

Service and Performance Plan

including Council Tax and Business Rates

2002/2003

for Woking Borough



Working for Woking

Best Value 



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This Service and Performance Plan 2002/2003 is published by:

Woking Borough Council
 Civic Offices
 Gloucester Square
 Woking GU21 6YL
 email:wokbc@woking.gov.uk
 Web site:www.woking.gov.uk

If you have any comments or questions please see the back cover for contact names and numbers.

Welcome....

...to Woking Borough Council's annual summary Service and Performance (Best Value) Plan, which is being sent to all residents and businesses in the Borough.



What is the Plan for?

The aim of the Plan is to:

- keep you informed of how the Council is managing the Borough's operations
- let you know about our plans for continuous improvement in the quality and value of services
- explain how you can have your say in those plans.

The Plan looks at the overall aims, objectives and performance of the Council, how improvements are identified, and how we are going to put these in place.

The middle section of this Plan provides information about the Council's budgets for 2002/2003 and how your Council Tax has been calculated.

Each year we will be publishing this Plan which will show what performance has been achieved compared with the previous year's targets, what consultations have taken place and what new improvement targets have been set.

The Key Issues

We continually look at the ways we can deliver and improve services, and how we can be closer and more accountable to our residents through:

- Improving local democracy
- Improving local financial accountability
- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct throughout the authority
- Improving services using the best, most cost effective method
- Promoting the well-being of communities
- Increasing the electronic delivery of services

We have a duty to ensure services are delivered in the best, most cost effective way by:

- Ensuring continuous improvement year on year
- Consulting residents, businesses, users of services and anyone else with an interest in our services
- Meeting set standards of performance
- Conducting reviews of all services
- Preparing an annual Best Value Performance Plan.



What is Best Value?

Best Value means achieving continuous improvement in quality and cost across all council services. This will be done by carrying out fundamental reviews, which will:

- Challenge why and how a service is being provided
- Compare our performance with that of other councils and providers
- Consult local taxpayers, service users and the business community about our performance and improvement targets
- Consider competition as a means of securing efficient and effective services

The reviews will look at:

- Economy - getting the best possible service at the lowest price
- Efficiency - making the best use of resources
- Effectiveness - ensuring that services actually do what they set out to do
- Environment - ensuring that sustainable development is reflected
- Equity - ensuring that targets cover any differences in providing services to those who are socially, economically or geographically disadvantaged.

Improving Efficiency



The Council's corporate approach to improving efficiency has developed over many years and savings of more than £6m have been achieved in the past ten years or so, for example, through efficient use of energy. Reductions of over £300,000 have been built into the budget for 2002/03 during the year. The Best Value programme will contribute to and build on this. We aim to achieve cost and

quality performance comparable with the best performing district councils. The Plan shows the performance we are achieving in a number of areas and the targets for improvement, which are monitored monthly and will be reviewed each year reflecting, for example, local consultation or national targets or initiatives.

Best Value Service Reviews

All Council services are to be reviewed over a five year period, which started in April 2000.

<p>2001/2002 (Last Year)</p> <p>Completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Arts ■ Leisure ■ Recreation <i>Completed June 2001</i> ■ Working Market <i>Completed January 2002</i> ■ Parking <i>Completed January 2002</i> <p>Ongoing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Housing; including advice, strategy, management and repairs <i>Review due to complete June 2002</i> ■ Grounds Maintenance Grass cutting, trees, planting, etc. on public land, parks and open spaces including allotments, war memorials, churchyards and nursery <i>Review due to complete May 2002</i> ■ Civic functions and initiatives <i>Review due to complete May 2002</i> ■ Building Control, Environmental Health, pest control and food safety <i>Review due to complete June 2002</i> ■ Legal and Land Charges <i>Review due to complete June 2002</i> ■ Planning and development control <i>Review due to complete June 2002</i> 	<p>2002/2003 (This Year)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Promoting the local economy <i>June - August 2002</i> ■ Marketing & communications <i>October - December 2002</i> ■ Grants and support for voluntary organisations <i>October 2002 - January 2003</i> ■ Private sector housing renovations and improvements <i>October 2002 - February 2003</i> ■ Services for older people, including day centres, meals service, etc. – joint review with social services <i>July - December 2002</i> 	<p>2004/2005</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community engagement & customer services ■ Community safety (security) ■ Emergency planning ■ Energy services ■ Electoral reviews ■ Electoral registration ■ Elections ■ Civic Offices accommodation and services
	<p>2003/2004</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Land and property management ■ Council tax and housing benefits ■ Business rate relief ■ Industrial estates ■ Local tax collection ■ Mortgages ■ Services to councillors ■ Support services (e.g. IT, accountancy, audit, personnel) ■ Corporate governance, management, policy & performance 	<p>2005/2006</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Waste Management <i>improvement plan</i> ■ Electronic service delivery <p>Further review programme to be identified</p>
		<p>2006/2007</p> <p>The programme of reviews is being considered and the Council will seek for them to be cross-cutting and inter-agency, informed by the community strategy.</p>

The review programme is constantly evaluated against operational issues, such as contracts coming up for re-tendering, performance monitoring and availability of resources to carry them out. A number of minor changes have been made to the programme published in last year's Plan. For example from April 2002, the Borough Council will no longer be carrying out highway agency functions on behalf of the County Council, so these elements have been dropped from the programme.

Audit and Inspection

The way the Council approaches Best Value and provides services is subject to external scrutiny. The Audit Commission appoints external auditors who, in addition to ensuring that we manage finances properly, report on our overall approach to Best Value and performance management. Their report (available on the Council's website) concluded that we have conformed with all the legal requirements and demonstrate good practice in a number of aspects.

The reviews of specific services are evaluated by the Audit Commission Inspection Service and they:

- Test the preciseness of the reviews
- Test whether the review has resulted in an honest assessment of performance and actions required to improve it
- Assess the service provided from the user's point of view, and assess whether the improvement targets identified are reasonable and achievable

The first inspection, of Waste Management, has taken place and in the Inspectors' opinion the service has been rated as "fair" and "unlikely to improve", unless a number of recommendations are actioned. The Council, whilst not agreeing with the Inspectors' overall judgements, has accepted their recommendations and incorporated them into our improvement plan.

The second inspection, of Leisure Services, concluded that the Council provided a "good" service, which has "promising prospects of improving". A number of examples of good practice were identified together with areas where services could be improved. The Council's improvement plan has been revised taking the Inspectors' recommendations into account.

Further inspections are planned for this year for those reviews recently completed or due for completion in the next few months.



Consultation

Involving all those who have a stake in the performance of the Council is an essential element of best value and improving democratic accountability. The Council has "consulted" on a range of subjects and in a number of ways over the years. Building on this the Council will:

- Listen to views without prejudgement and take all views into account
- Be ready to be influenced
- Make a decision and explain reasons for the decision

- Explain why comments have not been acted upon, if that is the case
- State limits on the Council's freedom of action such as money and legal powers

Further information about our work is set out overleaf.



Working with the Community



CITIZENS' PANEL

The Council established a panel of 1,400 Woking residents in 1999, statistically representative of the community. The Panel is consulted three to six times in a year on a wide range of subjects, to help the Council or other public service organisations to understand the views of the community in order to influence policy or inform decisions.

The Citizens' Panel is one of a number of ways that we consult and engage with people. Focus groups, community groups or the community at large are also consulted as appropriate. In addition we are working up plans for establishing a youth council.

This year we have consulted or involved the Panel in the following:-

- Developing visions and priorities for the Community Strategy
- Electronic Communication
- The Jubilee Clock.
- A number of Panel members participated in a Focus Group as part of the Improvement and Development Agency review of how the Council runs its business.

In addition to consultation through the Panel, considerable work has been done as part of the reviews of Leisure, Woking Market, Car Parking, Grounds Maintenance and Housing through questionnaires, focus groups and face to face interviews.

As part of our "Be at the Heart of It" community planning theme the Council's Roadshow visited six locations in the Borough where nearly 650 people shared with us the issues that impact on their quality of life and their aspirations for the future.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Much of the consultation in the last year has been about developing a Community Strategy for Woking, as part of the Government's modernisation agenda.

The Community Strategy is driven by the community to identify and tackle key issues for local people. A Local Strategic Partnership of public, private and community organisations has been established to consider communities' top priorities and needs and to work with local people to address them over time.



The Community Strategy will be published shortly and is built around the six key themes or visions identified by the community:-

- A strong community spirit with a clear sense of belonging and responsibility
- A clean, healthy and safe environment
- A transport system that is integrated and accessible, recognising Woking's potential as a transport hub
- Access to housing that is decent and affordable for local people and key workers
- A community which values personal health and well-being
- Integrated and accessible local facilities and services

POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Council operates within a policy framework, which is constantly reviewed in light of key local and national issues and legislation. The current policy framework comprises:-

- The Service and Performance Plan (of which this document is a summary)
- The Community Strategy (due to be published this year)
- Local Culture (Leisure) Strategy
- Financial Strategy
- Housing Investment Programme
- Housing Strategy
- Local Agenda 21 Strategy
- Local Transport Plan
- Local (development) Plan

Information on all these plans are available from the Council or on our website.

ACCOUNTABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO YOU

The Council aims to ensure that everybody has fair and equal access to services, including people with disabilities and those from ethnic minorities and to ensure this, existing policies are being reviewed and consolidated.

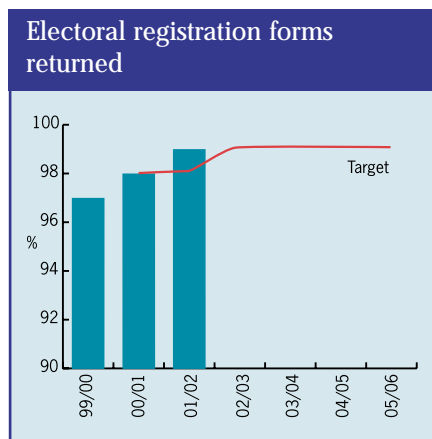
The Council conforms to Level 2 of the Commission for Racial Equality's Standard and aims to achieve Level 4 within five years.

The Council introduced a more open and accountable structure in May 2000, which separated executive decision making from the scrutiny role and following further public consultation in the last year will be refining this arrangement in May 2002, implementing the 'cabinet with leader' model.

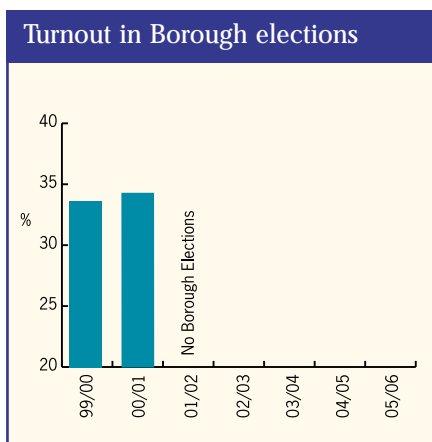
The existing Programme Boards will become formal Overview and Scrutiny Committees, dealing with social, economic and environmental issues.

To complement changes being made in the political decision making structure, organisational changes are being made at officer level to improve public access to services and information.

Democratic election of people representing the community (councillors) is a unique (and valued) feature of local government, compared to most other public service organisations.



There were no Borough Council elections last year. Elections for one third of Borough Council seats will take place in May 2002.



Of the complaints (about the Council) referred to the Local Government Ombudsman none were upheld.

The Council has 25 buildings which are open to the public and all of these are generally accessible to disabled people. However, only three fully conform to the Audit Commission's specific criteria.

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

To improve access to good legal services, the Council actively participates in the Woking Community Legal Service Partnership to:

- Work with other funders in planning and commissioning legal help
- Establish a single quality standard for all advice giving organisations
- Develop a comprehensive network of quality assured advice providers, aimed at preventing social deprivation and exclusion.

SHEERWATER MAYBURY PARTNERSHIP

The Council supports this partnership of local organisations and community groups which operates a number of schemes and projects to address specific needs in the area.

SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING THE COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH

The Government funding for the Sheerwater Maybury Partnership project is due to end in April 2003 and during the next year we will be considering how the experience gained can be applied to help further improve community involvement in developing services and improving quality of life.



Community Services

Promoting participation in recreational, sporting and cultural activities is key to improving the health and well-being of our community. Our aim is therefore to ensure that these activities are what the community wants and that they are accessible to all those visiting, living and working in the Borough.

WHAT WE DO

- Provide and enable recreation, leisure and public entertainment facilities and opportunities
- Operate pools, leisure centres, parks, recreation and sports grounds, controlled commons, open spaces and allotments
- Encourage residential developers to make provision for children's play space
- Assist in developing and promoting community sports, youth and visitor opportunities
- Promote cultural activities, events and arts development initiatives
- Provide support for community centres including, centres and drop in facilities for vulnerable people with special needs
- Provide hot meals to people in need in their own homes
- Give financial assistance to enable a wide range of organisations to provide services for the community
- Issue over 4,500 concessionary travel passes to eligible applicants

OUR PRIORITIES

- Work in partnership with Health, Social Services, schools, the voluntary and independent sectors so we can continuously improve the delivery of services
- Implement the actions in our Leisure Services and Grounds Maintenance/Outdoor Amenities Best Value Improvement Plans
- Update the Borough's Cultural (Leisure) Strategy
- Promote more participation in arts and leisure opportunities by young people and under-represented groups
- Plan for the modernisation of the Leisure Centre and Pool in the Park and seek funding to carry out the works
- Seek to extend Passport to Leisure use and other concessionary schemes to the Ambassadors and other facilities
- Address identified need for play areas, multi-use games areas, sports pitches and changing rooms
- Develop active sports programmes in Basketball, Girls Football, Hockey and Rugby
- Adopt open space at the former Brookwood Hospital site as the first phase of the Brookwood Canalside Country Park
- Ensure that stakeholders are involved in the development of the Countryside Action Plan
- Continue to seek external funding through, for example, the Lottery, developers contributions and regeneration funds

How we're doing and our targets

The Council provides 2.3 playgrounds per 1000 children under 12 (in 2000 the figure was 2.1) and of these:

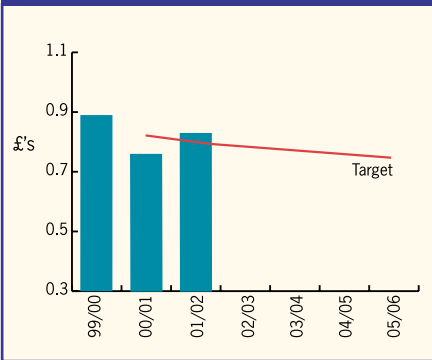
- 5% conform to national standards for local unequipped play areas
- 73% conform to national standards for local equipped play areas and
- 8% conform to national standards for larger, neighbourhood equipped play areas
- The Council has 37 playgrounds (36 in 2000/01) and anticipates providing a further one in 2002/03 funded through developers contributions.

