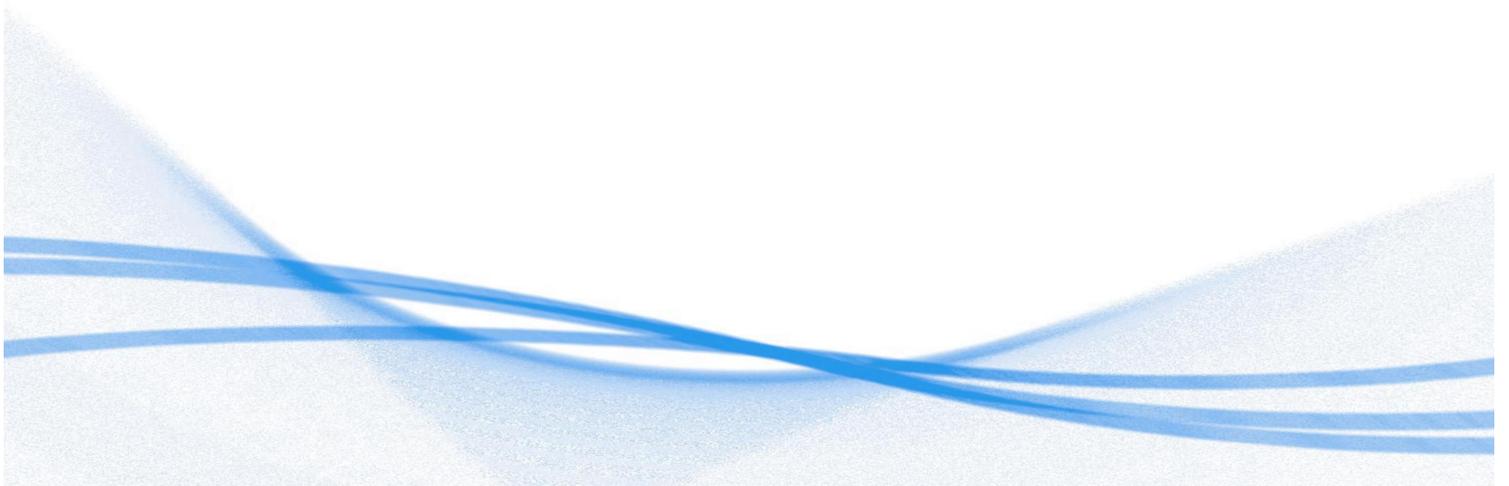




# **BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

**2006 / 2007**



## INTRODUCTION

Torrige District Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, to ensure proper stewardship and governance, and to regularly review the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements.

Under the Local Government Act 1999 (the Act) Torrige is required to prepare and publish a best value performance plan summarising the Council's assessments of its performance and position in relation to its statutory duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement to the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The provisions of the Local Government Act 1999 – Statutory Instrument 1999/3251 - (Best Value) Performance Plans and Reviews Order 1999 requires all authorities categorised as “poor” in their Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) to prepare a Performance Plan which is published annually by 30 June.

The form and content of the best value performance plan are prescribed in section 6 of the Act and statutory guidance issued by the Government, namely:

- A brief summary of the authority's strategic objectives and priorities for improvement.
- Arrangements for addressing the authority's improvement priorities, particularly the weaknesses identified in the CPA and the outcomes that are expected to be achieved as a result.
- Details of performance –
  - outturn performance over the past year on all Best Value Performance Indicators (\*BVPI's)
  - targets for the current year and subsequent two years for all BVPI's
- A brief summary on contracts.

## **Brief summary of the authority's strategic objectives and priorities for improvement**

Central to our ambitions is the Strategic Plan, Towards the Future, Torridge 2005-2010, which we circulated to every household in our district during the autumn of 2005. This document, produced after extensive consultations with our residents, our councillors and all the partners we work with outside the council, is crucial to our ultimate vision of making **Torridge a great place to live, work and visit.**

To achieve our ultimate destination, we set ourselves four goals:

- **Aim to become an excellent Council;**
- **Improve the quality of life for all;**
- **Promote sustainable economic growth;**
- **Safeguard the environment.**

Under each of these goals we have our strategic objectives required to help us achieve our vision:

### **Aim to become an excellent Council**

- Set out and communicate what you can expect from the Council
- Implement relevant recommendations from our Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)
- Build organisational capability and capacity to deliver objectives
- Streamline and simplify operational processes and procedures

