

Guildford Borough
Council

Guildford Spectrum

January 2001

Best Value Inspection

Version:

Draft 1



Best Value

The Government has placed a duty of best value on local authorities to deliver services to clear standards – of cost and quality – by the most economic, efficient and effective means available. Best value is a challenging new performance framework that requires authorities to publish annual best value performance plans and review all their services every five years.

From 1st April 2000, best value authorities are conducting best value reviews for all their functions over a five-year cycle. The Audit Commission has the responsibility for inspecting these reviews to determine whether authorities have complied with the requirements of the best value legislation and associated guidance

Authorities must show that they have applied the 4Cs of best value to every review:

- ◆ challenging why and how a service is being provided
- ◆ comparing their performance with others' (including organisations in the private and voluntary sectors)
- ◆ embracing fair competition as a means of securing efficient and effective services
- ◆ consulting with local taxpayers, customers and the wider business community.

Authorities must demonstrate to local people that they are achieving continuous improvement in all of their services. The Government has decided that each authority should be scrutinised by an independent inspectorate, so that the public will know whether best value is being achieved. The purpose of the inspection and of this report is to:

- ◆ enable the public to see whether best value is being delivered
- ◆ enable the inspected body to see how well it is doing
- ◆ enable the Government to see how well its policies are working on the ground
- ◆ identify failing services where remedial action may be necessary
- ◆ identify and disseminate best practice.

Contents

Best Value	2
Contents	3
Summary and Recommendations	4
Summary	4
Recommendations	6
1 Profiling Guildford Borough Council	8
Guildford Spectrum	10
2 Findings: How Good Are the Services?	12
Are the authority's aims clear and challenging?	12
Does the service meet the aims?	14
How does its performance compare?	17
3 Findings: Are They Going to Improve?	18
Does the BVR drive improvement?	18
How good is the improvement plan?	20
Will the authority deliver the improvements?	21

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

Guildford is a significant academic / retail / administrative centre, in west Surrey.

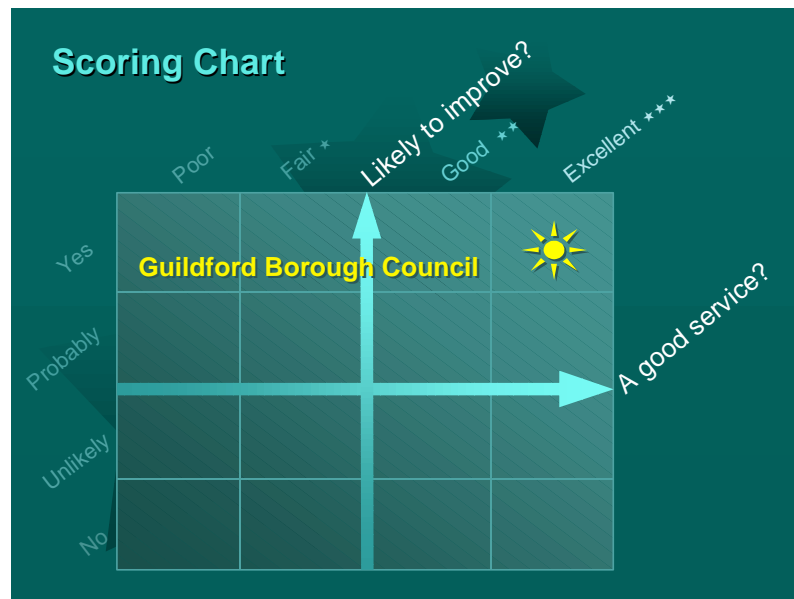
Guildford Borough has a population of around 125,000, with an even urban/rural split (60,000 people live in Guildford itself). The area is generally well off, with unemployment below 1%, although there are pockets of deprivation.

