

APPENDIX 2: What Other People Told Us

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CONSULTING THE PUBLIC 2001/2

Consultation Review

Consulting the public is an integral part of improving our levels of service at Dacorum and it contributes to the achievement of all of the Council's objectives. As part of the Council's role of community leadership, consultation is essential to ensure the views of all stakeholders are known and acted upon where possible. "Stakeholders" include residents, service users, businesses, voluntary, faith and community organisations, etc.

To illustrate the importance of public consultation, the post of Community Consultation Manager was created in August 2001.

During the year we consulted on a wide range of issues using a variety of methods. The main topics were:

- **The Future**
 - Budget Expenditure Proposals for 2002/03
 - Electronic Government
- **Our Community**
 - Creating a "BetterBorough" Vision for the Future of Dacorum
 - Community Safety Strategy
- **The Environment**
 - Managing our rubbish in the future
 - Consulting on the Local Plan
- **Dacorum Pavilion**
 - Public Perceptions & Usage
- **DBC Staff**
 - Asking our staff for their views

The consultation methods used are explained below.

● **The Future - Budget Expenditure Proposals for 2002/03**

New Government legislation and falling interest rates mean that we will have less money to spend on the provision of Council services over the next few years, and we therefore wanted to consult with the public over the potential changes to the expenditure budget. This is the first time we have consulted with all sectors of the public on the budget, and we used two different methods to do so – one conventional and one quite revolutionary.

The conventional method involved the creation of an information pack with feedback form, which was advertised in the local press and mailed to over 100 stakeholders, including local businesses, community associations, voluntary, community, and environmental organisations, and town & parish councils.

The revolutionary method was called SIMALTO – simultaneous multi-attribute level trade-off. For this consultation, 300 demographically-representative residents were selected for detailed, face-to-face interviews where they were presented with a range of options relating to the proposed budget changes which would affect the Council's front line services. In the same way that they would budget to balance their own finances, they were asked to make choices between the various proposed options (which may be a reduction in the level of service offered, or an increase in the charges made for a service), based on the limited amount of money available to be spent. This system then allows us to produce an *Ideal*

Budget Model – the selection of proposed changes which would give the highest levels of satisfaction to the highest number of residents.

The results of all this consultation formed part of the decision making process in determining the final budget package for 2002/03. Details of the budget were circulated with your Council Tax bill, and further copies are available on request. Details of the changes made to the proposals as a result of the consultation exercise were circulated to those who took part (unless their contribution was made anonymously).

● **The Future - Electronic Government**

Implementing Electronic Government – this is our vision for the future, and it's so much more than just putting Council services onto our web site. This philosophy will take us from administering one-size services **to** local people, to focusing on individual needs and solutions **for** people at times and places which suit them. Putting citizens and customers at the heart of what we do will have major implications for our culture, structure and ways of working as well as requiring major investment in our use of new technology.

It was therefore important to undertake some consultation on how residents see their Council operating in the future, before we start to make plans. To do this, we mailed a self-completion questionnaire to our Citizens Panel*, and the results from this consultation helped form our Implementing Electronic Government Statement which was then submitted to Central Government, and is scheduled to be fully implemented by 2005.

*The Citizens Panel is made up of 1100 residents who have agreed to take part in a range of consultation activities. We will be creating a new panel during 2002 to ensure that it remains fresh and representative of the public's views. During the year we also asked our Citizens Panel for their feedback on general contact with the Council and our collection of Council Tax payments.

● **Our Community – creating a “BetterBorough” Vision for the Future**

The Community Plan for Dacorum – our vision for the future of the Borough -has been created and developed entirely by you. Everyone in Dacorum was invited to contribute to the consultation during the year, and 818 individuals, businesses, town & parish councils, and other community, voluntary and environmental organisations took up the offer. Opportunities to participate included Summer 2001 Dacorum Digest, July 2001 Gazette Newspaper, a dedicated web site, a series of road shows in July 2001 and a stakeholder mailing in September 2001.

The current draft of the Community Plan fulfils most or all of the ambitions for the future of Dacorum of 55% of our residents, and at least some ambitions for a further 42% of residents.

The two factors which rate the highest in your vision for the future were “to have confidence in the safety and security of yourselves and your families” and “to have a cleaner, healthier environment”. The full results of this consultation were published in Spring 2002 Dacorum Digest. The final Plan is scheduled to be published in April 2002 and will be available to all residents on request.

● **Our Community – Safety Strategy**

Another area where we particularly needed your help was in the development of our Community Safety Strategy. Following a recent crime and disorder audit, a number of crime related issues were identified as requiring a strong focus of activity over the next few years.

Within Community Safety, there are a large number of issues which cause concern to the public, and we needed to check whether the issues which were highlighted by the crime and disorder audit were the same concerns that our residents have in the local areas where they live.

Nearly 2000 of you – from all sectors of the community – responded to this consultation project. We made particularly sure that we reached as much of the community as possible for this consultation, and we established and strengthened our links with a wide variety of minority groups in the Borough.

This consultation has allowed us (in conjunction with the Police) to finalise the community safety plan, which will be published in April 2002 and will be available to all residents on request.

- **The Environment – Managing our rubbish in the future**

The management of waste (household collections, refuse disposal and recycling) in the Borough will change forever over the next few years, and we wanted to ask your help to decide the best way forward.

The main reasons things *have* to change are because we are running out of suitable landfill sites in which to bury our rubbish, the Government is introducing very tough environmental targets which we have to meet, and costs are increasing significantly.

We are working with Hertfordshire County Council and the other nine District Councils in Hertfordshire to create a countywide solution to these issues.

In order to obtain your views, we ran a series of road shows in March, and distributed self-completion questionnaires across the Borough.

The results are now being considered as part of the decision-making process for the future of waste disposal across the whole of Hertfordshire. The final strategy will be published in May, and will be available to all residents on request.

- **The Environment – Consulting on the Local Plan**

The “Local Plan” is the plan on which all land development decisions in the Borough are based. It helps to ensure that we have enough houses, places of work, shops and leisure facilities in the future, while protecting the environment.

It is therefore very important that everyone in the Borough is given the opportunity to shape the content of this plan, and we undertook consultation during the year to ask you how you wanted to be consulted with on the local plan. We spoke to everyone who took part in the last Local Plan Public Inquiry and held focus groups with a number of residents.

This has helped us finalise our Local Plan Public Engagement Strategy, which explains how we will let you know what’s happening, and how you can tell us what you think. A copy of this Strategy is available to all residents on request.

- **Dacorum Pavilion – Public Perceptions**

One of the specific pieces of consultation we undertook during this year was into our residents’ perceptions and usage of the Pavilion – the arts and entertainment venue in the Marlowes in Hemel Hempstead.

We undertook face-to-face interviews with a total of 600 people in a variety of locations, including Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted, Tring, Kings Langley, and a number of villages. We posted 2,000 questionnaires to a random sample on the Pavilion's mailing list, to which 250 people responded. We also ran focus groups with private hirers, schools, and users of the Pavilion.

81% of people questioned were aware that the Pavilion exists, and 29% of these had attended an event during the previous year. The two main improvements suggested were refurbishment and a range of better quality shows. 52% of respondents thought having the Pavilion was important, while 48% thought it was not important. Access to the full consultation report can be made available to residents on request.

- **DBC Staff – Asking our staff for their views**

In addition to consulting with residents, local businesses, town & parish councils and voluntary, community and environmental organisations this year, we also carried out a detailed consultation exercise with our own staff.

There has been a great deal of change at DBC over the past couple of years, and we wanted to know how our staff feel, and what we can do better to improve things. Just over one third of staff responded to the survey.

The results from this consultation allowed us to create a number of actions plans covering a variety of topics, including improving the way in which we handle “change” and developing a staff suggestion scheme.

If you would like to know more, contact Caroline Fitz-Gibbon on 01442 228504, or email caroline.fitz-gibbon@dacorum.gov.uk

EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2000/1

Each year Dacorum Borough Council, in common with every other local authority, is audited by an independent External Auditor, appointed by the Audit Commission. Dacorum's External Auditor is Deloitte and Touche. The External Auditors Annual Audit Letter summarises the main findings and conclusions from all of the audit work Deloitte and Touche have carried out for Dacorum Borough Council over the last year.

The External Auditor has the following view:

'Recent years have been a time of great change for local government with the introduction of Best Value and the wider modernisation agenda bringing change to the way that the Council is structured and delivers its services. The Council has responded in a proactive and forward looking manner to these challenges'.

December 2001

External Auditor's Annual Audit Letter December 2001 : Action Plan

Subject of Audit	Ext. Audit Letter Item Numbers	Key issues and Auditor's recommendations for Members	Action to be taken	Officers Responsible	Target Date
Review of management developments in year	2.1	Corporate Work Programme : no issues for members	Corporate Work Programme to be revised and included in BVPP to improve linkages between corporate, strategic and services actions.	Assistant Chief Executive	31 March 2002
	2.2	New Political Arrangements : no issues for members	Effectiveness of new political management arrangements to be reviewed at end of pilot phase.	Chief Executive	30 April 2002
	2.5	Best Value: no issues for members	Council's draft Best Value Guidance to be reviewed in the light of the new Govt. guidance and review of service and financial planning guidance in February 2002.	Assistant Chief Executive	By end of March 2002
	2.6	E-Government : no issues for members	Implementation of eGovernment at Dacorum BC depends on the outcome of the PPP, although Government targets for electronic delivery apply whatever the outcome.	Director of Resources/ Director of Development Services	to be monitored quarterly.
Performance Management	3.1	Best Value Performance Plan Audit: Monitor progress on the implementation of the officers' responses to the recommendations in the detailed audit report on Best Value.	Copy of the officers' response is attached.	Assistant Chief Executive/ Head of Corporate Policy	Various
Performance Management	3.2	Performance Information: Generally, keep the performance management system under review to ensure that it works effectively alongside the Council's new political arrangements.	Performance management framework to be reviewed in April/May 2002 by Performance Management Group and Policy/Business Support Units. Amendments to framework to be made for 2002/3.	Assistant Chief Executive	30 June 2002

Subject of Audit	Ext. Audit Letter Item Numbers	Key issues and Auditor's recommendations for Members	Action to be taken	Officers Responsible	Target Date
	3.4	Performance Indicators: Consider the implementation of random checks to ensure that PIs are accurate and adequate supporting systems are being maintained	Seek agreement to Audit Plan to include quality checks of PIs.	Chief Internal Auditor	31 March 2002;
	3.4	Performance Indicators:	Training and awareness of importance of use of local PIs to be offered to services	Planning and Performance Officer	during 2002/3
	3.7	Corporate Governance: Seek to follow the corporate governance guidance set out by CIPFA/SOLACE and publish a statement on the Council's corporate governance arrangements in 2002	There is a need to ensure that the draft Financial Regulations are consistent with the CIPFA/SOLACE guidance.	Head of Finance	31 March 2002
	3.7	Corporate Governance:	It is intended that the publication of the Government's guidance for Comprehensive Performance Assessments will trigger work to prepare for a review in 2003. A statement on the current position will form an early part of this work	Assistant Chief Executive	By 31 December 2002
	3.8	Risk Management : Give further consideration to the Audit Commission's management paper 'Worth the risk – improving risk management in local government', focusing in particular on recommendations on the role elected members should be playing in the process. This process has started with the issue of draft financial regulations.	There is a need to agree an approach and corporate strategy to respond to this area of work. This will be included in the Corporate Work Programme 2002/3.	Assistant Chief Executive/ Head of Finance	30 September 2002
Use of Resources studies	4.3	Progress on past vfm studies: Service and financial planning.	A review of the Service and Financial Planning system will be undertaken in February/March to prepare for the next round starting in 2002/3.	Head of Corporate Policy/Head of Finance	31 March 2002

