

In the light of what the Council has learned to date, what does it plan to do next?

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IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT THE COUNCIL HAS LEARNED TO DATE, WHAT DOES IT PLAN TO DO NEXT?

LEARNING

What have we learnt from others?

IDeA Improvement Programme – 1999 – 2001

The original invitation to the IDeA to review the Council in late 1999 under the Local Government Improvement Programme has led to step change at Dacorum Borough Council. The opportunity to learn from agencies and other councils has fundamentally changed the culture of the organisation. To build on our progress the Council asked the IDeA to return for a check in 2001. The IDeA review team noted that the Council had made considerable progress through the implementation of the action plan from the earlier IDeA review. In particular it reported the following findings:

- Best Value – bigger reviews were taking place with more robust methodology to identify more radical changes in the way that services are provided;
- Political Management had changed although there was not yet widespread enthusiasm among Members;
- Area working was to be piloted with strengthened relationships with the parish and town councils.
- A Corporate Work Programme had been developed, but still required more involvement of managers;
- There was still a need to do more to break down departmental barriers;
- Although partnership working and a Community Strategy were under way, there was little involvement at less senior levels among officers, and Members were not engaged in the process;
- ICT development was hampered by historical acquisitions, although there was now a strategy in place to achieve e-Government targets;
- The Corporate Planning frameworks were either already in place or in development, to make the links between corporate and service plans and to enable periodic reporting on progress.
- EFQM and Best Value were being used consistently to allow continuous improvement. More progress was needed to develop the skills of project management;
- Member training and development was under way;
- There was clear corporate direction through the Key Aims.

However the Council's improvements were ongoing and the IDeA team specifically recommended for the future;

- Raising the profile of Members internally and externally;
- Keeping the political arrangements under review to overcome difficulties and learn from others;
- Maintain focus on services, to ensure that service standards are maintained;
- Improve external communication to ensure that the community are kept aware of the changes being made;
- Low staff morale needed to be tackled to ensure that the Council sustains its most valuable asset.

Although measures to tackle a number of these issues have been put in place since the last review in 2001 the Council recognises that they are not fully resolved. Therefore our plans for the future include more work in these areas.

IDeA Peer Challenge in February 2003

The IDeA were invited back to Dacorum in early 2003 to undertake a review of the Council's position in readiness for Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

The summary of findings suggested:

- Dacorum is a council that has a mission to improve. It wants to be known as an excellent service provider, an innovator, a measured risk taker and a good partnership worker. It has come a long way since an IDeA peer review in December 1999 and has invested in its corporate capacity to improve. New political management arrangements, a new CMT, new corporate mechanisms, exploration of alternative routes of service provision and good best value review inspections are some examples of the tools the council has invested in to help it shift up an improvement trajectory.
- The key area that the council needs to focus on post the election in May 2003 is the need to form a clear vision from the jigsaw of aims, priorities, key drivers, community plan and so on it currently has in place. Principally, the issue of where the council and community wish to be in the future needs working on.
- The public private partnership negotiations (for 21 of the council's support services) undertaken over the last 18 months has resulted in some delays in the work that council had intended to do during 2002. The real challenge for the council now it has decided to withdraw from negotiations is to press hard at progressing on with the overarching objectives.
- Dacorum is at a challenging juncture financially. Traditionally it has been an affluent council in terms of resources —both revenue and capital – and has spent well beyond FSA for most of its lifetime. Legislative changes, changes in capital returns and potential redistribution of capital balances place the council in a financial predicament that it has not experienced to date. This coupled with high expectations from the public (because the council has always provided services well beyond the statutory minimum) will result in tensions and pressures not familiar to the staff, politicians or residents of Dacorum and as such will require careful management over a long period of time.
- Dacorum Borough Council is not a complacent council but it is still for the most part an inward looking council who seeks to compare itself to the rest of Hertfordshire rather than the rest of local government. The review team felt the council could expand its knowledge and learning horizons far more – it has made a great start since 1999 but leadership of the next stage of change, both politically and from managers in the council, will need to be stepped up a gear if the council is to reach its full potential.
- Many of the mechanisms and tools to track service and corporate performance improvements are in place and where they are not in place are being worked on. Dacorum has good foundations in place to face challenges and opportunities – what needs to happen now is a more robust assessment of how these are impacting on local quality of life.

From these findings the team made the following recommendations that would build upon existing strengths and equip the Council for future challenges:

In order to effectively equip itself for future challenges and demands on services the council should:

- Embrace the opportunity to develop a visionary, widely owned and long term vision for the borough through the local strategic partnership.
- Be more explicit and confident about what are and are not the council's key priorities.
- Continue to invest in member development, scrutiny and community leadership.
- Look beyond Hertfordshire for inspiration.
- Continue to welcome external scrutiny.
- Ask the question – how robustly does Dacorum's scrutiny process challenge decision-making?
- Put the PPP negotiations (of the council's 21 support services) behind us and march on with realising the objectives set out for the PPP.
- Set out how the community plan influences the councils priorities.
- Invest in and undertake more community leadership roles.
- Push on with the development of a local strategic partnership agenda.

To ensure that the council optimises the use of its available resources it will:

- Face head on the equation of balancing the demands of tiring new town, a commitment to green belt protection, managing down resident expectations and diminishing resources.
- Continue to develop engagement with the local community to ensure that their needs and priorities are fully considered when forming corporate key aims and spending priorities.
- Develop and embed capacity building blocks of organisational development, risk management, procurement and asset management.
- Continue to shift council resources to areas designated high priority.
- Continue to explore the value of alternative methods of service delivery.

To promote greater consistency in planning and practice the council will:

- Concentrate on improving internal communications.
- Think seriously about whether an incremental approach to key challenges is the best approach.
- Implement as quickly as possible single status.
- Invest in data intelligence that talks across departments and provide regular performance updates.

External Auditor's Management Letter – December 2002

Each year Dacorum Borough Council, as with every other local authority, is audited by an independent External Auditor appointed by the Audit Commission.

The Audit letter provides a summary of the main findings and conclusions from all audit work the auditor has carried out at the Council in the past year.

The table below presents these findings and includes our planned actions.

Item Nos.	Key issues and recommendations for Members	Action to be taken	Officers Responsible	Target Date
Review of management developments in the year				
2.1	To maintain momentum in the build up to CPA against the back drop of the May 2003 elections.	Draft corporate self-assessment prepared and challenged by IDeA; awaiting final national guidance to firm up work on self-assessment and diagnostic themes; plan for period up to inspection to be revised; reporting to CPA Task & Finish Group & consulting widely.	Hilary Mitchell	January 2004
2.3	Continue the development of the Council's response to the Code of Corporate Governance and the Audit Commission's management paper 'Worth the risk – improving risk management in local government'.	Officer group to be set-up to devise a Code of Corporate Governance which will include:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the Community Focus ▪ Service Delivery Arrangements ▪ Structures and Processes ▪ Risk Management & Internal Control ▪ Standards of Conduct This draft code will be presented to Members for formal inclusion into the Council's Constitution.	Richard Micklewright	October 2003
2.3	Aim to publish a statement on the Council's corporate governance arrangements in its 2002/03 accounts.	The corporate governance arrangements statement will be published in the 2002/03 accounts.	Richard Micklewright	August 2003
Performance Management				
3.4	Implement the findings from the Performance Indicator recording and monitoring review.	Improvements in data collection and systems being introduced; corporate group working to improve ownership and understanding of PIs; complete solution depends on IT upgrades.	Hilary Mitchell	Work in progress; to be reviewed at 31 March 2004
3.6	Enter into early discussions with auditors to help inform the Council of their performance across the CPA 'audit indicator' categories.	Discussions with new External Auditors have taken place; awaiting final guidance on indicators; DA will be directly involved in later stages of preparation for CPA inspection.	Hilary Mitchell	January 2004
Use of Resources Studies				
4.2	Overall VAT is fairly well controlled at Dacorum. However the implications of out-sourcing VAT compliance needs to be carefully considered.	Plans to outsource the whole finance function have now changed. Work will continue to improve finance services, and handling of VAT will be included within this.	Richard Micklewright	Ongoing
Financial aspects of corporate governance				
5.5	Urgently review Internal Audit staffing levels to ensure full coverage and reliance on the fundamental systems are covered.	Management is reviewing the way the internal audit service is provided. From April 2003, computer audit will be contracted out and collaborative arrangements with other local authorities are being evaluated.	Richard Micklewright	Ongoing
5.5	For Members to take ownership of both internal and external audit findings and monitor progress of implementation of recommendations.	The Audit Commission have been requested to advise on best practice in relation to the reporting to Members of external and internal audit matters. A report setting out this advice will be placed before Members.	Richard Micklewright	June 2003
Auditing the accounts				
6	Strengthen year end accounts procedures to ensure finalisation can occur well within the statutory guidelines.	Dacorum will be following CIPFA guidance and ensuring that an action plan is discussed with External Audit for the 2002/03 accounts. The need to report the accounts a month earlier gives particular problems as the August Cabinet is likely to be on 5th, thus giving some 7 weeks less than the time available for the 2001/02 accounts.	Richard Micklewright	Ongoing

Item Nos.	Key issues and recommendations for Members	Action to be taken	Officers Responsible	Target Date
		A much tighter timetable is being developed to meet the new meeting dates which in turn will speed up the annual report itself in readiness for Audit. To achieve this, the culture at Dacorum will need to change so that other priorities take second place until the Accounts are complete. We also intend to fill previously 'on hold' vacancies to put the Accountancy Unit back up to its 2001 level. At the same time Dacorum will be looking to procure a new Accounting System which would be expected to speed up the final accounts process in following years.		

External Auditor's report on BVPP

The Council has to produce a Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) each year that complies with Audit Commission statutory guidance. The external auditors then have to consider whether we have prepared and published the BVPP in accordance with these requirements.

The external auditors report for the 2002/3 BVPP, issued in December 2002 stated that "...Dacorum Borough Council has prepared and published it's Best Value Performance Plan in all significant respects in accordance with...the Local Government Act 1999..."

The audit identified one aspect of the performance plan that does not strictly comply with the statutory guidance. This is set out below along with the Council's response.

<u>Recommendation</u>	<u>Council Response</u>
Appendix 2. It is our opinion that the BVPP would benefit from an update on action plans from earlier Best Value reviews, not just those carried out in 2001/2.	This recommendation will be adopted in the development of the next BVPP (2003/04).

An update of the Best Value Reviews undertaken can be found on pages 62-70.

Consultation 2002/03

Citizens Panel. In May 2002 we established a new Dacorum Citizens' Panel, which consists of 1046 residents who are demographically representative of the Borough as a whole in terms of age, gender, ethnic community group, and geographic location. We have so far used the panel for two full surveys, and to recruit participants for a variety of service focus groups.

Resident Survey. In October 2002 we used the Citizens' Panel for a full resident survey. The questionnaire was created as a combination of the questions required by the ODPM for their 3-yearly survey and questions that we have traditionally asked in our Viewpoint survey relating to issues such as importance.

Budget Consultation. In November 2001 we undertook detailed consultation on our budget proposals, including a SIMALTO exercise which allows the participants to make

priority choices within a real financial scenario. This successful programme was repeated in November 2002.

What have we learnt about ourselves?

Involving Employees

We undertook our first staff attitude survey in April 2001 and will be repeating this every two years. The next survey will therefore be carried out in April 2003.

One of the issues which arose in the first survey was internal communication and we have developed two new programmes to improve internal communications:

Team Talk

Team Talk is a system of regular meetings giving staff the opportunity to hear about, comment on, and ask questions on the work of the Council. Team Talk works through a "cascade" system, where the Corporate Management Team meet with the Heads of Service on the first Tuesday of each month. The Heads of Service then meet with their own managers and teams passing on the information down the line. Questions which managers cannot answer are passed back up the line for a response.

Staff Suggestion Scheme

The Staff Suggestion Scheme "Bright Ideas" was launched on October 2002 in response to a staff survey finding suggesting that staff wanted a means of communicating innovative ideas for possible implementation. The scheme provides this opportunity and allows anonymous evaluation of suggestions based on a relevant Head of Service assessment and a review by the Suggestion Scheme Panel.

The Scheme has attracted over 100 suggestions in its first 5 months of operation and at present 16 suggestions have been implemented with another 20 or so that maybe implemented.

If you would like to know more about the staff suggestion scheme, please contact Caroline Fitz-Gibbon, Community Consultation Manager on 01442 228504, or email caroline.fitz-gibbon@dacorum.gov.uk.

Best Value Reviews 2002/03

"the central purpose of Best Value is to make a real and positive difference to the services which local people receive from their authority;" DETR Circular 10/99.

