

Best Value

The Government requires all local authorities in England and Wales to *‘make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way, in which they exercise their functions, having a regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness’*. These ‘Best Value Reviews’ (BVR’s) have to be based on 4C’s:

Challenge why, how and by whom a service is being provided;

Secure **comparison** with the performance of other providers across a range of relevant performance data;

Consult local taxpayers, service users, partners and the wider business community in the setting on new performance targets; and,

Use fair and open **competition** wherever practicable as a means of securing efficient and effective services.

In other words we are asking local people what they

need and want and trying to align our services or work in partnership with others to meet these in the most cost effective ways possible.

The Best Value Review Programme

We established a five-year programme three years ago. This included 14 reviews. All but one of the reviews has a theme-based approach. For example the ‘Professional Support Services’ review currently underway covers the following services: finance and audit, information services, legal services and personnel and training.

The Council reviewed the programme earlier this year and a number of changes have been made in response to changing local circumstances. We will be undertaking a further review of the programme during the year, which will also consider the best value reviews to be carried out after the current programme is completed.

Year 1 2000/1	Year 2 2001/2	Year 3 2002/3	Year 4 2003/4	Year 5 2004/5									
Environmental Contracts Refuse Collection Recycling Grounds maintenance Building cleaning Public conveniences Street cleaning	Promoting Stroud’s Economy Economic Development Town Centre Regeneration Car parks Tourism Commercial Property Management	Professional Support Services Accountancy & Audit Legal Services Information Systems Human Resources Completes March 31 st 03	Community Services Community Safety Concessionary Fares Elections and Electoral registration Grants to voluntary organisations Land charges Starts Apr 03 Completes March 31 st 04	Planning Planning Strategy Development Control Conservation & Listed Buildings									
					Culture Subscription Rooms Museum Service Arts Development Leisure outreach Grants to voluntary sector (culture related)	Promoting Stroud’s Environment Environmental Protection Food Safety Pest Control Licensing Completes May 31 st 03	Corporate Governance Administrative support Corporate administration (including Policy & Review) Emergency Planning Starts Apr 03 Completes Dec 03	Revenue & Benefits Council tax NNDR Housing Benefit Council Tax Benefit					
									Committee & Member Services Democratic Services Completes May 31 st 03	Active Leisure Dursley Pool Joint Use Centres Stratford Park Leisure Centre Starts Apr 03 Completes March 31 st 04	People’s initial contact with the Council Out of hours message service Facilities management Information & Public Relations		
												Caroline Service Completes Dec 02	Building Control Starts Apr 03 Completes March 31 st 04

Best Value Reviews 2002/3

In the last year we have completed Best Value Reviews of:

- Careline Services
- Professional Support Services
- Environmental Health.

However at the time of publication, the final reports had not been considered by Cabinet.

We have yet to complete reviews of:

- Committee and Member Services
- Tourism and Public Conveniences

Housing Best Value Reviews

We are seeking clarification from the Audit Commission to establish whether there will be a Housing Inspection over the next year, which would feed into the Corporate Performance Assessment process. Because we have also been carrying out work on a possible transfer of housing stock to a Registered Social Landlord it has been decided to postpone the best value reviews of housing services.

Careline

A 24-hour Helpline Service that benefits older people, those with a disability and people feeling vulnerable who need reassurance. A pendant linked to the telephone connects users to the helpline service.

Compare

Benchmarking focussed on customer levels, staff resourcing and cost for local authority, housing association and private company providers of Careline. It established that Stroud's service is competitively priced compared to housing providers but the charges applied by private companies tended to be twice the cost. In terms of staff resources, Stroud's service has lower staffing levels in comparison with other housing providers.

Consult

Three user surveys were carried out during the review. Overall satisfaction with the service was high, with high levels of customer care. A consultation meeting with the Primary Care Group for Stroud and Cotswolds acknowledged the benefits of Careline such as the support it gives to people who wish to go home

following hospitalisation and the reassurance it gives carers.

Compete

The pros and cons of providing this service was investigated for eight options for future service delivery. The concluding recommendation was to expand the service provided by Stroud District Council.

Improvements

Assistant Careline Officer post for 2003/04.

Professional Support Services

The provision of accountancy and audit services, information technology services, legal services and human resource services to the Council.

Compare

Benchmarking was carried out with professional groups including CIPFA and SOCITIM. Best Value Performance Indicators that were relevant to the services involved were also compared.

The results were favourable on cost comparison with overall costs for accountancy and audit, IT and Human Resources below average compared with other local authorities.

Consult

Staff, members, managers and budget holders were consulted during the review. This took the form of focus groups and questionnaires. Satisfaction with the services was found to be to be high. With the exception of Legal Services, external consultation was a challenge because of the inward focus of the services. An additional challenge was injected into the review by using the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) as a critical friend during the review. They provided valuable input at the interim and final report stages of the review.

Compete

All the services covered in the review currently provide their services using a wide range of methods. It is expected that the overall management of the services will remain with the Council with a mix of outsourced activities being utilised where it is not effective or efficient for Stroud District Council to provide them directly.

Improvements

Each of the services has a separate improvement plan however the following issues are included:

- Performance Management
- Extended Service
- Corporate Governance
- Infrastructure
- Training
- Staff
- Marketing
- Competency & Customer Focus
- Quality
- Financial Systems
- Financial Planning & Reporting
- Risk Management
- Large Scale Voluntary Transfer

Protecting Stroud's Environment

The provision of food and health and safety services, housing improvement services, pest control services, environmental protection services and licensing to the District.

Compare

Extensive benchmarking exercises were carried out that showed that overall we compare well on cost and quality. However, our pest control service's costs are higher than those of other authorities. We are in the top quartile on a national exercise of 79 authorities concerning housing improvements. However, we serve fewer statutory notices and take fewer prosecutions regarding food and health and safety than similar authorities. A benchmarking exercise led by Vale Royal Borough Council established that we are also in the top quartile of those authorities that took part for environmental protection and dog control. However, the licensing function, while above average, was outside the top quartile and the provision of a formalised out of hours service was below average for the group.

Consult

Food and health and safety consultation with business proprietors and members of the public that had used the

service demonstrated a high degree of satisfaction with 90% of proprietors stating the service was good or excellent.

Housing improvements consultation indicated 87% good or excellent service was received but wished to be better informed about progress with their enquiries.

A survey of customers of the pest control service revealed a 98% good or excellent service with possible service improvements including a better indication of the time of the visit, more information about the pests and treatment provided, the cost of the service and free treatments, and waiting time for an appointment being too long during busy periods.

Consultation with customers of the environmental protection services showed that 87% rated the service as good or excellent. It was evident that customers wished to be kept more up to date with the progress of their request.

Compete

Much of the work carried out within the environmental health service relates to statutory functions and there is not currently a developed market for this work in the private sector. Efforts to engage private sector consultants for food and health and safety work have revealed a shortage of available professionals.

The areas that are more likely to be open to competition include the pest control and dog warden services. The pest control service has lower charges than commercial companies and charges for commercial work are lower than for the seven other authorities compared with. There are a number of options available for the pest control service which include:

- Cease commercial contracts to enable swifter resolution of responsive service.
- Employ one operative to carry out commercial work as self-funding/profit making stand alone service.
- Only provide rodent treatment.
- Keep service as present but make minor improvements.
- Increase charges. In particular for commercial work.
- Offer overtime payments for additional work in busy periods to enable treatment at a safer and more convenient time for the public.

Enquiries with four other authorities that have attempted to externalise their dog warden service has

revealed little success in this respect. Interest was received in providing a stray dog service but not on the promotional aspects, responsible dog ownership and licensing functions. During a period of crisis when long-term sickness and a resignation led to no service being provided, no private sector companies were able to assist.

Improvements

A number of improvements are planned as a result of the review. These include:

- Reducing food safety enforcement work targets to enable increased health and safety enforcement activity.
- Reducing amount of time food and health and safety field officers spend in doing administrative work enabling more time undertaking their technical duties.
- Reconsider the policy of training student Environmental Health Officers and focus on food safety officers.
- Carry out survey of local businesses to update existing database.
- Identifying methods of increasing Health & Safety inspections whilst maintaining food safety inspections, including benchmarking of resources.
- Develop the Proactive Computer system to minimise administrative burden on Officers
- Reduce the amount of officer time spent on largely administrative tasks
- Organise a food business forum involving a cross-section of local business proprietors. Develop existing web-based systems (such as email alerts) to keep business proprietors better informed.
- Consider options for training new Food Safety Officers to ensure that the most appropriate use is made of student training resources.
- Continue efforts to establish alternative dog holding facilities to reduce cost of present arrangements
- Review of present arrangements for the out-of-hours service
- Increase services delivered electronically.
- Ensure customers are kept informed of the status and outcome of their enquiry.
- Review impact of LSVT on service demand including planning for increased Disabled Facilities grant applications.
- Review impact of LSVT on service demand for drainage work.
- Improve promotion of the Environmental Health Service by:
 - a) Raise awareness of non-service users of the scope of the service through improved marketing.
 - b) Provide performance information on the website.
 - c) Raise awareness in hard to reach groups.
- Review following aspects of Pest Control Service:
 - Review charging process and calculation.
 - Consider overtime payments for additional work in summer months.
 - Introduce appointment-based service, e.g. a.m. or p.m. time slot.
 - Review balance between commercial contracts, chargeable service and free treatments.
 - Structure service to best respond to requirements of Licensing Act.
 - Structure service to best respond to changes regarding HMO Licensing, change in enforcement and sellers pack.
 - Staff training and awareness required in relation to corporate issues including Freedom of Information Act, RIPA and Equalities etc.
 - Explore opportunities to improve consultation routes and methods. Greater contact with Town and Parish Councils
- Review job titles and roles and develop staffing plan to replace staff approaching retirement age
- Implement new Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy
- Produce and implement equalities Action Plan to ensure equal access to the service.

The Audit Commission will be undertaking an inspection of this Best Value Review in July 2003. As part of the inspection, the Audit Commission not

only evaluate the process we followed but the findings as well. This will include interviewing a number of staff, Councillors, partners and residents to find out their views on the service. We expect that the findings of this inspection will be made available later in the year and will be posted on our website.

Audit Commission Inspection Service and the Regeneration & Culture Best Value Review

The Best Value Inspectorate visited Stroud to inspect our review of Regeneration and Culture in September 2002. They looked at the results of the review, which was carried out during 2001, and judged the service to be 'fair' with 'promising prospects for improvement'.

Following the review, a report was produced. Below are the main recommendations of the Inspectorate.

- Complete a regeneration and cultural strategy in consultation with the community and stakeholders.
- Increase the involvement of residents and stakeholders in the development and improvement of services, and improve communication.
- Increase public awareness of the services through a co-ordinated marketing and promotional strategy for both culture and regeneration
- Improve the performance management of the services by:
- Ensure that the services are delivered efficiently and effectively by reviewing and concluding on options for different ways of delivering the services.

The latest version of the Improvement Plan has as far as possible taken on board the observations and recommendations of the Best Value Inspectorate. Three new recommendations (24-26) have been added as a result. These deal with the development of a Regeneration and Culture Strategy, improving project management practice and finishing a number of outstanding BVR activities.

A copy of the Audit Commission Inspection Service's report can be found at www.stroud.gov.uk as can the latest version of the Improvement Plan.

Some improvements over the last 12 months

The service continues to improve its performance, some of the highlights over the last 12 months include:

- The development of partnership based delivery mechanisms for the Regeneration and Culture Strategy that will be published in October 2003.
- Usage figures at the Museum are up by over 100% as a result of extending opening hours and the move to free admission.
- The Museum Services is also leading the regionally recognised Digital Stroud Project, involving the Library Service, County Archives, Learning and Skills Council and Stroud College.
- Community and voluntary groups in the district are now achieving the same levels of success as others when applying for Community Fund and New Opportunity Fund resources.
- The Council has entered into 3-year funding agreements, worth £300,000 p.a, with 10 locally important voluntary sector organisations. The communities of Cam / Dursley and Stroud secured Market and Coastal Town status from the RDA. This has delivered £100,000 of funding to develop local partnerships and regeneration strategies.
- The service has or is in the process of securing a number of major developments in partnership with the private sector including in Stroud a cinema and Homebase and in Dursley a Tesco's.
- The service has also transferred the Weavers House, Dursley to the Town Trust and matched RDA and local funding to allow the restoration of this landmark building.
- The Council is an enthusiastic member of the Cotswold Canals Partnership and has committed £1m of its capital resources to the restoration of the canals.
- The Council helped local communities secure £93,000 through the Gloucestershire Rural Transport Partnership for local initiatives. £631,000 was secured through the Rural Bus Challenge scheme in order to extend the village link scheme operating in the western area of the District. The community of Wotton-under-Edge was helped to secure £40,000 from the Countryside Agency for the Wotton Hopper service.
- Council funding to support regeneration through sport has been focused in 4 areas: social inclusion, sports development, health and projects for young people.

Environmental Contracts Best Value Review Improvement Plan

On the 1st April 2002 the second phase of the Multi-Service contract was introduced. This was the Refuse and Recycling Services and completed the implementation of the contract. Many items referred to in the Improvement Plan below were implemented as a result of this second phase, involving: extending the kerbside recycling service to all households, resolving the problems created by collecting refuse on Bank Holidays, establishing new collection round schedules and working towards achieving recycling targets.

Also during the 2002/03 period work proceeded on the rationalisation of the Public Conveniences within the District, and progress was made in increasing community involvement with land management through the Stroud Valley's Project.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTRACTS IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2000-2006

The following table outlines the progress to date of the five-year improvement plan that was agreed following the Environmental Contracts Best Value Review.

No	Objective	Implementation	Target date	Progress comments
1.	Improve standards of public conveniences in District.	<p>a) Commence strategy to reduce total number of public conveniences from 16 to 10 and improve service provision to remaining 10.</p> <p>b) Consult with Town and Parish Councils which are affected with possible closure of public conveniences.</p> <p>c) Include increased frequency of cleaning in new contract price.</p> <p>d) Negotiate closure or alternative management of 6 affected public conveniences.</p> <p>e) Commence improved cleaning and service in new contract (Phase 1).</p>	<p>5 April 2000</p> <p>April 2001</p> <p>Dec 2000</p> <p>Sept 2001</p> <p>Oct 2001</p>	<p>a) The Number of PC's open are now at 11 with effect from 17/03/03 due to the reopening of May Lane PC's on a temporary basis.</p> <p>b) Ongoing with last one, i.e. Dursley Town Council.</p> <p>c) Completed Dec 2000</p> <p>d) No.1 St. Mary's Painswick transferred 1st October 2001.No.2 – Moreton Valence demolished 11 June 2001.No.3 – Cam was demolished 26th November 2001.No.4 – Old Town Wotton-u-Edge was transferred to the Town Council on the 25th March 2002.No.5 – Kingswood was transferred to Kingswood Town Council on the 19th February 2003.No.6 – May Lane closed and boarded up 21st April 2002. Negotiations will continue with Dursley Town Council on submission of the Supermarket plans. Re-opened due to Town Council pressure on the 17th March 2003 – running costs being met by the Environment Fund.</p> <p>e) Started 1st October 2001</p>
2.	Improve management and maintenance of recycling bring sites.	<p>a) Review usage of brings sites and reduce/resite to maximise cost effectiveness.</p> <p>b) Standardise signage to and at recycling sites.</p> <p>c) Provide collection facilities at sites for residual rubbish which is not recyclable.</p>	<p>Oct 2001</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>a) Completed – further review to take place June 2003</p> <p>b) Completed</p> <p>c) Completed</p>
3.	Improve management and maintenance of recycling bring sites. Extend kerbside recycling service to all households within the District and range of recyclables to be collected. (Current recyclables collected paper: cans: glass).	<p>a) Obtain base price for current level of service in new contract.</p> <p>b) Secure funds within Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in order to achieve extended service.</p> <p>c) Negotiate with short-listed contractors to maximise level of service within District.</p> <p>d) Award Contract.</p> <p>e) Commence phase 2 of contract.</p>	<p>Dec 2001</p> <p>Feb 2001</p> <p>April 2001</p> <p>July 2001</p> <p>April 2002</p>	<p>a) – e) Completed</p>
4.	Resolve the problems created by not collecting refuse on Bank Holidays.	<p>a) Obtain base price for current level of service in new contract.</p> <p>b) Negotiate solution with short-listed contractors to ensure that all householders within the District receive refuse collection on the same day every week.</p> <p>c) Award contract.</p> <p>d) Commence Phase 2 of contract</p>	<p>Dec 2000</p> <p>April 2001</p> <p>July 2001</p> <p>April 2002</p>	<p>a) – d) Completed</p>
5.	Improve special collection service for bulky household refuse items	<p>a) Obtain base price for current level of service in new contract.</p> <p>b) Negotiate solution with short-listed contractors aiming for collection by appointment level of service.</p> <p>c) Award contract.</p> <p>d) Commence phase 2 of contract.</p>	<p>Dec 2000</p> <p>April 2001</p> <p>July 2001</p> <p>August 2003</p>	<p>a) Completed</p> <p>b) Completed</p> <p>c) Completed</p> <p>d) Appointment based</p>