Subject of Audit	Ext. Audit Letter Item Numbers	Key issues and Auditor's recommendations for Members	Action to be taken	Officers Responsible	Target Date
	4.3	Progress on past vfm studies: Community Safety	Community Safety Strategy : the new Strategy will be in place by 1 April 2002, incorporating elements of performance management	Assistant Chief Executive	1 April 2002
	4.3	Progress on past vfm studies: PAYE and VAT audits	PAYE and VAT: action plans in place –to be monitored periodically.	Head of Finance	30 September 2002
	4.4	Future audits: Deloitte and Touche will be having discussions with Officers in the near future with regard to the priorities for the 2002 Use of Resources programme	Respond to proposals from External Auditors for studies under Resources programme	To be agreed	As required
Auditing the accounts	6.1	Accounts preparation process: to ensure the financial accounts are approved in a timely manner.	Annual programme requires draft Annual Report to Cabinet by September and ready for audit by 1 October.	Head of Finance	31 December 2002
	6.2	Retirement benefits: to give early consideration to the practical implications of FRS17 – Retirement benefits	Action will be taken to ensure compliance between DBC and the pension fund managers at HCC.	Head of Finance	30 September 2002

EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT ON THE SECOND BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Borough Council has to comply with the duty of Best Value as set out in the Local Government Act 1999. This means that we have to achieve continuous improvement in the way the Council's services are provided and we have to prepare a Best Value Performance Plan each year.

Our external auditors, Deloitte & Touche, have to consider and report on whether the Council has complied with the statutory requirements in the way in which we have prepared and published our Performance Plan and to comment on the Council's corporate and management arrangements for achieving Best Value. The auditor's report issued in August 2001 stated that: "... *in our opinion, the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) complies with the majority of statutory requirements.*" There were, however, a number of recommendations as to how the Council could improve its arrangements for achieving Best Value. These are set out in the table below along with the Council's response to the recommendations.

<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Council Response</u>
1. Closely monitor the implementation of the new performance management system to ensure that it is effective and meets statutory requirements.	1. Progressive implementation of the Performance Management system from July 2001. A review will be undertaken in April / May 2002.
2. Implement arrangements as a matter of urgency to carry out regular, independent checks on performance indicators to ensure that (1) the indicators are being calculated correctly and (2) under-pinned by robust and reliable systems.	2. Internal Audit is now checking PIs in terms of their validity. This audit will identify where systems can be improved and corrective action will be taken. Additional resources (Business Support Units and a corporate performance officer) have been created to provide training and support for managers on the creation and benefits of PIs.
3. Engage in discussions as soon as possible with the relevant portfolio holders on what they see as the key performance measures upon which they wish to rely to manage their area of responsibility. Evaluate the suggestions, consult with relevant line managers/responsible officers and develop performance measures/systems as appropriate.	3. Discussions are taking place as part of the corporate performance management systems, and we are developing through internal discussions between Cabinet Portfolio-holders and Strategic directors.
4. Discuss the frequency and level of detail of reporting with the overall aim of ensuring that the portfolio-holder (and other managers) get the right information in the right time frame in order to manage effectively. Specific consideration may need to be given to developing performance parameters that will trigger intervention / action by senior officers / members / portfolio holders in the event of deterioration in performance.	4. Linked to Above.

5. Consider focusing on the identification of 'critical success' PIs and/or consider how to filter / stratify reporting on PIs to portfolio holders / the cabinet and scrutiny to avoid information overload on senior officers / members.
6. Consider the development of a suite of local PIs to augment relevant BVPIs in support of the latter in order to capture information on performance across all the key dimensions of the service/ activity area.
7. The Council sets out its five-year programme of Best Value Reviews on page 77 of the Best Value Performance Plan. As it presently stands, the five year programme does not fully reflect the Council's Key aims as summarised on page 14 of the Plan in terms of the nature of the areas to be reviewed and sequence of reviews within the programme.
8. We understand that the Council intends to review the programme once its Corporate Work Programme is complete. We recommend that the review be completed as soon as possible.
9. Enhance the linkages between BVPI's and the Council's key aims in order that members and officers can formally assess progress on the implementation of the Council's five-year objectives.
10. Where BVPI's are not relevant, translate five-year targets into a suite of local PIs with SMART targets so that members and officers can monitor and manage the translation of the five-year objectives into reality.
5. Part of the process described in 1 & 3 above.
6. The service and financial planning process is encouraging the development of local PIs. Those local PIs that were identified in 2000 appear in the current BVPP.
7. This recommendation will be adopted in the development of the next BVPP (2002/3).
8. This is a misunderstanding. The 5-year programme of Best Value reviews will be reviewed in the light of 7 above and other criteria. The Corporate Work Programme will be separately reviewed and replaces the Council's approach to the Modernisation Agenda.
9. This recommendation will be adopted in the next BVPP (2002/3).
10. The service and financial planning process is enabling the identification of a growing number of Local PIs. Those PIs identified in 2000 appeared in the BVPP in 2001/2. More will be added following the current planning round.

11. We also recommend that the progress of the revised programme is closely monitored, any slippage is acted on promptly and the programme is adequately resourced and prioritised so that all the Council's functions are reviewed by the statutory deadline 2004/5.
 12. Include additional commentary in the 2002/3 BVPP sign-posting the reader to areas within which the Council's performance is assessed as good, areas for potential improvement and the Council's plans for delivering these improvements.
 13. Include measurable milestones against which progress can be monitored for action plans emerging from inspections, audit reports and the Council's own BVRs.
11. Periodic checks on progress in reviews are made throughout the year. It is expected that the change of Dacorum's methodology for carrying out Best Value Reviews will help prevent slippage. Project management skills are being developed and used regularly. In addition Business Support Units and an extra Corporate performance officer can help services to meet their targets more reliably. The corporate Performance Management framework requires regular reporting on progress of Best Value Reviews.
 12. This recommendation will be adopted in the next BVPP (2002/3).
 13. This recommendation will be adopted in the next BVPP (2002/3).

IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY – RE-REVIEW JULY 2001

In December 1999 the Improvement and Development Agency visited Dacorum Borough Council as part of the Local Government Improvement Programme. The resulting report was considered carefully and formed part of the Council's modernisation agenda.

The whole Council, Councillors and officers, has been affected by the changes recommended and implemented through the IDeA's first report. These include the introduction of the new political structure, new approaches to Best Value, early work on Community Planning, Performance Management, improved communication and consultation practices and so on.

In July 2001 the IDeA review team came back to Dacorum and re-reviewed the Council. The review team found that there had been substantial change in the intervening eighteen months. The following action plan shows the areas that they recommended still needed attention, and the Council's proposed activities in response.

Local Government Improvement Programme - IDEA Progress Review

Action Plan

Recommendation	Proposed Action	Lead	Timescale
1. Greater clarity and communication on the progress and improvements made by the Council to all key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the Council's Communication Strategy • Implementation of the Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mike Browne Head of Communications • Members • CMT • Heads of Service • Service Managers 	Report to Cabinet February 2002
2. The need to raise the profile of Members both internally and externally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of the Local Strategic Partnership will provide the Council Leader a key community leadership role • Consideration of other methods to raise Members profile in consultation with all groups • Members profile in relation to the media to be reviewed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader • Cabinet Members • Mike Browne Head of Communications 	<p>Formation of Local Strategic Partnership and preparation of community plan for consultation before May 2002</p> <p>To be agreed</p> <p>Part of the Council's Communication Strategy to Cabinet February 2002</p>

