



BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

2005 / 2006

INTRODUCTION

In October 2003 Torridge District Council was categorised as a “poor” authority in its Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA)

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 include the following items in their Performance Plan which is published annually by 30 June. The Government has set only four Performance Plan requirements and these are intended to capture the information necessary to monitor performance and provide a structured framework around which authorities can develop and articulate their improvement planning arrangements.

- 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

Following the disappointing results of our CPA in October 2003, the authority devised a Recovery Plan to improve service performance and responsiveness.

In addition to the Recovery Plan we launched our first Corporate Plan (2004 – 2011) which was composed around five corporate objectives supported by 17 core targets. Each core target consisted of several specific critical activities. It was envisaged that once a core target had been achieved, work would continue to maintain progress, although its status within the Corporate Plan would diminish and be replaced by new objectives essential for the Council's continuous drive for improvement.

There has been excellent progress in meeting these core targets over the last twelve months and as a result, Councillors have taken the opportunity to review their aims and objectives in order to widen the scope for improvement within the district.

The original Corporate Plan is in the process of being updated by Councillors and Staff. With the help of the public, and partners, once this has been adopted it will be available on our website at www.torridge.gov.uk

Arrangements for addressing the authority's improvement priorities

Following our "poor" CPA rating, the Council quickly responded. A Recovery Plan was compiled and adopted by Council and this Recovery Plan incorporated seven priority projects. Three of these projects covered the services which were deemed as failing in our CPA, namely Benefits, Housing and Development Control.

A Project Leader, Member Champion and project team members were selected to manage each project. External challenge was also incorporated.

Since then, steady progress has been achieved and the original Recovery Plan has been reviewed and updated. As a consequence the status of the seven priority projects has been re-evaluated. Five projects remain as priority "recovery" projects, the Housing project has been scaled down in status to an "on-going" project in view of the excellent progress made, and one project (Culture & Organisational Development) has ceased as its basic elements are incorporated in all projects.

The Projects are:

RECOVERY PROJECTS

Customer Services

Champion: Councillor Gould; Project Leader: Lindsey Ansell

Development Control

Champion: Councillor Collins; Leader: Andy Seaman

Benefits

Champion: Councillor Clarke; Leader: Lindsey Ansell

Performance Management / Vision

Champion: Councillor Isaac; Leader: Andrew Winfield

Communication

Champion: Councillor Sillifant; Leader: Kate How

IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

E Gov

Champion: Councillor March; Leader: Steve Burgess

Management Development

Champion: Councillor Ferguson; Leader: Lindsey Ansell

Partnerships

Champion: Councillor Bone; Leader: Gail Bowering-Sheehan

Procurement

Champion: Councillor Boundy; Leader: Jenny Wallace

Risk

Champion: Councillor Boundy; Leader: Jenny Wallace

ON-GOING PROJECTS

Housing Option Appraisal

Councillor Brown; Leader: Gail Bowering-Sheehan

Housing Management

Champion: Councillor Brown; Leader: Phillip Thomas

Housing Services

Champion: Councillor Brown; Leader: Stuart May

HR Policies

Champion: Mal Brown; Leader: Andrew Winfield

Member Development

Champion: Councillor Bewes; Leader: Andrew Winfield

Progress is monitored on a monthly basis and reported to the Council's Improvement Board and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's (ODPM) Monitoring Board.

The Council has been successful in obtaining funding from the Devon Improvement Group's Good Initiatives Fund to participate with other local authorities in piloting a member appraisal scheme. Funding of £100,000 has also been secured from the ODPM's Improvement Support Unit for customer services, and the Council is also one of six pilot authorities to be involved in the development of an ethical governance toolkit badged by the Standards Board for England, the Audit Commission and ODPM.

As circumstances have changed since the original Recovery Plan was adopted, the project briefs and key milestones are under constant review and are amended in the light of changing priorities.

The remaining two priority recovery projects, Benefits and Development Control are progressing well.

A key milestone for the Benefits project was to process new claims within 30 days. This is an ambitious target as Councils in the top quartile process new claims within 33 days. There has been some slippage in this respect due to a housekeeping exercise which resulted in old claims being processed and this has temporarily distorted the current figure. However, the processing time is steadily reducing.

The Development Control project has achieved its key milestone of consistently deciding applications within eight weeks and a preliminary enquiry scheme has recently been introduced. In addition, a system for recording incoming post has been implemented and work is progressing to marry up all enquiries whether postal, telephone or in person. The Local Users Survey (BVPI 188) is well underway and results will shortly be analysed.

REVIEWS – The Audit Commission will carry out a review of the Planning function in July 2005.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The desired achievements that the Recovery Plan and projects will deliver are;

- the provision of services that meet customer expectations, within budgetary and resource constraints, that are communicated effectively to all officers, Councillors and residents of Torridge
- improvements in all our Best Value Performance Indicators
- 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

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

CONSULTATIONS 2004/05

HOUSING

In December and January over 800 tenants took part in a survey of tenant's opinion about how Torridge District Council performs as a landlord. The survey is one that all Councils, who still have their Council houses, and all Housing Associations have to do every three years. It is known as the STATUS Survey.

Since then we have taken part in a benchmarking exercise, which gave us the opportunity to compare your responses with those of tenants across the country. All Local Authorities and Housing Associations were invited with more than 100 landlords taking part and that representing the views of 150,000 tenants.

One of the most important questions that any landlord can ask of their tenants is '*Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your accommodation?*' Of those landlords surveyed Torridge comes out as number one! That is a fantastic result. All staff and Councillors involved in providing the Housing Service are really proud of that result. To put into perspective we had a positive score of 93%, whereas some of the landlords achieved less than 60%. Of course it is no use just performing well in one area of work if others let us down. We are delighted to be able to tell you that of the 19 questions in the comparative study we were never outside of the top ten. In seven of the questions we were the best performing local authority.

PLANNING

Torridge District Local Plan Customer Satisfaction Survey 2003. A total of 1,792 survey questionnaires were issued in early 2003 following conclusion of the public local inquiry which asked recipients to submit a response reflecting their overall assessment of the local plan process following their involvement during one or both of the statutory 'deposit' (public consultation) stages in 1999 or 2001.

Torridge District Council received 470 completed responses, which subsequently prompted a statistical and narrative analysis of the results assembled prior to this overview. The key results established from this analysis include:

- 69% of all respondents felt that the overall quality of service provided by the member of the local plans team with whom they had been in contact with was either very good or good.
- 75% of respondents thought that in terms of expertise, the standard of the local plans staff was either very good or good.
- 65% of respondents thought that the local plans team had made a very good or good response speed with regard to public inquiries.
- 77% of all respondents thought that following direct contact with the local plans section, the helpfulness of the officer they had dealt with was either very good or good.
- Overall 81% were happy with the way they were informed by the local plans staff throughout the process.
- 77% stated that they pursued the Council's response to find out if any changes had been made regarding their representation on the plan.
- 75% of respondents felt that they were given sufficient information specifically about the Local Plan Inquiry process.

- 66% of responses indicated that they would not use public consultation documents made available electronically, preferring to continue with the use of current methods.
- 75% of respondents revealed that their involvement in the Local Plans process and their contact with a member of the local plans section had improved their knowledge of the Local Plan and its preparation process.
- The majority of Private Individual respondents suggested that they feel the protection of the countryside from development is the most important issue that should be considered within future Local Plan work, although increasing affordable housing within future Local Plan work is a key issue which reflects the main concern of Parish Council and Interest Group respondents.

It is pleasing to identify the positive way in which the Plan preparation has been received and lessons learnt will be applied in the formation of the new Local Development Framework for Torridge over the next five years.

On 8 March 2005 the planning department sent forms to 342 members of the public, agents and other stakeholders - who had previously requested to be involved in the Torridge District Local Plan process or had commented on the plan - and 140 agents asking whether they would like to continue to be contacted with respect to the Local Development Framework process. We received 174 affirmative replies and have updated our databases accordingly.

Other statutory consultations conducted on planning policy documents include:

- Public Consultation on Proposed Modifications to the Revised Deposit Torridge District Local Plan 2004; modifications agreed 2004 - statement of decisions produced 2004
- Public Consultation on Draft Infrastructure SPD 2004; guidance subsequently adopted 2004
- Public Consultation on Draft Education & Libraries Code of Practice; code subsequently adopted 2004
- Key stakeholder consultation on Housing Capacity Study 2004,
- Community engagement launched for evidence gathering stage of Core Strategy production 2004

OTHER SURVEYS & CONSULTATIONS INCLUDE:

- Housing Option Appraisal, an 18 month long continuous consultation exercise
- The rent survey
- Budget consultation
- We consulted the public and licensees over our Statement of Licensing Policy in September/October 2004 as required by the Licensing Act 2003. Approx. 450 copies of the Policy were sent out for consultation.
- We also have ongoing consultation with the taxi trade through quarterly meetings with the Taxi Consultative Committee
- Customer Service Baseline Assessment survey
- Consultation on our new Corporate Plan

Performance Highlights for 2004/2005

Are we improving?

For the first time at Torridge we have systems in place to report all of our Performance information.

The cost of household waste collection per household has stayed relatively stable over the last 3 years with costs actually being reduced this year by more than £4 per household. In addition the Council managed to improve kerbside collection of recyclables, House waste composting and Household waste for recycling. This points to no increase in the costs of collecting domestic waste while waste collection has improved.

Our Planning service has improved with an increase of 19.4%, since last year, on Major Planning Applications determined within 13 weeks. We have also seen an increase of 15.3% on Minor Planning Applications determined within 8 weeks.

The Council has gone through considerable change over the last year with organisational restructuring, stabilising service performance and undergoing close external scrutiny by the Audit Commission and the ODPM. This uncertainty may have contributed to days sick per staff and retirement by ill health. Days sick per member of staff have risen from 12.23 days to 13.07. Staff retiring due to ill health has also increased from .34% in 2003/2004 to 1.69% in 2004/2005. The authority is going to review its procedures for managing sickness and the target is to reduce this figure year by year.

Community Safety has had Highs and Lows over the last 12 months, there has been improvement in the reduction of domestic burglaries per 1,000 households and Violent offences committed under the influence of drink and drugs. However, there has though been an increase in Violent crimes and Robberies per 1,000 population.

ANNUAL STATEMENT ON CONTRACTS

The Authority did not award any contracts during 2004/2005 involving a transfer of staff. The Authority confirms that any such contracts awarded in future will comply with the Code of Practice on Workforce matters in Local Authority Service Contracts.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Torridge is proposing to spend £8.5 million on Capital Schemes and Capital Grants. Capital expenditure produced long term benefits to the community and the Capital Programme includes the following:

- £1.9 million creating additional infrastructure to stimulate local employment prospects
- £2.8 million improvements to leisure facilities
- £1.1 million improvements to council dwellings and estates
- £0.6million environmental enhancements
- £0.9 million grants for private sector housing
- £1.2 million equipment and vehicles to improve efficiency

CHANGES IN SPENDING FROM 2004/2005

	£	£
	000	000
2004/005 Budget Requirements		7,427
Increase (or decrease) due to:		
Net inflation		226
Planning & Economic Development	90	
Recreation & Tourism	70	
Environmental Health	94	
Refuse Collection	(146)	
Other Housing Services	596	
Other Services	(481)	
Parish/Town Precepts	58	281
Increases in Appropriation from Balances		(46)
2005/06 Budget Requirement		7,888

BUDGET REQUIREMENTS 2005/06

	£
	000
Budget requirements for year	7,888
Less: Revenue Support Grant	(2,929)
Less: Re-distributed non-domestic rates	(1,758)
Sub Total	3,201
Less Re-distributed Collection Fund Surplus	(70)
	3,131