

**BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 24 JULY 2000**

Present:- Councillor R P Chambers - Chairman.  
Councillors Mrs C A Cant, Mrs D Cornell, Mrs C M Little, R J O'Neill,  
R W L Stone and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E Forbes, M R Dellow, B D Perkins and  
M T Purkiss.

**BV1 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor R J O'Neill be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Sub-Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

**BV2 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2000 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**BV3 BUSINESS ARISING**

**Minute BV39 - Progress Report**

Members felt that further training would be useful particularly in clarifying the role of Members in the Best Value process and to ensure that their involvement was more than a "rubber stamping" exercise. The Chief Executive stated that the Member Workshop on 23 May had outlined the framework for the Best Value process. It was a learning process for both Members and officers. This workshop could be supplemented by a further one if required. She added that the methodology for undertaking the reviews would be reviewed in the future.

Members also stressed the important link between Members of the Reference Groups and the Sub-Committee and asked that future Best Value reports should include the names of the Best Value Reference Group Members.

Officers undertook to arrange a further Member Workshop on Best Value and confirmed that future reports on Best Value issues would include the names of the Councillors on the relevant reference group.

**BV4 DISTRICT AUDITOR'S REPORT**

The Chief Executive referred to the Auditor's Statutory Report on the Council's Best Value Performance Plan for the year ending 31 March 2001. The report had been discussed at the Council Meeting on 18 July and a formal response would be submitted based on the recommendations which had been approved at that meeting. The District Auditor had given a full presentation on the Performance Plan and copies of the slides used in his presentation were available for Members.

Further progress reports would be made to the Sub-Committee in due course.

Whilst Members had been given details of the District Auditor's costs for undertaking the inspection reviews, Members felt that they should be provided with details of the likely cost to the Council of the Best Value exercise as a whole and considered that the time and money spent on this needed to be closely monitored. Officers undertook to provide an estimate of the total cost and report to a future meeting.

## **BV5 BEST VALUE INSPECTOR**

It was reported that Andy Walford had been appointed as the Lead Inspector for Essex, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. He had met with officers of the Council to set out his expectations of the approach to inspection. He would provide an assessment of whether the Council's review was valid and testing enough and whether the conclusions were appropriate.

Each of the five reviews had been considered and allocated high, medium or low priority in terms of inspection resources. Housing had been given high priority, medium priority had been allocated to grants and low priority to trading activities, communications and political and management structures and Member support. Further reports would be made to the Sub-Committee in due course.

## **BV6 BEST VALUE REVIEWS - PROGRESS REPORTS**

Members received progress reports on the Year One Best Value Reviews.

### **(i) Grants**

Members felt that it would be useful to specify whether any of the grants were statutory and to explain why they were currently being made and also to examine the criteria for each grant scheme.

### **(ii) Communications**

Members felt that it was important to establish what information the public required from the Council and to provide them with this.

### **(iii) Housing**

It was explained that a tenant representative was on the Member Reference Group and consultants had been appointed to advise on particular aspects of the reviews. The Housing Review was subdivided into a number of smaller review teams comprising rents, estate management, housing register, right to buy and leasehold, repairs and planned maintenance and the stock options appraisal.

In relation to estate management, officers explained that outsourcing did not appear feasible at this stage until a clearer view had been established on the housing stock options.

In relation to Repairs and Planned Maintenance, Members felt that greater emphasis should be placed on providing the service which the tenants felt they ought to have and there was a need to encourage greater ownership and responsibility by tenants in monitoring the work which was carried out to their properties. Officers confirmed that the

views of tenants were often forthcoming through the Tenant Participation Panels which were now working extremely well and that surveys were undertaken with tenants following the completion of work to their properties.

Officers explained that there were two consultants involved. One was looking at the condition of the housing stock and the other one was dealing specifically with the stock options.

A presentation would be made to Members at a workshop on 18 September 2000 and tenant panel representatives would also be invited.

In response to questions from Members, the Government's current policy on stock transfers was explained and Members were advised of the content of the Government Housing Green Paper. This would be taken into account in the stock options appraisal.

#### **(iv) Political and Management Structures and Member Support**

It was reported that comparative data had been provided by some of the authorities within the Daventry Group and this would be discussed at the next meeting of the Reference Group.

#### **(v) Trading Activities**

Councillors questioned the inclusion of Bridge End Gardens within the Trading Activities review. The Chief Executive stated that she would refer this matter back to the Review Team.

### **BV7 BVPI SATISFACTION SURVEY**

Members were advised that as part of the Best Value process the Government required all local authorities to carry out a general survey for the "corporate health" indicators in the Autumn of 2000 and every three years thereafter.

Uttlesford was required to obtain 1100 responses to each question. It was clear that Uttlesford did not have the resources to carry out this work "in house". In line with most other local authorities it would be necessary to engage a market research company to undertake this project. It was reported that discussions had been held with Essex County Council and some other Essex district councils on the possibility of adopting a joint approach. The market research companies had indicated that such an approach would achieve cost savings. These discussions had picked up pace in early July and authorities had been asked to decide by 12 July 2000 whether they intended to be part of the joint exercise. In view of the tight deadlines involved and the advantages outlined at the meeting officers had agreed to this course of action.

RESOLVED that the action taken be confirmed.

### **BV8 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

It was reported that over the next few months a review would be undertaken of the Best Value Performance Plan. It was intended that the content of the plan would be improved, that there would be greater input from Members and that the recommendations made by the District Auditor would be incorporated. Members were asked to contact the Chief Executive if they had any suggestions for inclusion within the plan.

Members commented that last year's workshop, which incorporated group discussion, had been very useful and needed to be repeated at an earlier stage in the process.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.