Recommendation	Proposed Action	Lead	Timescale
3. The ongoing review of the new political arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Programme agreed by Group Leaders (copy attached) • Economic and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee appointed and Member Working Group • Members Services January 2002 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive/ Members Support Manager • Review Working Group 	Final decision on any alterations to current system 1 May 2002
4. Ensure basic service delivery continues to receive attention whilst managing major strategic change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Corporate Work Programme for 2002/03 is currently being developed and will reflect a balanced approach to key service and corporate priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMT • Heads of Service 	Programme to be completed by February 2002
5. Continue to improve on external communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the Council's Communication Strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mike Browne Head of Communications 	Report to Cabinet February 2002
6. Raise staff morale and their levels of satisfaction by for example involving them more in the change process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully implement the Action Plan resulting from the findings of the employee attitude survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMT • Heads of Service 	By March 2002

BEST VALUE REVIEW – ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY: INSPECTOR'S REPORT

April 2001

“A ‘good’ (two star) service that is unlikely to improve.”

This review covers the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy and the impact that the strategy has on the provision of support and practical help to people on low incomes. The review looked not only at the strategy itself but also the delivery of the strategy through a range of services provided by the Council.

The inspection Team judged that the strategy was a good 'service' with clear examples of best practice, but felt that there was not sufficient information to suggest that the 'service' would improve, and identified it within the criteria as 'unlikely to improve'.

The inspection identified that there was a strong commitment to social inclusion and anti-poverty within the Council and the services delivering the strategy did so at a good level. However, the strategy improvement and future was judged to have some challenges to face that had not been addressed in the improvement plan. These are shown below.

- ◆ Many people within the Council see the strategy as a project rather than as an important shaper of the Council's mainstream activities. Not all of the Council's objectives are aligned with the strategy thereby missing opportunities to address poverty at every opportunity through its full range of services.
- ◆ The council has a single definition of 'poverty'. It does not differentiate between people on extremely low incomes and those on modest incomes, leading to assistance not being targeted to those most in need.
- ◆ The Dacorum Card is a good initiative and it serves to increase access to services, but could be improved to make a greater impact on poverty.
- ◆ The council has no system by which the strategy can demonstrate its effectiveness.
- ◆ Whilst the council's partners spoke highly of its commitment to anti-poverty there is considerable scope for improving partnership working.

From these issues identified, the Inspection Team made several recommendations about the future of the strategy.

Recommendations

- ◆ Continues to develop the Anti-Poverty Strategy to strengthen the weaker elements and to improve and mainstream the mature elements of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- ◆ Establishes rigorous systems to provide information on how effective the Anti-Poverty initiatives, for example the Dacorum Card, are in reducing poverty.
- ◆ Increases the number of services available via the Dacorum Card, which are of direct relevance to people in poverty.
- ◆ Revises the Improvement Plan to deliver more comprehensive anti-poverty services.

- ◆ Reviews all its relevant policies, in related service areas, in line with the key objectives of the strategy. Integrates the policy objectives for economic development and affordable housing with the strategy.
- ◆ Develops a stronger partnership with Hertfordshire County Council on integrated economic and anti-poverty strategies.
- ◆ Introduces stringent grant allocation criteria and performance management systems to ensure that services provided by the voluntary sector (with council funding) deliver the objectives of the council and reflect best value.

There have been many developments following the inspection of the strategy. The introduction of a Council-wide Performance Management framework will assist in the monitoring of aspects of the strategy and a Voluntary Sector compact has led to increased management of grant allocation.

The area of anti-poverty has now become part of a wider remit of issues under the umbrella of 'Social Inclusion' - these include equal opportunities, housing, young people and older people. This joined up approach will see an improvement of awareness and service delivery in all aspects of social inclusion.

If you would like to know more about the Anti-Poverty Strategy, Social Inclusion and developments since the review please contact Christine Joseph on 01442 228258 or email christine.joseph@dacorum.gov.uk.

BEST VALUE REVIEW – SPORTS CENTRES: INSPECTOR'S REPORT

January 2002

*"...a 'good' (two star) service that has excellent prospects for improvement."*¹

This review focussed on the provision of sports facilities throughout the borough. The facilities concerned were,

- ◆ Hemel Hempstead Sports Centre;
- ◆ Berkhamsted Sports Centre;
- ◆ Tring Sports Centre;
- ◆ Longdean Sports Centre; and
- ◆ Dacorum Athletics Track.

These services are directly managed by the Council and provide a range of sports participation opportunities for residents and visitors to the borough.

1 - The Sports Centres Inspection was one of the first reviews to use new criteria for the improvement measurement. Where previously inspections asked the question "Is the service likely to improve?" with responses of yes, probably, unlikely or no, the question asked now is "What are the prospects for improvement?" with the response range being excellent, promising, uncertain and poor.

The inspection assessed the service as being of a good level and that the improvement plan and supporting strategies suggest excellent prospects for improvement. The table below summarises the reasons for the judgement.

Two Star Service	Excellent prospects for improvement
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Achieves high levels of customer satisfaction; ◆ Provides an extensive range of activities in well-maintained facilities; ◆ Achieves a number of visitors total that places it in the top 25 percent of best performing Councils; ◆ Ensures that everyone in the community feels welcome and is able to participate; ◆ Listens and takes appropriate action when customers complain or make comments or suggestions; ◆ Responds to changing demands and new products in the leisure market; ◆ Has a new management structure, training arrangements and staff appraisal system that is increasing the focussing on customer needs, and ◆ Identified areas for improvement and driving through change through the use of benchmarking, comparisons and the process of "Quest" accreditation. 	<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Customers have already benefited from a number of improvements made as a result of a thorough Best Value Review; ◆ The well formulated improvement plan has been accorded the necessary resources and will deliver further improvements for customers. This can be seen in Appendix 3; ◆ All stakeholders are supportive of the plans for improvement; ◆ The service and the Council have a track record of effective change management, and ◆ New performance management systems should ensure the implementation of the improvements.
<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The service does not have clear aims or standards to inform staff and customers; ◆ Lacks reliable management information to help shape the service; ◆ Has no marketing strategy to ensure that the service is reaching all groups in the community, and ◆ The service is high cost, and the reasons for this have not been fully analysed. 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The Council acknowledges that the scope of the best value review was too narrow and that linkages have to be strengthened; ◆ Much of the corporate and service planning is still in draft and needs distilling to provide staff and customers with a clear view of the way ahead, and ◆ Current problems in securing accurate baseline data from which to judge progress.

Recommendations

The inspection provided some recommendations that would assist the service in attaining the quality and improvements it strives for. The pointers that the inspection team recommends are,

- ◆ Produce clear service aims to inform customers and staff;
- ◆ Ensure customers are kept fully informed of improvement plans, what is being achieved, and of action taken in response to customers comments;
- ◆ Finalise draft policies and strategies, ensuring appropriate links with corporate priorities;
- ◆ Review pricing to ensure this reflects the market and accords with service priorities, and tighten procedures to ensure payment is secured from all customers;
- ◆ Obtain reliable baseline data from which to measure progress towards targets, especially with regard to involvement of all groups in the community, and monitor through performance management systems; and
- ◆ Ensure that maintenance of the current quality of service, continuous improvement, optimum utilisation of facilities and closely integrated sports development, are secured in any future arrangements for procurement of the service.

If you would like to know more about the review outcomes and the improvements that are taking place please contact Dave Cove on 01442 228750 or by email on david.cove@dacorum.gov.uk.