There is no overall political control of the Council. We inspected the Best Value Review of the Spectrum Leisure Centre in December 2000

- 1 The Guildford Spectrum Leisure Centre is the largest of its type in the country. Built at a cost of £28 million pounds in 1993 it attracts more than 1.7 million visitors every year.
- 2 Our inspection is guided by two judgements:
 - ◆ **How good is the Spectrum?** We have considered the views of users, partners, staff and how the centre meets the leisure needs of the community and contributes to broader corporate objectives.
 - ◆ **How likely is it to improve?** We have considered the best value review, the improvement plan, additional evidence gathered during the inspection and the commitment and capability of the council and centre management to change.

Scoring the Service

- 3 We believe that the Spectrum Leisure Centre provides an excellent service and that it will continue to get better.



The scoring chart displays performance on the two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale

4 How good is the Spectrum? We found that:

- ◆ The centre has clear aims and objectives, which link to the overall aims of the Council. These aims are reviewed annually within a broader five-year action plan.
- ◆ Users and partners were very satisfied with the delivery of programmes in the centre; activities were reviewed and amended following consultation.
- ◆ The centre performs extremely well. When measured against agreed targets and performance indicators (PIs) it consistently scores in the upper quartile of performance, nationally.
- ◆ It is also cost effective, providing an annual net revenue return to the Council in recent years. All surpluses are ring fenced and invested back into the centre.
- ◆ **Is it going to improve?** We found that :
- ◆ The management and staff of the Spectrum Centre have a very positive attitude to change and continuous improvement. Previous improvement plans have been implemented and amended in a manner consistent with delivering best value.

- ◆ The plans are intended to generate further improvement, with a continuing opportunity to benchmark against others and use quality control approaches. It has the highest Quest rating in the country (a national sport and recreation industry accreditation programme monitored by Sport England) and has also received Investors In People (IIP) accreditation.
- ◆ There is a history of management and staff at the Spectrum Centre delivering service improvements; the desire, and capability, also exists to see continuous improvement being achieved. They have adopted and are further developing innovative benchmarking and use of PI's in meeting local needs and cross cutting agendas.

In summary we have gathered evidence supporting the finding that the Spectrum delivers an excellent service to its users and partners and will continue to achieve significant improvements.

Recommendations

- 5 In order to support continuous improvement at the Spectrum we recommend that Guildford Borough Council:
 - ◆ Ensure that other services delivering of sport and leisure study and adopt the good practices implemented at the Spectrum. Other service areas within the council could also learn from the good practice of the Spectrum Centre.
 - ◆ Reflect good practice and evidence compiled in the Best Value Review in supporting the completion and adoption of the draft Leisure Strategy either separately or preferably as part of a broader Cultural Strategy. This document should establish common and consistent aims and objectives to be identified within Leisure Services.
 - ◆ Identify and implement innovative practice in the important areas of accessibility, programming for diversity and partnership. This should support encouraging more use of the centre from both current non-users and those current users who experience occasional programme complications.
 - ◆ Continue to progress and develop partnership initiatives, especially with the West Surrey Health Authority, Surrey University and the community transport network, which will help to deliver broader aims and objectives for the community's benefit. These will be concerned with, for example, developing linkages to the emerging health improvement agenda. It will also enable the local implications flowing from the development of the government's rural white paper to be implemented.

- ◆ Bring together the centre’s various action plans into one fully co-ordinated and consistent improvement plan.
 - ◆ Examine whether the member-monitoring group remains the most appropriate means of achieving effective member involvement in light of the modernisation agenda being implemented.
 - ◆ Address the issue of pressure on car parking space at the centre.
 - ◆ Progress the work being undertaken on staff recruitment and retention as the council moves toward single status’.
 - ◆ Promote opportunities for the use of Spectrum as a centre for the display of initiatives relating to crosscutting themes within the community, e.g. community art, education and recycling initiatives.
 - ◆ Review the user group consultation processes in order to ensure that they are consistent across the centre and fully linked to the various operational plans.
- 6 This report has been prepared by the Audit Commission (“the Commission”) following an inspection by the Commission under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 (“the 1999 Act”). This report is issued by the Commission in accordance with its duty under Section 13 of the 1999 Act.