### **Improve the quality of life for all**

- Create safer communities and promote social inclusion
- Encourage healthier lifestyles
- Improve equality of opportunity for all
- Help meet housing needs of the district and find innovative ways to provide affordable housing

### **Promote sustainable economic growth**

- Promote major development and regeneration projects with benefits for local people
- Encourage entrepreneurship and job creation

### **Safeguard the environment**

- Reduce the amount of landfill waste and promote energy conservation and recycling initiatives
- Work towards litter-free streets and public spaces through education, enforcement and investment in these services
- Protect and enhance our natural and built environment

The full version of our Strategic Plan, together with the Community Strategy can be found on the Council's website at [www.torridge.gov.uk/strategicplan](http://www.torridge.gov.uk/strategicplan)

# Arrangements for addressing the authority's improvement priorities

## Improvement Plan

To help address the weaknesses identified in our Comprehensive Performance Assessment and to continue our improvement, the Council has agreed an Improvement Plan with representatives from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Department for Communities and Local Government) and the Audit Commission.

We have compiled a robust improvement plan which achieves 5 key objectives:

1. Human Resource Realignment to Strategic Priorities and the development and implementation of the Council's workforce plan
2. Embedding Performance Management ethos, underpinned by cohesive Business Planning
3. Re-engineering Business Processes and cultural change throughout the organisation and building in-house capacity
4. Building a secure IT Platform
5. Improving Community Leadership via Member Development

We have defined specific action plans, milestones and resource commitments over a 6 quarter period to achieve the objectives.

The Improvement Plan is being monitored internally by the Council's Management Team and externally by the Government's Monitoring Board.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The change in Council structure will facilitate outcomes that will bring the Council into 21<sup>st</sup> century. A fit for purpose organisation, staffed appropriately to deliver a broad range of quality services to the public's satisfaction.

Performance Management - All processes will eventually be streamlined and simplified to achieve efficiency gains throughout the organisation - a move to a "can do" mentality. This will be done using the "what matters and to what purpose?" philosophy introduced by specialist consultants.

One positive outcome achieved during 2005/06 is the production of meaningful financial information through the introduction of a new e-financials package, CedAr, which was launched early in 2006. The system provides budgetary information, an enhanced payroll package which provides statistical information evidencing the corporate health of the Council, as well as a corporate procurement facility.

Another expected outcome is a higher, positive profile for the Council – a listening, doing Council; providing quick efficient responses to the overall satisfaction of Councillors, Staff & Customers, all of whom will have a stake in the Council's success.

Other desired achievements that the Improvement Plan will deliver are:

- the provision of services that meet customer expectations within budgetary and resource constraints that are communicated effectively to all officers, Members and residents of the district.
- improvements in our Best Value Performance Indicators across all services
- the level of complaints will reduce, and customer confidence will be restored

- the reputation of the Council will be enhanced and staff morale will improve

Torrige will become a well respected Council with a highly motivated workforce dedicated to achieving the aspirations of its Members by making an impact on the quality of life for all by providing high quality services to our communities and helping to delivery community needs.

**However, the most important expected outcome is our Vision: Torrige will become a great place to live, work and visit.**

## **PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

Torrige invested £20,000 in Torrige Voluntary Services. This provided the capacity to raise over £275,000 in additional projects and capital funding and helped local groups to secure over £110,000. An excellent return on our investment!

Their work over the last year directly addresses a number of the quality of life priorities in our Strategic Plan either directly through services provided to older people and Carers for example, or indirectly through the support provided to other local groups.

## **REVIEWS**

During the year the Audit Commission conducted the following reviews:

### **Progress assessment report - 30 Mar 2006**

“After a slow start, the Council is now making progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in its Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2003. Service performance generally remains weak but in some areas there are signs of considerable improvement. Future improvement is planned through a restructuring exercise that presents significant risks, which the Council is seeking to manage”.

### **Landlord services - 10 Nov 2005**

Poor Service | Poor prospects for improvement

“The housing landlord services provided by Torrige District Council are poor. Services are not customer focused and performance for key areas such as repairs, voids and rent collection is some way below that of comparable organisations. The Council has made few improvements in recent years and lack robust plans for the future”.

### **Planning services - 20 Oct 2005**

Fair Service | Promising prospects for improvement

“Torrige is delivering a mixed planning service. The Government targets for determining planning applications in 2004/05 were not met, but the Council is addressing the weaknesses in a proactive way, making significant investments to address the shortcomings. Their response to the new planning development approach is positive and good progress has been made.”

