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<td>On 20 September, the Government and Audit Commission issued a consultation paper on performance indicators for local services for 2000/2001. This document contains the Government's and Audit Commission's assessment of the consultation responses and the reasoning behind the performance indicators which they have identified for use in 2000/2001. Please note - this document has been electronically converted from the paper original. Although every effort has been made to achieve total accuracy, there may be some minor typographical errors in the text.</td>
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Best Value and Audit Commission
Performance Indicators
for 2000/2001

Volume Two: Feedback

Best Value

December 1999
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Introduction

On 20 September, the Government and Audit Commission issued a consultation paper on performance indicators for local services for 2000/2001. Both the Government and the Commission were grateful for the more than 350 responses to that consultation from best value authorities, representative bodies and members of the public.

This document – volume two – contains the Government’s and Audit Commission’s assessment of the consultation responses and the reasoning behind the performance indicators which they have identified for use in 2000/2001. Chapter 1 contains the Government’s consideration of the responses to consultation and the rationale underlying those best value performance indicators (BVPIs) which it has decided to specify by Order. Chapter 2 similarly sets out the Audit Commission’s views on the consultation and its reasoning for the indicators (ACPIs) which it has specified by direction.

The indicators themselves are set out in volume one, together with their definitions.
CHAPTER 1
Best Value Performance Indicators

1.1 GENERAL THEMES

As might be expected for a proposed suite of indicators covering the whole range of local services, responses ranged widely in their concerns. However, three overarching themes emerged.

First, a large number of respondents were of the view that too many indicators were being proposed and secondly, there was concern that having separate Audit Commission and best value performance indicators was confusing. The Government notes the concern over numbers of indicators. It has been at pains not to create an excessive burden in specifying its BVPIs and recognises that there is a balance to be struck: too many BVPIs is a burden, but too few has potential to skew performance. Having reflected, the Government considers that the BVPIs set out in Volume one of this paper strike the right balance. The Government is also of the view that the indicators are a means by which authorities can celebrate their successes and by which they and local people can compare their performance with other authorities, leading to improvements in knowledge and performance.

The third theme of the responses was the concern expressed about performance indicators involving surveys. Most respondents acknowledged the importance of indicators which measured user satisfaction, but were concerned about the cost of carrying out such surveys. There was also concern, however, about the need to secure robust data from surveys which could legitimately be compared across authorities. The Government has set out in chapter 14 of Volume one of this document its intentions in this area and section 1.10 of this Volume sets out its reasoning. Essentially it has tried to prescribe the minimum amount of information (the essential parameters of each survey) which is compatible with ensuring comparable information.

The sections which follow relate to the corporate health and service-specific chapters of the BVPI consultation paper. They summarise the key themes arising in consultation and endeavour to explain the Government’s approach.

1.2 CORPORATE HEALTH

The corporate health BVPIs are designed to provide local people with a snapshot of the performance of their authority as an institution and service provider. Given this crucial role, it was to be expected that the proposed BVPIs would draw a great deal of comment, with almost all respondents having a view on what the “headline” indicators for local people should be. As a result of the helpful comments, a number of changes have been made to the corporate health BVPIs, which the Government believes strengthen both the headline
introduction to best value performance indicators

indicators and their definitions. The suite of Corporate Health BVPIs has also benefited
dugely from the work of the Corporate Health pilot authorities and the Corporate Health
Steering Group. The Government is particularly grateful for the work of both groups.

There was broad concern, among respondents and pilot authorities, over the balance of the
indicators. In particular, a number of respondents felt that seven BVPIs under the heading
of "Staff Development" was excessive. There were also many comments to the effect that
the "Staff Development" heading itself was a misnomer, since the indicators tended to be
concerned with issues of staff profile rather than with issues of development, such as
training and assessment. The Government considers that the indicators proposed under
that heading were a reasonable reflection of the important role that best value authorities
have in their communities as an employer. They were proposed in light of the need to
ensure that authorities exercise sound economic stewardship and reflect the community
which they serve. The Government also feels that a definition of staff development which
includes only the experience of staff once they arrive in post is too narrow. The need to
develop the workforce so that it reflects the local population is also key. Nevertheless, the
Government has made changes to a number of the BVPIs under that heading, following the
helpful comments received.

Most respondents on BVPI 11 – number of women in senior management – felt that it
needed a clear definition of "senior management". The Government considers that the
most attractive option offered by respondents was that of the "top X tiers of the authority's
management structure". This was a view put forward, amongst others by the Employers'
Organisation. This approach has the great attraction of being adaptable to authorities with
different grading or salary structures. The Government has defined BVPI 11 in line with
the Employers' Organisation proposal, to cover the top three tiers of an authority's
management structure – i.e. as far as third tier Heads of Service in a local authority.

There was generally great enthusiasm for the "equality" indicators. Some respondents
suggested that there should be further "senior management" BVPIs for minority ethnic
communities and the disabled. The Government sees the merit in these proposals, but
considers it prudent to run with BVPIs 16 and 17 for the first year of best value and to assess
the potential for developing those BVPIs for future years. It has amended these indicators,
however, in light of local authority concerns about obtaining appropriate baseline data for
representation of disabled people and minority ethnic communities in the local population.
Given the lack of easy availability of data, the Government has decided, for 2000/2001, to
measure representation of these groups against the total workforce rather than against their
representation in the wider population. It will then work with interested parties on identifying
appropriate data sources for the second year of best value to allow use of the "as a
proportion of the population" measures.

BVPI 12, 13, 14 & 15 were seen by some as indicators of "negative" aspects of performance.
BVPI 13 (voluntary leavers), in particular, attracted criticism in this respect. However, the
Government considers that the indicators will provide important information to local
people on the performance of their authority in areas of significant spending and sensitivity.
BVPI 13 has great value as an indicator of the authority's performance in managing and
developing its staff. There were helpful comments on what were the appropriate denominators
for BVPIs 14 & 15. It was suggested that BVPI 15 (early retirements) should be expressed
as a proportion of the total workforce over 50 years of age (the age at which eligibility for
early retirement begins). Whilst there is merit in this suggestion, the Government is adopting
a top quartile approach to this BVPI and the available top quartile data is expressed as a
proportion of total workforce. Therefore the Government is persisting with the indicator as a proportion of total workforce. The other suggestion was that ill-health retirements should be shown as a percentage of the total workforce (since ill-health retirement can occur at any time) rather than as a percentage of retirements. This is accepted and the indicator has been amended accordingly.

BVPI 1 is intended as an indicator of an authority’s corporate performance on sustainable development. A number of respondents were concerned that as a yes/no indicator it lacked value – particularly for the long-term. However, the Government believes that BVPI 1 represents a good starting place for assessment of the level of local authority contribution to sustainable development. It will consider, with the relevant interests, the potential for BVPIs in future years which better reflect the quality of authorities’ work/performance on sustainable development. The Government also has in mind to consider the possibility of extending BVPI 1 to single service fire authorities for the second year of best value.

BVPI 2 was overwhelmingly welcomed, though some authorities, including pilot authorities thought that it was misplaced under the heading “Planning & Measuring Performance”. This is acknowledged and it now appears under the heading “Customers and the Community.”

Aside from concerns about survey methods which are considered in the User Satisfaction Survey section of this paper, there was general support for BVPI 3 (satisfaction with the overall service provided by the authority). However, some respondents were doubtful of the public’s ability to distinguish between the services provided by authorities. The Government believes that this is an incentive to carry out good, clear surveys rather than a reason not to prescribe an indicator in this regard. Respondents in respect of BVPI 4 (complainant satisfaction with the handling of complaints) were generally concerned that the outcome of a complaint was likely to skew the survey response. Again, the Government considers this reaffirms the need for good quality surveys.

The Government has amended BVPI 5 to make plain the fact that it is concerned with complaints to an Ombudsman, as a number of respondents said. On BVPIs 6 & 7, respondents were generally of the view that local authorities had minimal influence over electoral turnout or voter registration. The Government considers this an unduly negative view and considers both indicators fundamental to a view of authority corporate health.

The proposal for an indicator on payment of invoices – BVPI 8 – attracted comment from a number of authorities. Some were of the view that the new regime established by the Late Payments of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 provided sufficient incentive to authorities to pay promptly. Others were of the view that the targets for invoice payment contained in chapter 17.4.1 of the consultation document were too onerous. Still others thought that the targets were contrary to the statements elsewhere in the consultation document that it would be for authorities to determine locally their targets for PIs and that the Government did not intend to establish performance standards in the first year of best value.

The Late Payments of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 introduced interest penalties for local authorities which failed to pay invoices within 30 days. The Government considers it unacceptable for authorities to expose public money to such potential penalties and that it is therefore essential for local authorities to eliminate late payment in the shortest possible timescale. It has therefore decided to proceed to ask local authorities to adopt the payment targets proposed and the statutory guidance (under s.5 of the Local Government Act 1999) at chapter 14 of volume 1 of this document reflects this.
BVPI 18 (partnerships) attracted a good deal of comment. Many respondents, including the corporate health pilots and their steering group, were concerned about the difficulty of defining both "partnerships" and "best practice". There was a general feeling that the proposed indicator did not do this adequately. The Government accepts this and has decided not to proceed with such a BVPI for 2000/2001, but to work on refining these terms for the second year of best value. In doing so, it will consult with the relevant best value interests.

1.3 EDUCATION

General themes
The Government is grateful for the constructive comments and suggestions which respondents provided on the proposed performance indicators set out in the education chapter of the consultation paper.

The Government welcomes the fact that Best Value arrangements, including the development of performance targets and plans, make appropriate allowance for local factors, and the interface with existing central government policies and initiatives. This is of particular importance in the education sphere. It is vital that authorities set themselves targets which are challenging, but at the same time appropriate and realistic in the context of local circumstances, which may, for some authorities, preclude achievement of some national performance targets in 2000-01.

The Government is also committed to minimising the burden of bureaucracy on Local Education Authorities and schools. For this reason, it has amended some of the PI definitions to ensure that they are linked to existing data collection exercises. The Government recognises that this may lead to some of the information relating to PIs not being fully synchronised with the relevant financial year for Best Value Performance Plans. However, DfEE believes this is a surmountable difficulty, and preferable to requiring Authorities and schools to collect information more than once each year.

New Education Efficiency Measures
The consultation paper invited suggestions as to how further efficiency indicators might best be developed, to complement those already proposed (BVPIs 31-36), so as to link more directly expenditure managed at school level to examination performance.

Having considered the responses, the Government believes that two indicators should be introduced, one for expenditure on primary schools, and the other for expenditure on secondary schools. Primary school expenditure would be linked to outcome data for averages and/or composites of BV40 and BV41 (Proportion of 11 year olds in schools maintained by the Authority in the previous summer achieving Level 4 or above in the Key Stage 2 Mathematics/English tests). Secondary school expenditure would be linked to BV37 (Average GCSE points score of young people completing Year 11 in schools maintained by the authority) or BV38 (Proportion of pupils in schools maintained by the Authority in the previous summer achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent) once these alternatives have been tested and evaluated. It will be necessary to consider how LEA 'families' should be compared in relation to this measure. It is suggested that LEA 'families' should be used. At this stage these measures need to be regarded as provisional – further review will be needed, in consultation with local education authorities, in order to refine them.
Best Value and Audit Commission Performance Indicators for 2000/2001

There is room for debate over the choice of elements of school-managed expenditure to be included. In order to prevent the imposition of excessive burdens on local authorities, consistency will be vital between the relevant definitions of expenditure for the indicator, and the definitions used for the annual LEA financial statements which are required under section 52 of the Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998. For these reasons, it is not possible to include these new indicators in the BVPIs for 2000-2001. However, it is the Government’s intention to include them for 2001-02, and therefore to consult on them in the associated BVPI consultation exercise in Summer 2000.

Proposed Cost/Efficiency PIs

Comments on the proposed cost/efficiency indicators (BV31-36) were broadly supportive, although some areas of concern were identified.

The consultation exercise drew out a number of new proposals for indicators for LEA adult education which we think have merit. The Government intends to retain BV32 and BV 42 for 2000-01. However, for 2001-02, it is minded to propose a new indicator to take account of LEA gross expenditure on adult education, as this reflects levels of participation more closely. It is also minded to propose two new quality indicators for 2001-02 as set out below.

Concerns about the age range specified for Youth Service expenditure in BV33 were expressed by a number of Authorities, many of which cater for young people outside the 13-19 band. The Government therefore proposes to replace this band with a broader descriptor, which will more accurately capture actual LEA expenditure on Youth Service provision. Several LEAs asked for the wording of the performance indicators relating to surplus places in schools (BV34a/b, BV 35a/b) to be further clarified. The Government proposes to make changes to these indicators so that they correspond more closely to the criteria used in the DfEE’s annual exercise to collect information on surplus places.

Proposed Service Delivery Outcome PIs

These PIs, with which LEAs are familiar and content, did not draw any significant adverse criticism, and the Government therefore proposes no changes to them other than to redesignate BV30 (percentage of 3 year olds with access to good quality, free early years education) as one of this suite of PIs.

Proposed Quality PIs

The commitment of many Authorities to delivering high quality lifelong learning opportunities was evident from their responses, a number of which put a strong case for additional qualitative PIs for adult education. The Government therefore proposes that two new quality indicators should be introduced covering satisfaction levels and retention rates on LEA provided and secured courses which will reflect the quality of courses and LEA’s efforts to ensure learner commitment.

Some Authorities pressed for an additional qualitative PI for Youth Service provision. Whilst the Government is sympathetic towards this objective, it is concerned that under current arrangements, Authorities would be burdened with a significant amount of extra work in order to secure uniform data collection relating to such a PI. It does not therefore propose to include an additional PI for 2000-01, but will keep this area under review.

There was concern that BV42 did not properly constitute a quality indicator – although it is our view that it is a useful starting point when considering the issue of wider participation in adult learning. Furthermore we would expect a more stringent set of indicators to be placed upon LEAs once the new Learning and Skills Council is in place.
Proposed Fair Access PIs
There was broad contentment with the measures proposed, which the Government does not intend to alter except for amendments to some definitions relating to data collection arrangements, to ensure that additional work for LEAs and schools is minimised.

1.4 SOCIAL SERVICES

General
Some 101 respondents made comments on the proposed social services indicators. After the national consultation on the Personal Social Services (PSS) Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) earlier in the year it was not surprising that most of these expressed support for selection of the proposed BVPIs for social services from the PAF and approval for the indicators themselves. However, although the majority agreed that the selection of PIs was reasonably representative of social services as a whole, a small number felt that the selection was biased. Interestingly, some suggested this was in favour of children’s indicators and others that it was in favour of adults services.

Many responses made clear that the number of PIs being proposed for social services was causing concern. Several respondents said it was important to ensure that the set was kept small and manageable, concentrating only on areas of national importance. The current proposals led to worries that national prescription would leave little room for local priorities and targets.

Respondents stressed that putting in place arrangements for Best Value and establishing local level performance management systems was very demanding for authorities. Some acknowledgement of this was needed.

Use of Indicators
A high proportion of respondents commenting on social services asked for clarification on the way the indicators would be interpreted. They also sought reassurance that they would be used as the basis for asking further questions, not to make an immediate assessment. This was especially the case where data quality and differences in the way indicators were calculated between authorities raised questions about the comparability of data. In particular, it was suggested that without clear and easily followed guidance on cost indicators it would not be possible to compare between authorities.

Comments were also made on the importance of recognising behavioural implications of selecting indicators on certain services and the importance of avoiding indicators that would skew service delivery to the detriment of service users.

Developing Indicators
The need to constantly review and consider the indicators was pointed out in a number of responses. Suggestions for improving the indicator set included developing new indicators on:

- accessibility of services (e.g. accessibility of buildings and the availability of information in accessible formats);
- services for specific socially excluded groups, particularly children and young people;
- measures of joint working and partnership;
preventative and rehabilitative services;

services for deaf people;

outcome measures for adults and children.

Surveys

Most authorities commenting on social services also commented on the user satisfaction survey proposals. The key points raised were:

social services clients were hard to reach and would need costly follow up to obtain responses from all the key user groups and avoid bias;

the surveys would need to be confidential and not carried out by LA staff to reassure vulnerable social services users that criticism would not mean that crucial services would be removed;

the surveys would be resource intensive and burdensome. Financial support would be needed;

central guidance was important but opinion on what this should cover was divided; some said that it should be detailed, others said it should concentrate on data analysis and sampling, not on the methodology and others that the surveys should build on existing arrangements rather than introducing something entirely new;

the surveys had to be valuable at a local level and should not be carried out too frequently. Some felt annually would be acceptable, others that once every two or three years would be more appropriate;

the surveys should be held at the same time in all authorities to avoid seasonal bias;

the satisfaction PIs needed to be better defined (see specific comments on each of the indicators) in annex A.

GOVERNMENT DECISIONS

Final Indicators

The Government welcomes the detailed comments received from so many organisations. Given the general support for the indicators it has been decided not to drop any of the proposed BVPIs. However, the definitions have been strengthened in line with comments. The definitions of the final BVPIs and associated targets are listed in chapter 8 of Volume one.

Using the Indicators

The Government is committed to ensuring the data collected is used sensibly and as the basis for further questioning rather than immediate judgements. The Government recognises the efforts being made by authorities to implement Best Value and will provide the information they need to properly carry this out. To improve comparability of cost data authorities will be expected to work within guidance prepared by the Best Value Accounting Framework Steering Group which involves the LGA, DETR and CIPFA. Work is also being taken forward on the dissemination of good practice and on the development of local performance and information management skills. The recent report Meeting the Challenge
offers practice guidance on the types of management information social services authorities should collect if they are to commission services for older people effectively.

**Developing the Indicators**

Although the Government is not proposing to make any changes to the BVPIs for 2000/01, this does not mean that proposals for improved or new indicators will be ignored. The Government recognises that while the indicators are the best available using existing or planned for data, a great deal of work remains to be done to improve the quality and coverage of the indicators.

A PSS PAF Development Group has been set up involving DH officials, the Audit Commission, the ADSS, LGA and local authority information managers. This will oversee work to develop national performance indicators for social services and ensure all the suggestions made during the PAF and BVPI consultation exercises are considered and built upon. The team will take the advice of all stakeholders with an interest and will be looking at innovative ways of ensuring that a wide variety of views can be taken into account.

### 1.5 HOUSING

**Dealing with unfit private sector dwellings**

BV62 is an indicator covering condition of private sector stock was generally welcomed, though the LGA and a number of others called for a firming up of the proposal. We have therefore revised the headline descriptor and defined the list of actions which are to count in combating unfitness in the private sector.

The Government has decided to retain the BVPI and the top quartile target but to revise the headline descriptor and definition, as shown in Volume one, to take account of consultation comments.

**Energy efficiency**

BV63 and BV70, the two indicators on energy efficiency, were generally well received. The main comments argue for widening so as to also cover the private sector housing stock. We agree the desirability of so doing, but need to explore further the scope for coming up with an effective way of measuring the impact local authority actions (as opposed to the actions of others – e.g. energy companies, homeowners themselves, etc) have on improving the energy efficiency of the private sector stock. Other comments sought clarification on how information should be collected to inform these two PIs. This will be by way of an energy survey as specified in the definition in chapter 9 of Volume one. These two PIs are clearly linked, and presentationally it would be better to list them as such in the final specification.

The Government has decided to retain both these BVPIs and targets as originally proposed. However, it has revised the definition, as shown in Volume one, to clarify the mechanism for collecting information to inform the indicators.

**Private sector empty homes brought back into use**

BV64 was generally welcomed, though issues were raised about the impact of levels of demand for private sector stock – e.g. that some authorities experience problems of low demand for housing that are outside their control. Some respondents sought clarification on the actions that authorities might take to bring empty properties into use.
The issue of low demand was considered during development of the indicator and is reflected in part by the local target proposed for this PI. Authorities will need to publish their targets and performance against the PI in their BVPPs and where appropriate may wish to provide contextual information. The impact of low demand could be further minimised through the way local authorities are grouped for the purpose of comparison at the national level. It may be appropriate to have more sophisticated groupings to take account of such factors – factors which may also impact on other service areas.

The Government has decided to retain BVPI 64 but with revised headline descriptor and definition, as shown in Volume one, to take account of consultation comments.