Robert Persey
Trevor Smale
Inspectors

1 Profiling Guildford Borough Council

Guildford

- 7 The Borough of Guildford is one of 11 districts within the county of Surrey and covers an area of 104 square miles (22093 hectares). The principal town of Guildford accommodates approximately half of the borough's estimated population of 128,000 with the other half spread around a number of smaller towns and villages predominately to the west. Much of its countryside is very attractive, with large areas (up to 70%) designated as Green Belt.
- 8 Guildford is a major administrative, retail, commercial and educational centre whose influence extends well beyond the borough boundaries. With the A3 passing close by it is well connected to major transport links within one hour of London by car or rail and less than 15 minutes from junction 10 of the M25. The town has recently become the base for several regional organisations, including the Government Office for the South East and the South East of England Development Agency.
- 9 The area is recognised as buoyant and prosperous. There is a high proportion of owner-occupation (nearly 75%) and unemployment rates in the past 12 months have been as low as 1%. However there are pockets of deprivation within the Borough, with over 1600 households on the housing register. Ethnicity rates are currently running just below 1%.
- 10 The council spends £69.4 million each year providing services to local people.

The Borough Council

- 11 The mission statement for Guildford Borough Council states:

“We are committed to be the Local Government of Guildford, providing high quality and good value services to meet the needs of the local community.”
- 12 Their corporate documentation states that this will happen through:
 - Good management of our resources
 - Aiming to improve the quality of life
 - Protecting our heritage

- Supporting cultural and recreational activities
- Improving our environment
- Enabling the development of a strong local economy
- Always testing existing practice to see if it can be improved
- Striving to get things right first time, every time

13 The Council has 45 Councillors in 21 wards. With 19 Liberal Democrats , 16 Conservatives , 6 Labour , 3 independents and 1 vacancy there is currently no overall control. There are 6 Departments within the Council corporate structure;

- Chief Executives office
- Leisure Services Department
- Environmental & Planning Services Department
- Clerk & Solicitor's Department
- Borough Treasurer's Department
- Housing & Health Services Department

Responsibility for Spectrum comes within the Leisure Services Department.

14 The Council had drawn up a list of five strategic priorities that were listed in the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) . Whilst one relates to increasing the housing stock for the homeless and those on low incomes the other four have a relationship with leisure and recreation and include:

- ◆ Responding positively to inequality and disadvantage .
- ◆ Maintaining the viability of the borough as a centre of ...recreation, with particular emphasis on ...developing the borough as a Centre of Excellence in ...sports .
- ◆ Reducing the adverse impact of motor vehicles without reducing competitiveness
- ◆ Protecting and enhancing the quality of the borough's environment (working through Local Agenda 21)

- 15 The Best Value Performance Plan sets out the Council's own performance against 100 national targets. For leisure in 1998/99 the Borough's number of swim and other visits, at over 1.7 million, was the highest in Surrey.
- 16 To better understand local people's views on the changing service priorities the Council has engaged in a range of consultation techniques. A residents survey has been conducted every 3 years since 1993, a citizens panel was set up in 1998, and other activities such as focus groups, market research and customer forums have all been used. Many of these have been developed by Spectrum, which has also actively supported corporate initiatives.

Guildford Spectrum Leisure Centre The Spectrum was opened in 1993 at a cost of £28 million; the majority of the capital funded from land sales. The centre is owned and operated by the council and attracts over 1.7 million visits each year. It enjoys a broad appeal to residents with over 50% of the borough's population using the facilities in the past 12 months, compared to 10% nationally, and is also attractive to a wider market with 40% of users from outside the Borough. Over 70% of trips to the centre are by car and there are currently 750 parking spaces. The car park is a designated park-and-ride site primarily for commuters and shoppers to Guildford town centre. A regular bus service operates Monday – Saturday every 10 minutes into the early evening.