The full reports please can be found on the Audit Commission’s website:  
[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

	£000	£000
2005/2006 Budget Requirements		7,888
Increases (or decreases) due to:		
Net Inflation		240
Planning and Economic Development	69	
Recreation and Tourism	(135)	
Environmental Health	85	
Refuse Collection	72	
Other Housing Services	(167)	
Other Services	300	
Parish/Town Precepts	111	335
Decrease in Appropriation from Balances		505
<b>2006/2007 Budget Requirement</b>		<b>8,968</b>

### Capital Programme

Torrige is proposing to spend £11.5 million on Capital Schemes and Capital Grants. Capital expenditure produces long term benefits to the community and the Capital Programme includes the following:-

£6.4 million creating additional infrastructure to stimulate local employment prospects

£2.2 million improvements to leisure facilities

£1.0 million improvements to council dwellings and estates

£0.4 million environmental enhancements

£0.9 million grants for private sector housing

£0.6 million equipment and vehicles to improve efficiency

### Outstanding Borrowing

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2005 there were external loans outstanding of £6.1 million

There is a scheduled debt repayment of £0.2 million and it is anticipated that no additional loans will have been taken out by the end of the year.

The estimated external debt outstanding at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006 is £5.9 million

### Torrige District Council Staff

A comparison of budgeted employees shows an increase in numbers from 304 last year to 313 this year.

## Budget Requirements for 2006/07

Based on the registered population of Torrige of 63,351, the amount of expenditure per head of population for 2006/07 is calculated as follows:

	£000	Amount per head (£)
Budget requirement for year	<b>8,968</b>	141.56
Less: Revenue Support Grant	(891)	(14.06)
Less: Redistributed Non-Domestic Rates	(4,615)	(72.85)
Sub-Total	3,462	54.65
Less: Redistributed Collection Fund Surplus	(53)	(84)
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,409,000</b>	<b>53.81</b>

## PERFORMANCE 2005/2006

### CORPORATE HEALTH

There are a number of Corporate Health BVPIs that are the responsibility of various service areas.

To provide an “at a glance” picture of improvement, we have selected six customer focussed BVPIs which relate to the corporate health of the Authority.

A three year comparison of these indicators show an overall upward trend.

**BVPIs 09 and 10** show year on year improvement. Direct Debit take up is actively encouraged. 47.9% of our business rate payers now pay by direct debit. 61.5% of our Council Tax payers pay by direct debit. This frees up officer time to actively pursue arrears. Two collection dates are now available

The top quartile for District Councils for Council Tax collection is 98.50% and 99.50% for business rates.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>09 Council Tax collected</b>	97.21%	97.59%	97.83%	<b>Bottom</b>
<b>10 NNDR Collected</b>	98.06%	98.33%	98.80%	<b>Median = 98.81%</b>

**BVPI 12** although showing an improvement for 2005/06 we are working towards further improvement. Immediately following the disappointing 2004/05 result, a number of staff welfare policies were introduced. These included a ‘return to work’ interview following sick leave to identify whether work issues were a contributory factor to sickness absence.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>12 Days lost due to sickness</b>	12.23 days	13.07 days	9.66 days	<b>Below Median (Median = 9.59%)</b>

**BVPI 156.** Further planned improvement includes the re-designating of car parking spaces for the disabled, lowering of pay & display machines to assist those in wheelchairs, additional signage in all offices and the provision of automatic doors at all offices and leisure facilities.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>156 Buildings with facilities for disabled people</b>	48.57%	76.00%	80.00%	Not applicable

**BVPI 157.** The Government target for this BVPI is 100%. Although this BVPI ceases to be a national indicator with effect from 31 March 2006, we will continue work towards this target.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>157 Interactions enabled electronically</b>	40.36%	76.84%	95.25%	<b>Top = 87.50%</b>

**BVPI 008** is disappointing. A new financial information system has been installed and is currently being enhanced. There have been teething troubles and this is the main reason for the disappointing result. An evaluation of the situation will be undertaken and remedial steps taken to ensure performance rapidly improves.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>08 Percentage of invoices paid on time</b>	86.60%	73.20%	67%	<b>Bottom = 88.65%</b>

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**Other customer focussed BVPIs for various service areas are shown below. Again, it is pleasing to note that the majority show improved performance.**

## HOUSING

**BVPI 66a.** The target set for 2005/06 was 98.50%. Although there has been steady improvement in collection rates over the last three years, it was disappointing not to meet this target. To be in the top quartile for District Councils, a 98.74% collection rate is required. It is inevitable that improvement will slow down or level out as we approach the ceiling of 100%. We aim to be in the top quartile by 2007/08.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>66a Rent collected</b>	96.31%	97.04%	98.02%	<b>Above Median</b>

**BVPI 66b. Percentage of tenants with more than 7 weeks rent arrears (7 weeks equates to 35 working days).** This is a new measure introduced for 2005/2006. An efficient rent collection service is important. This indicator will be a key measure of the service's effectiveness and efficiency. The first year's result is an acceptable starting point of 4.84%

## BENEFITS

The 2003 CPA report identified the Benefits service as seriously under-performing. Since then customers have been asked what level of service they would expect to receive. The service has adopted the slogan, 'pay the right person, the right amount at the right time' Processes have been streamlined and tailored to achieve this aim.

**BVPI 78a.** This result does not highlight the improvement during the last quarter when the time taken to process new claims reduced from 24.2 days (third quarter) to 18.4 in the fourth quarter.

The Department for Works & Pensions' performance measure, PM3 – percentage of new claims decided within 14 days of receiving all information puts Torridge in the top quartile for the fourth quarter's result.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>78a Average time processing new claims</b>	76.4 days	60.8 days	30.3 days	<b>Below Median</b>

**BVPI 78b.** Similarly, this result does not highlight the improvement during the fourth quarter when changes in circumstances were being processed within 7.7 days (top quartile is under 8 days). This is a considerable improvement on the third quarter which was 13.5 days.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>78b Average time taken to process written changes in circumstances</b>	27.2 days	18.6 days	16.7 days	<b>Bottom</b>

**BVPI 79a.** Although showing a steady improvement, this BVPI is disappointing. However, during the third quarter of the year, 99.20% of cases were processed correctly this achieved top quartile status for that quarter.

Improvements made to the service will be evidenced in the forthcoming year.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>79a Cases processed correctly – random sample</b>	94.58%	94.00%	96.0%	<b>Bottom</b>

**BVPI 76d.** Result is the best for any Devon (or Unitary) authority due to the efficient grading system operated by our fraud investigation team.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>76d Number of prosecutions &amp; sanctions per 1000 caseload</b>	6.82%	5.31%	7.42%	<b>Top</b>

## ENVIRONMENT

The number of households within Torridge is rapidly increasing. As a result there is more waste to collect. Government is encouraging less waste, more recycling. Recycling figures are increasing and as a consequence the Government expect the level of household waste collected to decrease. Torridge is taking a proactive stance in encouraging householders to recycle more waste.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
82a(i) % household waste sent for recycling	14.59%	15.78%	17.04%	29.34% Government Target 30%
82b(i) % of household waste sent for composting	8.07%	8.64%	12.30%	
84a Household waste collected (kg per head of population)	405.50 kgs	418.30 kgs	429.90 kgs	Above Median

**BVPI 86.** Collection costs have increased from last year, this in part is due to the extensive expansion of the recycling services. An additional 7000 properties have been included on the organic / Cardboard recycling scheme. Other factors are the considerable increase in diesel fuel and raw material prices. Our performance rating will improve to above median when the accurate 2005/06 quartiles are used

86 Cost of household waste collected per household	£39.39	£35.01	£43.07	Below Median (Median = £42.01)
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## PLANNING

The Planning Service Best Value Performance Indicators do not truly reflect the tremendous amount of work undertaken this year to streamline processes and provide a quicker response time. In October 2005 the service was literally taken apart by a team of specialist consultants and re-built with total emphasis on steps of value to the customer.

This new method of working has been applied to all new applications received since November 2005 and this has resulted in an enormous improvement in determination times as evidenced below:

Period	Method	Average number of days to process	Comments
July - December 2005	Old	117	All applications
January 2006 - March 2006	Old	127	All applications (backlog – some cases 2 years old)
January 2006 - March 2006	New	49 (under 10 weeks!)	All applications - the way forward!

Prior to July 2005 applications processed using the old method took on average 165 days! The current average of 49 days is a vast improvement, but still no good enough!

**BVPI 109a.** We receive a very low volume of major planning applications. During the second quarter only two applications were determined – one was within 13 weeks, one wasn't – the result being 50%. The median quartile for District Councils is 59%.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>109a % of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks</b>	24.44%	29.17%	30.43%	<b>Bottom</b>

**BVPI 109b and 109c** The reason for these disappointing results is in the main due to the clearance of a large backlog of 50 applications – some 2 years old! This housekeeping exercise created a short term deterioration in results but has cleared the way forward. Determination times are now under 10 weeks. It had to be done!