**Average weekly costs per local authority dwelling spent on management and repairs**

Around a quarter of respondents, including the LGA and CIH, commented on BVPI 65. Most of the comments raised concerns about inconsistencies in the bases on which authorities calculated management and repairs costs. The issue of consistency is one that we have recognised (in part by not setting a top quartile target for this PI). But we take the view that having a cost indicator is essential and that we should go with the PI proposed but with a commitment to look at ways of improving measurement in the future. Other comments suggested that the PI needed to take account of context (e.g. age and type of stock, renovation backlog) by relating spend to the work that needed to be done. This clearly has some attraction but no one was able to suggest how this might be achieved and there is no established method for assessing the scale of management and repairs work on which to base a PI.

The Government has decided to retain the PI as proposed in consultation paper and as defined in Volume one.

**Rent collection and arrears**

Around a third of those responding on housing, including the LGA and CIH, commented on BVPI 66. Most raised questions about the definition, particularly on the position on Housing Benefit. We have now clarified the definition in this respect. One or two of the responses raised concerns about the possibility of providing a disincentive to write-off rent arrears. We do not consider this a good argument against this part of the PI. Routine auditing arrangements should ensure that authorities make sensible and prudent decisions about arrears management.

The Government intends to retain BVPI 66 as proposed but with a revised definition and confirmation of top quartile target as shown in Volume one.

**Homelessness**

Some respondents, including the LGA and CIH, disagreed with the use of proportions of cases dealt with within a target timescale, as BVPI 67, as they consider this will favour districts receiving low numbers of applications. We remain of the view that the indicator is valid because the target timescale is long enough for all authorities, including those with large caseloads, to have a reasonable time to deal with applications.

The Government intends to retain this PI as proposed in consultation paper, including its definition and target.
Average relet times
Around a fifth of those responding on housing referred to BVPI 68. Most were concerned about its being ‘unfair’ on low demand areas. This is clearly linked with concerns about comparisons between authorities at the national level. Several responses, including those from the LGA and CIH, queried whether development voids should be included in the PI. This was covered in the definition but we have revised to make this clearer.

The Government intends to retain this PI as proposed in consultation paper, including the top quartile target, but to revise its definition, as shown in Volume one, to take account of consultation comments.

Percentage of rent lost through dwellings becoming vacant
Just under a quarter of those responding on housing referred to this BVPI 69. Most were concerned that it was ‘unfair’ on low demand areas. Some of the responses also argued that rent lost on dwellings undergoing major repairs or which have been identified for sale or demolition should be excluded. There is clearly some merit in these suggestions. However, we recommend sticking with the PI as proposed for the following reasons:

- allowing these exceptions would mean the PI would, in effect, be measuring much the same thing as the average relet one;
- allowing these exceptions could complicate checks on the accuracy of the PI data and open up the possibility for manipulation; and
- sticking with the proposed definition means that local authorities have an incentive to minimise the time taken over major repairs or while waiting for dwellings to be sold or demolished.

The Government has decided to retain this PI as proposed, with a top quartile target and as defined in Volume one.

The number of local authority dwellings receiving renovation work as a proportion of the assessed need
BVPI71 attracted comment from around half those responding on housing. Comments were largely around the issue of definition which we have now clarified. There were also some criticisms of the PI on the basis that it covers an area in which it is not easy to ensure consistency of measurement between local authorities. In the consultation paper we recognise the need to devise improved and wider indicators of stock condition (such as change in backlog) as an issue for further development. Meanwhile, we remain of the view that there needs to be an indicator measuring stock condition of the local authority owned stock and that BVPI71 is the best currently available.

The Government intends to retain BVPI 71, but with revised headline descriptor and definition, as set out in Volume one, to take account of consultation comments.

Completion of urgent and non-urgent repairs
Some respondents requested clarification on the definition of urgent and non-urgent repairs in BVPI72 and BVPI73. Others commented that both indicators should be measured using the same method – i.e. either by the percentage of repairs completed within Government time limits or by the average time taken to complete repairs. BVPI72 is based on the Government time limits set for urgent repairs in the Secure Tenants of Local
Housing Authorities (Right to Repair) Regulations, 1994. BVPI73 is based on the average time taken to complete repairs rather than the proportion completed within a time limit. The reasons for this are twofold: first, there are no Government time limits set for non-urgent repairs and second, to remove any incentive for local authorities to give low priority to repairs that have passed the time limit.

One or two respondents commented that any comparison of the PI data would need to be informed by contextual information regarding the area and frequency at which repairs are required – e.g., average number of repairs per dwelling per year. While authorities will be free to include contextual information when reporting against BVPIs in their BVPPs, we consider comparisons across authorities in this area are helpful as a means of identifying those who perform best at meeting demand.

The Government intends to retain both PIs and the local targets proposed, but clarify definitions, as shown in Volume one, to take account of consultation comments.

Tenants satisfaction with overall housing service

BVPI74 was generally supported, but some respondents commented that it would need to be informed by a common survey approach to ensure consistency. This is what we intend. We shall be specifying that local authorities use the NHF’s STATUS standard tenant satisfaction questionnaire and associated guidance which has been developed with RSLs and local authorities in mind. It will therefore provide a good read across in this area between local authorities and RSLs – a point welcomed by some of the respondents – e.g., the CIH.

The consultation paper asked for views about the inclusion of leaseholders. Most respondents felt that separate questions would be required for them. On balance, and in the interests of minimising the burden from national PIs, we do not think the inclusion of leaseholders justified. Where there are significant numbers of leaseholders authorities will be free to develop local satisfaction PIs. Another issue raised by a few related to whether the target for this PI should be set locally. Levels of tenant satisfaction are relatively high on average but vary between authorities. We therefore remain of the view that a top quartile target is appropriate. Some general points about user surveys were raised, including sampling and the desirability of breakdowns of results by ethnic origin. These go wider than housing and will need to be considered as part of the Government’s consideration of the general criteria that should apply to the conducting of all BVPI user satisfaction survey PIs, and on which comments were sought in Chapter 13 and Annex 7 of the consultation paper.

The Government will retain this PI, with its top quartile target, but has clarified the headline descriptor and definition, as shown in Volume one, to take account of consultation comments.

Tenants satisfaction with participation

There was also support for BVPI75, the second tenant satisfaction PI, though some concerns about the definition. The London Borough of Hackney and five others raised several issues including implicit assumptions about awareness of and engagement in tenant participation that may not be justified and difficulties of distinguishing between satisfaction with arrangements and outcomes. The Chartered Institute of Housing stressed the need for comparable data between RSL and local authorities. We have considered further, and will be specifying a new question which is relevant for tenants of both RSLs and local authorities in the STATUS standard tenant satisfaction survey. We are dropping the proposed reference...
to Tenant Participation Compacts in the headline of this PI so as to facilitate the read-across between local authorities and RSLs. However, we will be including two new questions about compacts in the STATUS standard tenant satisfaction survey, and local authorities will be asked to report on these via their Housing Investment Programme returns.

The Government has decided to retain the PI and the top quartile target, but to revive the headline descriptor and definition, as shown in Volume one, to take account of consultation comments.

1.6 HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

Security
Very few consultees expressed a view on BVPI 76. Of those who did comment, some doubted that the indicator would provide a sufficiently robust measure of local authorities’ efforts to tackle benefit fraud and error, but others broadly supported the proposal.

The Government believes that this performance measure will give all local authorities a clear signal which reinforces the importance of putting in place active strategies to protect programme expenditure which commit each authority to demonstrably undertaking specific initiatives to combat fraud and error, including those sponsored by DSS. The measure will act as an effective driver for all local authorities to refocus their efforts in this important area and fits well with the overall aims of Best Value.

The Government therefore intends to set the indicator without change.

Cost/efficiency
Consultees who responded on BVPI77 broadly endorsed the proposed indicator and many specifically welcomed the proposal to weight reported costs to reflect differences in the characteristics of claims handled by local authorities.

A majority of those commenting, however, remained concerned that local variations in accounting practice could mean that reported costs were not be comparable between authorities. The Government recognises this concern. DSS is currently undertaking research to establish more clearly the reasons for the current inconsistencies in the costs of administering benefits which local authorities report. This work will take account of proposals being developed by CIPFA for a new accounting framework for Best Value and will establish the feasibility of framing further guidance for local authorities which would help to ensure that they report benefit administration costs in a more consistent and directly comparable manner.

The Government intends to set the indicator without change; DSS will aim to provide further guidance in support of it before April 2000.

Service delivery outcome
BVPI78 concerns speed of processing claims. The importance of measuring the speed of processing benefit claims and in-claim notifications of changes of circumstances was recognised by all respondents, but a majority also expressed concern that measuring the average speed of the end-to-end process could penalise authorities unfairly in cases where late action by the person claiming benefit, or a third party, is perceived to contribute to any delay.
The Government believes that it is right to set a performance measure which reflects local people's experience of the speed of the benefit service provided by authorities. The Government particularly wishes to encourage local authorities to take a pro-active approach to gathering information and evidence in support of claims and to ensure that clients and others have a clear understanding from the outset of their responsibilities as part of that process. This approach was supported by a number of consultees who cited the problem of escalating rent arrears where the claims process is unduly prolonged.

Several respondents thought that performance against the indicator could be affected where the authority concerned is implementing the Verification Framework. (The Verification Framework is a DSS initiative to prevent fraud and error from entering the system which specifies a minimum standard of evidence which local authorities can accept in support of a claim, and a series of checks which must be made during the life of a claim.) In recognition of this concern, the Government proposes to signal in any published performance data that where an authority has been participating in the Verification Framework during the year in question its performance against the indicator may have been affected as a result.

The Government intends to set the indicator without change.

**Accuracy of processing**

Most of those who commented on BVPI 79 recognised the value of setting this performance measure and supported its introduction. Some were concerned, however, about how large a sample of cases local authorities would need to check under BVPI 79(a) and the potential resource implications. Others felt that further guidance was needed in order for authorities to be clear what was required of them.

DSS is producing further guidance in support of the indicator. It is proposed that the sample size for BVPI 79(a) should vary according to the size of local authority caseloads, but should be limited so that no authority is required to check more than 500 cases a year. The sample size will be designed to provide reasonable confidence limits without imposing undue burdens on authorities, particularly smaller ones.

The Government intends to set the indicator without change.

### 1.7 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

#### 1.7.1 Air quality

The majority of responses to the consultation on BVPI81 suggested that the indicator was not very informative because it simply required a yes/no answer and it did not show, that for some authorities, there would be a continuous process after the review and assessment had taken place. The Government acknowledges this point, but feels that even if the indicator was expanded in future to consider the designation of AQMAs, it would be difficult to compare "like with like", if one local authority has an AQMA, whereas another does not have to designate one. The Government will, however, need to consider how to develop the indicator in future.