Best Value means a complete assessment of all that Councils do, how they spend the public's money, how they provide public access to services, what targets they set for improvement and how they tell the public what they have achieved. By delivering Best Value through well-run services, the Council will be in the best position to develop the social, economic and environmental well-being of its area.

All local authorities have to undertake a programme of service reviews. The Council's service reviews have to consider 4 C's:

- **Challenge:** should the service be provided, if so how and by whom?
- **Comparison:** how do we compare with other service deliverers, including other Councils?
- **Consultation:** what do our service users and others think about the service?
- **Competition:** has the service embraced fair and open competition in its service delivery?

Following the review of each service, the Council draws up an improvement plan of how it will improve the service to achieve the quality and cost of the top performing Councils.

The Best Value Reviews that were undertaken by Dacorum Borough Council in 2001/02 were:

- HOUSING MANAGEMENT (INSPECTED)
- COMMUNITY ALARM SERVICE (INSPECTED)
- SUPPORT SERVICES
- BUILDING CONTROL
- ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION
- ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
- REGENERATION
- SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

A summary of the Inspectors reports follows this section and an update on those yet to be inspected is provided.

In 2002/03 six reviews were undertaken and improvement plans are being produced in line with the corporate guidance. The reviews are as follows:

- CATERING & CARE SERVICES
- LANDSCAPE & RECREATION
- SHELTERED HOUSING
- COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
- FLEET MANAGEMENT
- PLANNING

If you would like further information on these reviews please contact the officers identified below.

If you would like to know more about Best Value in general please contact Gordon Glenn, Best Value Officer, on 01442 228429, or email gordon.glenn@dacorum.gov.uk.

For further information about the **Catering and Care Services** review, contact Brian Trainor on 01442 228783 or by e-mail at brian.trainor@dacorum.gov.uk

For further information about the **Landscape & Recreation** review, contact Peter Snow on 01442 228498 or by e-mail at peter.snow@dacorum.gov.uk

For further information about the **Sheltered Housing** review, contact Lou Wilson on 01442 228615 or by e-mail at lou.wilson@dacorum.gov.uk

For further information about the **Community Involvement** review contact either Dave Gill on 01442 228511 or by e-mail at dave.gill@dacorum.gov.uk , or contact Mike Kember on 01442 228640 or by e-mail at mike.kember@dacorum.gov.uk

For further information about the **Fleet Management** review, contact Alan Gater on 01442 228349 or by e-mail at alan.gater@dacorum.gov.uk

For further information about the **Planning** review, contact Graham Winwright on 01442 228583 or by e-mail at graham.winwright@dacorum.gov.uk

Best Value Reviews – Completed

Sports Service

The Sports Service Best Value Review was inspected in November 2001 and received a Two Star/ Excellent prospects for improvement rating. The key findings of the inspection and the action taken as part of the improvement plan are shown in the table below.

Recommendation	Progress to date
Produce clear service aims to inform customers and staff	On way, as part of the proposed Trust Business Plan
Ensure customers are kept fully informed of improvement plans, what is being achieved, and of action taken in response to customer comments	Carried out through customer newsletters and Customer Information Boards being established in centre reception areas (these have been ordered)
Finalise draft policies and strategies, ensuring appropriate links with corporate priorities	Sports Strategy published. Corporate policies / strategies are being agreed and finalised
Review pricing to ensure this reflects the market and accords with service priorities, and tighten procedures to ensure payment is secured from all customers	Pricing has been reviewed and will be in more depth as part of the proposed Trust Business Plan. Procedures have been reviewed and strengthened, e.g. staff member stationed in Weights Room
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	Business Support Officer has dedicated time to improving this and developments are ongoing. Currently considering purchasing 2 'bolt on' packages which will significantly enhance our ability to develop this.
Ensure that maintenance of the current quality of the service, continuous improvement, optimum utilisation of facilities and closely integrated sports development, are secured in any future arrangements for procurement of the service.	Part of the process of trust transfer. Sports Development is now part of the overall sports service.

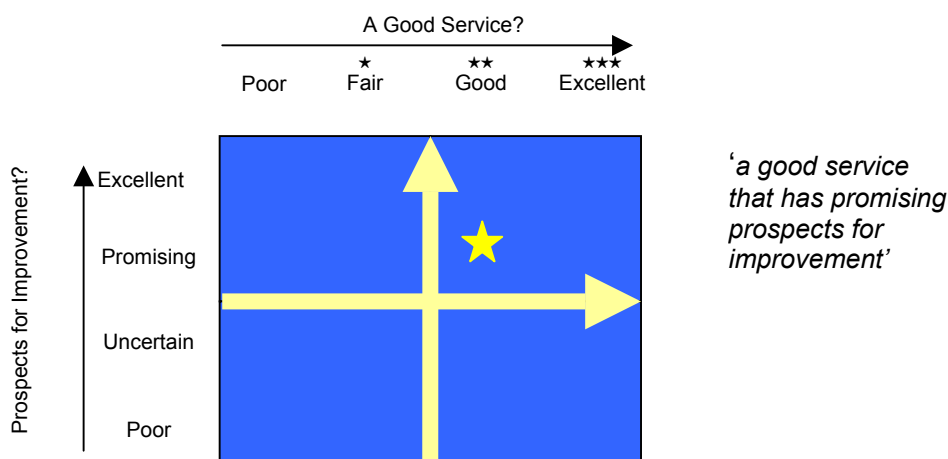
The inspection endorsed the decision to investigate establishing a trust to include the Sports Development service. This work is currently underway.

Housing Management – Inspectors Report

The Housing Management Review covered the following service areas:

- tenancy and estate management;
- homelessness and housing needs;
- void properties and allocations; and
- rent collection and recovery of arrears.

Scoring the service



We have assessed the Council as providing a 'good', two star service that has promising prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

The rent collection and arrears management performance is strong with a good variety of collection methods and a fast track approach to tenants' arrears management that ensures that the total level of arrears remains within that of the top performing district councils.

The Tenancy and Estate Management Service includes a good range of measures to tackle anti-social behaviour both internally and in partnership with the Police and Social Services. Service improvements such as the introduction of Estate Wardens, a corporate approach to abandoned vehicles, and physical measures such as the installation of door entry systems and CCTV have developed directly from previous service reviews and customer consultation.

Customer consultation is developing and the Council is actively supporting both tenants and residents living on Council housing estates; but there remains more work to be done before stakeholders are fully engaged within Council decision making.

The Homelessness and Housing Needs Service provides good support and advice to applicants including reasonable, self-contained temporary accommodation for vulnerable households. It does not normally utilise bed and breakfast accommodation. However, the average length of time taken to determine an application is 45 days and is below the performance of the best performing district councils.

Void management and allocations services are weaker. With an average re-let time of 43 days compared with the district councils' top quartile of 26 days, the services have much work to do. Some incentives are employed with positive effect; these include the very popular Tenant Removal Scheme and the use of HOMES. However, the Council has limited information on the availability of different types of Council accommodation within the various locations.

Although we consider that the 4C's could have been more rigorously and consistently applied within the review, we found evidence that the Housing Service is capable of

turning poor elements of service around. Managers and operational staff are well motivated and show a high awareness level of good practice and innovation.

The Council has introduced a corporate Performance Monitoring Framework and a new Service Planning Standard that link to best value and the EFQM Model. For these to be effective it will require a clear process of performance monitoring not only to be established but also to be fully understood and utilised by Officers and Members.

Recommendations

To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team feels that the Council should now take action to resolve a number of general, political, managerial and partnership issues.

We recommend:

- extending the information within the Tenants' Handbook with a comprehensive list of service standards and information on the Council's complaints procedure and how to appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman. This information to be integrated into the next revision of the Handbook;
- development of a comprehensive Homelessness Information Pack and a strategic plan for the Homelessness and Housing Advice Service, taking account of the needs of all household types, young, single and families;
- development of a systematic, open, clear and measurable methodology for feeding the views of tenants and residents into the Council's decision making process;
- introduction of a training programme for tenants' and residents' representatives that enables them to become fully engaged in the participation process; and training and improved joint working with the Tenant Participation Team to ensure that all staff fully engage in the ethos of tenant participation;
- formal adoption of the Leaseholders' Compact;
- development of a BME Consultation Strategy;
- the introduction of clear reporting responsibilities, targets and monitoring arrangements for the staff involved in the Housing Management Service, and Members, ensuring that the appropriate level of performance monitoring and review is fed into the new Cabinet arrangements;
- development of Service Level Agreements and monitoring arrangements with all other Council departments so that consistently high services between departments are achieved and policies and procedures are developed in partnership;
- amending the services' re-charge policy to ensure that it meets current requirements and is implemented consistently;
- revision of the project planning arrangements to ensure that the introduction of new initiatives is managed effectively, incorporating all health and safety arrangements and financial and other resource planning issues necessary;
- revision of the monitoring and control arrangements of void works and estate improvements to improve contractor accountability, ensuring that all staff are familiar with policies and procedures regarding health and safety;
- evaluation of the existing computer system to ensure that it is utilised to best effect by all appropriate staff ensuring that training is provided and monitoring arrangements are clarified and documented;

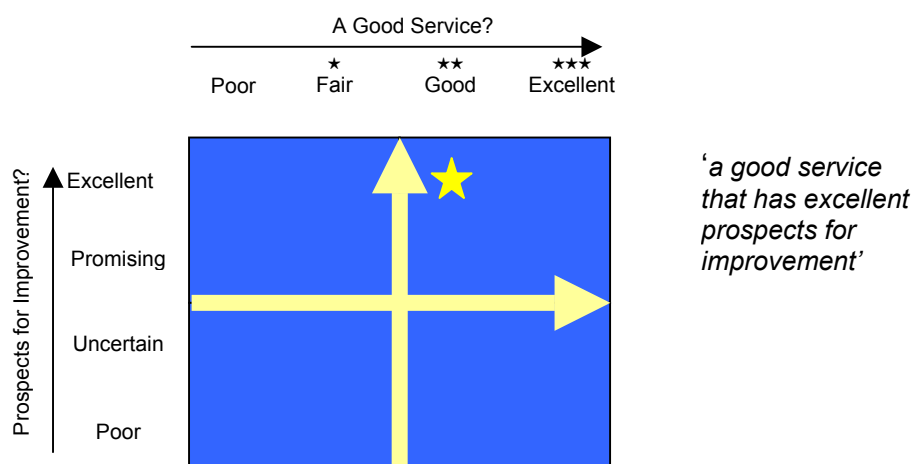
- development of lettings information (availability of properties by type and location etc.) for tenants and applicants so that all those involved can make informed decisions;
- inclusion of external sources of impartial advice and assistance is incorporated within the formal rent arrears notifications and notice of seeking possession;
- an analysis to include the tenants' perspective of the impact of collecting water charges with the rent;
- regular analysis of the user survey of the Homelessness Service; and
- development of an improvement plan for the Chilterns Hostel that incorporates the needs of licensees with disabilities and improved security to the play area.

If you would like to know more about the Housing Management Service please contact Steve Bradley, Housing Services Manager on 01442 228459, or email steven.bradley@dacorum.gov.uk.

Community Alarms – Inspectors Report

The Community Alarms Review covered the Community Alarms Service provided to the tenants within the Council's sheltered and non-sheltered elderly persons' dwellings, as well as elderly and vulnerable people purchasing the Lifeline Service privately or through corporate clients from the RSL sector. The contract to manage the Community Alarms Service was awarded to Tunstall Lifeline Limited and began in October 2001.

Scoring the service



We have assessed the Council as providing a 'good', two star service that has excellent prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

The Community Alarms Review's recommendations are clear and outcome-focused, specifying the resource implications. Its aim has been communicated to the staff, individual and corporate stakeholders. Furthermore, the expected outcomes for continuing service improvement are detailed in the subsequent service plan and are being monitored on a monthly basis.

However, the target manual and the performance monitoring and management system have not been adjusted to take account of the reporting requirements for the Community Alarms Service.

For the service users the satisfaction level has remained high with an improved level of satisfaction since the new contractor began operating in October 2001.

A comparison of the in-house service with the standards expected by the Association of Social and Community Alarms Providers (ASAP) clearly demonstrates that the Council's in-house service fell well below the expected standards. However, the newly outsourced service has addressed the procedural guidance for staff; performance monitoring; and customer accountability requirements of the code; and has resulted in significant financial savings for the Council and its customers as well as improvements in operational performance and customer satisfaction. The service now complies with 96 out of the 97 requirements of the ASAP code of practice and the code's remaining performance indicator should be met within March 2002, which is within six months of contract commencement.

Staffing arrangements have been reviewed and an assessment of financial and other resources to meet the service aims have been completed to ensure compliance with the best value review requirements.

We believe that the 4C's were rigorously applied. The improvement plan was developed before the decision was taken to externalise the service. Since out-sourcing the plan has continued to be in use however, it has not been revised to reflect the new contractual arrangements and does not identify the lead officers or the resources required to move the service forward.

The contract was tendered in 2001 and awarded to Tunstall Lifeline Limited. It commenced in October 2001 and will produce in the first year a saving of approximately 56 per cent on the previous year's operating costs. Furthermore, if the contractor delivers the specified performance, the service will soon comply fully with the ASAP code of practice.

Managers and operational staff are well motivated and show a high level of awareness concerning good practice and innovation.

Recommendations

To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. In this context, the inspection team feels that the Council should now take action to resolve a number of general, political, managerial and partnership issues.

We recommend:

- supplementing the information within the tenant's handbook with a comprehensive list of service standards for the Community Alarms Service, information on the Council's complaint's procedure and how to appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman. This information to be integrated into the next revision of the handbook;
- the introduction of clear reporting responsibilities, targets and monitoring arrangements for the staff involved in the Community Alarms Service, and Members, ensuring that the appropriate level of performance monitoring and review is fed into the new Cabinet arrangements; and
- development of a systematic, open, clear and measurable methodology for feeding the views of tenants and residents into the Council's decision-making process.

If you would like to know more about the Community Alarms service please contact Lou Wilson, Special Needs Housing Manager on 01442 228615, or email lou.wilson@dacorum.gov.uk.

Support Services – Completed Review

In 2001, the Council commenced a large, cross-cutting Best Value Review of its Support Services.

The review was complex, and involved setting out initial key objectives focusing on service improvement, efficiency savings and investment in new technology in order to improve customer access.

The review considered the following options, assessing each of them against 6 criteria: -

- The development of a strategic in-house Improvement plan to see if we could meet the key objectives as mentioned above;
- Testing the market via an OJEC Advertisement (Official Journal of European Community) to see if there was a potential “private” market that would be willing to work with us in a partnership arrangement (PPP) and have the capacity and capability to meet the objectives set;
- Engaging in dialogue with 10 neighbouring Authorities to try and develop the potential for greater Local Authority partnership working.

In June 2002 the Council evaluated the review outcomes against the DTLR models for service delivery. Members agreed that the one that would most meet the Review’s objectives would be that of a Public Private Partnership (PPP).

It was anticipated that the PPP could deliver not only improvements and substantial savings for the services along with the protection for officers associated with the services, but would also meet the large-scale investment needed to pursue our “IEG” (Implementing Electronic Government) Statement in line with the Government’s target for Local Authorities.

During 2002, there were substantial assessments of the three shortlisted bidders and their proposals, and in July Northgate Information Systems was selected as the Council’s preferred partner. There followed an intense period of contract and service level agreement negotiations between Northgate and ourselves. Unfortunately we were unable to agree a commercially viable package with Northgate and it was decided that alternative options for service delivery be considered. However the objectives of the PPP remain valid and the knowledge gained from the experience valuable.

If you would like to know more about the Support Services Review please contact Paul Spencer, Strategic Director of Resources on 01442 228585, or email paul.spencer@dacorum.gov.uk.

Building Control – Completed Review

The Best Value Review of Building Control commenced in 1999 as a pilot review, and was originally considered by the Development Control Committee in March 2000. Following development of the Best Value Guidance, in June 2001 it was decided to revisit the review

and as a result certain aspects were strengthened. The review was completed in March 2002 when it was endorsed by Cabinet. It has not yet been subject to inspection by the Audit Commission.

The review identified significant opportunities for improving service delivery, specifically in the areas of costs, organisational structure, customer consultation, Information Technology and by applying for quality standards.

The review fully investigated alternative options for service delivery, and Members agreed that the service should remain in-house. However, Officers will seek to develop partnership working with other local authorities, initially on a small scale but in the long term as a Hertfordshire Consortium.

If you would like to know more about Building Services please contact John Gavin, Building Control Manager on 01442 228578 or email john.gavin@dacorum.gov.uk.