It is also pleasing to know that the refusal rate has dropped to 20%. This evidences the fact that there is more contact with the customer – issues are talked through and applications amended to the mutual satisfaction of the customer and the Planning Officer.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>109b % minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks</b>	47.00%	54.19%	55.20%	<b>Bottom</b>
<b>109c % other planning applications determined within 8 weeks</b>	62.21%	68.96%	66.86%	<b>Bottom</b>

## CULTURAL

It is encouraging to note that our museums are attracting an increased number of visitors and usages.

BVPI	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Quartile
<b>170a Visits/uses of museums per 1000 population</b>	1,978	1,755	2,010	<b>Top</b>

*Quartile – is an indication of our ranking against other District Councils for the 2004/5 outturn data.*

**The above results evidence that Torridge is well on the road to recovery. We may not appear to be doing quite so well when comparing our results to the quartiles for all District Councils, but we are getting there!**

## **THE FUTURE .....**

We use SparNet Performance Management System for the monitoring of BVPIs. Local Indicators are being developed and will also be monitored on SparNet. Torridge is adopting a corporate scorecard approach to Performance Management. The four themes within the corporate scorecard are:

- Customers
- Internal Business Processes
- Employees and Organisational Capacity
- Financials

The expected outcomes are:

- Increased customer satisfaction and a reduction in complaints
- Reduction in response/waiting times and improved quality of services
- Improvement in employee satisfaction, reduction in turnover and absenteeism and an increase in the number of internal promotions
- Reduce operational costs and increase revenue

## **Performance Highlights 2005/6**

- We are currently undertaking a major overhaul of the services we offer and how our staff deliver them. With the help of specialist consultants, we are replacing out-dated ideas and practices with a modern approach. What matters to our customers and the purpose of the service is of prime importance.
- The services that have been the subject of specialist intervention to eliminate inefficiencies are Benefits and Planning. As a consequence there have been noticeable improvements in end-to-end times and this will be evidenced in the BVPI's for the quarter ended 30 June 2006.
- The Housing service is currently the subject of intervention, Value, Work and Waste evaluations are taking place - for example, the Housing Repairs service found that there were currently 33 work steps in the repair flow, when only 3 were of value steps, 30 were waste!!
- We have currently created two Performance Improvement posts, the holders of these posts are shadowing the specialist consultants and will eventually apply their values to all services as part of our on-going quest for improvement.
- To support this valuable work there has been a massive re-alignment of key positions to ensure that the best skills available fit neatly within the organisation.

**Achievements this year** (all of which support the Strategic Plan) **include:**

- A permanent Chief Executive who is committed to Torrington and its ambition to become an Excellent Council by 2008.
- Award winning Caddsdawn! Our environmental-friendly business park has won wide-spread acclaim. It was named best renewal energy scheme in 2005 by Regen SW. The project also won the Sustainability Category (Southwest) of the RICS Awards 2006 and has been short-listed for the International Final!
- Bideford Youth Council Elections – As part of Local Democracy Week, staff & Councillors attended three local colleges and spoke at 12 assemblies to highlight the electoral system and encourage students not only to vote, but to become interested in the democratic process. In conjunction with the colleges our Election Officer then arranged a ‘real’ election. 25 students contested 16 seats. The event was an enormous success and has since been held as an exemplar. The Council has continued its involvement with the Bideford Youth Council and is currently working with them to provide a basketball court and also the possible relocation of a playing field site which is causing a nuisance to neighbouring properties.

In addition, two members of the Bideford Youth Council are working with us to develop the Neighbourhood Wardens project. They will be attending meetings and will have a chance to influence how the project will interact with the young people living in the area.

- Torrington First – our informative residents newsletter is now being produced on a quarterly basis.
- We topped the “secret shopper” league – a survey of how local authorities handle housing and Council Tax benefit enquiries.
- Energy Efficiency - figures released by Defra reveal that the 3.07% annual improvement achieved by Torrington was bettered by only one other council in the county.
- Planning online - A new planning service is now available through our website. Anyone with an interest in planning – professional planners, local businesses and the general public – can access a range of up-to-date information on planning applications and planning policy.
- Online Local Plan - The Plan is important to everybody because it will help to guide future development in the district. In particular, the Plan provides the local basis for making decisions on planning applications and other land use issues.
- Licensing Act 2003 – TDC personally helped about 500 licensees with their applications and responded to 12,000 telephone enquiries!
- For the second successive year, Westward Ho! was awarded the prestigious Blue Flag for the quality of water cleanliness and safety of its beach.
- A Citizens Panel was established with 250 volunteers.