No	Objective	Implementation	Target date	Progress comments
5.cont.				collections trailed with furniture recycling company – initially proved unsuccessful. Will instigate further trials
6.	Provide a green waste collection service	a) Negotiate with short-listed contractors to achieve at least partial service to District householders. (5000 properties). b) Award contract. c) Commence phase 2 of contract	April 2001 July 2001 April 2002	a) Completed b) Completed c) Changes to ABPO have prevented scheme from going ahead. Awaiting new Regulations from DEFRA (June 2003)
7.	Provide monitoring data for Councillors and key service managers.	a) Extract performance monitoring data from IT systems. b) Produce one off year report for period April 2000 – March 2001 to establish base line. c) Produce information reports on quarterly basis, identifying particular problem areas.	April 2001 May 2001 Start July 2001	Progressing
8.	New contract operations to be understood by Council staff.	Training to be carried out for key staff on operational procedures and contacts prior to start of new contract.	Aug/Sept 2001	Progressing
9.	Review of client side structure and staffing levels	a) Negotiation with preferred contractor on operational interaction with client side staff and possible transfer of staff to contractor. b) Report on level of staffing required for client side to Cabinet, advocating that any financial savings be re-invested into achieving future enhanced service level of contract. c) Implement appropriate staff changes.	July 2001 Sept 2001 April 2002	February 2003 – Environmental Contracts amalgamated with Environmental Health and also progressed towards the setting up of a Contact Centre.
10.	Establish operational protocols with new contractor.	Agree/Establish:- • Monitoring systems • Key performance indicators • Fleet • Partnership Board (Comprised of Councillors: Contractor Management: Client Officers: Other Representatives).	July 2001 to April 2002	Progressing
11.	Establish new collection round schedules for the new contract.	Agree:- a) New refuse schedules b) New kerbside collection schedules c) New organic collection schedules d) New street cleaning schedules	July 2001/ March 2002	a) Implemented b) Implemented c) Not applicable d) Implemented
12.	Establish protocol with new contractor promoting waste management issues	Agree:- a) Waste minimisation campaign b) Liaison with County Contract c) News items, events etc.	July 2001/ March 2002	Will progress through Partnership Board
13.	Achieve nationally recognised standards/awards.	Develop with contractor service standard improvements to achieve national accreditation.Eg Green Flag status for Stratford Park.	April 2004	Ongoing monthly meetings between Clients, Contractors, Cabinet Member and Stroud Town Council to progress
14.	Interface District waste collection contract with new short term (2 year) County Waste Disposal Contract.	Liaise with:- County Council County Contractor District Contractor	July/Aug 2002	Completed
15.	Review new collection round schedules Monitor and review progress of new contract. Increase community involvement in land management	Agree and implement any changes if found necessary a) Operation and development of agreed protocols. b) Performance monitoring of targets and PI's. c) Data extraction from client and contractor interfaced IT systems. d) Advise Cabinet/Council on achievements to date. e) Identify shortfalls or problem areas and advocate remediation or funding as required.	Aug/Sept 2003 April to Oct 2002	Action delayed from 2002 due to operational difficulties. On going

No	Objective	Implementation	Target date	Progress comments
16.	Monitor and review progress of new contract.	a) Explore opportunity for voluntary bodies to look after/ develop local amenity land sites b) Develop protocol for involvement in such sites.	Aug 2001 to Oct 2002	a) Working with Stroud Valley Project on site at Dursley b) Not yet developed
17.	Increase community involvement in land management	a) Explore opportunity for voluntary bodies to look after/ develop local amenity land sites b) Develop protocol for involvement in such sites.	Aug 2001 to Oct 2002	a) Working with Stroud Valley Project on site at Dursley b) Not yet developed
18.	Aim to achieve statutory recycling target	a) Monitor and review systems and progress to achieve or exceed 26% target. b) Advocate for changed systems, funding sources as necessary	March 2004	a) Achievement as of March 2003 – 20.2%. Estimated achievement by March 2004 21.5%. b) Unable to increase recycling rate to achieve target without central composting facility
19.	Aim to achieve higher statutory recycling target	a) Monitor and review systems and progress to achieve or exceed 36% target. b) Advocate for changed systems, funding sources as necessary	March 2006	To follow above

The Auditors Report

Our Best Value Performance Plan and our service improvement processes are audited by District Audit. They make a number of recommendations for improvement and the Council agrees an action plan in which we will deal with the issues that arise. The key issues are set out below:

2002/3 Best Value Audit (Statutory recommendations)

Auditor Comment/Recommendation	Council Comment/Action
We recommend the Council revisit and reinforce the existing arrangements for the production of BVPI's and targets by nominated officers, to ensure the accuracy of BVPI's prior to submission to the quality assurance process at the year-end.	<p>The Heads of Service with the Internal Audit Manager and the Policy & Review Manager undertook a BVPI 'Health Check' of all BVPI's. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that the definition for each BVPI was being used, • Establishing what documentation is kept regarding the definition, the process for calculation and responsibility. • Establishing whether the correct data being used to calculate the BVPI's. • Allocating a risk rating for each BVPI <p>Reports went to Strategic Team and Executive Board outlining progress as far as our ability to compile accurate BVPI's first time rather than having to wait for Internal Audit to see them at the end of the year. We hope that this will ensure that all BVPI's will be accurate not only at year end but during the year as well.</p>

Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI's)

The diagram below explains what the information in the following BVPI table means.

Indicator	2001/02 Actual	2001/02 District Average	2002/03 Target	2002/03 Actual	National Target (incl. date)	2003/4 Target	2004/5 Target	2005/6 Targets	Comments
Description of the performance indicator									Additional information about the service or performance can be found in here.

Information on our actual performance for 2001/02 is shown here

This is the average performance of all District Councils. It can be used to compare our results against others'.

This is the performance target we set ourselves for 2002/03

This is how we performed last year (2002/03)

Sometimes the Government set targets that they expect us to meet. If this is the case, then it is shown here.

These are the targets we have set for next three years

Corporate Health

Ref	Indicator	2001/02 Actual	2001/02 District Average	2002/03 Target	2002/03 Actual	National Target (incl date)	2003/4 Target	2004/5 Target	2005/6 Target	Comments
BV 1	Has the authority established a timetable for preparing a community strategy that works towards a long-term sustainable vision for the area? Yes/No	Yes	76% Yes							
BV 1a	Does the authority have a Community Strategy with the Local Strategic Partnership, for improving the economic, social and environmental well being in a way that is sustainable?			Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	