

SECTION 9

RESPONDING TO EXTERNAL SCRUTINY

The District Auditor

The body responsible on behalf of the Government for the overall scrutiny of local authorities Best Value performance, is the Audit Commission. There are two parts to this scrutiny.

The District Audit Service undertakes a detailed examination of the Council's annual accounts and also looks at various key areas of operation. In relation to Best Value, the District Auditor is responsible for ensuring that local authorities act in compliance with the various legislative requirements.

The District Auditor reports in June of each year with specific reference to the Council's Best Value Performance Plan, and the Council is required to respond to any suggestions. The District Auditors Report and the Council's response to specific issues raised can be viewed at the Council's Offices.

In summary, the District Auditor considered that the Council was continuing to make good progress in relation to Best Value. The various areas of concern, for example performance management, objectivity and resource issues, are specifically addressed throughout this document.

The Best Value Inspection Service

The second and more specific body responsible for external scrutiny is the recently created Best Value Inspection Service within the Audit Commission. This service has the direct responsibility to review individual services which have undergone Best Value Reviews. Its own analysis is based upon 2 basic judgements:

- 1) How good is the Service? and**
- 2) Is it going to provide the continuous improvement required by Best Value?**

The Best Value Inspection Service has carried out a comprehensive review of one of the Council's services, Guildford Spectrum Leisure Complex. As reported elsewhere in this document, the Council has achieved the highest performance of any local authority anywhere in the United Kingdom in relation to both judgements.

The Council's response to this external scrutiny is obviously therefore one of pride. Nonetheless, the detailed Audit Commission report (see Appendix 4) makes a number of constructive suggestions as to how the Council can continue to improve the service. All these suggestions will be taken on board during the coming year in the next stage of the Guildford Spectrum Best Value Service Plan. So far as the Council is concerned, the approach to service improvement does not stop simply because of the Best Value inspection has been completed. The whole point of Best Value is that the process is continuous and Guildford Spectrum will carry on seeking to improve the quality and value for money of its service.

Finally, in its overall response to external scrutiny, the Council has established its own Audit Committee. In addition to a wide-ranging performance monitoring role, the Audit Committee had direct access to the District Auditor and leads a direct intent in ensuring that the Council adopts an effective response to external scrutiny, as well as developing its own internal scrutiny role.