## Efficiency Savings

Savings are also important. We are obliged under the Gershon Review to make 2.5% savings each year. Our target for 2005/06 was £279,000. All staff are on the alert to spot waste. For example we have made a terrific saving on office cleaning bills through composting and recycling everyday waste items.

A flavour of how we achieved this is set out below:

- Savings on vacant posts
- Extended Use of Car Parks
- Caddsdwn procured by Design & Build
- Interest on capital receipts
- Management of existing Assets
- Reduced door to door rent collection
- Consolidated contracts
- Use of Purchasing Cards
- Use of coloured paper restricted
- Various other efficiency savings, for example:

### Mobile phone charges - Orange

Previous annual costs	approx. £27,000
Anticipated costs	approx. £ 9,000
Saving – approx. 66%	
Or in other words £1,500 per month, every month!	

### Landline telephone charges - Telewest

Current annual costs	approx. £22,000
Re-negotiated annual costs costs predicted	approx. £12,500
Saving in excess of 43%	
Or in other words £800 per month, every month!	

Even small stationery items have been reviewed and costs slashed through collaborative procurement with our neighboring Authorities.

- ‘PRITT’ TYPE GLUE STICK - 20G – WAS £1.26, **NOW ONLY -15p**

## CONSULTATIONS

### Strategic Aims

In May and June 2005 we conducted an extensive consultation exercise. We sent out 5,000 questionnaires to a random selection of residents. These questionnaires ask whether they agreed with our proposed aims for the coming year. Comments and suggestions were invited. A flavour of the responses are set out below -

- Whereas 42% agreed, 56% strongly agreed, that providing better and quicker access to information and services was a priority
- 55% strongly agreed that affordable housing was a high priority

Both these issues are being actively pursued and can be evidenced by the excellent 95.25% types of transactions that can be enabled electronically.

The 2005/06 council programme of affordable housing, delivered in partnership with developers and housing associations, should provide up to 56 new homes – an increase on the 36 for 2004/05 and significantly better than the average 15 units delivered in previous years.

We require a proportion of homes to be affordable – the guideline for Bideford, Northam, Westward Ho! and Appledore is 30 per cent, although the figure varies throughout the district.

### **Housing Stock**

Consultation is on-going with tenants. A Tenant Panel has been established and the panel is playing a major part in short-listing potential partner Housing Associations. This has included desktop evaluation exercises and visits to Housing Associations. A series of roadshows have been held to inform tenants and encourage comment.

### **Other consultations undertaken were –**

- Postal feedback survey of users of the Environmental Protection Service
- Postal and telephone survey of users in respect of the Licensing Act 2003
- Meetings of the Taxi Consultative Committee
- Meetings of the Licensing forum meetings (trade, solicitors, police, fire, etc)
- Card feedback system following Food & Safety inspections
- 250 Torrridge citizens have volunteered to form a Citizens Panel. The first questionnaire recently undertaken covered customer services with particular emphasis on access – results have yet to be determined
- appraisal of the Moreton Park/Grenville College Development Brief
- New business park development – a 12.3 hectare site.

### **ANNUAL STATEMENT ON CONTRACTS**

The Council did not award any contracts during the financial year 2005/6 involving the transfer of staff. The Council confirms that any such future contracts awarded will comply with the Code of Practice on Workforce matters in Local Authority Service Contracts.

## **CONCLUSIONS - BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Twelve months into my role as Chief Executive of Torridge District Council offers a timely opportunity to reflect on progress towards my top priority of making the authority fit for the 21st century. You can see from this Best Value Performance Plan that tangible improvements in the way we deliver our services have been made.

However, there is still much to be done and by taking a radical approach now to two of our services, Benefits and Planning, I am sure performance indicators will show improvement next year. Over the coming months all services will be targeted for improvement and this will be an ongoing process to ensure we have a council that everyone can be proud of.

You can be assured that as well as focussing on front line services a lot of work is also happening in the back offices as they also have a key role in supporting our commitment to excellent customer service. We will be looking at all systems and processes and getting these right, and examining how the whole organisation works. There is a clear need to realign some of our functions and best place the important people who work for the council in a way that enables them to do their work effectively.

Of course, as you would expect, the council is committed to be an efficient organisation and has made progress in meeting the Government's target of 2.5% savings each year.

I anticipate that I will be reporting positively again next year about the effect of these activities, but most importantly, expect to see the Best Value Performance Plan showing these results.

**John van de Laarschot**