A survey of residents' satisfaction with cultural and recreational services was carried out in 2000. Overall 63% were satisfied with the services and facilities and 69% were satisfied with parks and open spaces which puts Woking in the top 25% of local authorities nationally.

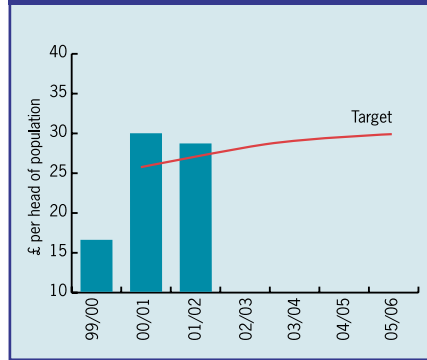
We launched our Local Cultural (Leisure) Strategy in October 1997 and we plan to complete the work on reviewing it in December 2002.

A fundamental review of sport, recreation, arts and visitor services has now been completed. The Best Value Inspectorate judged the service to be good with promising prospects for further improvement. Details of the inspection process and the outcomes are set out on page 5. A review of outdoor amenities (parks, recreation grounds, grounds maintenance, etc.) has just been completed and will be inspected in the summer. The outcome of this inspection will be published in next year's Plan.

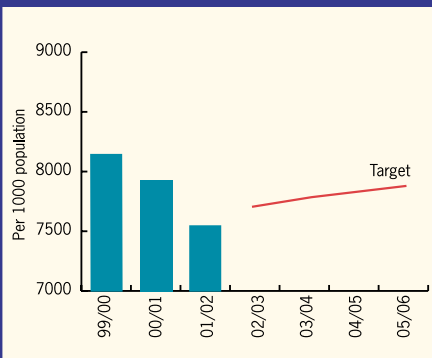
Cost per swim/visit



Total spend on culture and leisure



Number of swims/visits



At present the Council does not operate or support any museums. However, The Galleries initiative is being worked on with a target for completion in 2005/06.





Housing

Ensuring access to decent and affordable homes appropriate to the needs of local people and keyworkers is a significant challenge for the Council. Whilst resources and availability are a problem in Surrey our aim is for Borough residents to have access to good quality housing suitable for their needs at a price they can afford.

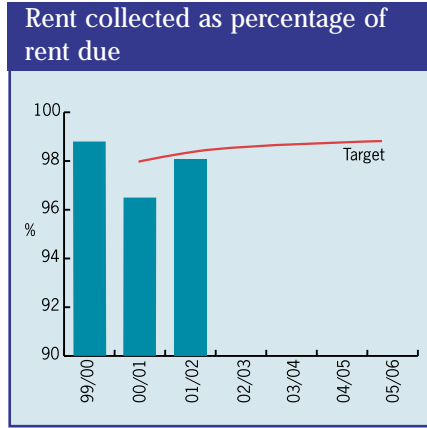
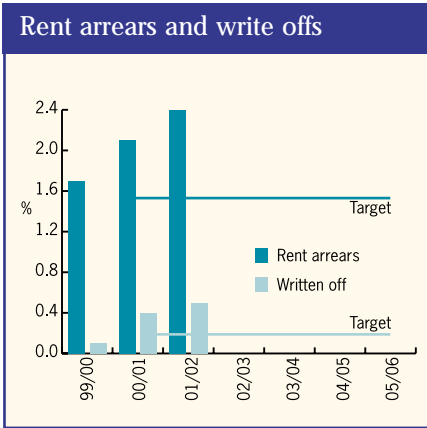
WHAT WE DO

- Provide affordable housing to rent and buy requiring residential developers to contribute to its provision wherever possible
- Provide housing advice
- Maintain the Borough's Housing Register and allocate homes
- Work to improve access to the private rented sector
- Provide grants and advice to enable occupiers/landlords to improve the quality of accommodation
- Take enforcement action to improve poor quality accommodation
- Collect rent from all residential tenancies, garages and leaseholders
- Manage and maintain the Council's housing and associated land including major programmes of investment and improvement
- The Home Support Service enables older people to live independently in their own homes
- Take action to improve the energy efficiency of homes in the Borough
- Consider and promote opportunities for improving community safety

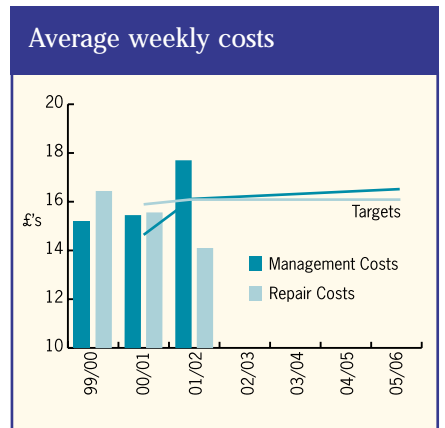
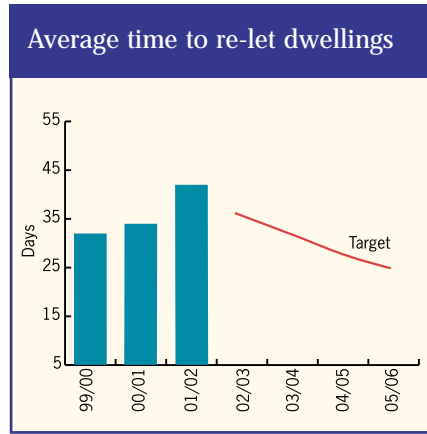
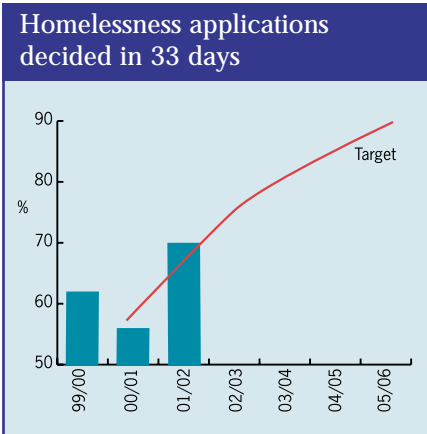
OUR PRIORITIES

- Implement our Best Value Improvement Plan, including further development of partnership working, and enhanced customer service and information
- Collect as near 100% rent as possible every year
- Work up a homelessness strategy aimed at ending the use of bed and breakfast and reducing the time taken to investigate homeless applications
- Review the cost of repairs and maintenance to keep them in line with other social landlords
- Improve the maintenance of grounds and trees on housing land
- Re-organise our Home Support Teams to provide the most effective support to older residents
- Increase tenant/leaseholder involvement in the management of their homes
- Increase the number of affordable homes available in the Borough
- Target grants towards those properties and individuals in greatest need
- Improve energy efficiency through the provision of energy conservation grants and schemes

How we're doing and our targets



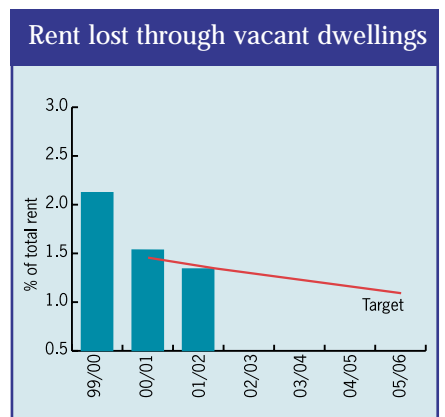
1% of unfit private homes were made fit as a result of grants from the Council. The aim is to maintain this at 1% per year over the next five years.



1,071 people responded to a satisfaction survey of all tenants in early 2001. The results showed:

79% were satisfied with the overall service provided and 71% were satisfied with the opportunities for participation in management and decision making.

The Council follows the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice in rented housing.



Did you know?

The Council manages over 3,600 residences, 942 garages, 200 leasehold properties, in grounds that have over 3,600 hectares of landscaping and 5,700 trees.



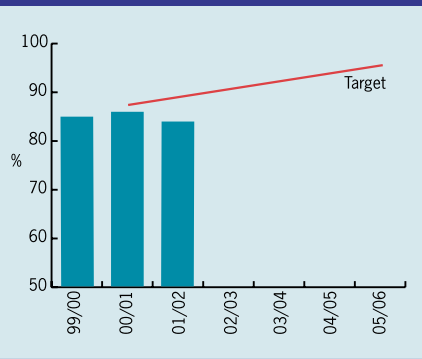
Woking Borough Council, in partnership with Thames Valley Housing Association, has successfully bid for funding to provide around 30 starter homes in Woking for nurses, teachers and police during the next 3 years.

In 2001 a survey of Council housing revealed that the average energy efficiency rating (SAP) of our homes had improved from 57 to 62.3. This improvement resulted from a range of insulation and heating measures, double glazing and combined heat and power.

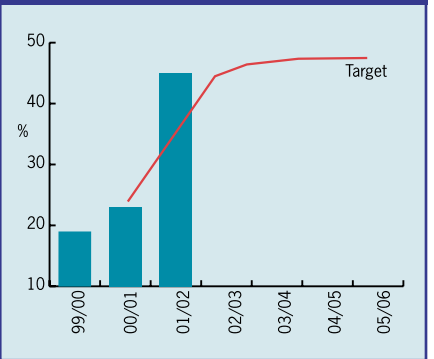
In 2001/02 75 units of affordable housing were funded by the Council in partnership with local housing associations. This compares to 42 units funded during 2000/01.



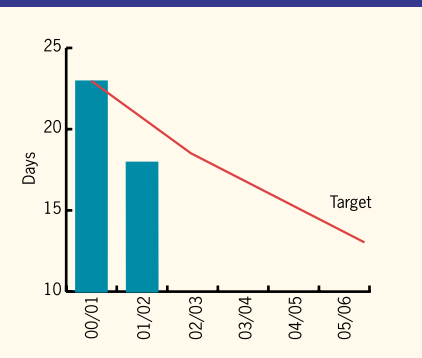
Urgent repairs done in government targets



Appointment for repairs made and kept



Average time to complete non-urgent repairs



Did you know ?

19 people sleeping rough in the Borough have been assisted into appropriate housing since June 1999.

Did you know ?

In December 2001, the Government assessed the Council's housing performance as Above Average.

Council Tax and Business Rates

This section should be read in conjunction with your Council Tax and/or Business Rates Bill

THE COUNCIL TAX AND SERVICES FOR WOKING BOROUGH

The Council Tax is a local tax set by local councils to help pay for local services.

The amount you pay is based upon the property band into which your home falls and the level of tax set for each band. Generally, you pay more the higher the capital value of your home. The value of your home has been assessed by the Valuation Office Agency (part of the Inland

Revenue), not by the Council, and is based on its estimated sale price on 1 April 1991. Your home was valued to establish its relative value compared with other homes and any changes in property values, either up or down, since then cannot be taken into account.

The relationship between the amounts for each band has been set by the Government and the basic rate is fixed at Band D's level that, for Woking, in 2002/2003 is £969.53.

If you live in a Band A property you pay two thirds of the basic rate and if you live in a Band H property you pay twice the basic rate. Your Council Tax bill shows which band applies to your home and the table below sets out the amounts due for 2002/2003.

You are entitled to a discount if you live alone and other reductions, such as those for people on low incomes, may be available. Details of these are given on pages 15 and 16.

HOW MUCH IS IT? - Council Tax by band for 2002/2003

Property Values (1 April 1991)	Band	Surrey County Council	Surrey Police	Woking Borough Council	Total Council Tax	Extra for Byfleet Parish
£40,000 or less	A	481.32	64.29	100.74	646.35	10.69
£40,001 to £52,000	B	561.54	75.01	117.53	754.08	12.47
£52,001 to £68,000	C	641.76	85.72	134.32	861.80	14.25
£68,001 to £88,000	D	721.98	96.44	151.11	969.53	16.03
£88,001 to £120,000	E	882.42	117.87	184.69	1,184.98	19.59
£120,001 to £160,000	F	1,042.86	139.30	218.27	1,400.43	23.15
£160,001 to £320,000	G	1,203.30	160.73	251.85	1,615.88	26.72
£320,001 or more	H	1,443.96	192.88	302.22	1,939.06	32.06

EMPLOYEES

The Council has budgeted for 487 employees (full-time equivalents) in 2002/2003 the same as in 2001/2002.

BYFLEET PARISH COUNCIL

Woking will also collect £45,000 in 2002/2003 on behalf of Byfleet Parish Council. This sum represents £8.15 per year per Byfleet elector. The Parish Council is committed to providing high standards of service and increasing their responsibilities in the Village. They will continue to provide financial support to groups based in Byfleet.

OUTSTANDING DEBT

At 31st March 2001, the Council had borrowing of £21 million outstanding. By December 2001 the council had repaid all of its long term debt.

ASSETS

The Council's assets at 31st March 2001 were £284 million.

Woking Borough Council is responsible for collecting the Council Tax that, this financial year, will total over £37 million. Of this £28 million will go to Surrey County Council, £4 million to Surrey Police with the Borough retaining £6 million. £45,000 goes to Byfleet Parish Council.



THE COST OF SERVICES

2001/2002

2002/2003

Expend	Government Grants	Other Income	Net Cost		Expend	Government Grants	Other Income	Net Cost
£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000		£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
5,761	0	4,799	962	Highways	6,418	0	5,178	1,240
5,156	0	3,753	1,403	Planning & Economic Development	5,297	0	4,140	1,157
6,452	0	3,072	3,380	Recreation and Tourism	7,100	0	2,972	4,128
993	24	142	827	Environmental Health	1,045	22	153	870
1,566	0	169	1,397	Refuse Collection	1,624	0	179	1,445
17,022	2,739	13,762	521	Housing	17,388	3,138	13,542	708
7,647	6,653	0	994	Benefits	7,671	6,653	0	1,018
2,274	3	675	1,596	Community Care	2,388	0	711	1,677
6,447	143	1,641	4,663	Other Services	6,711	167	1,610	4,934
0	0	5,690	-5,690	Interest and DSO Surpluses	0	0	5,707	-5,707
1,440	0	0	1,440	Movement in Reserves	578	0	0	578
177	0	0	177	Management of Change	99	0	0	99
-325	0	0	-325	Budget Reductions	-296	0	0	-296
54,610	9,562	33,703	11,345	Total Budget Requirement	56,023	9,980	34,192	11,851
0	0	3,511	-3,511	Less Business Rates Receivable	0	0	3,943	-3,943
0	2,333	0	-2,333	Less Revenue Support Grant	0	2,039	0	-2,039
0	0	5	-5	Less Community Charge Surplus	0	0	0	0
0	0	53	-53	Less Council Tax Surplus	0	0	78	-78
58	0	0	58	Plus Housing Benefit Subsidy Withdrawal	0	0	0	0
54,668	11,895	37,272	5,501	Amount to be met from Council Tax	56,023	12,019	38,213	5,791

This is the equivalent of the following amounts per head of Woking's population:

	Total Net Cost £'000	Net Cost Per Head £
Total Budget Requirement	11,851	126
Business Rates Receivable	-3,943	-42
Revenue Support Grant	-2,039	-22
Council Tax Surplus	-78	-1
Amount to be met from Council Tax	5,791	61

Why the cost of Woking's services has increased:

	£'000
Budget Requirement 2001/2002	11,345
Inflation	+593
Unavoidable additional service costs	+223
Increased financing costs	+668
Increased fees, charges and commercial rents	-799
Efficiency savings	-179
Budget requirement 2002/2003	11,851

COUNCIL TAX, BENEFIT AND BUSINESS RATES ENQUIRIES

If you have any queries or problems do not hesitate to contact us by:

- telephoning the Civic Offices on 01483 755855, or
- writing to the Council Tax, Benefits or Rates Section (as appropriate) at Woking Borough Council, Civic Offices, Gloucester Square, Woking GU21 6YL, or
- sending an e-mail to ctax@woking.gov.uk, benefits@woking.gov.uk or brates@woking.gov.uk (as appropriate).

If possible please quote the account number shown on your council tax or business rates bill with any communication.

Further information can be found on the Council Tax and Business Rates pages on the Council's website: www.woking.gov.uk

COUNCIL TAX

EXEMPTIONS

Some dwellings are exempt, including vacant properties which:

- are unfurnished (exempt for up to six months)
- are owned by a charity (exempt for up to six months)
- are uninhabitable and require or are undergoing major repair works or structural alteration (exempt for up to six months after the repairs/alterations are completed or a maximum of twelve months from the date they became necessary)
- are left empty by someone who has gone to live in a hospital, nursing or residential care home
- are left empty by someone who has gone to live elsewhere (not a hospital or care home) to receive care because of old age, disablement, illness, drug or alcohol dependency or mental disorder
- are left empty by someone who has gone into prison or other place of detention, e.g. hospital under Mental Health Acts
- are left empty by someone who has moved in order to provide personal care for another person
- are waiting for probate or letters of administration to be granted (and for up to six months after)
- have been repossessed
- are the responsibility of a bankrupt's trustee
- are empty because their occupation is forbidden by law
- are waiting to be occupied by a minister of religion
- were last occupied by a student who was the owner
- are caravan pitches or boat moorings
- are separately banded dwellings which form part of another property or are situated within the curtilage of another property and are difficult to let separately

e.g. an annexe which could not be let separately without a breach of Town & Country Planning Act 1990.

Other exempt properties which are not vacant

- Forces barracks and married quarters (contributions to the cost of local services are received through a special arrangement)
- Student occupied households and those which include, spouses or dependants of overseas students who are not British citizens and unable to work or claim benefit
- Properties occupied solely by people under 18 years of age
- Dwellings occupied only by a person or persons who are severely mentally impaired
- Certain dwellings occupied by diplomats
- Annexes occupied by someone who is related to the residents living in the rest of the property and is 65 or over, or severely mentally impaired or permanently disabled.

If you think your property may be exempt you should contact the Council Tax Section stating which exemption you are claiming. If we require further information to verify the exemption we will write to you.

DISCOUNTS

The full Council Tax assumes that there are two or more adults living in a dwelling. If only one adult lives in a dwelling (as their main home), the Council Tax bill will be reduced by a quarter (25%). If a dwelling is no one's main home, the bill will be reduced by a half (50%). This can apply to empty dwellings and second homes.

Certain people will not be counted (i.e are disregarded) when looking at the number of adults resident in a dwelling if they meet certain conditions:

- full-time students, student nurses, apprentices and Youth Training trainees
- patients resident in hospital

- people who are being looked after in care homes
- people who are severely mentally impaired
- people staying in certain hostels or night shelters
- 18 and 19 year olds who are at, or who have just left, school
- careworkers working for low pay, usually for charities
- carers for someone with a disability who is not a spouse, partner or child under 18
- members of visiting forces and certain international institutions
- members of religious communities (monks and nuns)
- people in prison (except those in prison for non-payment of Council Tax or a fine)

If your bill indicates that a discount has been allowed, you must tell the Council of any change of circumstances that affects your entitlement. If you fail to do so you may be required to pay a penalty.

The bill will show you if you have been granted a discount and the types are listed below

Single person - 25% discount because there is only one adult resident who is counted;

Single with disregards - 25% discount because there is more than one adult resident but only one is counted;

Empty discount - 50% discount because there are no adult residents;

Disregards only - 50% discount because all the adult residents are not counted;

Single who is disregarded - 50% discount because there is one adult resident who is not counted.

People with Disabilities

If you, or someone who lives with you, have a room, or an extra bathroom or kitchen, or sufficient space to permit the use of a wheelchair in your property, to meet special needs arising from a disability, you may be entitled to a reduction on your Council Tax bill.

The bill may be reduced to that of a property in the band immediately below the band shown on the valuation list or by one ninth in the in the case of band A properties. These reductions ensure that disabled people do not pay more tax on account of space needed because of a disability.

If you think you may be entitled to a discount or disabled reduction and it is not already shown on the bill, you should contact the Council Tax Section stating which discount you are claiming. We will then send you the appropriate application form.

BENEFIT

You may receive up to 100% help towards your Council Tax through the benefit scheme if you are in receipt of income support or you are on a low income. Certain other factors will be taken into account, such as any non-dependants living with you, and these will reduce the amount of benefit.

If you do not already receive benefit and you think you may qualify, further details and an application form can be obtained from the Benefit Section.

APPEALS

To the Council

You may appeal if you consider that you are not liable to pay Council Tax, for example, because you are not the resident or owner, or because your property is exempt, or you feel that we have made a mistake in calculating your bill. If you wish to appeal on these grounds you must first write to the Council Tax Section giving details of your appeal and we will reconsider your case. Making an appeal does not allow you to withhold payment of tax owing in the meantime. If your appeal is successful you will be entitled to a refund of any overpaid tax.

To the Valuation Office

If you wish to appeal against the banding of your property, you should write to the:

Listing Officer, Valuation Office Agency, West Block, Westbrook Mills, Borough Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 2SG

Tel no. 01483 702900

The grounds for appeal about banding are restricted to the following cases:

- where you believe that the banding should be changed because there has been a material increase or material reduction (this is explained below) in the dwelling's value;
- where you start or stop using part of your dwelling to carry out a business, or the balance between domestic and business use changes;
- where the Listing Officer has altered a list without a proposal having been made by a taxpayer;
- where you become the taxpayer in respect of a dwelling for the first time. (Your appeal must be made within 6 months, but if the same appeal has already been considered and determined by a Valuation Tribunal, it cannot be made again).

A material increase in value may result from building, engineering or other work carried out on the dwelling. In these cases revaluation does not take place until after a sale - so the person appealing would usually be the new owner or resident. A material reduction in value may result from the demolition of any part of the dwelling, any change in the physical state of the local area or an adaptation to make the dwelling suitable for use by someone with a physical disability. In these cases revaluation should take place as soon as possible. Making an appeal does not allow you to withhold payment of tax owing in the meantime. If your appeal is successful you will be entitled to a refund of any overpaid tax.

For further information on appeals and bandings, visit the Valuation Office website: www.voa.gov.uk

BUSINESS (NON-DOMESTIC) RATES

This Council is responsible for collecting rates on all business properties in the Borough on behalf of Central Government. All monies collected are paid into a central pool and in return a grant is received towards the provision of local services. In 2002/2003 the total rates due from businesses in the Borough is £36 million and the grant received will be £3.9 million.

Broadly, the amount you pay is calculated by multiplying the rateable value of your property by the multiplier or "poundage" set by the Government each year, which for 2002/2003 is 43.7p. However, this amount may be changed by any transitional or other relief to which you may be entitled and where applicable, these are shown on your bill.

Please see separate explanatory notes enclosed with your bill for further information

All rateable values are assessed by the Valuation Office Agency. If you have any questions on such matters you should contact:

The Valuation Officer, Valuation Office Agency, West Block, Westbrook Mills, Borough Road, Godalming, Surrey GU7 2SG - Tel. no. 01483 702900

For further information visit their website: www.voa.gov.uk

In exceptional circumstances business premises that are partly unoccupied for a temporary period may be entitled to some relief from rates based on the unoccupied part e.g. due to trying to let the empty part (but not keeping part of the premises empty through choice) or because structural alterations are being carried out (but not redecoration etc.).

The Council will consider applications for hardship relief for local business ratepayers, if they comply with special conditions laid down by the Government.

Should you require an application form or further information on any reliefs please contact the Rates Section.



The Environment

Preserving and enhancing the environment through the adoption of sustainable social, economic and environmental policies is key to improving the quality of life for residents and those who work in and visit the Borough.

WHAT WE DO

- Keep the streets and other public areas clean including dealing with abandoned vehicles and fly tipping
- Maintain grass, trees, shrubs, etc. in areas like highways, parks, town and village centres
- Make the most efficient use of urban land and protect the countryside, wildlife and trees which contribute to the amenity of the Borough
- Develop planning policy and design guidance in order to secure the future sustainable development of the Borough
- Manage the Council's countryside land so that it is accessible to the public and its ecological and amenity value is preserved
- Encourage developers to promote sustainable travel and minimise car use
- Promote the reduction of energy and water consumption and pollution and implement sustainable and renewable energy systems
- Implement low or zero emission transport projects such as natural gas refuse vehicles
- Collect refuse from all households as well as trade waste, garden waste and bulky or special items such as clinical/medical waste.
- Encourage waste minimisation and recycling including providing a kerbside collection of paper and green waste
- Provide car parks in the town centre and the majority of village centres and manage residents' parking and on street parking spaces for short term visitors and shoppers
- Ensure that all our property which is open to the public is fully accessible and meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Help to safeguard and enhance the historic and built environment through conservation areas, grant funding and small environmental projects
- Support the Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) group and other initiatives which seek to protect and improve the environment



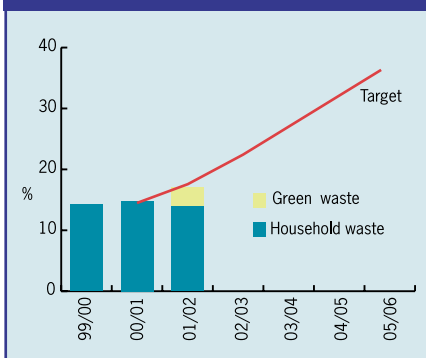
OUR PRIORITIES

- Implement the improvements identified by our Best Value Reviews into Waste Management and Street Cleansing, Car Parks and Grounds Maintenance
- Develop and implement a Climate Change Strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Continue our grant aided energy efficiency schemes and initiatives such as combined heat and power and renewable energy
- Work with partners on initiatives such as the Eco Schools Scheme and the Green Pages and Gardening for Life projects
- Refurbish public conveniences and provide additional facilities for disabled people
- Expand the range and quality of materials which are collected for recycling
- Improve litter enforcement and reduce the number of complaints about street cleansing
- Review the trial free collection of unwanted vehicles
- Complete an Urban Capacity Study to help inform decisions on future developments
- Set up a design award scheme to promote good quality design
- Seek wider public access to Woking Palace and submit a lottery application for this work
- Provide grant aid for maintenance and improvement of the environment



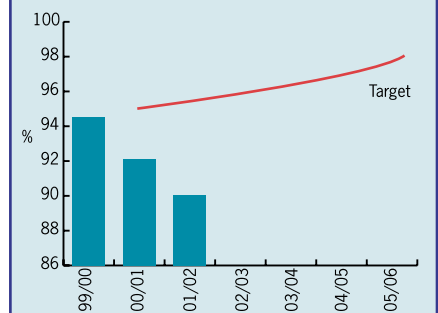
At the end of its trial in December 2001, the collection of green waste resulted in 1106 tonnes of garden waste being composted rather than being sent to landfill.

Household/Green waste recycled



In 2001 the Council completed an assessment of air quality which revealed that air quality in the Borough complies with Government objectives. The intention is to maintain this position and a further assessment will be carried out in 2003.

Acceptable or high standard of street cleanliness



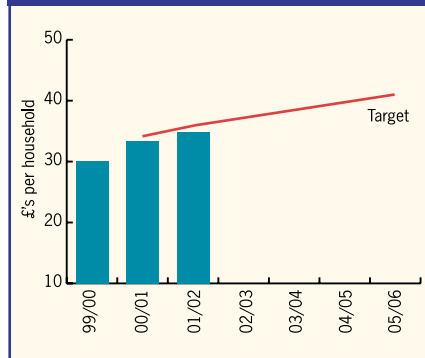
We operate 19 public conveniences which are open at least 330 days per year.

The Street Cleaning and Waste Collection services have been reviewed to improve efficiency and respond to the views of the community. The Best Value Inspectorate judged the service to be 'Fair and Unlikely to Improve'. Further details of the inspection process are set out on page 5. A new contract and an improvement plan are now in place which together with a more comprehensive approach to managing and monitoring the service should improve standards and satisfaction levels over time.

Within the Council's business planning and decision making processes, we seek to ensure that the sustainability implications of everything we do are taken into account.

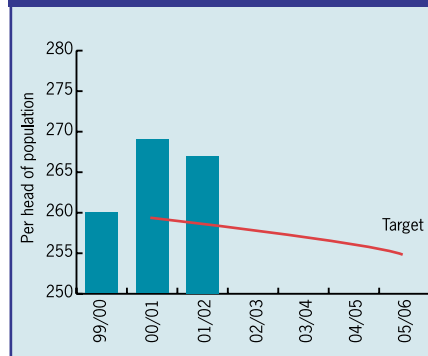
We have a Car Parks Charter, which sets standards and performance indicators. These are regularly publicised and discussed by the Car Parks User Group. The Service is monitored by regular user surveys and an annual User Group meeting. The comments from these are used to make continuous improvements to the service.

Cost of refuse collection

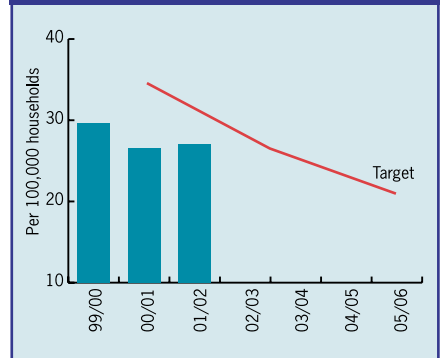


100% of the Borough's population is either served by the kerbside collection service and/or live within 1 kilometre of a recycling centre. There are 30 mini recycling centres throughout the Borough. Each site has a range of facilities for recycling colour separated glass, newspapers and magazines, food and drinks cans, textiles and shoes and engine oil.

Kilograms of household waste collected



Missed collections

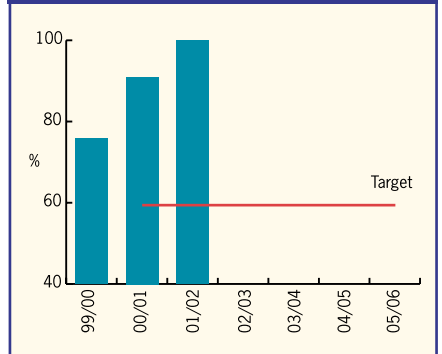


Did you know?

The Council has won the prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise - Energy Services. The only local authority to win the Award.

Did you know that each year the Council collects over 24,000 tonnes of household waste from 37,410 properties?

Homes built on previously developed land



Did you know?

The Council saved nearly.....

...£4.7 million through its energy and water efficiency programme from 1991 to 2001

...142 million kWh of energy – enough to heat 5,550 homes

...303 million litres of water – enough to fill 455 swimming pools

...and carbon dioxide emissions have been reduced by 78,605 tonnes – enough green house gases to fill 78,000 hot air balloons.





Community Protection

The protection of people living, working in or visiting the Borough is a key objective for the Council. We work to ensure the safety of the public through community safety initiatives, environmental health and licensing activity and through the regulation of the use of land and buildings.

WHAT WE DO

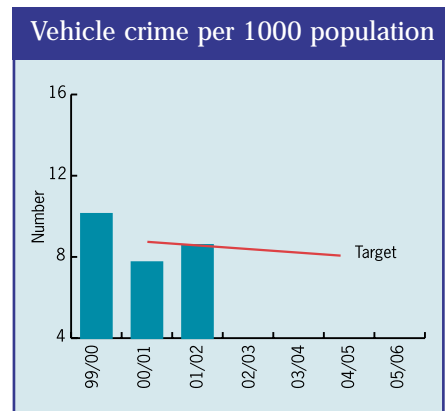
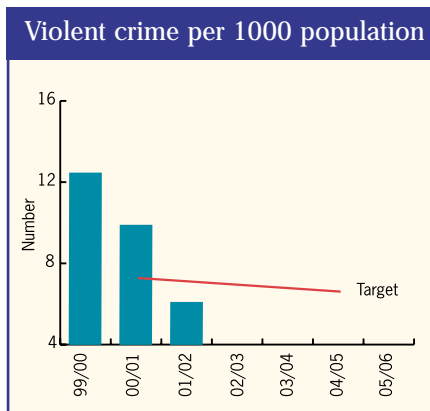
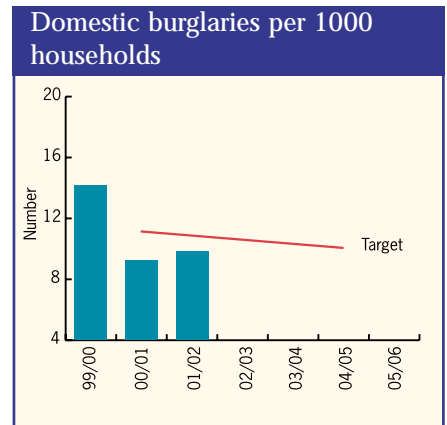
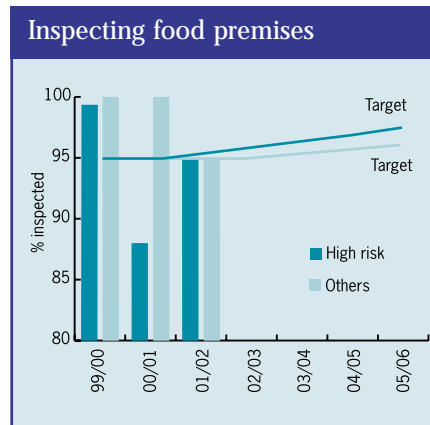
- Work with others, to reduce crime and disorder through the Community Safety Strategy
- Work with Surrey Police to manage and maintain the Council owned, police operated, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) system
- Work with the County Council, emergency services and others on emergency planning
- Inspect commercial premises to make sure they comply with food safety, health and safety at work and other public health rules
- Investigate complaints of public nuisances including noise, drainage, smoke, smells, dog fouling and straying, pest control, rubbish, unauthorised gypsy encampments; offer advice and take appropriate enforcement action
- Run licensing and registration schemes to ensure the health, safety and well being of members of the public in licensed establishments, or when receiving licensed services
- Make sure that new buildings meet requirements relating to construction, health, safety, energy conservation, access and facilities for the disabled
- Carry out enforcement against unauthorised development
- Seek to design development to reduce crime
- Ensure that development does not cause unacceptable harm to neighbours or the environment and take full account of the views of interested parties
- Protect irreplaceable resources such as wildlife sites, open space, trees and listed buildings
- Seek to control the loss of valuable land uses such as housing and employment



OUR PRIORITIES

- Make sure all our licensing and regulatory functions are carried out in compliance with statutory requirements and timescales
- Ensure that licences and registrations are only issued to suitable people and that licensed premises and vehicles are safe
- Improve performance in respect of the processing of planning applications so that decisions are made as quickly as possible
- Respond to all complaints and requests in respect of environmental health matters within 2 days
- Ensure that community safety issues are taken into account in all decisions made by the Council
- Publicise and promote the new CCTV scheme in Sheerwater
- Carry out a Best Value Review of Planning, Building Control and Environmental Health Services to identify where improvements might be made.

How we're doing and our targets

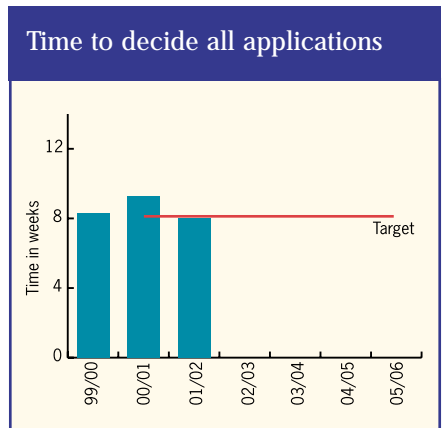
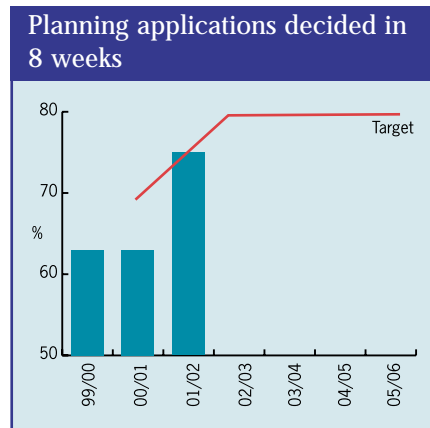
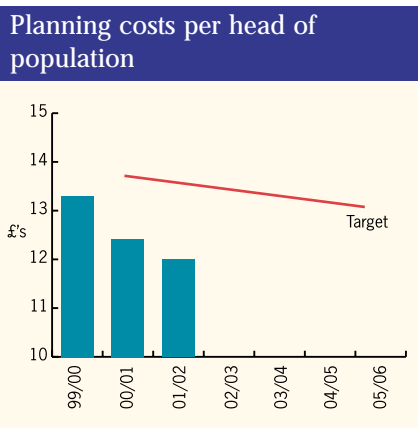


A survey of applicants' satisfaction with the Planning Department was carried out during 2000/01. The results revealed that overall, 83% of respondents were satisfied with the service provided.

Licences are issued by the Council to around 108 taxi drivers, 300 private hire drivers and 34 private hire operators, who between them operate about 52 taxis and 340 private hire vehicles.

We currently carry out 100% of local land searches within 3 days which is well within the Government target of 10 days.

Last year, the Council advertised only 5 departures from the approved Local Plan.