However, the Government intends to retain BVPI 81, as it will bring to the attention of the public and other organisations that local authorities have a duty to review and assess air quality in their area, as required under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995. Also it will show that local authorities are complying with their statutory requirement. We have amended it slightly to make clearer exactly what information is being sought.
Some local authorities pointed out that the target date for completion of the review and assessment was to be deferred. This is true and we have suggested that the review and assessment should be completed by June 2000. This has been taken into account in the definition of the BVPI. The BVPI is therefore still applicable for 2000/2001.

1.7.2 Waste management

The move to a single set of indicators covering waste management as a whole was welcomed though respondents expressed some concerns about individual indicators. Indicator BVPI82 attracted the most comments from respondents. The main issues raised were as follows:

- A number of respondents highlighted the potential impact on headline recycling rates of using ‘municipal waste’ rather than ‘household waste’ as the denominator. Some respondents also felt that it would penalise authorities collecting significant quantities of commercial waste;
- A number of respondents felt that the indicator’s use of municipal waste was at odds with targets in the Government’s draft waste strategy for England and Wales, A Way With Waste;
- A significant number of respondents wished to include home composting figures in BVPI82b;
- A number of respondents wished to include the recovery of energy from landfill sites under BVPI82c;
- A few respondents considered that performance would be better judged on a county-wide basis in two-tier areas rather than individually for waste collection authorities and waste disposal authorities;
- A number of respondents wanted to see third party recycling for which collection or disposal recycling credits were paid covered by the indicator.

The Government appreciates the concerns expressed by respondents about the use of ‘municipal waste’ as the denominator for this indicator and the potential impact this could have on the performance of authorities with extensive commercial waste services. We have therefore decided to amend the indicator so that ‘household waste’ is the denominator. However, we consider that the question of whether to use ‘household waste’ or ‘municipal waste’ as the denominator will need to be revisited once decisions have been made about the most appropriate mechanism for implementing the Landfill Directive in the UK. The recent consultation paper, Limiting Landfill, proposed that performance indicators and a top quartile target could be used to ensure year-on-year reductions in the amount of biodegradable municipal waste delivered to waste disposal authorities by collection authorities and future best value performance indicators for waste management will be developed in the light of responses to this proposal.

The targets in the draft waste strategy, A Way With Waste, cover both the recovery of ‘municipal waste’ and the recycling/composting of ‘household waste’ and whilst this indicator will now only apply to household waste, there is nothing to prevent local authorities developing their own local indicators to track performance on municipal waste.
The Government agrees that it is important to recognise the support given to third party recyclers by local authorities in the form of recycling credits. The definition of the indicator has therefore been amended to include arisings dealt with by these bodies in order to give a clearer overall picture of recycling activity.

The Government is keen to encourage home composting but it does not feel that it is appropriate to include it within the definition of this indicator. Material composted at home does not enter the waste stream and it is therefore difficult to arrive at accurate figures for the amount of waste material treated in this way. However, the impact of successful home composting initiatives should be reflected in an improved performance against indicator BVPI84.

It is the Government’s view that whilst the recovery of energy from landfill sites is to be welcomed the priority in the light of the Landfill Directive must be to avoid landfilling waste in the first instance whether or not methane is subsequently captured. For this reason we believe that all waste landfilled should be recorded under section d) of the indicator and not section c).

The indicator is intended to reflect the performance of individual authorities and the Government’s view is that both waste collection and waste disposal authorities should complete this indicator. However, we would encourage authorities in two-tier areas to place their performance in a county-wide context when reporting on this indicator.

Whilst respondents supported the rationale behind indicator BVPI83 a number of concerns were expressed about the usefulness of the indicator as proposed. In particular they felt that it was potentially biased against rural authorities, failed to reflect the environmental benefits of rail or river transport, would be complicated to calculate, would not be understood by the public and that upper quartile targets would be unachievable (at least in the short to medium term) due to geographic constraints such as the fixed location of existing facilities. In the light of these concerns the Government considers that it is not appropriate at this stage to persist with the indicator in its present form. We will, however, explore with local authorities the development of an alternative indicator reflecting the importance of the proximity principle for waste management.

Indicator BVPI84 was generally supported by respondents though a number of respondents argued for an actual kg per head figure rather than a year on year % and there was also some support for the indicator to measure kg per household rather than per head. Respondents also sought clarification of whether arisings collected by third parties paid recycling credits should be included.

On balance, the Government accepts the view that an actual figure is a more meaningful comparator and the indicator has been amended accordingly. However, we believe that a per head figure is a fairer indicator than per household. Arisings collected by third parties for which collection or disposal recycling credits are paid should be included and the definition has been amended to make this clear.

Indicators BVPI86, 87 and 88 attracted little comment from respondents and will be retained in the form consulted on.

Respondents raised concerns about the cost and resource implications of the survey-based approach for indicator BVPI 90 but these concerns applied to survey-based indicators generally and are addressed in section 1.10 of this paper.
Indicator BVPI 91 was generally welcomed by respondents but some authorities felt that the indicator was biased against rural authorities with dispersed populations. Clarification was also sought on the definition of a ‘recycling facility’. A few respondents felt that it would be difficult to measure the population within a 1km radius of facilities and suggested that the density of such facilities might be an easier indicator to measure.

It is Government’s view that the indicator is not biased against rural authorities. It is recognised that it may be impractical to have large numbers of bring sites in areas with widely dispersed populations but we believe that kerbside collections are a viable alternative for such areas and one which we are keen to encourage. For the purposes of this indicator a ‘recycling facility’ will be defined as a collection of drop off / bring banks in one location, or a civic amenity site or materials reclamation facility at which members of the public can deposit one or more materials. Indications from other respondents suggest that any data collection requirements are not insuperable.

1.7.3 Litter

Comments were received from 64 local authorities and other organisations in response to the litter indicators.

There were a number of key themes including resource implications, the need for further clarification and clearly defined methodology for surveys. The Department recognises that the range of services provided will vary between authorities. It is recognised that satisfaction will vary according to expectations. However, the amount of litter on streets is an issue which concerns many people. The introduction of Best Value is an ideal opportunity for authorities to ensure that residents are aware of the level of service they can expect and to develop local anti littering awareness campaigns.

The indicators have been amended to ensure consistency with the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse and to reflect consultation responses. It was felt that BVPI 85 was too narrowly worded. We are satisfied that BVPI 89 is a useful indicator. It will show whether authorities are implementing the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse to the satisfaction of local residents. There is a clear definition of how each PI should be measured. One respondent suggested that a noise BVPI would be desirable. Noise is also an issue which concerns many people and for which local authorities have powers to deal with complaints and the Government will consider the potential for an indicator in this area for 2001/2002.

1.7.4 Transport

Does the local authority have a local transport plan?

The response to the consultation on BVPI 92 was largely negative. Respondents felt that the indicator was meaningless, as all local highway authorities will have a local transport plan, since it is the means of allocating local transport capital funding. What mattered was the quality of the plan, not its presence, which said nothing about the authority’s performance. It was also suggested that the indicator undermined the credibility of best value and the significance of the local transport plan. The Government has some sympathy with this view and has therefore decided to delete this indicator.

Indicators on bus services

BVPIs 101, 102 and 104 attracted a lot of criticism; nearly all the authorities who commented on them did so negatively. The widespread feeling was that authorities had little control over privately operated bus services, and that the indicators would not be
measuring their performance. However, the Government is of the view that local authorities are not without influence over the effectiveness of bus services within their local transport systems. Controls over provision of bus lanes and car parking, for example, are key to the effectiveness of bus services. The Government is keen to see authorities entering into constructive partnerships with bus operators in their locality and considers that the proposed indicators would assist authorities in seeing how they can facilitate better bus services in their area. They will also help local people to assess the level of their authorities’ engagement with the integrated transport agenda. The Government has therefore decided to retain these indicators for 2000/2001.

### 1.7.5 Planning

#### General

A total of 164 responses were received on the proposed indicators for planning. The vast majority of these were from individual local planning authorities: the remainder were from local government organisations, business associations, special interest groups and private sector consultants.

The package was welcomed on the whole, subject to concerns about the definition and scope of particular indicators and about the number of indicators proposed. As a response, the wording of some indicators has been amended and their scope will be clarified in accompanying guidance and related planning policy guidance.

**Percentage of new homes built on previously developed land**

Of those that expressed an opinion, the majority welcomed BVPI 106, while a small number were not in favour of its inclusion. There were some concerns that this indicator would measure the availability of brownfield land in an area rather than any action on the part of the local planning authority. Some queried whether or not county councils should be covered. Others sought greater clarification of the wording of the indicator. There were also suggestions that the indicator should go wider and look at the proportion of all new development on brownfield land.

The Government is considering whether further guidance is needed in relation to this indicator although significant concerns have not been raised in response to consultation on Annex B of the draft PPG3. We are able to confirm that the indicator will not apply to county councils. The Government wishes to retain the focus on housing development. However, local authorities may also choose to have a local indicator showing the percentage of all development in their area taking place on brownfield land.

**Planning cost per head of population**

While some respondents were content with BVPI 107, a much larger number expressed concern about the clarity of the proposed definition of costs and felt that it was insufficiently detailed to ensure that consistent comparisons could be drawn.

The Government has modified the indicator definition to refer to the financial information which local authorities supply on the DETR financial returns, RO4 and RO6. Our current intention is to modify the definition of the relevant lines on these two forms for 2000/01, in the light of the Planning Officers’ Society’s current pilot study, to enable a gross core planning costs figure to be derived from specified boxes on these two forms.
Introduction to Best Value Performance Indicators

The number of advertised departures from the statutory plan approved by the authority as a percentage of total permissions granted

Those who commented welcomed BVPI 108 as an improvement on the present Audit Commission indicator. However, a number also expressed concern that the definition of a departure was interpreted differently by local planning authorities. The Government has recently issued guidance on departures which should address the concerns raised about consistency of interpretation. This will be referred to in accompanying indicators guidance. This indicator will be retained, as it signals the Government’s commitment to the plan-led system.

