

BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE held at 7.00 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 26 JANUARY 2000

Present:- Councillor R P Chambers - Chairman.
Councillors G R Brown, Mrs C A Cant, Mrs D Cornell and R W L Stone.

Officers in attendance:- M R Dellow, A Forrow and B D Perkins.

BV29 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M A Hibbs and Mrs C M Little.

BV30 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2000 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

BV31 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute BV27 - Best Value Workshop

The Chairman hoped that the workshop had proved useful and that the points raised by Members could be incorporated in the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP).

It was noted that Councillor Mrs Cornell would like to attend the Member seminar at Ipswich on 7 February 2000, as would Councillor Sell. Councillor Mrs Cant stated that she would like to attend a future seminar on the subject.

BV32 PROGRESS REPORT

The Sub-Committee received an oral report on the progress made since the last meeting. Officers had met with the District Auditor's representative on the Best Value "milestones", which were the dates by which the Authority should have achieved certain steps. District Audit's view of the situation was awaited but the results should be good. The Authority had made significant progress over the last few weeks.

A further meeting had been held today with representatives of the District Auditor, at which the compliance list had been discussed. This covered items that we should have done, what we would have to do in the future, and the sort of target and aspirations that should be included in the BVPP. A number of questions had been raised. It was noticeable that District Audit was not in a position to answer some of these questions. The District Auditor would be required to produce his report on the Council's first BVPP by 30 June. The audit process involved a high degree of prescription.

In answer to Members' questions about the regime for Best Value, the Chief Accountant stated that the questions to be asked had been prepared. They were not all relevant to all authorities.

In relation to key areas where the Council would need to do more, three had been particularly identified:-

- (i) It needed to achieve more in areas in which it did not have direct control but which nevertheless reflected the community's priorities.
- (ii) It needed to spend more time working with others - the sphere of Health was perhaps the most obvious example.
- (iii) It needed to communicate with and involve the community more to ensure that we were doing the right things. This was something for which Members had been pushing and much had been achieved recently.

It was noted that Best Value would be a continuous process and priorities would change over time.

Members of the Sub-Committee were pleased with the way Best Value was developing within the Authority but recognised the difficulty of the task ahead. One problem was perceived as being that of making clear to all Members of the Council the fundamental effect Best Value would have on the way the Council operated and the importance of their role in ensuring that Best Value was achieved. Members congratulated officers on the progress made so far and the Corporate Director-Development undertook to pass these to colleagues.

The Sub-Committee discussed the efficiency savings being sought by the Government. The 2% being looked for was generally considered to be achievable.

Considerable concern was expressed over the additional audit and inspection costs. The Chairman said he was writing to the Government on this issue. The addition of costs would effectively counteract efforts to achieve savings. When asked about the possible appointment of a Best Value Officer, the Chairman commented that this would doubtless be considered in the future but would not be appropriate at present.

It was noted that the Council's five year Service Review Programme would have to be included in the BVPP and the programme would involve Members in asking some extremely hard questions.

BV33 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Chief Accountant circulated copies of the Guidance Notes prepared by the Corporate Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) on Performance Indicators. These were set by both Central Government and the Audit Commission and there were 89 such indicators prescribed for District Councils. In addition, local authorities would be expected to develop their own local performance indicators and targets. Some targets would be set nationally. Where this was not the case, targets should be set in the light of the performance of the top 25% of local authorities. As regards overall inter-authority comparative performance, the Audit Commission was adopting a "traffic light" approach to its published figures. Thus services whose performance was in line with that of the top quartile (25%) of authorities were "green"; those in the middle two quartiles were "amber"; those in the bottom quartile were "red" and therefore, on the face of it, in most urgent need of review. For the purpose of more specific inter-authority comparison, the Council was part of a group of authorities drawn from its audit family which consisted of a number of authorities whose characteristics were broadly similar to Uttlesford.

BV34 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Chairman noted that there was now very little time in which to complete the Council's first BVPP. The Sub-Committee needed to consider how to ensure that it was published on time. It was suggested that the best way of securing the necessary progress would be to authorise the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman of the Sub-Committee, to prepare the Council's draft Best Value Performance Plan. Documents would be sent to the Members of the Sub-Committee as appropriate and an informal progress meeting could be held if desirable.

RESOLVED that the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chairman of the Sub-Committee, be authorised to complete the preparation of the Council's draft Best Value Performance Plan 2000/2001.

The Chairman of the Sub-Committee thanked the officers for the work achieved to date.

BV35 PUBLICITY AND PUBLICATION ARRANGEMENTS

The Corporate Director - Development informed the Sub-Committee that, as well publishing the full Plan, the Council would have to send a summary leaflet to every household in the district. It would need to be brief and eye-catching. It would need to illustrate what the Council was aiming to do especially in Years 1 and 2 of the programme of reviews. A draft would be made available for the Sub-Committee.

Care needed to be taken in this exercise since this was one of three leaflets which would be circulated in the next few weeks, the others relating to Political Management and the Local Plan Issues Report. There was a risk of the Council being accused of wasting money. On the other hand, the consultation on community priorities had been well received.

The BVPP would also be publicised on the website and sent to a number of appropriate organisations.

BV36 TIMETABLE

The BVPP had to be published by 31 March 2000 and should be approved by full Council. If the deadline was to be met, the plan would need to be approved by mid March. It was intended that all Members should receive a copy of the draft BVPP by 3 March 2000.

RESOLVED that a special Council Meeting be held at 7.30 pm on 15 March 2000 for the purpose of approving the Council's Best Value Performance Plan 2000/01.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm.