

**POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE**

2nd February 2005

Report of the Chief Executive

**PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT TEAM: AVERAGE RELET TIME FOR
VOID PROPERTIES**

purpose of report

1. To present the outcome of the Performance Improvement Team on former Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 68, Average Relet Time for Void Properties.

background

2. In 2002, as part of its drive to improve performance, the Council identified 15 indicators that showed our performance as particularly poor. These indicators have been monitored especially closely: improvement targets have been set and progress is reported regularly to Corporate Management Team and to the Policy and Strategy Development Committee.
3. In many cases, the extra focus placed on these areas by service teams has led to improvement, but in some cases improvement was either not sustained, or has not been rapid enough to meet the improvement target. When this happens, the Council's approach is to set up a time limited Performance Improvement Team (PIT) to examine reasons for underperformance and suggest improvements.
4. Former BV68: Average Relet Time was selected for a PIT in January 2004 because, although performance on this indicator had improved, it had not improved enough to meet the target.
5. The PIT consisted of Joanne Dunn, John Dowson, Nicola Stinson and Joy Brindle.
6. The PIT met from February to March 2004 and many of the improvements suggested by the team have now been implemented.

what does this performance indicator cover?

7. This indicator relates to the average relet times (in days) for Council properties let in the financial year. It is calculated from data on the total

number of lettings made during the year, and the total number of days these dwellings were vacant. It excludes:

- properties let after major repairs where “the repair is the reason for the property being void”
- mutual exchanges.

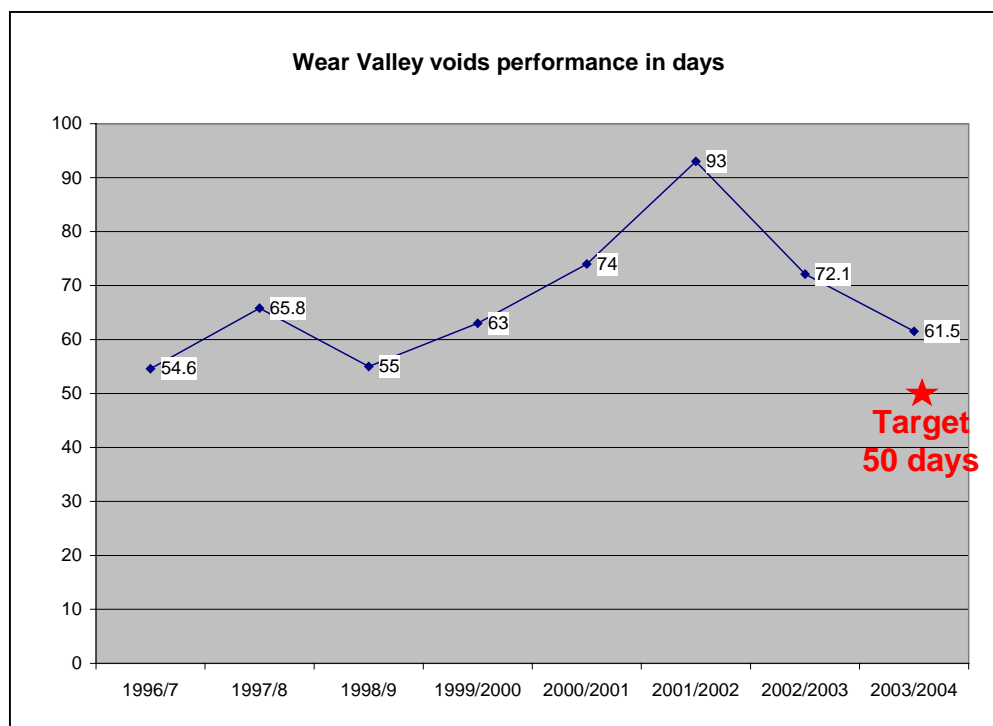
8. This indicator is no longer required by the Audit Commission¹ but has been retained as a local indicator in Wear Valley. When relet times were a BVPI, all authorities were set the target of achieving top quartile performance.

9. This indicator is strategically important to the Council in terms of:

- Council Plan priorities around the environment and organisational development (Housing Stock Options)
- Maximising Housing Revenue Account income
- Council efficiency targets related to the Local Public Service Agreement (round 1)

