribute towards the achievement of, the aspirations for the town.

The commitment to seek the attainment of Quality status will, if successful, enable the Council to consider, together with the Borough Council, services that could be appropriate for delivery by the local Council so that they become more responsive to the needs of the local community.

The Town Council, Borough Council and Locomotion will need to work together to ensure that real economic benefit accrues to the town as a consequence of the success of the facility.

The Government appears intent on developing neighbourhood governance and consequently the role of the local councils and the Town Council needs to ensure that it is best placed to take advantage of this possible enhanced role in the future.

The Town Council would welcome comments on this Plan or any aspects of its services and if you wish to comment please contact us by either:

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