



Road Traffic Casualties

Report by a Working Group of the
Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel



8 May 2008

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Councillor Mrs Ballin, Executive Member for Planning and Transportation
Councillor McCracken, Executive Member for Leisure, Corporate Services and Public Protection

The following officers from Bracknell Forest Borough Council:

Roger Cook, Transport Development Manager
Richard Beaumont, Head of Performance and Scrutiny

1. Foreword by the Lead Member

Road traffic casualties are a tragedy for people affected by them, and reducing the number and severity of those casualties is a national priority. Helping drivers and others to reduce those casualties is a hugely important role for Bracknell Forest Borough Council and its partners. This report records the outcome of a Working Group of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel, established to examine performance in reducing road traffic casualties, at the request of the Council's Executive. The Working Group's review was conducted jointly with a representative of Thames Valley Police, due to their significant role in regard to road traffic casualties, and its membership comprised:

Councillor Alvin Finch (Lead Member)

Councillor Mrs McCracken

Councillor McLean

Mr Richard Owen, Operations Manager, Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership

This review demonstrates how Overview and Scrutiny can respond promptly and constructively to requests from the Council's Executive, investigating matters of importance in collaboration with partners, adding insight and assisting in the formulation of Council policies and target setting.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's Executive asked for a review by Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) of the Borough's performance on minimising road traffic casualties (RTC), at their meeting on 23 October 2007, when they considered the Quarter 1 Corporate Performance Overview Report for 2007/08. Noting the number of 'red' Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) in this area, the Executive agreed to the Chief Executive's suggestion that Overview and Scrutiny should review that performance.
- 2.2 The BVPI's shown as 'red', i.e. indicators that had not been or were not likely to be achieved on time/ to target were:
- BV 99a (i) Number of people Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI) in road traffic collisions in the previous calendar year
 - BV 99 a (ii) Percentage change in the number of people KSI in road traffic collisions in the previous calendar year
 - BV 99 a (iii) Percentage change in the number of people KSI in road traffic collisions in the previous calendar year compared to the 1994-98 average
 - BV 99 c (i) Number of people slightly injured (SI) in road traffic collisions in the previous calendar year
 - BV 99 c (ii) Percentage change in the number of people SI in road traffic collisions in the previous calendar year
 - BV 99 c (iii) Percentage change in the number of people SI in road traffic collisions in the previous calendar year compared to the 1994-98 average.
- 2.3 The Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel decided to form a Working Group to carry out the review requested by the Executive, and to report back to the panel. The panel appointed Councillor members as listed in section 1 above, and as requested by the Executive, the Working Group also included a representative of Thames Valley Police (TVP).
- 2.4 The Working Group agreed that the scope of their work should be to:
- a) understand the reasons for the 'red traffic light' indicators on the various Best Value Performance Indicators No 99, with particular reference to the reported under-performance in 2006
 - b) establish whether the statistics give a true reflection of the real performance on road traffic casualties (RTC)
 - c) establish the long-term trends on RTC, taking account of all relevant factors
 - d) consider whether local targets are being set appropriately
 - e) recommend whether there is a need for a separate and substantive overview and scrutiny review of RTC reduction measures in the Borough, and if so, to propose an outline scope for the review
 - f) ascertain and review the causes of RTC in the Borough.

3. Investigation and Information Gathering

3.1 The Working Group first met in December and then on three subsequent occasions, allowing time for research work to be done between meetings. We wrote to the Executive Member for Planning and Transportation on 27 February with the Working Group's provisional findings and conclusions. The outcome of the group's investigation and information gathering is summarised below.

The Nature of the Targets against which Performance is Measured

3.2 The Government determines the nature of the targets against which performance is judged, and all councils must comply with that framework, with additional local indicators as they see fit. The Working Group found that using those BVPI targets alone to judge performance made for a less than fully informative picture:

- The three targets in the BVPI 99 area: KSI all-ages (BVPI99 (a)), KSI children (a sub-set of "all ages") (BVPI99 (b)), and Slight Injuries (BVPI99(c)) each have three BVPIs relating to the performance in meeting that target, (Roman i, ii and iii) making 9 in all. Two of the three 'subset' BVPIs for each target are in effect identical (the Borough's target for casualty reduction) – so, in terms of traffic lights, if achieving the target is at risk, two reds are shown, not one, and this effectively overstates the performance under-achievement.
- It is possible for a BVPI to have a 'red traffic light' despite the annual (intermediate) target having been achieved, if performance has not been as good as in the previous year.
- Unusually, the reporting period for BVPI 99s is the calendar year, not the financial year period, thus the reported performance in quarter 1 of 2007/08 would have been heavily influenced by performance in 2006. This is particularly significant (see paragraph 3.14 below).

3.3 The Working Group also noted that the BVPI definitions take no account of influencing factors such as the growth in population, traffic and vehicle ownership, nor changing lifestyles (the Borough is regarded as 'money rich and time poor'). The Borough is a growth area, and this serves to make the national targets harder to achieve, all things being equal. We return to this point at paragraph 3.10 below.

3.4 The Working Group also reviewed the new National Indicators, which replaced BVPIs from April 2008. The definitions contained an anomaly in our view, in that both the all-age and children KSI indicators would only measure the change from year to year, and not have any comparison to the national long-term target itself. The Working Group also noted that the new NI targets have recently been defined as being on a rolling three year average basis, and slight injuries are no longer to be measured.

Performance Against the Long-Term National and Borough Targets

3.5 It is worth noting that relatively few road traffic collisions result in injuries, and the BVPI's measure only the cases of personal injury resulting from collisions.

- 3.6 The Government's national targets for road accident collisions are, relative to the average figures for 1994-98, to achieve by 2010: a 40% reduction in the number of people Killed or Seriously Injured (KSI); a 50% reduction in the number of children KSI; and a 10% reduction in the number of people Slightly Injured (SI).
- 3.7 Bracknell Forest Borough Council ('the Council') has chosen to adopt more stretching targets than the national targets referred to above. These were last set in the second Local Transport Plan, to achieve, by 2010:-
- A 60% reduction in Killed and Seriously Injured (all ages of casualty)
 - A 66 % reduction Killed and Seriously Injured (children) (a sub-set of "all ages") (BVPI99(b)).
 - A 27% reduction in Slight Injuries (BVPI99(c)).
- 3.8 Judging long-term performance against these 'stretched targets' must therefore be interpreted sensibly in relation to the national targets. Indeed, the stretched targets were the most demanding the Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership had seen. Further reductions in casualties are increasingly difficult to achieve, and it has to be recognised that there is an irreducible minimum number of casualties which no amount of investment could remedy. The Borough's performance against the three targets is shown in Figures 1 to 3.

Figure 1

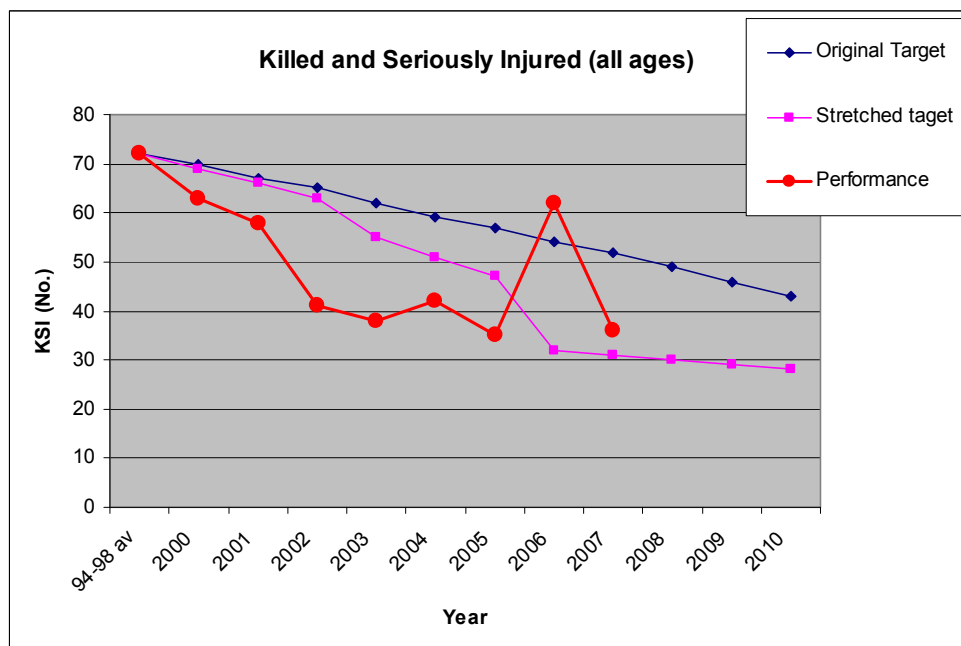


Figure 2

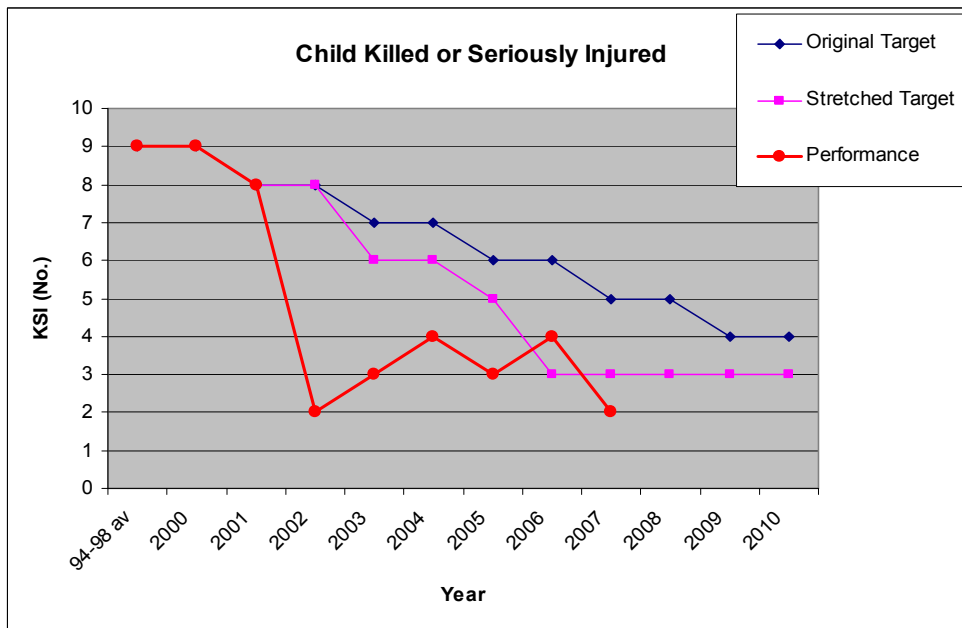
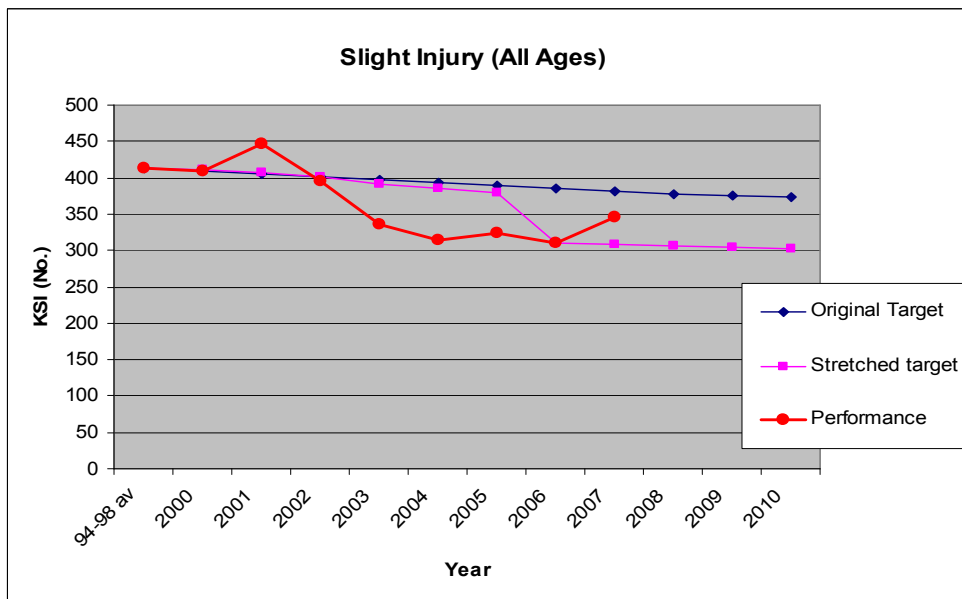


Figure 3



3.9 Until 2008/09 the Council was required by government to measure performance on an annual basis. However, given the long-term nature of the national targets, and the effect of short-term variations, there is a case to also measure performance on a longer basis. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the Borough's performance on a rolling, three-year average basis for two of the targets.

Figure 4

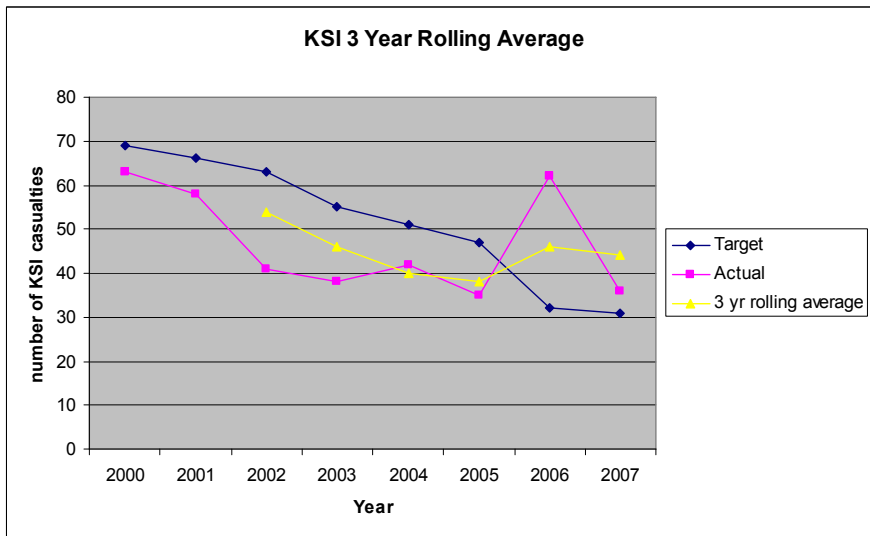
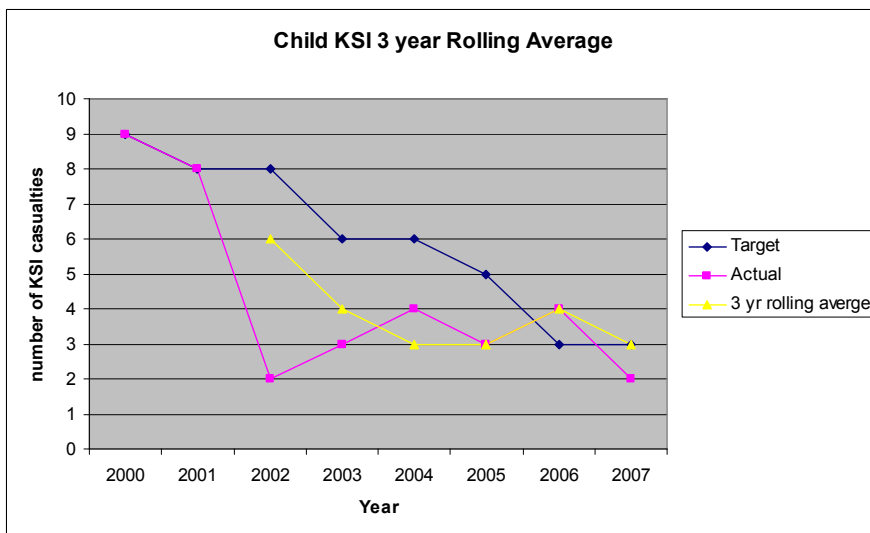


Figure 5



3.10 As noted in paragraph 3.3 above, the target base does not take account of influencing factors such as the growth in population, traffic and vehicle ownership, nor changing lifestyles, which all serve to make the targets harder to achieve, all things being equal. This may have a correlation with the high incidence of driver-related causes of collisions (see paragraph 3.20 below). Notwithstanding that, the increases in population and traffic had a disproportionately small impact on KSI cases, reflecting an even steeper real reduction in casualties than as reported using the BVPIs. This is illustrated in Figures 6 and 7.

Figure 6

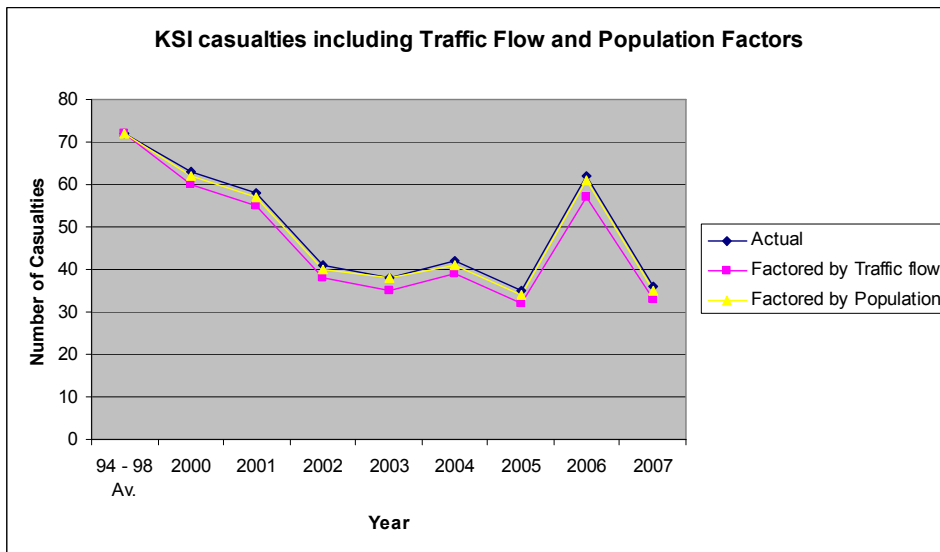
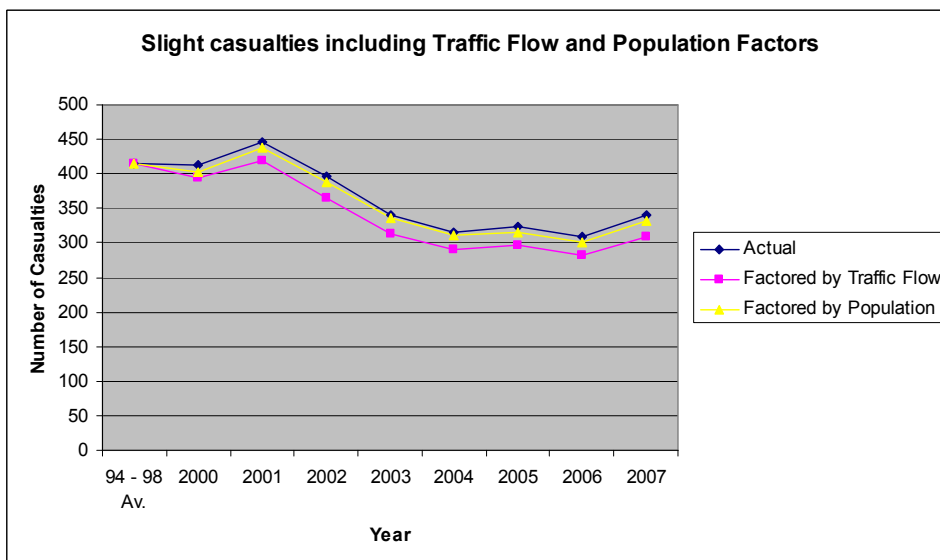


Figure 7



Intermediate Targets

3.11 The Council is required to set one-year, i.e. intermediate targets for each BVPI, within the long-term targets referred to above. As the 'red traffic lights' reported underperformance in the early part of 2007/08 would have been heavily influenced by performance in the 2006 calendar year, the Working Group focussed its attention on the targets set and performance achieved in 2006.

3.12 Taking targets first, we were informed that there were three main options in setting intermediate (one year) targets for casualty reductions in 2006:

- ramp down the target from the target values in 2005;
- ramp down the target from a trend line of progress towards reduction; or

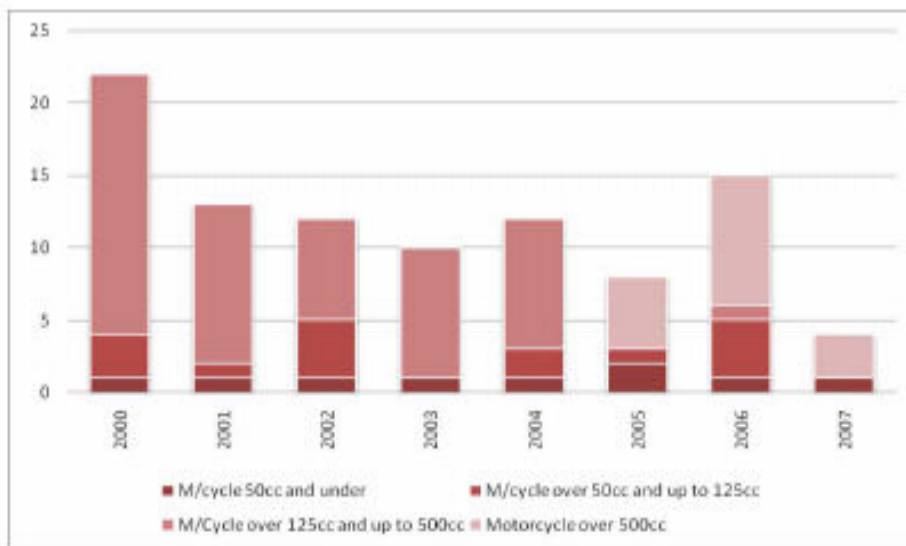
- draw the target line from the actual recorded values of 2005.

3.13 In the event, the last option was chosen by the Council, giving an in-year target which was much more demanding than a 'straight line' reduction to achieve the 'stretched' long-term 2010 target; see Figures 1-3. Coupled with the Borough's long-term targets being much more demanding than the national ones, the effect of that has been to give the Borough extremely tough targets in the interim years, especially vulnerable to chance factors. The small size of the Borough and the relatively small number of casualties involved makes a variation against a one-year intermediate target quite likely. The Council's target of not-more-than three child KSIs in one year is the most obvious example of that.

3.14 Added to the very demanding intermediate targets for 2006, Bracknell Forest experienced a surge in road accident KSI in 2006. This 'surge' (which was worse than the national target for the year) was also replicated to varying degrees elsewhere in the Thames Valley (see paragraph 3.19 below). A lot of work has been done to attempt to identify the causes of the 'surge' in KSI casualties in 2006, which concluded that there was no identifiable reason for that surge. The unusual nature of the surge in KSI injuries is made more remarkable by the fact that there were actually fewer 'injury-producing' collisions than in the previous year, but the collisions resulted in a higher rate of recorded casualties than in the previous year. The Group noted that the number of motorcycle KSI casualties in Bracknell Forest in 2006 (Figure 8 below) broadly matched the surge in all-age KSI.

Figure 8

Motorcycle KSI Casualties in Bracknell Forest



3.15 Nationally, 2006 saw a levelling out of RTC. The Department of Transport has yet to review the position.

3.16 The Borough's performance against the intermediate yearly targets is illustrated in Figures 1-3. The combined effect of the intermediate year stretched targets and the surge in injuries in 2006 resulted in two thirds of the

BVPI's being underachieved. The overall 'Killed or Seriously Injured' (KSI) figures for 2007 are close to 2005 performance, resuming the previous downward trend.

- 3.17 The surge in recorded KSIs lasted between April 2006 and March 2007, however, since BVPIs are reported in the Performance Monitoring Report as a rolling 12 month figure, the effect will be tending to cause a continuation of red traffic lights into the Spring of 2008 for the BVPI's. Also, as the new National Indicators are on a rolling three year average basis, the impact of the 2006 surge will continue to apply until 2009.

Comparison with other Thames Valley Highway Authorities

- 3.18 Bracknell Forest's performance compared to other Highway Authorities in the Thames Valley is very good – in 2003/07 Bracknell Forest was the third lowest (out of the 16 TV Highway Authorities) for personal accident collisions casualties per 1000 population; BF had the lowest rate per 1000 population (i.e 16th position out of 16) for three categories of road users, and had lower casualties than the median point for all categories of road users. This is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9

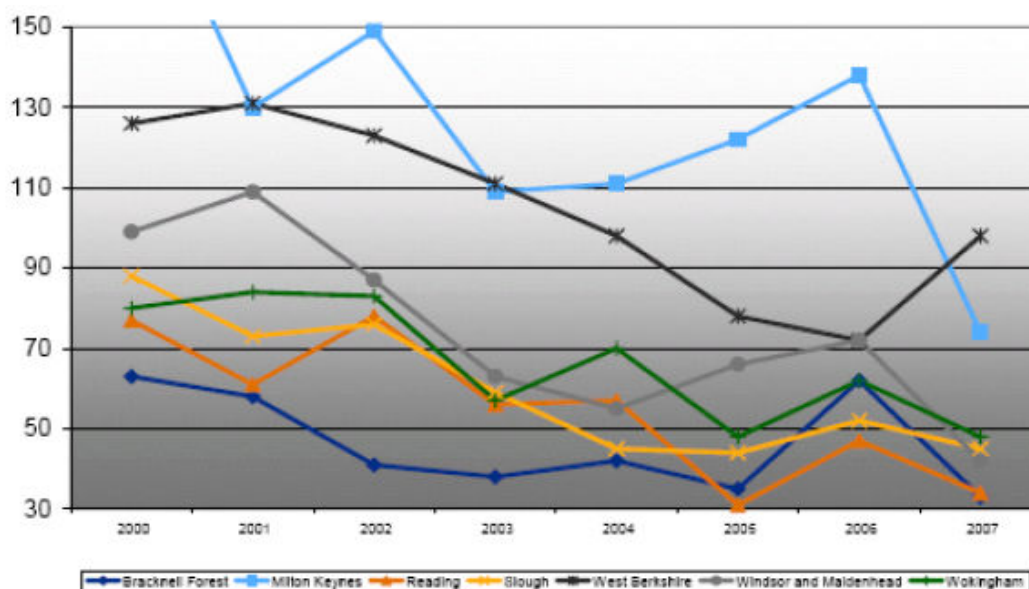
Ranking (Based on casualties per 1000 population) [2003-2007]

Local Authority Description	PIC casualties	KSI casualties	Pedestrian casualties	Child casualties	Motorbike rider/pillion casualties	Pedal cyclist casualties
Aylesbury Vale	3	4	9	5	7	13
Bracknell Forest	14	12	16	16	16	10
Cherwell	7	8	7	3	8	11
Chiltern	12	5	5	10	15	12
High Wycombe	11	7	4	9	13	16
Milton Keynes	2	11	8	2	6	7
Oxford City	9	10	3	7	10	1
Reading	8	16	1	6	3	2
Slough	5	15	2	1	11	3
South Buckinghamshire	1	1	11	4	1	9
South Oxfordshire	4	2	10	12	2	8
Vale of White Horse	10	6	12	14	5	5
West Berkshire	16	9	14	13	12	14
West Oxfordshire	6	3	13	8	4	15
Windsor and Maidenhead	13	13	6	15	9	4
Wokingham	15	14	15	11	14	6

- 3.19 This performance of Bracknell Forest KSI reduction compared to other Highway Authorities is illustrated in the annual KSI totals in Figure 10 below which also shows that the surge of casualties in 2006 was widespread.

Figure 10

Annual KSI totals for Berkshire unitaries (plus Milton Keynes) from 2000-2006 (plus 2007 data to the end of November 2007)



The Causes of Road Traffic Casualties

3.20 The breakdown of causes of RTC in Bracknell Forest, set out in Figure 11 is broadly similar to the breakdown for the Thames Valley at Figure 12. This demonstrates that driver error is the major cause of collisions.

Figure 11

Count of Recorded Causation Factors for all Collisions in Bracknell Forest in 2006.

Causation Factor	Percentage
Failed to look properly	19.93%
Careless, reckless or in a hurry	10.21%
Failed to judge other's path or speed	9.88%
Loss of control	5.27%
Poor turn or manoeuvre	4.28%
Sudden braking	3.79%
Traveling too fast for conditions	3.29%
Slippery road (due to weather)	3.29%
Impairment - alcohol	3.29%
Following too close	3.13%
Exceeding speed limit	2.97%
Learner or inexperienced driver/rider	2.80%
Other	27.84%

Figure 12

Count of Recorded Causation Factors for all Collisions between Jan 2005 and Nov 2007 in the Berkshire Unitary Authorities plus Milton Keynes

Causation Factor	Percentage
Failed to look properly	20.36%
Failed to judge other's path or speed	10.22%
Careless, reckless or in a hurry	8.30%
Poor turn or manoeuvre	5.44%
Loss of control	4.86%
Traveling too fast for conditions	3.77%
Following too close	3.22%
Slippery road (due to weather)	3.10%
Impairment - alcohol	3.04%
Sudden braking	3.03%
Learner or inexperienced driver/rider	2.40%
Aggressive driving	2.25%
Exceeding speed limit	2.17%
Other	27.84%

- 3.21 The Working Group established that there is no discernible effect on road accident casualties resulting from the change from Summer time to Winter time or vice-versa.
- 3.22 The Working Group noted that Coroners' verdicts on fatality cases – which give the definitive adjudged causes in such cases - were not routinely reported to Highway Authorities.

The case for a further review

- 3.23 This report has concentrated on understanding what lies behind the performance data, in response to the request from the Executive. Road Accident casualties are an important issue for people who live in or travel through the Borough. A follow-on review could usefully explore: the Council's participation in the Thames Valley Safer Roads Partnership, operational issues including education and other measures taken to reduce road accident casualties, the arrangements for safety cameras, and performance against the Council's Road Safety Plan. The review might also examine whether the Council carries out sufficient analyses of the nature and location of each type of accident and the vehicles involved, whether or not drivers were local and whether or not more than one vehicle was involved, to identify any particular feature which might be remedied. This separate and substantive review of operational issues is worthy of consideration by the Environment and Leisure O&S Panel as part of its work programme but as the Council's performance is clearly good in relation to its long-term targets, to other parts of the Thames Valley and nationally, this review does not in our view have a high priority.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The Working Group found several deficiencies in the nature of the targets set by government in terms of their usefulness in assessing the true performance in RTC reduction. This deficiency is continued in part in the new National Indicators from April 2008. The nature of the BVPI's has somewhat overstated the underperformance against the targets.
- 4.2. As performance against the BVPI's is effectively on a rolling 12 month basis, the impact of the stretched target and the 2006 surge in injury numbers can be expected to cause a continuation of red traffic light BVPI indicators for KSI all- age and SI until the Spring of 2008. As the new National Indicators are on a three year basis, that impact will continue to apply to 2009.
- 4.3. Bracknell Forest's long-term trend in the reduction of road traffic casualties is much better than that required by the national targets, and the long term targets for the Borough are much more stretching than those national targets. Given the increasingly difficult task to further reduce what are already commendably low casualty figures, it is important that the Council's 'stretched targets' are reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate, and we note that this is being discussed with Government in the preparation of the new Local Area Agreement.
- 4.4 With relatively small numbers of casualties occurring, figures in any one year are more susceptible to variation by a high proportion due to chance factors. The Government has decided to average KSIs in this way when reporting the new National Indicators (NI). Given Bracknell Forest's relatively small size and low casualty numbers, measuring all types of casualty cases would benefit from this approach as well.
- 4.5. The reported under-achievement has occurred not in relation to the long-term target, but with the intermediate 2006 targets (see figures 1 and 3). All the in-year 2006 targets were much more demanding than a 'straight-line' reduction to achieve the long-term 2010 target. The reason for this appears to have been that to set a target less demanding than the previous year's performance would not have been appropriate – despite that having been done in previous years. The consequence was extremely demanding targets for 2006, almost requiring the full reduction due until 2010 in just one year. The increased intermediate target was clearly over-ambitious, and possibly the long term target too.
- 4.6. Individual years can contain large percentage variations due to the small actual numbers of casualties (for example, the target for children KSI is no more than 3 each year), making averaged outturns a more appropriate measure of performance than single year targets.
- 4.7 In recommending greater focus on long-term performance, the Working Group are mindful that the Council has no direct control over driver errors – the principal cause of collisions; also that investments in road safety are necessarily long-term in nature as are their returns, and it has to be accepted that there will be fluctuations in individual years. It would therefore be more appropriate to measure and report on outturns in relation to targets over a period greater than one year.

- 4.8 Coroners' verdicts on fatality cases are a useful source of information to understand the full causes of fatalities, and the adjudicated causes should be sought as a matter of routine for all fatality cases.

5. Recommendations of the Working Group

To the Council's Executive, we recommend that:

- 5.1 The Council decides whether to adopt a local performance target for slight injuries, as the Government have ceased requiring this to be measured, and if so, this should be on a rolling three-year average basis.
- 5.2. The Council should consider, with its partners, its long term targets for casualty reduction, as set out in its Road Safety Plan and Service Plan. They need to be challenging yet achievable, and the current 'stretched targets' appear extremely ambitious.
- 5.3. The Council's annual targets should not set a step reduction in any one year, but instead be based on a straight-line reduction to the 2010 'stretched' BFBC targets.
- 5.4. The Council should ask government to change the methodology for computing performance on RTC reductions to take account of (a) growth and other contributory factors (paragraph 3.3 above refers); and (b) incorporating a progress measure against the national long-term target (paragraph 3.4 above refers).
- 5.5. Officers should standardise the form of a note to be issued to Local Members and the Executive Member for Planning and Transportation on the officially recorded circumstances of fatal road collisions and the causes of death issued by the Coroners Service. The Council should also use the information to demonstrate publicly that it has a full understanding of fatality cases and has both learnt what it can, and taken appropriate action in all cases.

To The Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel, we recommend that:

- 5.6. The work of the Working Group be regarded as concluded.
- 5.7. The Environment and Leisure O&S Panel considers mounting a separate and substantive review of operational issues affecting road traffic casualties as part of its work programme, but as a low priority.
- 5.8. This report should be copied to all Thames Valley Highway Authorities for their information and interest.

Glossary of Terms

BVPI	Best Value Performance Indicator
KSI	Killed or Seriously Injured
O&S	Overview and Scrutiny
RTC	Road Traffic Casualties
SI	Slightly Injured
The Council	Bracknell Forest Borough Council
TVP	Thames Valley Police