Environmental Action – Completed Review

It was agreed in October 2000 to undertake a Best Value review of Environmental Action, and the review itself commenced in February 2001. The review was completed in April 2002 when it was endorsed by Cabinet. It has not yet been subject to inspection by the Audit Commission.

The scope of the review covered:

- The Council's corporate Environmental Action Strategy – Local Agenda 21
- The role of the Environmental Resources unit

The review demonstrated that the Council is performing well on the Environmental Action Strategy in comparison with other local authorities. However, three main improvement areas were identified, which will lead to key service changes – revision of the Local Agenda 21 Strategy, the mainstreaming of Environmental Action, and building on the existing community links and partnerships.

If you would like to know more about Environmental Action please contact Jon Foster, Environmental Resources Manager on 01442 228239 or email jon.foster@dacorum.gov.uk.

Environmental Health – Completed Review

The Best Value Review of Environmental Health commenced in March 2001, in the context of large scale service restructure arising from sudden recruitment and retention difficulties, a problem experienced by authorities across the South East. The review was completed in June 2002 when it was endorsed by Cabinet. It has not yet been subjected to external inspection by the Audit Commission.

The scope of the review covered: -

- Food safety
- Health & Safety endorsement
- Pollution control and monitoring
- Private sector housing (including grants)
- Pest control services

- Clinical waste services
- Dog warden services

It did not cover licensing functions or traveller issues.

The review indicated that the service compares favourably with other local authorities. A number of changes were implemented during the review itself and the restructure has introduced a more flexible approach. Key recommendations arising from the review included undertaking a management review of the licensing function, establishing closer links with the local business community, exploring the possibilities of partnership working with both other local authorities and the private sector as well as continue to research alternative provisions of service delivery.

If you would like to know more about Environmental Health please contact John Clarke, Environmental Health manager on 01442 228480, email john.clarke@dacorum.gov.uk or Stephen Reeves, Environmental Health Manager – Operational Support on 01442 228482, email stephen.reeves@dacorum.gov.uk.

Regeneration – Completed Review

The Best Value Review of Regeneration commenced in April 2001, when the Regeneration service as it exists now was formed by combining Town Centres, Economic Development, Heritage and Tourism and key project functions. The review was endorsed by Cabinet in October 2002 but has yet to be subjected to external inspection by the Audit Commission.

The scope of the review concentrated on: -

- Town Centres
- Economic Development

During the course of the review, there were a number of recommendations around the service which were agreed by Cabinet – re-structuring town centre management, refocusing LifeLong Learning and securing a new lease for The Bridge to enable the continued delivery of training to meet specific needs (e.g. basic skills, ICT), at least in the medium term.

Key recommendations arising from the review included raising awareness of the Regeneration service as a whole, maximising the use of ICT in the service, raising the profile of Dacorum, greater support for businesses and increased partnership working. The actions in the improvement plan were split into 6 areas – adequate financial resources, a buoyant economy and a well skilled workforce, an inclusive society, a clean and healthy environment, effective partnerships and organisational effectiveness. Priorities will be reflected in a Regeneration Strategy and implemented through a series of Action Plans on External Funding, Lifelong Learning, Business Support and Marketing of the service.

If you would like to know more about Regeneration please contact David Wass, Head of Regeneration on 01442 867439, or email david.wass@dacorum.gov.uk.

Sports Development – Completed Review

The review of Sports Development was originally included within the Active Communities Review which commenced in April 2000. However, this review was then split into two separate reviews – Sports Development and Landscape and Recreation. It was not included in the scope of the Sports Centres Best Value Review, which was completed in 2001 and inspected by the Audit Commission in January 2002.

The review was completed in January 2003 when it was endorsed by Cabinet. It has not yet been subject to external inspection by the Audit Commission.

The scope of the review covered the three main areas of the Service: -

- Leisure and Development
- Youth Sports Development
- Community Sport

The review indicated that there was a very high level of satisfaction amongst current users and amongst partner organisations. There was widespread and good levels of support for the service.

Key findings from the review included the need for the Service to identify its target audience more clearly, the need for it to take on an enabling role as opposed to being a provider, and to strengthen existing partnerships, taking on a more co-ordinating role where possible. A number of recommendations and improvements have already been implemented, including the restructure the service.

If you would like to know more about Sports Development, please contact [Pat Bailey](#), Sport Development Manager on 01442 228787, or email pat.bailey@dacorum.gov.uk.