

**BEST VALUE SUB COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 27 NOVEMBER 2000**

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

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E Forbes, Mrs D Burrige, R Chamberlain,
Mrs S McLagan, B D Perkins and M T Purkiss.

BV17 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P A Wilcock.

BV18 MINUTES

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

BV19 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute BV14 – Best Value Performance Consultation

The Committee and PR Manager reported that, following the last meeting,
alternative quotations had been obtained for undertaking the surveys for
housing, planning and housing benefit. The contract for these had been let to
SMSR and a significant saving had been made on the price which had
originally been quoted.

BV20 BEST VALUE REVIEWS

(i) Trading Activities

Councillor O'Neill declared a non-pecuniary interest in so far as this item
related to Bridge End Gardens.

Members considered the preferred improvement options arising from the
Trading Activities Best Value Review. The review included Meals on Wheels,
Uttlesford Grounds Maintenance, External Grounds Maintenance Contracts
and Bridge End Gardens.

Councillor O'Neill asked whether there had been any guidance on whether
Officers directly concerned with the delivery of service should be part of the
review team. The Chief Executive explained that in forming the review teams
it had been felt that they should normally be led by the person responsible for
the service so that there was ownership of the report and the lead officer

would have a detailed knowledge of the service. She added that a similar practice had been adopted in other authorities.

In answer to a question from Councillor O'Neill it was confirmed that the County Council was statutorily obliged to provide Meals on Wheels. However, it was normal practice for the District Councils to undertake the service. Also, Uttlesford wished to keep the service local.

In relation to Bridge End Gardens, Councillor O'Neill explained that, whilst the improvement of the gardens was not a statutory obligation, it was a legal requirement of the lease. He stated that the Council should be aiming to provide a high and improving quality of maintenance and he suggested that comparative information be obtained from other authorities which managed public gardens (eg. Abbey Gardens at Bury St. Edmunds).

RECOMMENDED that the preferred options identified in the assessment of options for Trading Activities be approved.

(ii) Grants

Councillors Chambers, Mrs Cornell and Mrs Little declared their respective interests in this item.

The Sub-Committee considered the preferred options for the future delivery of the grants schemes administered by the Council. A fundamental review had been undertaken of "Amenities" grants administered by Community and Leisure Services totalling £166,820, "Environmental" grants administered by Planning Services totalling £23,000 and "Economic" grants administered by Planning and Community and Leisure Services totalling £29,000. Actual savings of £8,000 had been recommended through the cessation of the listed building grant scheme (£5,000), and reductions in both the conservation enhancement scheme (£500) and the tree planting scheme (£2,500). In addition, efficiency savings had been made where schemes had been refined or redefined. It was particularly noted that the report suggested that the Village Initiatives Grant Scheme (£10,000) should cease and the budget transferred to the Voluntary Organisations Support Grant Scheme (VOSG) and that the budget for the Ad Hoc Grant Scheme be reduced by £5,000 and this sum be also transferred to the VOSG scheme.

Councillor Chambers felt that, bearing in mind that there was a total budget of £218,000, savings of more than £8,000 could have been put forward. He considered that expenditure on grants would need to be revisited in the future. Councillor O'Neill added that it would have been useful to know the amounts of funding which other partners, (eg. Essex County Council and Parish Councils), provided and what would be the impact of withdrawing funding.

In answer to a question from Councillor Mrs Cant, it was explained that the reason for recommending the cessation of the Listed Building Grant Scheme was that the administration costs were high and there was no matched funding from other partners. In contrast, the Saffron Walden Conservation

Grant Scheme was administered by Essex County Council efficiently and effectively and the County Council also provided matched funding.

Some Members were particularly concerned at the suggestion of transferring money from the Village Initiatives and Ad Hoc Grant Schemes to the VOSG Scheme and from the Princes Youth Trust to the Village Shop Development Grant Scheme. Whilst the Sub-Committee supported the recommendations on the operations of the Village Initiatives and Ad Hoc Grant Schemes they did not feel that money should be transferred between budgets and if the budget from the VOSG scheme was to be increased it should be dealt with as a growth item by the Policy and Resources Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the preferred options for each grant scheme as set out in the appendix and action plan contained in the report be approved subject to any increase in the VOSG and the Village Shop Development Grant schemes being determined by the Policy and Resources Committee as a growth item.

(iii) Political and Management Structures and Members' Support

The Sub-Committee considered recommendations on the outcome of the review process relating to the following elements:

- Political decision making
- Management Structures
- Committee and Member Support

Attention was drawn to the relationship between this review and the work of the Organisation Joint Working Party.

In relation to political decision making it was noted that the Council had decided that no further work should be undertaken on this issue until government regulations had been received. The Organisation Joint Working Party was therefore currently in abeyance.

Recommendations on a new management structure had been made to the Policy and Resources Committee in September and had been agreed in principle. A number of concerns had been raised by Members and a further report on implementation would be submitted to the Internal Services Sub-Committee on 6 December 2000.

The Committee and Member Support Service had been profiled to analyse service objectives, current costs and performance and a detailed action plan was submitted for approval.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 Members urgently determine a new political decision making structure in accordance with the legislation to enable detailed planning to be undertaken;

- 2 Decisions on the implementation of the changes to the Management Structure be taken at Internal Services Sub-Committee on 6 December 2000;
- 3 The future role and organisation of Committee and Member support be as set out in the report and action plan.

(iv) Housing

It was noted that the Housing Best Value reviews for the landlord functions had been carried out by a team of officers who had concentrated on various aspects of the service. In addition a stock options appraisal had been carried out by consultants regarding the future management of the Council's housing stock. It was proposed that the Council should consider this issue early in 2001 and determine its policy approach once further announcements had been made by Government on related housing issues.

Members also referred to the need to review the existing arrangements for the involvement of Members in allocations. It was considered by Officers that Member involvement could not be justified as it added nothing to the process and caused delay.

RECOMMENDED that the Housing Best Value reports be noted and the action plan approved.

(v) Communications

The Sub-Committee considered a report which put forward a number of suggested improvements in the Council's communications activities. It was noted that the areas addressed in the report would help develop the production of a communications strategy which would be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee.

RECOMMENDED that the areas for improvement highlighted in the report be approved in principle and developed as part of a formal Communication Strategy and action plan setting out what can be achieved in 2001/2.

BV21

BEST VALUE INSPECTIONS

The Chief Executive reported that the new Lead Inspector for Essex was Dorothy Welsh, a former local government officer. A meeting had been held with the Lead Inspector and she had briefed Officers on the process of inspection. It was particularly noted that Housing had been given a high priority and Inspectors would visit the Council to discuss this service over a period of one week in the new year. Officers had expressed concern at the administrative burden and impact on staff time. Members shared this view and were particularly concerned at the cost of the review and asked that a record of costs be kept.

BV22 BEST VALUE SURVEYS - UPDATE

The Committee and PR Manager reported that the Council was required to obtain a minimum of 1100 replies for the survey for Corporate Health indicators. 750 responses had been received as at 24 November 2000. However, responses to the Housing survey had already exceeded the minimum number required. Work had now started on the Planning survey and it was hoped that the Benefits survey would commence in early December.

BV23 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Chief Executive reported that a draft of the Best Value Performance Plan would be circulated as soon as possible to enable it to be fully discussed at the Member Workshop on 17 January 2001.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm.