

**BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 25 SEPTEMBER 2000**

Present:- Councillor R P Chambers – Chairman.
Councillors 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, J B Dickson, J Pares, B D Perkins and
M T Purkiss.

BV9 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs C A Cant.

BV10 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2000 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

BV11 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute BV3 – Progress Report

The Chief Executive reported that the training requirements for both Councillors and Officers had been discussed at recent meetings of the Review Teams. The process for the Best Value Performance Plan 2001/02 incorporated proposals to seek advice from all Members on the shape and content of the plan and she stated that ongoing feedback from Members would be welcome. Councillor O'Neill felt that it would be appropriate to assess training needs once the first year reviews had been completed and lessons had been learnt from this process and other Members concerned.

(ii) Minute BV4 – District Auditor's Report

At the last meeting Officers had undertaken to provide an estimate of the total time which the Officers had spent on Best Value. The Chief Executive reported that Officers involved in the Best Value process had estimated the time which they had spent on Best Value between April and August this year and this amounted to 1500 hours (ie almost 40 person weeks). This was a significant amount of work and had undoubtedly had an impact on other services. Councillor O'Neill considered that the amount of work spent on this process reinforced the need to obtain something worthwhile from Best Value. The Chairman considered that the Government should be made aware of the burden which Best Value was placing on Local Authorities.

(iii) Best Value Inspector

The Chief Executive reported that since the last meeting Dorothy Welsh had been appointed as the new Lead Inspector for Essex, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Details of her background would be included within a future Members' Bulletin.

BV12 BEST VALUE REVIEW PROGRESS REPORT

Members received progress reports on the following Best Value Reviews:-

Political and Management Structures and Members' Support
 Communications
 Housing
 Grants
 Trading Activities

BV13 BVPI SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Committee and PR Manager reminded Members that Uttlesford was participating in a joint approach to the general survey of "Corporate Health" indicators. Following an evaluation of the seven tenders received the contract had been awarded to ORC International. The total cost for the survey work was £66,981 and Uttlesford's contribution would be approximately £7,000. It was hoped that the first questionnaires would be sent out shortly and that the full report would be available by the end of November. Provision had been made within the tender for each Authority to specify how they wanted the results presented to them. ORC were prepared to make an individual presentation to each authority and Members were asked to decide whether they wished to take up this offer.

RESOLVED that an offer of an individual presentation be accepted and that the presentation be made to a meeting of the Best Value Sub-Committee and all Members of the Council be invited to attend.

BV14 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE CONSULTATION

Members were advised that in addition to the "Corporate Health" survey being undertaken by ORC the Council was required to carry out the following surveys of Uttlesford residents over the next two months:-

- (i) a satisfaction survey of Council Tenants consisting of a minimum of two satisfaction questions answered by a minimum of 625 tenants
- (ii) a satisfaction survey of recipients of Housing Benefit consisting of a number of satisfaction questions answered by a minimum of 625 people who claim Housing Benefit
- (iii) a satisfaction survey of recipients of the Planning Service consisting of a number of satisfaction questions answered by a minimum of 400 applicants.

The statutory guidance from the DETR on how to run these surveys was highly prescriptive and the surveys needed to be completed in time to feed into next year's Best Value Performance Plan which would be published in March. The DETR also required all Authorities to send the data from all surveys to them by the end of March 2001. There was an urgent need to get these surveys underway as soon as possible.

In view of the urgency of this matter discussions had been held with ORC International who had provided the following estimates for the cost of the surveys:-

Housing	£9,600	Full survey (£7,000 for shorter survey)
Planning	£5,600	
Housing Benefit	£5,600	

Members were anxious to ensure that the Council obtained value for money from these exercises and urged Officers to negotiate a discount on the above figures and, if time permitted, to obtain alternative quotations.

RESOLVED that

- 1 authority be delegated to Officers to negotiate with ORC International on the basis of the details set out in the report
- 2 provision be made for the fuller Housing Survey and for the survey to incorporate a face to face of tenants
- 3 in view of the urgency of this matter the relevant Standing Orders in relation to contracts be suspended, if necessary, to allow Officers to negotiate with ORC International.

BV15

BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2001/02

Members recalled that the District Auditor had stated that the "Best Value Performance Plan 2000/01 complies in all significant respects with the Statutory requirements" and he had given an unqualified opinion to that effect.

For this reason it was considered appropriate to leave the structure of the plan essentially as it was and make only the modifications and improvements recommended by the Audit Report and suggested by the progress on Best Value issues during the year. Members were provided with a summary of the proposed changes.

In particular, Officers were seeking comments from Members on

- the shape and contents of the BVPP
- the Council's strategic objectives
- the priorities for next year
- the action needed on service areas as suggested by performance results
- how and when it would be best to seek advice from all Members on the above

Members were also advised of the following timetable.

Month	Date	Who	Action
September			
	25.9	Best Value Sub Committee	Review BVPP 2000/01 & make proposals for BVPP 2001/02
October			
November	27.11	Best Value Sub Committee	Review progress
	23.11	Planning and Development Committee	Monitoring reports
	27.11	All Members	Partnership Event
December	5.12	Community Services Committee	Monitoring reports
	19.12	Policy & Resources Committee	
February	27.2	Council Meeting	BVPP formally adopted
March	1.3		BVPP printed
	26.3		BVPP distributed

Since the BVPP summary was the document that was read by most people it was suggested that the Council produce a fuller summary of the plan this year. It might be possible to combine the summary with other information about the Council or include the summary with the Council Tax demand.

By reducing the number of pages of the BVPP, only using two colours and printing the plan in-house it was possible to print the plan at a reduced cost from last year. This saving could be used to improve the summary as suggested above.

Councillor Wilcock, whilst agreeing with the general approach, considered that there was a need for the summary to be succinct. He considered that it was particularly important that the timetable allowed sufficient time for comment and input by Members.

Councillor O'Neill felt that best use should be made of the period between the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 19 December 2000 and the Council meeting on 27 February 2001 to allow an opportunity for Members have an input. He suggested that, if possible. A Member Workshop should be held during this period. The Chief Executive agreed with this approach and stated that arrangements could be made for a Member Workshop to be held in mid January followed by a Best Value Sub-Committee later that month, which would make recommendations to the Policy and Resources Committee.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Officers' suggestions for the proposed changes to the Best Value Performance Plan and the suggestions for improving the summary be confirmed and
- 2 a Member Workshop and meeting of the Best Value Sub-Committee be arranged as suggested above.

BV16

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was confirmed that the next meeting of the Best Value Sub-Committee would be held on Monday 27 November 2000 at 7.30 pm.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.