

SECTION 8 – PART II

UPDATE ON SERVICE REVIEWS COMPLETED IN 1999/2000

Last year, six service areas were reviewed under Best Value. We can now report on achievements in services and value made.

REVENUE SERVICES

Revenue Services produced a review document in May 2000 that reported upon its continuing performance review progress and noted the following improvements during 1999/2000:

- Collection of Business Rates - An all time high of 99.4% was achieved, ranking the Borough's revenue service 13th out of 263 nationally
- Collection of Council Tax – The Council maintained its position in the top 25% nationally by collecting 98.6% of the tax due
- The anti fraud service achieved treble the national average of prosecutions for benefit fraud
- A video for the hard of hearing has been introduced to the Council's revenue reception to explain welfare benefits and give Council Tax advice
- The Plain English Crystal Mark was awarded to the new housing benefit application form
- A satisfaction rating of 93.7% with information provided was achieved with benefit claimants
- A satisfaction rating of 87.9% with treatment received from the Council was achieved with claimants.

It is of no surprise that the regime of striving for better performance has carried over into 2001/02. As well as compliance with statutory performance indicators, a wealth of local Revenue performance data exists, giving the opportunity to monitor local performance levels set against realistic targets. The following data reflects performance for 2000/01 against a range of meaningful local indicators and targets:

	<u>Target</u> <u>2000/01</u>	<u>Actual</u> <u>31/03/01</u>	<u>Target</u> <u>2001/02</u>
Council Tax Direct Debit take up	31,000	31,100	33,000
Business Rates Direct Debit take up	1,700	1,720	1,850
Number of prosecutions for Housing/ Council Tax Benefit fraud	10	12	12
Cost of collecting Council Tax per chargeable dwelling	£14	£14	£13.5
	Target	Actual	Target

	<u>2000/01</u>	<u>31/03/01</u>	<u>2001/02</u>
<u>Arrears performance</u>			
Council Tax up to 1989	£556,000	£536,000	£236,000
Business Rates up to 1998/99	< £1 million	£995,000	£500,000
Council Tax up to 1999/00	n/a	n/a	£800,000
Business Rates up to 1999/00	n/a	n/a	£1,095,000

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The section has continued working to achieve and maintain Best Value. Key points include:

- The response time target for Pest Control treatment has been reduced from five to three days
- A customer feedback data base has been implemented
- A Food Safety Service Plan has been introduced
- The service has responded to more requests for service within target response times compared to the previous year

Fundamental to the success of Environmental Health is the response that the section provides to the public, its service users. In attempting to demonstrate how this being addressed locally, the under mentioned table sets out performance achievements against predetermined local targets, together with new targets to aim for in 2001/02.

Responding to Service Requests

<u>Category</u>	<u>Target Response Time</u>	<u>Performance % within Target 1999/2000</u>	<u>Projected Out turn 2000/01</u>	<u>Target 2001/02</u>
1	4 hours	75%	94%	96%
2	1 day	82%	94%	96%
3	3 days	88%	95%	97%
4	5 days	88%	100%	100%
5	10 days	-	97%	99%
Pest Control	5 days *	86%	-	-
	3 days **	-	53%	90%

* Target from April 2000 – July 2000

** Revised target August 2000 – March 2001.

LEGAL SERVICES

The introduction of the computerised Timebase system has enabled Legal Services to calculate the costs of every aspect of every aspect of its work with absolute accuracy and thus improve the cost management and monitoring of all regular and routine tasks.

Legal Services successfully secured re-accreditation under the Law Society's Lexcel Scheme that sets standards of excellence in legal practice management.

GUILDFORD SPECTRUM LEISURE COMPLEX

Guildford Spectrum continues to improve the range and value for money of its services, providing a whole range of sports and leisure opportunities for people of all ages and levels of ability.

Spectrum remains the only local authority owned facility of its type to run at an operating surplus and apart from its outstanding success with its external Best Value inspection, achieved the top position in the country as a result of the recent assessment as part of Quest, the quality award for the sport and leisure industry.

The increasing profits generated by the Spectrum are used to improve the services at the Complex, with a direct benefit to customers, as well as supporting other services provided by the Council.

Improvements to the service over the last year include:

- Extended opening hours for the Customer Services Section
- A baby changing room has been provided
- Catering outlets and bars have been refurbished
- An American pool facility has been provided.
- A new cycle and access path has been constructed.
- "Active", the Guildford Leisure Card, has been introduced.
- The ten-pin bowling scoring system is being replaced.

In response to customers needs, the following improvements will be introduced by next year:

- The opening of a major extension to the Health & Fitness Facility
- A new water feature in the Leisure Pool.
- The provision of a viewing area overlooking the sports arena.
- The easy payments system for regular customers will be expanded e.g. swimming.
- The Active Leisure Card will be developed including expanding rewards to card-holders.
- IT systems will be upgraded to improve customer service.

As part of the Best Value process, the Audit Commission's Best Value Inspection Service recently inspected Spectrum and found it to be an excellent centre. The Inspection Service listed several notable strengths and also identified areas for further improvement

Spectrum Key Strengths:

- High customer satisfaction levels (above 90%).
- Innovation to meet customer needs.
- Consistently in the top 25% in the country for performance benchmarking.
- Realistic action programmes reviewed annually.
- Financial surplus reinvested in Spectrums facilities.

Spectrum: continuing improvements

- Further innovation in accessibility, programming and partnership.
- Positively addressing car parking.
- Capturing and promoting good practice.

Performance achievements (2000/01):

- Income has been increased by 10%
- Visits to Spectrum have increased by 37,000
- Over 3,000 'Active' Leisure Cards have been issued
- Letters of complaint have reduced from 98 to 90
- Letters of compliment have increased from 77 to 91

Other facts:

- 49% of Guildford's residents use Spectrum (This compares favourably with a national average of only 10%)
- Satisfaction levels are at 93%
- 47% of all users are under the age of 16
- A profit of £1.06 per head of population is achieved by Spectrum. This is the only local authority owned leisure facility that is not directly subsidised by local residents.

COMMITTEE SERVICES

As part of the Best Value review, the section has achieved a number of improvements. Key points include:

- The introduction of a trial committee structure based on the Government's modernisation agenda
- Paper copies of Committee agendas have been significantly reduced as a result of benchmarking comparisons and in response to Government e-commerce initiatives
- The cost of servicing meetings is continuously monitored with the aim of reaching realistic figures.

PRINT UNIT

The Council's Print Unit achieved second place out of twelve authorities in Best Value benchmarking (the analytical technique used to measure and systematically compare performance). Formal quality control checks have been introduced.