Percentage of applications determined in 8 weeks

While some respondents were content with BVPI 109, it also attracted a range of suggestions which were focused on eliciting a more rounded view of performance. Some felt that the indicator should be broken down into different types of development to reflect the fact that, for example householder applications could generally be dealt with more quickly than most commercial proposals. The Government intends to proceed with this indicator as set out in the consultation paper while offering clear advice about how the indicator is to be calculated. The following indicator (BVPI 110), covering the average time taken to determine applications, has been included to provide a more rounded view.

Average time taken to determine all applications

BVPI 110 was welcomed by most respondents who commented. There was a concern, though, that the result was likely to be distorted by a few cases taking a long time, for instance those involving section 106 agreements. It was suggested that such cases be excluded from the calculation.

The Government has decided to retain this indicator as worded. We feel that, in order to present an overall view, it is important that all applications are included. There will not be a nationally set target for this indicator. It is for local planning authorities to devise and justify their own target in the light of their local circumstances.

Percentage of applicants and those commenting on planning applications satisfied with the service received

The bulk of those commenting on this indicator expressed concern that people’s views would be biased by the outcome of the application and that the indicator would be expensive for local authorities to operate.

In response to these concerns, the Government has decided to restrict the indicator to applicants for the various planning consents and to provide that the survey need only take place every three years. We have also included a question on the outcome of the application so that local authorities can check whether this is influencing expressed levels of satisfaction.

Score against a checklist of planning best practice

Most respondents who commented welcomed this indicator and accepted what was designed to measure. Also fears were expressed about the resource implications of undertaking what was required to achieve a high score. Comments on individual items in the checklist centred on queries about definition and clarity.

The Government has rephrased some items on the checklist to meet concerns raised. The checklist does not impose new burdens because it is based on existing guidance to local authorities about planning best practice.
Other comments received

Some new indicators were suggested by consultees, for example on enforcement and conservation. However, the Government considers that these are incorporated to some degree into existing indicators and in related guidance. For example, targets for enforcement will be required in the customer charter element of the checklist in BVPI 112 and listed building consent and conservation area consent applications issues are best addressed by local indicators.

1.8 CULTURE AND RELATED SERVICES

General

A total of 106 respondents made comments on the Cultural and Related Activities Indicators. These included a number of national organisations commenting on all areas, such as the LGA Cultural Services Best Value Network, Chief Leisure Officers Association, ILAM, Sport England, ISRM and the Arts Council.

The national organisations welcomed the inclusion of cultural services indicators this year as a first step in the right direction, but highlighted the need for the indicators to be developed over the next year. All these organisations indicated a willingness to assist in work undertaken to improve the indicators and are members of the LGA Cultural Services Best Value Network (LGA CSBVN).

The two general themes in the responses were (a) that more indicators of quality are required rather than quantity and (b) that the service specific indicators covered only a few services. The Government considers it a valid statement that at this stage the indicators are based mainly on inputs. However, cultural services is a difficult and subjective area to evaluate quality outcomes. It is noticeable that no proposals of such indicators are forthcoming from the respondents. The Government will accept the offers of assistance and seek to establish a working group from the LGA CSBVN to develop a small number of indicators of quality for 2001/2.

The Government also acknowledges that at this stage some services have indicators whilst others do not. This has been based on one of the services being statutory and also the availability of data. Suggestions have been made at broadening out a number of the indicators but at this stage there is no certainty that the data would be available for all cultural sectors. The Government is also concerned that, in order to show fairness, should an indicator for each cultural service be developed for each BV category this could lead to at least the need for eight service indicators for each BV category – a total of 40 indicators. It would be too onerous to collect information on so many indicators. It should be noted that the LGA CSBVN have indicated that they are not in favour of a new raft of service specific indicators. The Government understands the concerns expressed and recommends that the aforementioned suggested working group also be tasked with looking at broadening a number of the current indicators for 2001/2. The difficulty of this task should not be underestimated.

Number of pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups

The major issues raised by respondents on BVPI 113 were (a) that it could be broadened out to all other cultural services and (b) that it should not be just restricted to school visits. The Government is concerned that the data may not be available for all other cultural services areas. However, it is considering recommending that the suggested working group look at the broadening of this indicator on the issue of wider educational activities within the cultural sector for 2001/2.
Some respondents expressed a desire for the indicator to include all forms of educational activity. The increase in outreach work of museums is acknowledged. However, the present indicator addresses a significant target group and a strategic issue of long-standing importance. In the main, activities like outreach (which is more difficult to define) are a comparatively recent innovation and compared to in-house educational works, they are pursued by a smaller number of museums. Measurement of other types of educational activity might also be problematic.

The indicator remains unchanged, but a small amount of the definition has been amended for the sake of clarification.

**Does the local authority have a local cultural strategy?**
BVPI 114 was particularly welcomed by the national organisations and is generally supported by the local authorities. However there were comments to the effect that a "yes/no" indicator was a "blunt instrument", lacking a quality or "active implementation" aspect. There was also a view that the timing was wrong, with introduction of this PI coming too early. The Government acknowledges that the indicator is basic this year, but it will be a strong encouragement for the strategies to be prepared in line with DCMS Guidance. The Department has also indicated that it expects local authorities to have a local cultural strategy in place by 2002. Draft guidance has been published and pilots being monitored. The Guidance will then be published in summer 2000 in light of pilot experience. However, the Department is aware that authorities are already developing strategies and this indicator gives a baseline start. Suggestions were that the indicator be amended to state 'or are in the process of development of a strategy'. The concern here is that all authorities could claim this and never move from this position.

This Government has decided that the indicator should remain unchanged, but the suggested working group could look at the issue of quality and 'in active use' for future years.

**The cost per visit to public libraries**
BVPI 115 elicited a number of varied comments with few overall themes. Comments made included that a visit should be more than just by person. The Government is of the view that this is not the best place to include data about ICT/virtual visits. ICT is of increasing importance, but currently its patchy coverage and the ease of access to services where it does exist, would distort the figures. Physical access is very important to users in providing often the only link between citizens and their local authority. This issue will be considered within the Department's current exercise to develop standards for the library service and for the indicators in 2001/2.

**Spend per head of population on cultural and related activities**
There were concerns that BVPI 116 was purely an input indicator. This is acknowledged. It is basically a broadening out of the Audit Commission indicator which was spend per head on sport, recreation, parks and opens spaces. Issues raised were: that the definition for cultural services is too narrow in only relating to very specific RO form lines and that it should be more like BVPI114; that it was unclear whether library spending and levered in funding could be included; and that the indicator should include activities in addition to facilities.

Levered in funding could be difficult to gauge and there would need to be an agreed list of what such funding should entail. The Government had not intended to restrict this to facilities as much of cultural services work is development and people based.
The Government has decided that the indicator should remain, but should be amended to add ‘activities’, and the definition of what is included has been extended to all areas of the DCMS remit on the RO4 form. The suggested working group should look at how a quality element could be added to this indicator in future years.

The number of visits per head of population to public libraries
There were few comments on BVPI 117. The main issue raised was the definition of a ‘visit’ and whether it should be more than ‘in person’. Requests were made for clarification on the CIPFA survey method and it was suggested that this BVPI could be broadened out in future years to visits to all cultural facilities.

The Government is of the view that the proposed working group should look at the issue of visits to cultural facilities for a future years indicator, but there is also an issue of taking part in activities.

The percentage of library users who found the book(s) they wanted and/or the information they needed
The main views expressed on BVPI 118 were that it would take no account of the different circumstances of the impact on rural areas and that it should be two separate indicators. The Government concurs with the view of Library Association about the problems of how this indicator could penalise rural authorities and agrees with the wording suggested by the Library Association, ‘The percentage of users who found the book/information they wanted, or reserved it, and were satisfied with the outcome’. The Government will retain the indicator, amended in light of the Library Association’s comments.

Percentage of residents by targeted group satisfied with the authority’s cultural and recreational facilities
BVPI 119 was supported, but received the most comments. Issues raised were:

- that the definition is too narrow and should have the breadth of BV114;
- that a clear definition of “targeted groups” was required;
- that many users of facilities were not residents of the authority’s area.

Concerns about surveys more generally are considered in section 1.10 of this Volume.

Parks
Some respondents were concerned that there appeared to be a lack of coverage of parks in the Culture and Related Services PI. In fact, BVPI 114 on local cultural strategies explicitly includes parks within its definition. BVPI 116 on spend on cultural and recreational facilities similarly includes spend on parks, by virtue of the inclusion of the relevant line of the RO4 form as does BVPI 119 on customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, the Government is concerned to ensure that management and development of parks receives adequate coverage in the BVPIs. This is particularly the case in light of the recent report of the House of Commons Environment, Transport and Regions Select Committee, Town & Country Parks. That report raised concerns about the current management of parks by local authorities and stressed the importance of best value in promoting parks and allowing comparison of parks provision by different authorities. The Government will therefore consider with the relevant interests over the coming months the potential for refining BVPIs in the 2001/2002 suite to relate them to parks provision in a more direct way.
1.9 EMERGENCY SERVICES

1.9.1 Police

General
The police BVPIs have been refined as a result of consultation; changes to both the performance indicators and corporate health indicators have been proposed. The indicators have been updated to reflect changes in terminology, legislative changes and recommendations made, for example by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

One of the key themes which dominated the responses to the consultation related to the use made of demographic data. It was felt that account should be taken not simply of a force area’s resident population, but also of the transient population. In respect of indicators relating to vehicles, the indexing factor should relate to vehicle presence in the area or traffic volume. Advice from the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office was that currently there was no better measure than resident population. This is a point that Home Office will reflect on in the future.

Specific BVPIs
BV21 and BV22 referred to Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) complaints. Since 31 March 1999 complaints have been recorded under Section 69 of the Police Discipline Regulations Act 1999, and not under Section 84(4) of PACE. To prevent any confusion, “PACE” has been omitted from both indicators. BV21 measured complaints “per 1,000 population”. Several respondents considered that a more accurate measure would be “per 1,000 officers”, since it was the performance of officers which would potentially generate complaints. BV21 has been amended to reflect this.

BV140 was formerly “number of substantiated complaints for breach of PACE codes per 1,000 prisoners”. It has been changed to reflect the fact that complaints are no longer recorded under PACE and “detainees” has replaced “prisoners”. The indicator was conceived as a measure of how fairly people in custody were treated by the police, and the suggested use of “arrestees” instead of “prisoners” was not considered accurately to reflect this.

The deliverability of BV138 and BV139 was questioned by respondents who stated that new systems would be required in order to track an individual arrest resulting from a PACE stop/search to its ultimate disposal. The Government has amended both indicators to record the percentage of PACE stop/searches leading to arrest.

A number of respondents said that forces were unable to obtain the data required for BV136 “percentage of persons arrested for notifiable offences who were charged/reported for summons or cautioned” – an existing indicator – on a common basis. The indicator has nevertheless been retained in the Best Value suite on a developmental basis, in order to encourage forces to work towards providing comparable data.

It has been decided that the survey-based indicators which support the overarching aims for the police service (BV120 – BV123) should be measured using the 2001 British Crime Survey (BCS) enlarged to a sample of 40,000; this will provide reasonable force level estimates for fear of crime, confidence in the police, and perceptions of disorder for 2000/2001. In the case of BV120 “level of crime”, only a very crude indicator of overall exposure to victimisation will be possible. We will continue to work with the police towards agreeing a viable force-level survey to provide better measures, in particular of victimisation.
Indicators deleted

BV129: “percentage of recorded crime committed by offenders under 18. Offenders under 18 as a percentage per population under 18”. The police cannot know the age of the person who committed an offence unless they have detected the offence. If the indicator measured detections, it would be perverse: the fewer crimes involving young people detected by a force, the smaller that force’s relative youth crime would seem. BV129 has been replaced with a new indicator: “percentage of full youth files provided both within pre-trial issue time guidelines and which are fully satisfactory or sufficient to proceed; percentage of expedited/remand youth files which are fully satisfactory or sufficient to proceed”.

BV135: “percentage of victims and witnesses satisfied with overall treatment by the police in the course of the case”. Data on victim satisfaction with their treatment overall in the CJS (including the police) is to be obtained using the BCS for an over-arching CJS measure but this may not give force level information. It is also not yet certain whether the related witness satisfaction survey for the CJS measure will provide information at force level, at least initially. BV135 has been omitted pending further work on satisfactory force-level information either by the police or for the over-arching CJS measure.

Indicators added

The suite of BVPIs published in the consultation paper included only one drugs performance indicator which related to arrest referral schemes. Following consultation, we have included a further one: “number of offenders dealt with for supply offences in respect of Class A drugs per 10,000 population”. The additional indicator is consistent with the key performance indicator in support of the National Drugs Strategy target to increase by 10% the number of offenders dealt with for supply offences in respect of Class A drugs by the end of 1999/2000. Its inclusion in the Best Value suite was recommended by the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit (UKADCU).

Following some helpful discussions with the Audit Commission we have included a number of the proposed Audit Commission Performance Indicators in our Best Value suite; the Audit Commission will not be specifying separate PIs for the police. In doing this we have arrived at one suite of performance indicators for the police and reduced the overall number.

As part of BVPI 131, the Government has added: “percentage of full youth files provided both within pre-trial issue time guidelines and which are fully satisfactory or sufficient to proceed; percentage of expedited/remand youth files which are fully satisfactory or sufficient to proceed”. This replaces the deleted BV129 and is consistent with the first key performance indicator in support of the Ministerial priority for 1999/2000 to deal speedily and effectively with young offenders, and with the Youth Justice Pledge.

Three BVPIs have been extended to local authorities in addition to police authorities. These relate to vehicle crimes per 1,000 population, domestic burglaries per 1,000 population and robberies per 1,000 population. They replicate performance indicators for police authorities and will ensure that these shared indicators reflect the joint statutory responsibility of the police and local authorities for developing and implementing crime and disorder strategies under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The need for these indicators to apply to local authorities was raised by respondents to the consultation.

There have been slight changes to certain other indicators which, in the main, were made to improve the construction of the indicators.
1.9.2 Fire

General
On the whole the proposals for BVPIs for fire authorities were well-received and there was support for the proposal to delete the Audit Commission indicators. Two general themes emerged. First, there was concern about not recording information for certain corporate health indicators on a consistent basis for single-service fire authorities and county fire authorities. Second, there was an issue about potential areas of duplication between the BVPIs and Home Office indicators.

Corporate health indicators
It is accepted that, for some of the corporate health indicators, information would not be available for comparisons between single-service fire authorities and county fire authorities. The Government has therefore decided to require separate reporting of fire service data on certain corporate health BVPIs, where the fire service is provided by the county council. This will also distinguish between county councils which have fire service responsibilities and those which do not. The BVPIs in question are BV12, BV15 and BV17.

In the light of the concerns about duplication, BV12 has been subdivided into (a) whole time uniformed staff, and (b) all staff. BV15 has been amended to distinguish between staff eligible for membership of the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme and the Local Government Pension Scheme. In both cases this will avoid the need for a separate departmental indicator. BV14 has been deleted as it is not a relevant indicator for the fire service as there are no equivalent early retirement provisions for firefighters to those which apply to local government staff in general. BV17 has been modified to be more consistent with Home Office targets and with the equivalent indicator for the police (BV25) in reflecting the local workforce rather than the local population.

Service-specific indicators
The Government agrees that there is scope to rationalise the suite of fire service BVPIs to avoid unnecessary overlap with departmental indicators and has accepted a number of the suggested changes which arose from the consultation process. Some respondents considered that BVPI 143 would be improved by showing deaths and injuries separately. Respondents also pointed out that BVPI 144 should be explicit about accidental fire. The Government accepts both these points and has reworded the relevant indicators. The Government has recast BVPI 142 to include the number of calls to fires and has therefore deleted BVPI 148. Respondents suggested that BVPI 149 was more appropriate as a measure of fire detection equipment malfunction at non-domestic premises. This is accepted and the indicator has been revised accordingly.

Additional indicator
Some authorities suggested recording details of primary fires (mainly those involving casualties or rescue) – information which is already provided to the Home Office by fire authorities. The Government accepts the case for making this change to BVPI 142.

1.10 USER SATISFACTION BVPIs

There were 191 consultation responses on this issue. Most were supportive of the user satisfaction indicators. The Government is grateful for the comments received.
There were two significant themes of consultation. First, nearly all respondents on user satisfaction were concerned that the collection of user satisfaction performance indicators will require considerable resources: human, economic and skills. Secondly, there were differing views as to the appropriate level of prescription.

A very small minority of respondents were strongly opposed to any kind of prescription by central government as to survey questions or methodology. The majority, although they had many concerns about how the data collection would be carried out, saw a need for central government to prescribe certain key details in order to ensure comparability across authorities.

Those who did not want prescription can be divided into:

- those who considered that any kind of data collection method would do;
- those who had invested in alternative consultative arrangements with citizens and did not want to change them;
- those who saw user satisfaction PI's as replacing local consultation and thought that the parameters of consultation should be established locally to allow for local circumstances and priorities.

Among those who were in favour of the Government prescribing survey details, there were varying views on the appropriate degree of flexibility. Those who wanted some flexibility fell into two broad camps:

- flexibility on the method of data collection, provided that it arrives at the desired confidence interval;
- flexibility on the questionnaire so that it allows local authorities to add questions on local issues.

Those who wanted prescription emphasised the need for the questionnaire to ask other questions which will be useful to local authorities. Among those the most common views were as follows:

- there should be questions which divide the service into all of its different aspects so that authorities can target resources;
- there should be questions about respondents' expectations and needs as these may vary from authority to authority;
- there should be some questions about quality of life as this may affect the response;
- the questions should be able to differentiate between users and non-users of the service in question.

A majority of respondents were in favour of the following:

- questionnaires which were translated into languages appropriate to the local population;
• special efforts to get responses from hard to reach groups;

• surveying between mid-September and the end of November. There was a need to avoid spring because of elections, summer because of holidays and winter because it would be too late to insert in the performance plan. However, there was also overall concern about the difficulties of carrying out research everywhere at the same time, this was more of a concern to those who thought face to face would be the method used. Most were in favour of giving a window of a month or two months so that any local issues, or local media interest in the local council could be avoided;

• surveys every 2 to 4 years;

• confidence intervals of +/- 3% maximum. If a local authority wanted to set a target for a smaller confidence interval it should be left to their own discretion;

• as a minimum, estimates for the whole population. If authorities wanted to get more accurate estimates for subgroups, they should increase their sample size accordingly;

• postal questionnaires where possible, provided that they were carefully administered. Whilst face to face surveys were generally preferred, postal surveys were cheaper and good response rates could be obtained;

• 100% census of the user group if the user population was too small to sample.

Other comments of interest were that:

• random sampling was challenged by a few respondents on the grounds that if the response rate is very low there will be a big threat of non-response bias. The case for quota sampling was made by market research organisations and many authorities;

• there was a possibility of survey saturation and consultation overload;

• that in two-tier areas, the general survey should be administered at county level, with the list of addresses stratified by district authority and around 1000 respondents chosen from each district;

• measuring satisfaction with complaint handling was very difficult because of the diverse ways in which local authorities deal with complaints and because the outcome of the complaint may have an effect on their satisfaction. Some respondents therefore proposed questions on whether a complaint was dealt with fairly and/or whether a decision made was clearly explained;

• many wanted to use consultation panels already established as the vehicles to collect the data from;

• surveys could be split quarterly to allow seasonal variation;

• it would be a waste not to collate data centrally once it has been weighted.
The Government’s view

Best value has been designed to emphasise the importance which Government attaches to the role of local people and service users in determining the quality and cost of local services. The customer satisfaction indicators which form part of the set of BVPIs will play a key role in measuring the improvements which best value will bring about. It is essential that there is a common understanding of how customers’ views might be obtained, and compared across services and between authorities.

The Government has no wish, however, to prescribe the detailed forms of consultation that are acceptable under best value. Focus groups, local panels and surveys, for example, all have a contribution to make. What is important is that authorities adopt a realistic corporate approach to consultation which recognises the need for overall economy and the benefits of joint design and working with others, especially under a two-tier local government structure.

User satisfaction surveys provide, however, a reliable and consistent way in which authorities can meet their obligations to provide information on the relevant BVPIs. The Government has therefore decided to prescribe what it considers to be the minimum detail in respect of each survey which is consistent with delivering comparable data. It has set out its approach fully in chapter 14 of volume 1, and makes reference to the appropriate sampling frame, questions and confidence intervals.

1.11 ELECTRONIC SERVICE DELIVERY

The consultation paper explained that discussions were underway between the Cabinet Office Central IT Unit, which has responsibility for central government targets on electronic delivery, and Local Government Association. These were aimed at developing an agreed process for electronic service delivery target setting by local authorities. These discussions are continuing and both sides have found the responses to the consultation exercise helpful in identifying many of the key issues that need to be addressed in drawing up effective processes to establish targets and ultimately best value indicators for electronic service delivery. The responses to consultation will be used to inform the ongoing discussions.
CHAPTER 2

Audit Commission Performance Indicators

2.1 GENERAL COMMENTS

This is the eighth year that the Audit Commission has consulted on proposals for performance indicators for local government, the police force and fire brigades. This document reports on the responses we received to these proposals from local authorities, police and fire services and a wide range of consumer and professional organisations. It outlines our conclusions on which performance indicators should be specified by the Commission for 2000/01 for England and should be read in conjunction with Volume One.

This year’s consultation was the first to be carried out jointly with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and the Home Office. Following the passage of the 1999 Local Government Bill, the consultation exercise sought consultees’ views on the Government's proposed Best Value performance indicators (BVPIs), in addition to the Commission’s proposals on changes to its suite of performance indicators (ACPIs). In the first section of this feedback document, the Government has detailed its response to consultees on the proposed BVPIs.

The Commission’s proposals on ACPIs within the consultation document were shaped by the Government’s proposals on BVPIs. The Commission proposed to delete ACPIs similar to those proposed as BVPIs to avoid duplication of effort by authorities. It proposed to retain those ACPIs which either covered important areas not included in the proposed BVPIs, or which provided important contextual information. In addition, it proposed a limited number of new ACPIs in new or cross-cutting areas.

More than 350 responses were received, including responses from over half of local authorities. The Commission is grateful to all those who responded to the consultation, and particularly to those who provided alternative proposals for future years. This document continues the Commission’s practice of informing consultees how we have acted on their comments.

About one half of respondents commented on the overall framework. Almost half of these expressed concern at the total number of proposed performance indicators (BVPIs and ACPIs combined). Although for most authorities the proposed overall number of BVPIs and ACPIs combined was only marginally more than the total previously set by the Commission alone, local authorities argued that there were too many, if they were also expected to establish a large number of local indicators. While we sympathise with this concern, we know from experience that it is very hard to measure local authority services adequately with only a handful of indicators for each service. We have subsequently carefully assessed whether each remaining indicator can be justified. We have taken into account the burden on councils in the first year of Best Value and the need for ACPIs and
BVPIs to complement one another. As a result, we are proposing to make further significant reductions to our suite of indicators. In addition, we will not introduce some of the new indicators we proposed in the consultation document. Overall, we proposed to reduce our number of indicators from 241 to 75 in the consultation document, and we have removed a further 21 indicators. The issues covered by the omitted indicators remain important, but we feel that their value has to be balanced against the concerns expressed by consultees.

A similar number of respondents expressed confusion over the respective roles of the BVPIs and ACPIs and argued for a seamless set of PIs. BVPIs should be published alongside ACPIs to ensure that the two make a seamless set. The Commission will also handle the helpline for all the indicators. The Commission considers that it retains an important role in measuring the performance of local authorities through the use of performance indicators. We consider that there is value in the Commission setting indicators in areas of public interest where no BVPIs have been set, and in retaining some indicators which help to provide a context for the BVPIs. We can also contribute to developing indicators in new, cross-cutting areas, where the setting of indicators has traditionally proved more difficult. We are well-placed to promote good practice in setting, collecting and interpreting performance information. Nevertheless, we intend to initiate a wide-ranging review of our role in performance indicators in the New Year. We will consult local authorities, national and consumer organisations, government departments and other stakeholders about what role we should play in future in specifying and analysing performance indicators for local authorities.

The rest of this document follows the main headings and issues identified in the original consultation document:

Corporate health
Education
Social services
Housing and related services
Housing benefit and council tax benefit
Environmental services
Transport
Planning
Environmental health
Cultural and related services
Emergency services
Other indicators
Future developments:
library of local PIs;
quality of life and cross-cutting PIs.

2.2 CORPORATE HEALTH INDICATORS

In last year’s consultation document the Commission consulted on the idea of introducing a set of indicators to measure the “general health” of an authority: the quality of management of its key corporate responsibilities on finances, staffing, customer orientation and democratic accountability. Respondents supported the idea in principle but had reservations about some of the specific indicators which were suggested. The Commission therefore co-ordinated a pilot process to test the feasibility of a range of “general health” indicators. The pilot
process ran for six months from March to October this year and the pilot steering group eventually made recommendations on which indicators should be included for 2000/2001. The Government then decided which PIs to specify as “corporate health” BVPIs, and how they should be defined.

The Commission would like to thank the 48 councils in England and Wales which took part in the pilot process, and those representatives from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the Local Government Association (LGA), and the DETR who participated in the steering group.

Our original proposals
A number of the proposed best value corporate health performance indicators were previously included in the Audit Commission’s set of indicators (under Section A “Dealing with the Public” and Section H “Collecting Local Tax”). The Commission proposed to delete these PIs from the ACPIs. In addition, we outlined our intention to delete some additional indicators from our existing Section A “Dealing with the Public” (the indicators on equal opportunities and adherence to employment codes of practice). We considered these were adequately replaced by the proposed best value corporate health indicators on the level reached against the CRE Standard, and those on the authority’s staffing profile. Finally, we proposed to retain the indicators on access to local authority buildings and on the cost of collecting council tax.

Consultees’ comments
Consultees supported all our proposals on retaining and deleting ACPIs from the former Section A “Dealing with the Public” and on retaining the indicator on the cost of council tax collection.

Our response
The Commission proposes to retain the indicators on access to local authority buildings. In order to reduce the overall number of indicators and to enhance the complementary nature of ACPIs, we have decided to delete the indicator on the cost of collecting council tax. We will also delete the other indicators as outlined in the consultation document.

2.3 EDUCATION

Our original proposals
The Commission proposed to delete a large number of ACPIs on education as they had been included within the proposed BVPIs. In addition, we proposed to delete the indicators relating to school meals to reflect the change in LEAs’ responsibility for the service from 1 April 2000, when schools will have delegated funding for school meals. We proposed to retain a number of ACPIs in areas which were not covered by the proposed BVPIs. The quality of alternative tuition for pupils permanently excluded from schools is an important issue, and we therefore proposed to retain these indicators, which will complement the proposed BVPIs looking at the level of exclusions in schools. In line with new government targets, we proposed to change the boundary for the number of hours of alternative tuition for excluded pupils from twenty to twenty-five hours. We proposed to retain indicators on the overall number of absences from schools (not just the unauthorised absences included in the BVPIs), those on primary school class sizes, and one on attendance at adult education to complement the BVPIs and for contextual purposes. Finally, we also suggested amendments to our indicators on key stage results to focus solely on test results rather than teacher assessments.
Consultees’ comments
There was strong support from consultees for the amendments we proposed to our ACPIs on alternative tuition and on key stage results, and for their retention, along with those on overall absences from schools, primary school sites and attendance at adult education. There was virtual unanimity amongst consultees that we should delete the ACPIs we specified in the consultation document.

Our response
Although there was clear support for our proposal to amend and retain the key stage indicators, the Commission has decided to delete them. There are two reasons for this decision. Firstly, we are keen to respond to consultees’ concerns about the number of indicators in the first year of Best Value. Secondly, there was a potential for confusion between our key stage indicators for English, maths and science, and the proposed BVPIs, which focus on only maths and English. We will also delete the indicator on the number of pupils in special schools as a percentage of all children. A small change has been made to the definition of the indicator on absences. We will make all the other amendments, deletions and retentions proposed in the consultation document.

2.4 SOCIAL SERVICES

Our original proposals
In reviewing the existing set of ACPIs the Commission took account of both the proposals for best value, and also the coverage provided by the Personal Social Services Performance Assessment Framework (PAF). Our aim was to ensure that overall the three sets of indicators were consistent and complementary.

Following the work carried out for the Referrals and Assessment Project (RAP) review, we proposed to include two new indicators relating to social services waiting times. We explained that we were considering whether to break down the two indicators first by clients referred by health bodies and non-health referral clients; and then by those who are awaiting residential and community based services.

We proposed to retain a number of PIs which focus on the quality of service provided for adults in residential care, and children looked after by the local authority. We also proposed to keep the indicator on respite care provided for carers in order to provide trend data on this important area.

Where the Commission felt that service areas were sufficiently covered by PAF we proposed the deletion of our indicators (for example, on inspections). In Feedback 98 we said that we would retain the indicators relating to the start date for arranging social service provision. With the proposed new RAP indicators these are no longer required, and we proposed to delete them. We proposed to delete our existing indicators on costs but sought consultees’ views on whether instead we should delete the cost indicators or retain them using the slightly different definitions set out in PAF, in order to provide a comprehensive set of unit cost indicators across the Best Value and Audit Commission sets.

Consultees’ comments
Few respondents opposed the introduction of our proposed new indicators on social services waiting times, although a significant minority suggested that it might be more appropriate to delay their introduction until the completion of the RAP project. There was strong support from consultees for all other proposals on retaining and deleting indicators.

Our response
Given consultees’ concerns over the number of indicators and over the desirability of completing the RAP project prior to specifying waiting times indicators, we have decided not to introduce the new indicators on waiting times this year. We remain committed to developing indicators in this crucial area and we hope that the issue will be included in either the BVPIs or ACPIs in 2001/2002. We will make the deletions we proposed in the consultation document, and retain the indicators on adults in residential care, children looked after by the local authority and those on respite care provided for carers.

2.5 HOUSING AND RELATED SERVICES

Our original proposals
Where the proposed BVPIs directly covered issues previously addressed by the ACPIs, the Commission proposed to delete the relevant indicators. In other instances – such as serious rent arrears and the use of bed and breakfast accommodation – the proposed BVPIs covered similar areas to the Audit Commission’s set, but we felt that there was an advantage in retaining our ACPIs, as we have previously highlighted them in our reports and it should prove useful to retain comparative information. The Commission considers that it was important to retain the indicators on adherence to the CRE’s Code of Practice for Rented Housing and appointments for housing repairs. Last year we introduced a new indicator concerning vulnerable tenancies with a view to eventually extending the indicator to cover the percentage of such tenancies which break down. This is an important “cross-cutting” area which brings together the work of a number of local authority departments and external partners. We therefore proposed to retain this indicator.

Consultees’ comments
Respondents supported by a wide margin all our proposals on retaining and deleting indicators.

Our response
We therefore intend to make all the deletions we proposed. We also propose to retain the indicators on repair appointments, serious rent arrears, adherence to the CRE code of practice, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and vulnerable tenancies.

2.6 HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

Our original proposals
The proposed BVPIs addressed the majority of areas covered within the existing set of ACPIs, so we proposed to retain only two indicators, on fraud and overpayments.

Consultees’ comments
Just over half of respondents who commented on the individual indicators supported the retention of the indicators concerning fraud and overpayments and about twenty per cent opposed them (the remaining respondents made non-committal comments). There was overwhelming support for the deletions of our other indicators.
Our response
We will delete the indicators on fraud and overpayments, because they cover aspects already covered partly by BVPIs, and delete all the other ACPIs on benefits.

2.7 ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Our original proposals
Following the Tidy Britain Group’s survey highlighting public concern about dog fouling, we proposed to introduce a new indicator on the percentage of pavements containing dog fouling, linked to the existing street cleaning inspection indicators. Presently these indicators measure highways reaching high or acceptable standards; we suggested combining these to produce one indicator highlighting acceptable or above standards. We proposed to retain indicators on home composting, removing fly tips and provision of public toilets, all of which are issues of public concern but which are not included in the proposed BVPIs. We proposed to delete all other indicators as they covered the same areas as the proposed BVPIs.

Consultees’ comments
More respondents opposed the introduction of the new indicator on dog fouling than supported it. A number of consultees expressed concerns or lack of understanding of how the proposed inspection mechanism would work. There was strong support from respondents for the retention of the indicators on home composting, fly tips, and public toilets. Consultees overwhelmingly endorsed our proposed deletions.

Our response
We do not intend to introduce the proposed new indicator on dog fouling for next year. We will consult further with local authorities, especially over the proposed definition of the indicator, as we still believe that it is an issue of considerable concern to the public. We have also decided to reduce the number of indicators in this section by deleting the indicator on home composting and three of the four indicators on public toilets. We will retain the indicator on the overall number of public toilets provided by local authorities, the indicator on fly tips, and the indicator on street inspections, amended as we proposed in the consultation document.

2.8 TRANSPORT

Our original proposals
Whereas the proposed BVPIs addressed issues relating to the condition and the safety of roads, the Commission felt that it was important also to address issues that affect the ‘usability’ of roads and footpaths. We therefore proposed to retain indicators on the accessibility of pedestrian crossings, and on footpaths and public rights of way. We proposed to amend the latter indicators so that they would be based on the sum of the lengths of the rights of way that met the conditions on signposting and ease of use, as a percentage of the total length of the relevant rights of way. The Commission proposed to delete all other ACPIs, as the issues were covered by the proposed BVPIs.

Consultees’ comments
Respondents supported by a wide margin all the proposed retentions, amendments and deletions of indicators that we proposed in the consultation document.
Our response
We therefore intend to retain the indicator on pedestrian crossings, and the amended indicators on footpaths and rights of way, and to delete all the other indicators as we outlined in the consultation document.

2.9 PLANNING

Our original proposals
The Commission proposed to retain just one indicator, on the percentage of local land searches carried out within a 10-day standard, an important measure of a service for all those who need to move house. We proposed to delete all our other planning indicators, as they were covered by the proposed BVPIs.

Consultees' comments
There was no opposition from consultees to the proposal to retain the indicator on land searches, and there was clear support for all our proposals for deleting indicators.

Our response
We therefore propose to retain the indicator on land searches and to make all the other deletions proposed in the consultation document.

2.10 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Our original proposals
As the Government had decided to delay the introduction of Best Value indicators in this area for a further year, the Commission proposed to retain our entire existing set of ACPIs for environmental health.

Consultees' comments
Respondents supported our proposals to retain the environmental health indicators until the Government sets BVPIs in this area.

Our response
We will retain most of our suite of environmental health indicators for next year, but we will delete the indicator on spending on environmental health and consumer protection in order to reduce the number of indicators.

2.11 CULTURAL AND RELATED SERVICES

Our original proposals
As the proposed BVPIs did not cover important aspects of leisure facilities such as swimming pools and playgrounds, the Commission proposed to retain ACPIs in these areas. Last year we introduced indicators concerning the usage, quality and cost of museums. We suggested that these indicators should be retained along with the indicator on the usage of the library service. We outlined an amendment to combine the two indicators on the number of books and the number of other items issued. We proposed to delete other indicators which we felt were covered by the proposed BVPIs. We also proposed to delete the indicators on the number of sports pitches, and the indicators on spending on sport, recreation, parks, and open spaces and on the number of libraries.
Consultees’ comments
Respondents supported the retention of all the indicators we suggested by a considerable margin. While the majority also supported the deletions, a significant minority supported the retention of the indicators on the number of sports pitches, sports spending on sport, recreation and parks, and those on user satisfaction with libraries.

Our response
We will retain the indicators on museums, leisure facilities and playgrounds, and those on library usage. We intend to make all the deletions outlined in the consultation document.

2.12 EMERGENCY SERVICES

Our original proposals
The Commission welcomed the proposed BVPIs for the police service. We proposed to delete a significant number of our ACPIs for the police and fire services, as these areas were covered by the proposed BVPIs. We proposed two new indicators on the important issue of domestic violence: arrests for domestic violence incidents and the repeat incidence of domestic violence.

We also proposed to keep a small number of indicators in areas which we felt were important and of interest to members of the public, to supplement the areas covered by the BVPIs. Repeat domestic burglaries are a source of considerable concern and we had only recently introduced this indicator into our set of police PIs, with the support of consultees. We considered that information on the variations in crime detection rates should continue to be available. We felt that the proposed BVPI on traffic accidents involving death or serious injury could be usefully supplemented by retaining our indicator on the proportion of these accidents where at least one driver tested positive for alcohol. We also proposed to retain indicators giving the overall numbers of complaints recorded against the police and the number which are resolved informally, in order to provide a context for the proposed BVPI on substantiated complaints against the police.

We explained that we would delete all our ACPIs for the fire service, as they had all been included in the proposed BVPIs.

Consultees’ comments
There was considerable support for the introduction of our new indicators on domestic violence, although some respondents had concerns over whether the indicator should cover incidents occurring when both parties were not living together, and also over whether the focus on arrests might appear to encourage forces to take inappropriate action against offenders in some instances. Respondents supported the retention of indicators on repeat burglaries, complaints against the police and traffic offences involving alcohol. They also endorsed all the proposed deletions of indicators for the police and fire services.

Our response
Following further discussion with the Home Office, it has been agreed that the ACPIs on repeat burglaries, the two new indicators on domestic violence, and the informal resolution of complaints will be taken on as BVPIs. The Commission will, in turn, delete the indicators on detections per officer, traffic accidents involving alcohol and the number of recorded complaints, in order to reduce the overall number of indicators. We will delete all the ACPIs for the fire service, as we proposed in the consultation document. The Commission will, therefore, not be specifying any indicators for the emergency services for 2000/2001.
2.13 OTHER INDICATORS

Our original proposals
The Commission proposed two new indicators on how councils deal with racial harassment, along similar lines to those proposed as BVPIs for the police service. We also suggested a new ACPI for councils on their provision of domestic refuge places. Finally, the Commission proposed to retain its indicator on overall net spending per head of population.

Consultees’ comments
There was overwhelming support from respondents on introducing the two indicators on how councils deal with racial harassment. Consultees also endorsed the proposal for a new indicator on the provision of domestic refuge places, although there was concern about some definitional issues concerning provision outside of the council area. There was support from consultees on retaining the indicator on net overall spending per head of population.

Our response
We will introduce the new indicators on racial harassment and domestic violence refuge provision, with small changes to the definition of the latter in the light of consultees’ comments. We will also retain the net spending indicator.

2.14 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Our original proposals
The Commission suggested that it might be useful for us to establish a “library” of “off the shelf” local performance indicators, complete with standard definitions, that local authorities could opt to use. Clearly, there would be no statutory basis for such indicators and authorities would be under no compulsion to use them. They would, however, be available for those authorities that wanted to use standard definitions for a range of local indicators to facilitate comparisons with similar or neighbouring authorities.

We also outlined our interest in developing more indicators on cross-cutting themes, and in particular around those areas which have been termed “quality of life” issues.

Consultees’ comments
There was considerable enthusiasm for the Commission’s offer to establish a library of local indicators with “off the shelf” definitions to facilitate benchmarking. There was also endorsement of the importance of developing new indicators on cross-cutting themes which more closely reflect the experience of the service from the perspective of the customer.

Our response
The Commission intends to consult other organisations such as the DETR, the LGA and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) about the establishment of such a library of local indicators. Depending on the outcome of those discussions we hope to begin work on the project in the early new year. In the meantime, we strongly encourage authorities to consider adopting as local PIs any ACPIs proposed in the original consultation paper but not now included in the Direction.

The Commission will continue to promote good practice in setting, collecting and interpreting performance information, through published papers and in other ways. We shall also operate the helpline for queries about both BVPIs and ACPIs, thus helping to achieve a seamless set of national PIs.
2.15 CONCLUSION

We are very grateful for the time and effort which respondents put into their consultation responses this year. We recognise that Best Value has placed a number of demands on local authorities. The changes we have made to our performance indicator suite this year are the biggest since the introduction of ACPIs in 1993. In adapting our indicators to the new regime of Best Value, we have tried to ensure that our indicators add value to those specified by the Government as BVPIs – either by focusing on areas not covered by the BVPIs, or by adding important contextual data to make the BVPIs more comprehensible. Nevertheless we have taken note of the concerns raised by consultees both about the overall number of national indicators and also about the perceived lack of clarity about the respective roles of the ACPIs and BVPIs. We are therefore committed to carrying out a fundamental review of our role in local authority performance indicators over the next year.

As always, we would welcome your comments on our work on local authority performance indicators. These should be sent to:

Steve Evans
Head of Performance Information
Audit Commission
1 Vincent Square
London SW1P 2PN

Questions about individual indicators should be directed to the Commission’s indicators hotline on 0171 828 1212. More detailed questions specifically concerning the BVPIs on user satisfaction can also be forwarded to the DETR by e-mail. The address is: performance_indicators@detr.gov.uk