- 18 The Leisure Services Department was responsible for £6.1 million of the Council's total spending in 1999/2000 of £20.8 million. The centre's total income in 1999/2000 was over £5.2 million, with a net surplus of over £300,000 being achieved. It is involved in various crosscutting projects relating to health, youth, education and tourism.
- 19 The current contract was won by the Council under compulsory competitive tender (CCT) in 1997 and runs until the end of December 2003, with an option to extend to 2007. Spectrum employs about 250 full and part time staff.
- 20 Facilities provided include:
 - ◆ Olympic size ice rink
 - ◆ 32 lane ten pin bowling centre
 - ◆ leisure pool, 25m competition, teaching and diving pools
 - ◆ 10 court sports hall
 - ◆ health and fitness suite and aerobics studio

- ◆ 3 squash courts
- ◆ outdoor 400m athletics track and football pitch
- ◆ children’s play area and nursery / crèche provision (Speckys)
- ◆ a range of bar/ catering concessions

21 Spectrum’s mission statement is :

“To provide and manage profitably a comprehensive range of top quality leisure facilities which are accessible and which represent value for money for local residents and other potential users”

22 The centre’s commitment to customer service is embraced within the following statement from the draft leisure strategy: **“ there is never a second chance to make a good first impression”**.

2 Findings: How Good Is the Service?

Introduction

- 23 The Spectrum is a high profile facility. In gathering evidence we have concentrated on the:
- ◆ views of service users and partners and how programming meets their agreed needs.
 - ◆ costs of the service, including the pricing mechanisms used to attract all users within a viable and rational framework.
 - ◆ contribution Spectrum makes to meeting agreed corporate objectives in Guildford.
- 24 We found evidence of a comprehensive policy and objectives framework, matched to the needs of users and partners, and with effective and challenging performance management in place.

Are the aims clear and challenging?

- 25 Best Value requires councils to show why they are providing the service being reviewed and whether alternative ways of providing it have been examined. The challenge element is a very important component of the performance improvement requirement. Part of the challenge for the Spectrum is to show that both corporate and community aims are being met.
- 26 The service aims for Spectrum are well developed. There is a clear cascade of aims and objectives through from the corporate level to Spectrum as a centre and then on to the separate elements within the centre. Team and individual targets are also set and are subject to regular review. The objectives for Spectrum link back to the corporate priorities for the Borough Council set out in paragraph 13 above, relating to social inclusion and excellence issues.
- 27 Spectrum's role is encompassed within the draft Leisure Strategy prepared for the Borough Council. This is a comprehensive document which, without adoption, has no formal status and has been primarily used as a management tool and work programme guide.

- 28 The Spectrum's mission statement is clearly reflected in the overall service plan and the more specific action plans. The centre is managed profitably and provides a comprehensive range of facilities. Extensive consultation indicates a positive view from residents and other users that the centre does provide quality and value for money.
- 29 As part of the Best Value Review (BVR) process the Council challenged the need for the centre, who it is for and the benefits of its provision. This involved consultation with the local community through the Citizens Panel, together with detailed research into both users and non-users. Other techniques used included focus groups and specific user groups. The findings were reviewed by the Spectrum Member Monitoring Group, with regular reports also to the service committee. Senior officers also reviewed the centre at regular intervals and these processes are ongoing.
- 30 External challenge is supported through the centre's participation in Quest, an accreditation programme for leisure facilities in England. This process involves extensive assessment, benchmarking and review against 24 specific criteria in ten core areas. Assessment was completed in October 2000 and Spectrum was awarded a score of 82%, the highest recorded to date. Challenging targets are being set to achieve an even higher Quest score. This process is also supported by a detailed use of the Business Excellence Model self-assessment technique and by the Investors in People (IIP) accreditation. Detailed plans are in place to enable an annual assessment for IIP.
- 31 We believe that the scope of the review could have been more challenging. Sport and recreation facilities at the Lido, close to Spectrum, and Ash Manor, in the western part of the Borough were not included in the BVR despite a close management and user relationship. However, this review was initiated prior to guidance being published and the council has recognised the benefits that may accrue in adopting a more inclusive approach. The council has confirmed that lessons from this pilot exercise will inform the scope and preparation of future reviews.
- 32 The review process could have included more external involvement. Though consultation was effectively addressed detailed involvement in other parts of the process from interests external to the centre were limited. The range of external partners with whom Spectrum is working and the quality of these programmes particularly impressed us. During the inspection we were provided with a list of the partners involved in the centre. The list covered many separate types of activity ranging from schools and further education colleges, through to individual businesses and organisations representing sectoral interests. However their involvement only became apparent through

the inspection and could have been made clearer within the review, for example in highlighting the amount of partnership working that does take place.

- 33 The in-house team has successfully secured the contract to run Spectrum until 2003. The Best Value process has encouraged consideration to be given to alternative ways of providing the service. Independent advice has been sought and there will be a report to the Council early in 2001. This will highlight in particular the opportunities offered by Trust status. We look forward to the outcome of the findings being reflected in the next Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP).
- 34 We have gathered evidence that opening itself to challenge has not deflected the centre from its agreed mission statement. The performance improvements implemented and identified are linked to changing priorities and expectations of users and partners. This approach has enabled the investment of over £1 million in the centre in the past 4 years, all funded from the operating surpluses.

Does the service meet the aims?

- 35 The next stage in the inspection process, having reflected on the aims that the Council has set for the service, is to examine how well the service is meeting those aims. This includes:
- ◆ the checking of actions against plans,
 - ◆ performance against targets,
 - ◆ and overall performance management.
- 36 Spectrum's BVPP sets out many actions required to meet the Council's aims and the community's needs and expectations. There is a range of improvement targets, for all aspects of provision, based on both national and local performance indicators. Where the national indicators are not sufficiently well developed Spectrum has played a leading role in defining local ones that are capable of effective management and measuring.
- 37 The identified indicators cover participation and usage targets, as well as a series of more generic cross-cutting headings dealing with matters of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The BVPP sets out in detail how resources will be used to meet the targets and objectives set. Continuous improvement plans are established for all areas of activity, including training and development programmes for all staff.

- 38 A detailed programme of repairs and refurbishment is also included in the Plan, looking ahead 15 years in the case of major plant. These are funded through an annual contribution from the revenue generated. A clear link exists between plans to achieve continuous improvement and the resources available to support this.
- 39 We have examined a considerable number of published, and internal working, documents. It is clear that performance against target is monitored on a regular and consistent basis. Annual plans are set within the context of a five year plan, which establishes the key objectives, targets, action plans, investment plans and resource requirements. Internal monitoring at Spectrum takes place frequently, with regular team meetings. Individual staff members are set targets, which are then the subject of appraisal and included, in their “Pride” files. During inspection we asked a number of staff to provide their files. Without exception they were up to date and relevant to the needs of the individual staff member. Senior council officers have a monthly review meeting which is attended by the chief executive, whilst the Members Monitoring Group meets four times a year. A Members sub-group has recently been established to scrutinise the review process and to further contribute to the development of continuous improvement. As the council undergoes modernisation it may wish to review effective member monitoring of the centre though the system currently operates effectively.
- 40 Considerable weight is placed on identifying customer needs and monitoring customer satisfaction. Action plans are based on customer feedback, with these both enhancing strong areas and planning to overcome identified weaknesses. A customer review takes place monthly, with a more detailed annual review to ensure priorities are built into the Performance Plan. An innovative customer satisfaction rating has been devised to monitor feedback; the results of this are also analysed monthly and action taken where necessary. This requires the customer to give a general value to a specific issue before relating it directly to the Spectrum hence improving the quality and relevance of consultation findings. Other forms of consultation are used to validate trends and results, including the Citizens Panel, and user forums. The groups we interviewed expressed high satisfaction with the centre as did virtually all the individual users we spoke to during the inspection. There was an effective process in place to ensure that those consulted were advised about how their comments had been taken into account.

- 41 We concluded that Spectrum meets its aims extremely well. The service delivers:
- ◆ A quality service to over 1.7 million visits each year, including 40% from outside the Borough
 - ◆ Usage of the centre by over 50% of residents, compared with a national average of only 10%.
 - ◆ A net return to the Council of over £300,000 in 1999/2000, ring-fenced for reinvestment back into the centre.
 - ◆ Use of the centre by a very broad customer base, including young people, over 50's, and people with a disability
 - ◆ Support to a range of partnerships, including the West Surrey Health Authority, Surrey County Council, University of Surrey, Guildford College, Surrey Sports Forum, the North Guildford Project and a large number of local schools, colleges and sports clubs.
- 42 The centre is extremely popular. This, together with its location in an area of low unemployment and relative prosperity, does generate some distinct issues. A large number of stakeholders, including staff, users and partners, commented on the parking problems at peak times. These have been exacerbated by the site's use as a park-and-ride facility. However, this is not the only reason. The car park does not have the capacity to always meet demand for parking when major sports events are hosted by the centre irrespective of the park and ride issue. More frequently visitors unable to find a space elsewhere use the allocated disabled bays and this is unacceptable.
- 43 When the centre was initially planned proposals were made for over 1000 spaces but only 750 were constructed. Plans exist for another 350 spaces on the site, which could be funded from established reserves. The council ought to review the options in the context of developing local transport and sustainability issues.
- 44 Staff turnover at Spectrum is averaging 27% each year. Whilst this is below the regional average of 33% some concern was expressed by users that this rate of turnover is starting to have an impact. Staff satisfaction surveys also highlight that part time staff are not as positive in their views as the full time staff. The centre is a major employer with over 250 full and part time staff; their performance is critical in achieving success for the centre. The Council will need to carefully consider its recruitment, retention and training policies in order to ensure that this aspect of performance is not put under threat.

How does Spectrum's performance compare?

- 45 Effective performance management requires a clear knowledge of how the service compares with other similar services. The analysis of how other services perform tasks differently enables improvements and resource allocation to be better targeted.
- 46 We found very strong evidence that Spectrum carries out performance comparison in a rigorous manner. The centre is involved in extensive benchmarking activity, with both the public and private sectors. This includes very detailed work with the South East Contractors Group (SECG), the Inter Authorities Group (IAG), Quest, and through a benchmarking group established with other large leisure centres in Bournemouth and Colchester.
- 47 The benchmarking work within SECG is with 15 centres, whilst the IAG contains 25 centres. Results show that Spectrum is at the higher end of performance in all the key performance indicators. It is well within the top 25% and, in most cases, within the top 5%. Detailed analysis of the data indicates that Spectrum is the number one centre in respect of financial performance indicators and ratios. The centre leads the way on recovery rate, and subsidy/profit per visit and head of population. The gross and net recovery rates were 100% and 126% respectively, whilst the regional averages were only 55% and 70%. The average visit to a leisure centre in the region is subsidised by £1.88, while each visit to the Spectrum generates £2.63 profit to plough back into the centre. To date it is the only local authority owned and operated leisure centre that has consistently made an annual surplus in recent years.
- 48 Spectrum puts considerable effort into identifying the views of customers, residents and other stakeholders. As there is no standard approach to comparing customer satisfaction in the leisure industry the centre has devised an innovative satisfaction rating and indicator system. This helps to identify trends and focuses management on the areas considered important by customers. The indicator system allows for service standards to be compared with other large leisure centres. Customer satisfaction in a number of key areas can be compared with customer expectations, allowing both internal and external benchmarking to be carried out. Overall customer satisfaction is about 90%.
- 49 The centre also uses the Guildford Citizens Panel, which is made up of 1000 households. 69% of the panel were also Spectrum users, but non-user information was gained from the other 31%. This has provided feedback on satisfaction levels and areas for improvement. A follow up survey is planned to evaluate the impact of actions carried out.

- 50 Customer surveys are also carried out for each of the main service areas within Spectrum. Customers are asked for their views on improvements. These support the separate service action plans and the overall performance plan. A number of other forums exist to gather views from customers and stakeholders, including User Forums, Guildford Access group, and specific focus groups. Staff surveys are also carried out. Spectrum is IIP accredited and these surveys enable appraisals, training and development plans to be better targeted. Staff sickness rates are about 1.55%; the regional average is 3.4%.
- 51 Spectrum demonstrates industry best practice in a number of areas. The centre was recently invited by the DTI to join its Inside UK Enterprise scheme; this encourages best practice exchange across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Spectrum's strengths are listed as customer focus, people issues and continuous improvement. It was the first public sector service to be invited to join the scheme. The centre's strength in the people management area has also been recognised by its IIP accreditation, and by the Surrey Business Awards.
- 52 The service is recognised nationally as a market leader. It is serving all sections of the community and is now further progressing partnership initiatives. It has a pricing policy that allows for use by a range of client groups and is detailed. User groups have expressed high satisfaction with the services provided and improvements are regularly made to address issues identified.

3 Findings: Are They Going to Improve?

Does the BVR drive improvement?

- 53 The best value review should be the mechanism for ensuring authorities deliver continuous improvement in the services they provide. We understand that Guildford Borough Council restricted the scope of the review primarily because of the scale and significance of this facility and because it was a pilot for best value in the authority.
- 54 The BVR was comprehensive and informative. Although much of the supporting information provided was not of direct significance to the inspection, we found strong linkages developed between strategic priorities and objectives for the centre.
- 55 We found evidence that confirmed that management and support of the BVR process was undertaken within an established corporate framework that was fully supported by member involvement. Management meetings attended by the chief executive and centre

manager are held monthly and meetings with the MMG regularly take place on a six – eight week cycle. The culture within Spectrum embraces involvement at all levels and the staff focus group we facilitated confirmed our impression of involvement in the BVR across a broad range of grades and responsibilities.

- 56 We believe that the council has challenged its role and the delivery of service in the Spectrum and this feeds through into the improvement plan to secure continuous improvement. In considering how competitive the council's choice of procurement we recognise that more than two years of the existing contract remains with an option to extend to 2007. When the last contract was tendered under CCT legislation in 1997 a number of private sector operators expressed initial interest though no firm bids were received. Despite the current in – house operator achieving profitability and high overall satisfaction a report is being taken to committee in February 2001 considering the potential for, and implications of, transferring the operation into a trust.
- 57 The Spectrum has made extensive use of benchmarking and consistently scores in the top 25% across a range of service specific and cross cutting PI's. For example its energy cost per square metre in the first quarter of 2000 was £6.79 compared to a similar major leisure facility with a cost of £24.63. Equally, when compared against the same facility its income per fitness station was £607.28 as against £243.60
- 58 Benchmarking has taken place within both the public and private sectors through the South East Leisure Contractors Group, Inter Authorities Group, Inside UK Enterprise, the ILAM benchmarking survey and Quest. Additional local comparison has been undertaken including feedback from users and these have informed challenges about what services to provide, who to provide them to, how much they should cost, and whether the current provider is the best one.
- 59 Spectrum has used the Business Excellence Model, which identifies its top scoring areas as; business results, customer satisfaction and leadership. The three lowest scoring areas were resources, impact on society and processes. We found evidence that these areas were being addressed within the improvement plan, most notably in developing existing partnerships.
- 60 The review embraced meaningful consultation and we identified how this was used to inform identified actions. The Citizens Panel was used to research the views of non-users whilst the Residents Survey 2000 and the department specific user/focus groups identified the satisfaction levels and areas for action from existing customers.

Overall customer satisfaction in September 2000 was 85% measured against the criteria identified in below.

- 61 We wish to particularly commend the council on its approach to consultation and benchmarking and the way these have informed the review and identified good practice and areas for improvement within the centre. Consultation of customers is qualitative in providing an average score for selected criteria against which a weighting is applied. Benchmarking in many areas takes place monthly. It has been used not only to measure performance within the leisure industry but also to look at issues such as energy efficiency and sustainability as evidenced in the PI on energy costs. We noted with particular interest the crossover benefit of the refrigeration from the ice assisting in the heating costs of the water.

How good is the improvement plan?