performance trend

10. Our performance trend on relets is shown in the table below:

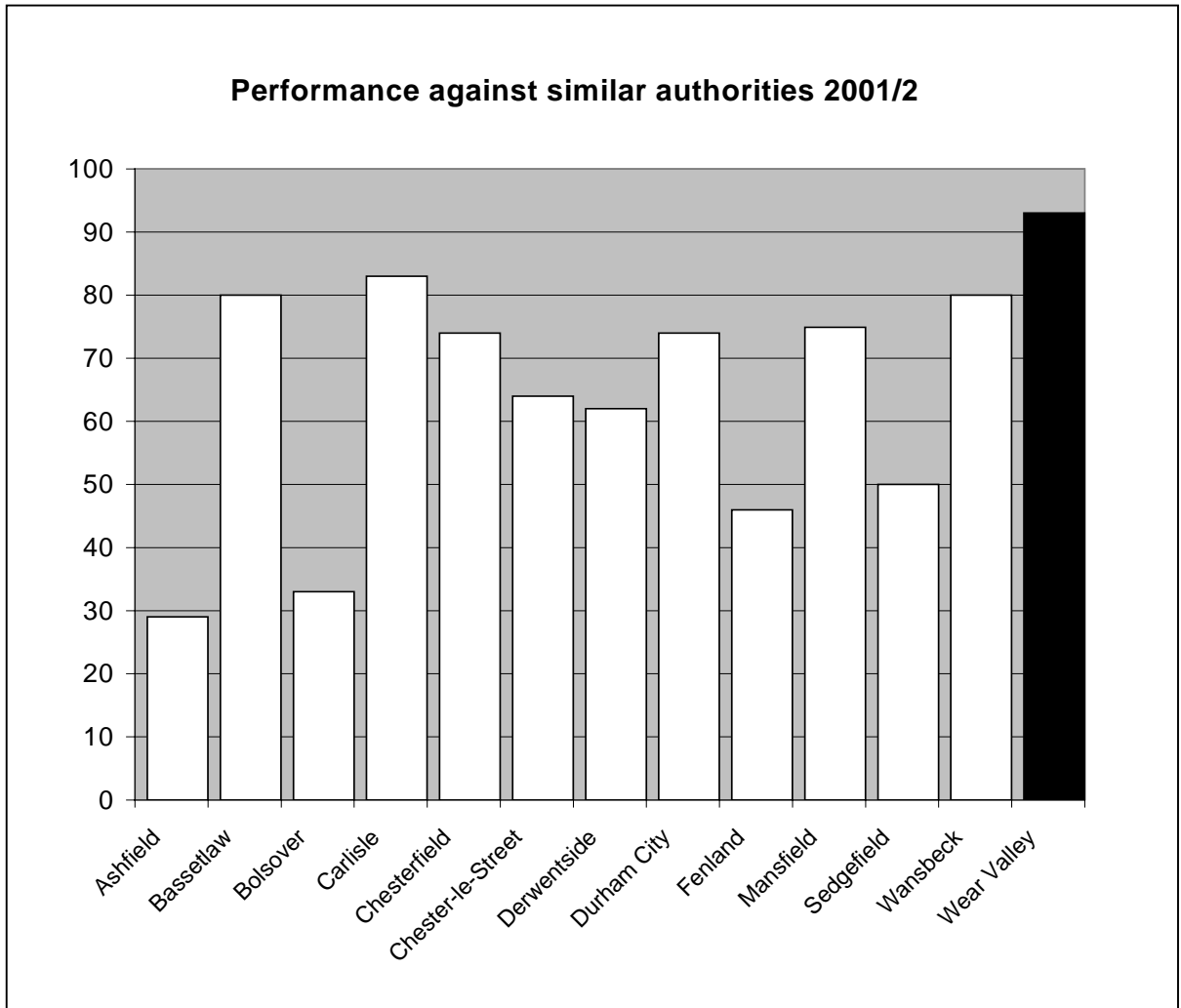


11. Our performance over time shows a downward trend 1998-2002, with an improvement in performance since 2002/3. The speed of this improvement had not been fast enough to meet our stated target for 2003/4 of a 50 day average relet time: the final figure for 2003/4 was 61.53 days.

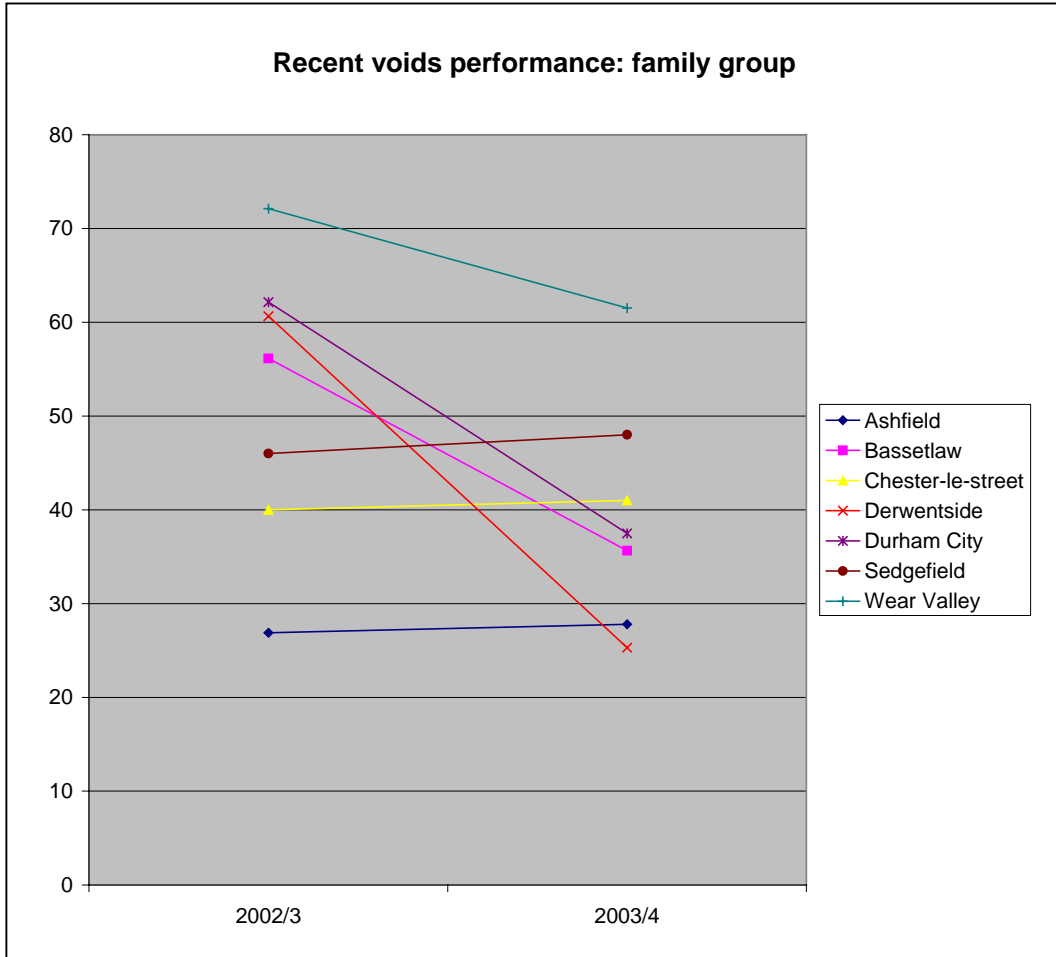
¹ The Audit Commission’s draft BVPIs for 2005/6 propose reinstating this PI

comparative performance

12. Authorities are no longer required to collect data about relet times and many of them have ceased to do so. In 2001/2 (the last year this data was required as a BVPI), Wear Valley's performance was the worst in its family group:



13. Only 7 of our family group are still collecting this data. The table below shows our performance in comparison with these: although our rate of improvement is clearly shown (particularly in relation to our 2001/2 figure of 93 days), our performance is still the lowest:



14. Note the major improvement achieved by Derwentside in this period (one of our improvement recommendations is to visit Derwentside to identify any further learning which we can incorporate into our Improvement Plan).

15. The best performing authorities in 2001/2 were achieving relet times of 36 days or less; many of our family group authorities are now achieving around this level and some of the best performing authorities nationally are turning round voids in under 30 days (Ashfield, Selby, Tees Valley Housing Association and now Derwentside).

how the team tackled the problem

16. The Housing team has already initiated some service changes that have positively impacted on performance against this PI. These include:
- Structural and work practice changes to the Repairs team including the introduction (from April 2004) of a Voids Squad to focus on repairs to void properties
 - Introduction of a revised Voids procedure
17. The team developed a process map showing all elements of the voids/relets process, as a tool to see where we could further improve our performance by identifying any delays, gaps, overlaps or blockages. This is attached as Annex 1. The exercise threw up three areas of potential for improvement:
- process improvements
 - staffing/management issues
 - issues specifically related to “hard-to-let” properties
18. In relation to these areas, the team also examined best practice from a range of high performing authorities and Housing Associations, identified through their Housing Inspectorate scores and the Housing Corporation innovation website. Pursuing best practice around hard to let properties was particularly useful.

findings - processes

19. Although our processes were on the surface similar to those of high performing authorities particularly Selby, we identified several areas where we could potentially remove delays:
- We had a one-month period after the tenant has given notice when staff could go into the house and assess the repairs needed. Our practice was to leave this until after the keys have been handed over;
 - Potential tenants were not shown into properties until they were vacant. If we did what estate agents do in the wider housing market, potential tenants could see properties when they are occupied which might make them more attractive and also cut delays;
 - The 2003-4 move towards only doing essential repairs while the property is empty, and picking up smaller ones with the tenant in place, was felt to be a good move to cut delays;
 - The work done around implementing a Void Squad will further improve turnaround times on the repairs side.

findings - staffing

20. The team felt that the new structure/performance culture in Property Services had led to improved service (evidenced in their exceeding turnaround targets on repairs). A similar shift needed to happen on the housing management side:

- Workloads in housing management have been reengineered to reduce Housing Officers' workloads and set up specialist teams for homelessness, enforcement of tenancy agreements and tenancy support;
- Problems with new IT systems. Three new systems were introduced in a short period: Repairs, Rent Arrears (mid 2003) and Lettings (January 2004). The first system was properly introduced with a team of staff seconded to work with the supplier (IBS) to implement the system, and all trials done on a test system before it went live. The Rent Arrears system was introduced without a test system and with only informal arrangements for staff to work on it. It went live with all its hiccups (including housing benefits and Supporting People not being posted against individuals' accounts, making it look as if people are in arrears when they were not). Housing staff had to work with IBS to put the problems right. The new lettings system was implemented with similar lack of resource/testing and the team felt that it could have similar problems. These problems had a direct impact on voids because "officers were chasing themselves on arrears";
- Discussion of this matter threw up an issue around how well Housing was working across teams (in terms of identifying capacity in the whole Department not just the specific team under discussion);
- There was poor morale and a high level of sickness in the Housing Management team;
- Many new policies were introduced at the time of the Housing Inspection. Staff had complained that these were confusing - management used training time to reinforce these;
- There were no specific voids targets for staff in the Housing Management team.

findings - hard to let properties

21. Many of the highest performing authorities had focused on the broader issues of what makes properties hard to let, and taken actions which either proactively improved the "liveability" of their neighbourhoods, or which more reactively looked at how the hard-to-let properties might be better marketed.

- If Council housing is now a less popular choice alongside new, cheap owner-occupied properties, perhaps the experience of choosing a Council property should be made as similar to the wider marketplace as possible;
- If there is a much wider choice of property type/ownership in Wear Valley and trends are towards a desire for ownership, shifting our properties (particularly less desirable ones) is going to get harder. Part of our thinking about voids should continue to include demolition of undesirable properties, and remodelling of properties into types of housing most desirable/needed by current Wear Valley residents;

- In some cases, taking out small eyesores like blocks of flats can raise the perception of desirability of an estate;
- What is the impact of other regeneration initiatives (eg activities around young people) on the desirability of an area?
- What is the impact of nuisances on the desirability of neighbourhoods? We have 2 teams in place to tackle anti-social behaviour, environmental problems etc: Tenancy Enforcement and Street Wardens. These teams have the potential to pick up some of the good practice so we should build on what we have already invested in this area. Issues:
 - Management: There had been some management difficulties - however these were addressed by bringing the management of the two teams together;
 - Sustainability: The Street Wardens are externally funded
 - Skills/role: the Street Wardens have focused on the softer issues but will shortly be given enforcement powers. Do they have the right skills to do this?

areas for improvement

22. The team identified a series of recommendations for concrete improvements which can be made in the way we manage relets and these are shown in the table in Annex 2.

conclusions

23. Performance against former BV68 has been improving since 2001/2; however the pace of improvement was not sufficient to meet the target of 50 days for 2003/4.

24. Our performance has improved significantly as a result of the actions outlined in this report. In the first quarter of 2004/5, performance against this PI was 41.1 days. This is close to the 2001/2 top quartile figure of 36 days.

25. The recommendations outlined in Appendix 2 (some of them already being implemented) have the potential to allow us to improve further.

26. In the light of our Council Plan priorities (which include using housing as a regeneration tool - *Environment 2a* - and conducting a Housing Stock Options appraisal- *Organisational Capacity 7*) we should maintain stretching relets targets to bring us in line with the performance of the highest performing authorities.

recommendations

1. Committee notes the improvements suggested by the PIT and the progress made by the Housing team in improving the service.
2. A follow up report be produced in April 2005.

Officer responsible for the report

Iain Phillips
Chief Executive

Author of the report

Joy Brindle
Policy and Performance Manager
Ext 878



POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

2nd FEBRUARY 2005

Report of the Chief Executive

REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 – UPDATE REPORT

purpose of the report

1. To report the Council's activities undertaken under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 over the period from September 2003 to December 2004.

background

2. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000 requires that authorities who are entitled to undertake "directed surveillance" and the use of "covert human intelligence sources" (CHIS), have a formal policy for managing these activities.
3. The Council endorsed a policy and procedure for compliance with the RIPA legislation at its meeting held on 30th October 2002 (Minute No. 465 refers). A copy of the RIPA policy is available from the Management Support Unit.
4. The Council's RIPA policy requires that the RIPA Monitoring Officer present an annual report to the Policy and Strategic Development Committee summarising all surveillance activities undertaken by the Council. This report is designed to comply with that requirement.
5. It should be noted that the Office of Surveillance Commissioners has now set dates for Local Authorities to report their annual statistics. To more closely align our reports with those dates, we would need to submit future reports to Committee in March of each year.
6. Several new members of staff have been appointed into posts in the Council that engage with RIPA activities. Training needs to be arranged for these staff prior to their involvement. The Management Support Unit will meet the cost of this training.

surveillance activities undertaken since the previous report in september 2003 in accordance with ripa policy

7. There have been a further eight applications made for authority to undertake directed surveillance.
8. Details of the applications are held on file within the Management Support Unit. However by their very nature each application is considered to be confidential.
9. No requests have been received for CHIS applications.

conclusion

10. The Council has undertaken activities under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 since agreeing its policy and procedures in 2002.
11. The arrangements for ensuring that the Council complies with the Act appear to be working well.
12. It is considered appropriate that the RIPA Policy and Procedures are reviewed every three years, the next review to be undertaken in September 2006 as supported by the Committee.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. That the Committee notes that activities have been undertaken by the Council in respect of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.
 2. That reports to Committee be changed from December each year to March, starting March 2006, to coincide with the Office of Surveillance Commissioners reporting policy dates.
 3. Further training sessions be arranged for newly appointed officers, in compliance with RIPA training. The funding of this be met by the Management Support Unit.

background papers:

1. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 a full copy is available from the Management Support Unit
2. Policy and Strategic Development Committee Report October 2002 – “RIPA Policy and Procedures” copies of this are available from the Management Support Unit.

Officer responsible for the report

Iain Phillips
Chief Executive

Author of the report

Su Barker
Administrative Officer
Ext. 317



POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

2ND FEBRUARY 2005

Report of the Chief Executive
**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RATING ACT 1997 -PUBLIC PETITION –
CREATION OF GREATER WILLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL**

purpose of the report

1. To notify Committee of receipt of a petition for the creation of a Town Council for Willington.

background

2. In accordance with the above Act, a petition has been received with 570 signatories (13.8% of the electorate) for the creation of a Greater Willington Town Council in accordance with the boundaries on the plan attached at Annex 3. It is proposed that the town council should not be warded and that there should be nine members. The Town Council boundary will be coterminous with the current combined District ward boundaries of the Willington Central and Willington West End Wards.

consultation

3. Notices were displayed within the area and letters sent to interested parties. Two representations have been received, one from Wolsingham Parish Council and the other from the Durham Association of Parish and Town Council's; both have confirmed their support for the application. No objections have been received to date.

action required

4. We are obliged to forward the application to the Secretary of State by 14th March together with our comments and those submitted by interested parties.

conclusion

5. As the proposal envisages a Town Council of nine members, it is suggested that, in passing our observations to the Secretary of State, we raise the possibility that the Town Council should be split into two wards to coincide with the current two District Council wards and that those seats be allocated as follows:

Ward	Seats
Willington Central Ward	6
Willington West End Ward	3

6. In the event of the Secretary of State not agreeing to this request I suggest we support the application as submitted.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Committee consider the report and determine the determine the comments to be forwarded to the Secretary of State together with the application.

Officer responsible for the report	Author of the report
Iain Phillips Chief Executive Ext 304	Terry Richardson Senior Admin Officer Ext 320



POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

2ND FEBRUARY 2005

Report of the Chief Executive

COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT – DIRECTION OF TRAVEL ASSESSMENT – DECEMBER 2004

purpose of the report

1. To submit for information and approval, a report from the Audit Commission that assesses the progress that the Council has made since undergoing a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in November 2003.

background

2. The Audit Commission undertook CPAs of all District Councils in County Durham in November 2003. The outcome from the process for Wear Valley District Council was that it was assessed as “Fair” on a scale that covered – Poor, Weak, Fair, Good and Excellent. The other District Councils in the County received ratings that are shown below:

• Easington	Excellent
• Sedgefield	Good
• Derwentside	Good
• City of Durham	Fair
• Wear Valley	Fair
• Chester le Street	Poor
• Teesdale	Poor

3. As a follow-up to the initial CPA process, the Audit Commission has undertaken ‘Direction of Travel Assessments’ for all of the Districts in the County in November and December 2004. A copy of Wear Valley District Council’s Direction of Travel Assessment report is attached as Annex 4 to this report.

4. The assessment was conducted as a desktop research exercise by the Audit Commission and was based on their analysis of:
 - a self assessment document submitted by the Council;
 - a review of a supporting database of evidence submitted by the Council, and;
 - a review of the available information of the Council's more recent performance as evidenced in Best Value reviews, BVPIs and other performance data.
5. The contents of the report have been summarised and will appear as an element of our Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. The detailed report is provided as an internal document designed to assist the Council with taking forward our ongoing improvement programme.

report content

6. The overall assessment from the report is that “the Council is making good progress in improving its services and the way it works.”
7. The report sees the development of our Council Plan (which includes our CPA improvement plan) as a key step in our progress and is complimentary about the way in which we have developed balanced scorecards to link operational service delivery with the achievement of our corporate objectives.
8. The report is broadly supportive of our work in progressing our key priorities but the work on the ‘economy and healthy living’ priorities is assessed as not progressing as quickly as that on the other priorities.
9. An assessment of our service performance, based on an analysis of our BVPIs concludes that they “show solid improvements across the range of council services although there remain some individual low performers.”
10. With regard to our progressing issues identified during our CPA, the report supports the development of our Council Plan and the overall approach that we are taking to continue to improve our performance. It should be noted that the final sentence of paragraph 30 of this section of the report (referring to housing stock transfer options) has been acknowledged as no longer being accurate.
11. The report concludes with a summary of five key messages. These, along with our proposed actions for addressing them are shown below.

Key Message

Proposed Action

Improve the delivery of corporate priorities on the economy and healthy living environment

Council Plan Key Actions 3a and 3d for Economy and 5c, 5d,5e and 5f for Healthy Living will address these areas.

Develop user focused outcome measures for actions and priorities and report progress against them

Council Plan Key Objective 7c (Balanced scorecard development) will ensure that service plans develop user focused outcome targets and reporting procedures.

Develop and implement a robust human relations strategy including workforce and member development

Consultant's work almost completed and report expected on recommended way forward early in 2005.

Continue to address poor and mixed performance, including addressing diversity issues and e-government

Council Plan, BVPI monitoring, PITs, Best Value reviews and Balanced Scorecard will continue to be used to drive improvement.

Clarify future plans for leisure in delivering the council's objectives

Community Services Department formally tasked with developing a strategic options paper for taking leisure services forward.

conclusion

12. Our recent Direction of Travel Assessment has returned a broadly positive view on the progress that we are making with our improvement plans.
13. The report has quite rightly identified some key areas of work that need further attention and plans are already in place to address the identified issues.

Recommendations

1. That Committee notes the content of the Audit Commission's Direction of Travel assessment.
2. That Committee accepts the report and endorses the proposed response to the identified Key Issues, as detailed in paragraph 11 of the report.

Officer responsible for the report

Iain Phillips
Chief Executive

Author of the report

John Docherty
Head of Management Support
Ext 306



POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

2 February 2005

Report of the Chief Executive
SIMALTO MODELLING 2005 - BUDGET CONSULTATION

purpose of the report

1. This report outlines the headline findings and methodology of the 2004 SIMALTO exercise, undertaken to identify the opinions of local residents as to Wear Valley District Council (WVDC) spending priorities.

background

2. In November – December 2004 an in-depth consultation on the Council's spending priorities and council tax levels took place with residents throughout the district. The aim was to identify residents' service funding priorities in order to inform the Council's 2005 budget setting decision making process.
3. This public consultation made use of the SIMALTO modelling process endorsed by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and used by a growing number of local authorities. It is acknowledged to be an effective, robust technique for identifying local priorities for spending and council tax levels.
4. This is the second year in which the Council has used SIMALTO to research public opinion on emerging budget options. External consultants, Research for Today, were commissioned to undertake the consultation.
5. Through the use of SIMALTO, the following issues regarding the allocation of council tax between various council services in 2005 have been addressed:
 - Which current service levels should be reduced in order to cause least 'distress' among residents?
 - Which improvements on other services, if any, should take priority?
 - Would residents be willing to pay more council tax, beyond an expected annual inflation increase, to lessen any reduction, or fund improvements in service benefits?

method

6. The 2004 SIMALTO survey involved a random, representative sample of 302 Wear Valley residents, representatively split by age, gender, and location. Trained facilitators conducted 50 minute interviews with residents in their own homes.
7. The SIMALTO technique uses a matrix supplied by the Council that identifies 22 service areas, for which the level of provision could be altered as a result of the budget setting process. Participants are asked to allocate and prioritise possible improvements across services.
8. The main advantage of SIMALTO over other methodologies is that residents are encouraged to think strategically and realistically about the implications of their choices. This is because the relative savings/extra costs of each different service level in terms of council tax cuts or increases are shown to residents, and they only have fixed, constrained budgets to allocate across the competing services.
9. Through this exercise residents' are encouraged to recognise that some changes save/cost more than others, and that the Council cannot spend the same money twice. A list of the 22 services, and a brief overview of the SIMALTO method, is set out in Annex 5.

headline findings

10. A brief summary of the main findings of the SIMALTO exercise is set out below. The detailed breakdown of findings can be found in the full consultants' report (Copies of the full report can be obtained from the Policy and Research Officer in the MSU).

general findings

11. To maintain the current rates of service, council tax is expected to need to rise by inflation, but in fact the research suggests that, overall, residents appear to be willing to pay even more than inflation for service improvement. When made aware of the impact their chosen improvement scenarios would have to council tax rates:
 - 61% of residents chose to accept an additional increase of £5 a year or more on their council tax bill to achieve their allocation of improved service provision;
 - In total only 19% of residents chose the largest reduction in tax offered (£10 per year) by accepting the trade-off of a significant overall lowering of service standards.

12. SIMALTO models the results of all residents' service priority allocations against five council tax scenarios:

Budget equivalent of scenario	-£200k	-£100k	As now	+£100k	+£200k
Predicted Tax Impact	-£10/yr	-£5/yr	As now	+£5/yr	+£10/yr

13. Given responses from residents, SIMALTO then predicts the most preferred combination of service reductions and improvements for each of these five alternative budget scenarios, what SIMALTO terms 'optimum consensus budgets' (see Annex 6 for these results).

predicted resident satisfaction

14. The table below sets out SIMALTO predictions of resident satisfaction given the potential implementation of each of the 5 modelled budget allocations:

Table 1 - Prediction of % resident satisfaction for 5 optimum consensus budgets					
	-£200k	-£100k	As now	+£100k	+£200k
Predicted Tax Impact	-£10/yr	-£5/yr	As now	+£5/yr	+£10/yr
Very unhappy	19%	14%	10%	5%	4%
Slightly unhappy	27%	20%	20%	17%	14%
Uncertain	33%	34%	30%	29%	23%
Quite pleased	18%	27%	32%	38%	46%
Very pleased	3%	4%	8%	11%	13%
Extremely pleased	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