Resources

The Resources Service is responsible for a number of key functions supporting the work of the Council. These include the provision of Information Communication Technology, Human Resources and Financial Management. We have a duty to our residents to ensure that the Council's financial affairs are properly managed and to keep tight control on public expenditure.

WHAT WE DO

- Pay housing and council tax benefits to 3,883 claimants
- Collect council tax from over 37,500 households and business rates from 2,500 business premises.
- Process over 40,000 items for payment each year
- Employ over 480 staff – we are one of the Borough's largest employers
- Provide up to date, effective Information Communication Technology to enable the Council to deliver the most efficient service to our customers
- Deal with approximately 45,000 personal callers at the Civic Offices, accept over 100,000 payments in our cash offices and receive in excess of 350,000 calls through our switchboard.

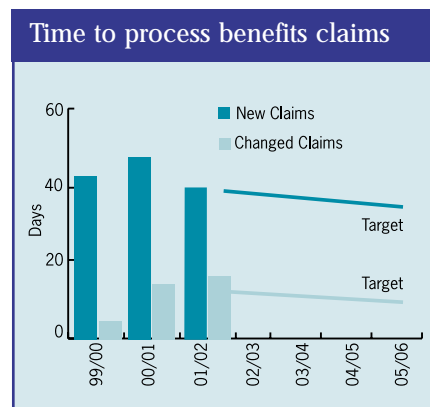
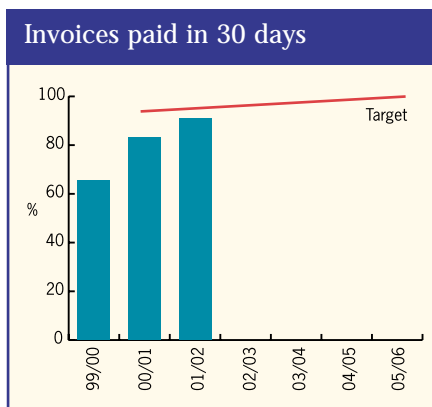
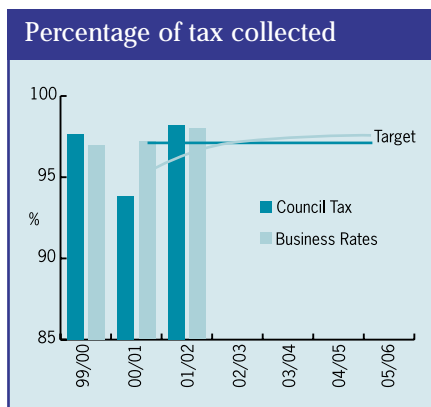
Further information relating to the budget, council tax and business rates can be found in the centre pages of this document.

OUR PRIORITIES

- Provide a benefits service which is reliable, efficient, correct and on time
- Continue to detect and deter error and fraud using sound investigative and monitoring methods
- Offer visits to anyone who may experience difficulty in completing application forms to offer assistance and advice
- Improve the collection rates for council tax and business rates
- Increase the number of invoices paid within agreed timescales.
- Further develop IT systems and processes to ensure that the Council's services are capable of being delivered electronically by 2005



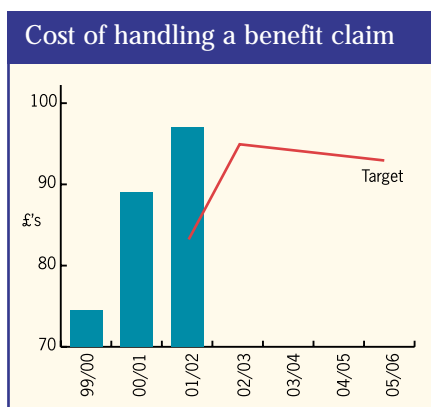
How we're doing and our targets



The Council follows a proactive strategy for combating fraud and error.

A survey of benefit applicants was carried out during 2000/01 to establish the level of satisfaction with the service provided. 1,296 applicants returned their questionnaires with the following overall results:

- 83% were satisfied with the contact/access facilities
- 82% were satisfied with the service in the benefits office
- 76% were satisfied with the telephone service
- 83% were satisfied with the staff in the benefits office
- 67% were satisfied with the clarity of forms and leaflets
- 74% were satisfied with the time taken for a decision

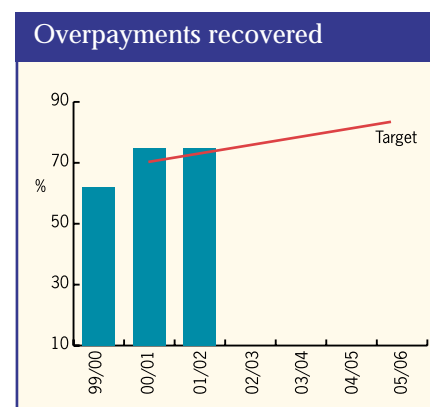
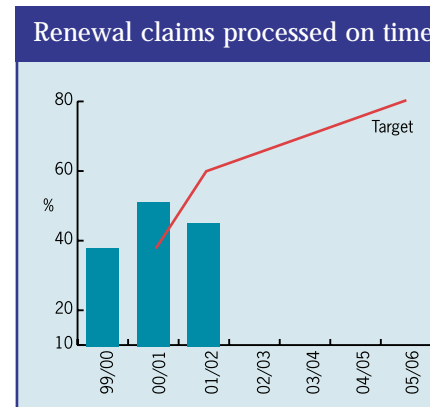


The Council has an 'Implementing Electronic Government' statement which sets out how it will ensure that 100% of its services are capable of electronic delivery by 2005. In 2001 the Government approved the statement as satisfactory (the highest rating available)

Human Resources

We are committed to equal treatment and equality of opportunity and monitor how well we are doing in the recruitment of staff by sex, ethnic origin and disability. The Council has an excellent record of achievement in training and development of its staff and councillors. In April 2001 the Council's Investors in People award was re-accredited for a further three years, an achievement of which the Council is very proud.

Best Value Performance Indicator	99/00	00/01	01/02	5 year target
% of women in senior posts	18.5	27.5	27.5	
Average days sickness	7.6	7.5	9.4	
% of staff leaving – normal turnover	8.6	16	11.3	Maintain 10-15%
% of staff retiring early	1.4	1.6	2.26	Govt target 0.45%
% retiring due to ill health	0.8	0.2	0.2	Govt target 0.35%
% of staff from ethnic community	4.82	5.3	4.3	
% of staff with a disability	1.6	1.6	2.27	



If you have any general comments on this Plan please contact David Johnson on 01483 743060 or email: david.johnson@woking.gov.uk

If you want more information about specific service areas please contact:

Housing Services

Jan Chapman,
01483 743610
jan.chapman@woking.gov.uk

Community Services

Graham Keyworth,
01483 743810
graham.keyworth@woking.gov.uk

Community Protection

Chris Fairlamb,
Planning & Environmental Health
01483 743410
chris.fairlamb@woking.gov.uk
Alan Harrison, Community Safety
01483 743031
alan.harrison@woking.gov.uk

The Environment

Dave Ward,
01483 743452
dave.ward@woking.gov.uk

Finance and Resources

Steve Bonsor,
01483 743221
steve.bonsor@woking.gov.uk

The information contained in this plan is what the Government requires us to publish. We will continue to develop these statistics and other (local) indicators in future plans.

This is a summary of the full Plan which can be viewed at the Civic Offices, Leisure Centre, Sheerwater Neighbourhood Office & local libraries or on the Council website: www.woking.gov.uk, from 1 April 2002



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



Woking Borough
Council

Civic Offices
Gloucester Square
Woking
GU21 6YL

www.woking.gov.uk