- 62 There are a number of separate action plans in operation for the centre, ranging from the Service Plan 2000 - 2005 through to detailed plans for each of the main activities; swimming, ice, and health and fitness. Market research and public relations, Information Technology (IT) and financial plans provide further support to operational activities.
- 63 The actions detailed in the improvement plan 2000 – 2001 are mostly SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed) clearly stating the objective that the action is targeted to address and the date by which it should be completed. They respond to changing customer needs and reflect the strategic aims of the council detailed within the Guildford Leisure Strategy, upon which we have commented earlier, and other corporate documentation.
- 64 We believe implementation of the actions will deliver a “step change” in improvements. For example, action no:10 requires a cross cutting approach to the delivery of leisure services to the community. The Spectrum currently receives in excess of 1300 GP referrals each year and has recently entered into a partnership with the West Surrey Health Authority to pilot a cardiac referral programme from the Royal Surrey Hospital. Referrals will be managed and monitored through the programme and encouraged to continue using the facilities following completion of the original course. The health and fitness suite will be expanded shortly to help meet demand from both programmed and casual users and in this way is responding to customers needs and the implications of developing new and existing partnerships.
- 65 Market research has been used to guide both the broader and more detailed action plans. Plans are prepared to both a detailed one-year

horizon, more concerned with operational matters, and a five year timescale, more concerned with broader trends and priorities.

- 66 We did find that a number of the detailed improvements being undertaken within specific service areas are not recognised within the improvement plan attached to the BVR. The lack of co-ordination between these could create confusion and potentially clouds the benefits of some of the detailed improvements and how they contribute to the council's strategic objectives.
- 67 The improvement plan not only details service based actions for short term implementation but importantly considers a 15 year plan on capital expenditure for plant replacement. This programme is reviewed annually and the generated income is ring fenced to help finance this along with other actions. We believe that this plan is comprehensive with realistic cost estimates and provides considerable comfort that the quality of service delivered today will be protected into the future.

Will you deliver the improvements?

- 68 We have looked for evidence that the council will deliver what it sets out within its improvement plan. We also look for the council and service track record of managing change and check that the proposals have the necessary support from members, management, staff, customers and other stakeholders.
- 69 We recognise Guildford Borough Council has traditionally used CCT as a vehicle to demonstrate the benefits of retaining services in-house. However we do not interpret this as being anti-competitive as evidenced in Spectrum's case by the serious interest previously shown in the tender process from the private sector and their current consideration of the implications of transferring the management and operation into a trust.
- 70 We gathered evidence that a number of the identified actions had already been implemented. These include the launching of the leisurecard which has linkages with the private sector and other cultural experiences and successful re-accreditation of Quest with the highest overall rating in the country of 82%.
- 71 Financial resources are identified to deliver the improvements and we particularly commend the agreed policy that income raised from this profitable centre is reinvested into service improvements.

- 72 The MMG, with representation from both the liberal democrats and conservatives, shares a consensus to the direction and objectives of the centre and is regularly involved in the centre's operation.
- 73 There is also a robust reporting framework at a senior level between the centre management and officers in Leisure Services, the Chief Executive's Department and other interested services. We were impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of staff across all levels who demonstrated a strong customer focus and job satisfaction. This is supported by the evidence we gathered in the staff PRIDE folders that demonstrated a commitment to staff training and development,
- 74 As a result of the consultation and review process substantial and regular improvements have been carried out. In addition to a new reception area, improvements in childcare and changing facilities have been introduced and the health and fitness suite has been expanded. These physical improvements have facilitated existing partnerships to be developed further, for example the cardiac referral programme and the promotion of the centre to the over 50's and those people with childcare responsibilities. Taken as a whole these have made a significant contribution to providing more opportunity and extending the appeal to specific target markets identified for the centre and casual users.
- 75 Further improvements were also made to the catering facilities, one of the sources of concern identified in the consultations. The existing partnership with Granada Compass was reviewed, and this has led to a £500,000 investment by the private sector operator at Spectrum. Changes made were linked to customer feedback and have broadened choice whilst retaining the quality benefits of high street branded outlets. We were particularly impressed by the childrens' video area which provided a safe and attractive activity for kids whilst parents/carers enjoyed their refreshments.
- 76 In conclusion, we are satisfied that the council, though recognising the success and value of the Spectrum, continues to demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement. It is clear about what areas can be improved in the short term and has identified the resources required to achieve this. We found a focus on the customer experience and this can be traced from the service objectives through to Guildford Borough Council's corporate priorities.