- Potential dissatisfaction declines steadily as a tax scenario of the current level of tax is reached, and reduces markedly at the £5 increase scenario;
- 30% of residents were predicted to be 'very' or 'slightly unhappy' with the optimum consensus 'no tax increase' scenario. The percentage of those unhappy decreases to only 18% for a consensus budget equivalent of an extra £10 tax, to increase current spending by £200k;
- Generally residents' satisfaction is predicted to increase as better service improvements become possible due to greater council tax increases.

resident budget allocation preference

15. SIMALTO modelling also allows us to ascertain the relative popularity of the 5 alternative optimum consensus budgets, as highlighted in table 2 by grouped area and age of resident:

Budget equivalent of scenario	-£200k	-£100k	As now	+£100k	+£200k
Predicted Tax Impact	-£10/yr	-£5/yr	As now	+£5/yr	+£10/yr
Total	19%	17%	16%	22%	27%
Bishop Auckland	18%	14%	13%	27%	28%
Crook	18%	19%	17%	17%	28%
Rural	22%	25%	22%	13%	17%
Under 40	18%	14%	14%	16%	38%
40 – 59	18%	15%	17%	25%	26%
Over 60	20%	23%	16%	24%	17%

- Overall 49% chose optimum budget allocations above the cost equivalent of current council services;
- SIMALTO calculations predict that the overall consensus preference is around the inflation % plus £3 tax increase level;
- SIMALTO predicts that both older and rural residents of the Wear Valley District are less keen on those budget allocations involving the largest increased taxes:
 - Across the three district areas, both of the relatively urbanised areas of Bishop Auckland and Crook appear more likely to countenance increased taxes for improved service levels (Bishop Auckland, 55% and Crook 45% when compared with only 30% in rural Wear Valley);
 - SIMALTO predicts that the younger age bands will show greater preference for improved services through tax hikes (54% of under 40s and 51% of 40-60s preferring tax rises to pay for service enhancement, compared to a lesser 41% of over 60s).

service related findings

16. Given residents responses it is also possible for SIMALTO to predict areas where reduction to service levels will be best tolerated, where improvements to services will cause most satisfaction, and also identify those services where reductions would cause the most dissatisfaction among residents.

service improvement priorities

17. Annex 7 shows how many respondents spent at least some of their points improving each of the 22 service attributes, ranked in priority order. A summary is presented in table 3 below of top and bottom ranking services:

Table 3 – Service improvement priorities	
Five most popular improvement priorities	Five least popular improvement priorities
1. Street cleaning	18. Leisure subsidy
2. Modern apprenticeships	19. Disadvantaged people
3. Activities for younger people	20. Neighbourhood relations
4. Drug enforcement	21. Consultation
5. Waste / recycling	22. Money advice

- ‘Street cleaning’ is ranked as the most popular improvement priority by residents, with ‘money advice’ allotted the least points, Modern apprenticeships also feature highly;
 - Least popular services to improve appear to be consultation and money advice;
 - Street wardens are ranked 14th (out of the 22 services). A possible explanation for this is that as street wardens only operate in areas of relatively high deprivation, residents from other areas may be unaware of the service, or rate it as less important for their own area, relative to the other service choices;
 - ‘Town and village investment’ ranked 7th (out of 22), ahead of ‘Bishop Auckland investment’. Again this could possibly reflect the research sample – the larger proportion of respondents from outside of the Bishop Auckland area may see improving Bishop Auckland as less important than investment in other areas of the district.
18. It should be noted that, while interesting, the results presented in this table are un-modelled results, and should be treated with extreme caution. The rankings do not show the relative importance of different attributes since on the matrix residents completed some service improvement options start from current 2004 service levels and others start before this – the rankings are not produced from a level playing field.
19. The subsequent summary of results is more reliable for use in budget setting, as these findings are based on final modelled results.

potential service enhancements causing most satisfaction

20. SIMALTO modelling for the Council predicts that to achieve a preferred combination of services across all five alternative optimum budget scenarios, those areas where service improvement would cause *most* satisfaction among residents are:

Table 4 - Potential service enhancements causing most satisfaction	
Service	Level of service provision causing most satisfaction
Activities for young people	Providing free access in leisure facilities at pre-programmed times
Street cleaning	Increasing cleaning at specific times (weekends, market days etc)
Neighbourhood Drug and Youth Disorder Enforcement	An additional 2 officers
Modern apprenticeships	Support an additional 7 apprenticeships;
Drug treatment	Support 1 additional Drug Action Worker to help addicts come off and stay off drugs.

21. The model also predicts that the following service improvements will cause resident satisfaction, however unlike those above these enhancements are predicted to be possible only as part of the two modelled budget scenarios involving council tax increases of £5 or £10 pounds a year per household (equivalent to +£100k and +£200k investment in the council respectively):

- **Street Warden scheme** – Additional 2 wardens working in other areas;
- **Domestic Violence Team** –1 additional officer to support victims;
- **Bishop Auckland Improvements** – Complete improvement work already in progress including building and public realm improvements in North Bondgate, Fore Bondgate and the Market Place.

service reductions causing the least displeasure

22. SIMALTO predicts that to achieve a preferred combination of services across all five alternative optimum budget scenarios, those areas where a reduction to the current level of service provision would be least keenly felt by residents include:

Table 5 – Potential service reductions causing the least displeasure	
Service	Level of service reduction causing least displeasure
Grounds maintenance (excluding recreation grounds)	Reducing from existing 15 grass cuts per year on a fortnightly basis to 12 grass cuts
Level of subsidy for Leisure Centres	25% increase for users
Recreation grounds	Slightly less maintenance of facilities at recreation grounds
Council information	Undertake minimum activities to inform local people about what the council is doing.

services that are predicted to cause greatest resident dissatisfaction if reduced

23. According to the predictions of the SIMALTO consultants, these are service areas where residents are broadly content with the existing service provided by the council, but would quickly become dissatisfied if this level of service was reduced as part of the budget planning process (Table 7).

Table 6 – Services predicted to cause resident dissatisfaction if current level reduced.	
Service	Current level of service provided by council
Level of investment in leisure centres	Currently invest in basic repairs only
Waste management/ recycling	Currently introducing weekly wheelie bin for general waste and provide a fortnightly recycling service;
Town and village centre improvements	Currently have a programme of planned improvements at Crook town centre, building improvements in some villages, Coundon and Stanhope.

24. It is important to note here that maintaining the current level of service provision will not negatively effect resident satisfaction levels.

conclusions

25. A number of limitations of the SIMALTO process should be noted. Residents comments are inevitably biased by their own personal circumstances and experiences. In the experience of the consultants it is likely that the first priorities a person makes are for personal and/or family benefit, with later priorities tending to be for the more 'general good'. Moreover if residents have not made use of a particular service (e.g. money advice) their ability to offer an informed opinion as to whether service should be enhanced or cut will be limited.

26. In addition while the sample of over 300 residents means that the exercise can be said to be generally reflect the entire Wear Valley District administrative area, given the stratification of the sample across the district, some residents will have attached a different level of importance to certain services depending on where they live (e.g. street wardens).
27. Most significantly residents undertaking the exercise are unlikely to be in possession of all pertinent facts and therefore cannot be expected to understand all the implications and real impact of their chosen priorities.
28. Due to such limitations, inherent in any market research of this type, the results do not challenge the responsibilities or discretion of elected members to decide council budget policy. SIMALTO modelling should best be viewed as one of the range of management tools available to allow both members and officers to make confident, informed budget decisions. The results of the SIMALTO exercise should empower the Council, offering an extremely important input from the 'silent majority' into the decision making process.

RECOMMENDED

1. That Members note the report and retain it for reference during the budget setting process.

Background Papers

- Research for Today Limited (2004) **Wear Valley District Council: 2005 Budget Input Consultation Using SIMALTO Modelling**. December 2004.
- Green, J. and Kilner, M. (2003) **Budget Policy SIMALTO Modelling – Resident *and* Councillor Applications**. Laria News. Issue 72, June 2003.

Officer responsible for the report

Iain Phillips
Chief Executive

Author of the report

Graham Coulson
Policy and Research Officer
Ext.448



POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

2 FEBRUARY 2005

Report of the Chief Executive

LOW PERFORMING PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

purpose of the report

1. To report on the status of the Best Value Performance indicators (BVPIs) identified as being poor performing.

background

2. The MSU has compiled the latest performance information for these indicators for 2004/2005. Annex 8 shows the end of year performance for previous years, our own target for this year, best quartile performance and our performance for the 1st three-quarters for this year. (The top quartile figure is based on the 2002/03 data, current national performance has not been published to date.)
3. The trend in performance in relation to our targets is presented graphically in Annex 9.
4. An analysis of each indicator is presented in Annex 10.

Recommended

1. That the committee note the content of this report and the MSU continue to monitor the low performing performance indicators and report on a quarterly basis.

Officer responsible for the report
Iain Phillips
Chief Executive

Author of the report
Dave Turnbull
Best Value Manager
Ext. 313



POLICY AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

2nd FEBRUARY 2005

Report of the Chief Executive
MINUTES OF THE SAFETY PANEL

purpose of the report

1. To submit for information minutes of the Council's Safety Panel.

introduction

2. It has previously been agreed that minutes of the Safety Panel should be submitted on a regular basis to the Policy and Strategic Development Committee to ensure that we are complying with our statutory duty in this area.
3. Attached, as Annex 11 to this report are copies of the minutes of all Safety Panel meetings since they were last reported to Committee.

RECOMMENDED

1. That Committee notes the content of this report and the attached minutes of the Safety Panel.

Officer responsible for the report

Iain Phillips
Chief Executive

Author of the report

Denver Meade
Health and Safety Officer
Ext 416
