

REPORT OF THE PRINCIPAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OFFICER
TO THE EXECUTIVE
5th May 2006

Best Value Review Programme 2006-08

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

- 1.1 On the 3rd March 2006 the Executive resolved that 2 Best Value Reviews (BVR) should be carried out during 2006-07:
- A cross cutting review around the Vale Strategic Partnership and other partnership arrangements
 - A review of the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre
- 1.2 It was proposed that further service reviews would be considered once the new senior management structure was in place. The Executive resolved that a further report identifying appropriate service reviews be submitted as soon as practicable. This report proposes that a further 4 service reviews be added to the review programme and cover the next 2 years.
- 1.3 The Contact Officer for this report is Robert Woodside, Principal Performance Management Officer (01235 520202 ext 499).

2.0 Recommendations

That the Executive

- (i) *Approves the additional service Best Value Reviews detailed in section 5*
- a) *Housing Services*
 - b) *Environmental Health*
 - c) *Building Control*
 - d) *Human Resources*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

- (a) Vision Statement objective E.
- (b) The report does not conflict with any Council Strategies.
- (c) The report complies with existing policies.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 In January 2005 The Executive decided that a new approach should be developed for two types of reviews, service reviews and cross cutting reviews. This report proposes that a further 4 reviews be added to the programme which will cover the period 2006 – 2008.
- 4.2 A number of factors have been taken into account when looking at which service areas may be appropriate for a service review to be carried out:
- A need to consider service areas that have not been subject to a previous best value review. Since reviews started in 2000, most service areas have now been subject to at least one review
 - The Strategic Service Review exercise
 - Comments made by the Audit Commission in the draft Affordable Housing Inspection report (March 2006)

- Comments made by the Audit Commission in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter (March 2006)

4.3 Directors group have considered and agreed the proposed review programme. Each of the Deputy Directors / Assistant Directors in the Senior Management Team has a review in one of their service areas and Directors see this as a good development challenge for each of them to undertake.

Recent Best Value Reviews have all been carried out solely by the Principal Performance Management Officer. However it is proposed that for future reviews the relevant Deputy Director / Assistant Director would be responsible for 'scoping' the review (in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and Strategic Director). This would involve identifying the key areas for the more detailed work to be carried out during the review.

The detailed review work will then be carried out by the Principal Performance Management Officer and an officer from the service area being reviewed. One exception to this will be the cross cutting review of the Vale Strategic Partnership and other partnership arrangements referred to in section 1.1. This will be a much broader review and will require a slightly larger group to carry it out. Each completed review would be subject to an initial challenge by the Senior Management Team before being formally considered by the Executive and Scrutiny Committee.

The Audit Commission have made a number of comments on the new process for carrying out reviews but their final report has not yet been received. The comments / recommendations made will be taken into account, where appropriate, when carrying out future reviews.

5.0 Proposed Best Value Service Reviews

5.1 Housing Services

The Executive, on 14th January 2005, resolved that a review of Housing Services be included in the review programme. However, it was not practical to carry out this review before the Audit Commission inspection in February 2006. It is therefore proposed that a BVR be carried out, probably during early 2007, to look at progress with the improvement plan which will be agreed following receipt of the final inspection report. This review could have a specific focus on 'value for money', this being a key issue identified by the housing inspectors.

5.2 Environmental Health

This area was subject to a BVR which reported in March 2003 and identified a number of areas for improvement. The service did produce a draft improvement plan but this was not formally agreed. A further review could use the original review as a baseline.

There are limited opportunities to use alternative service providers in this area of work. However there is scope to review the service to look at the overall quality of service and cost of service to see whether it is providing value for money. This review could include new consultation on satisfaction levels with service users and some comparative benchmarking of resources with other councils.

5.3 Building Control

This is an area that has not yet been subject to a BVR so we cannot formally demonstrate that Council Tax payers are getting 'Best Value'. This review would include consultation with service users to establish satisfaction levels with the service and consider alternative service providers.

5.4 Human Resources

This is another area that has not yet been subject to a BVR. This review would include consultation to establish satisfaction levels with both internal and external users of the service. The review would look at alternative service providers.

6.0 Risk Analysis

6.1 A number of general risks have been identified and these have been detailed below. By carrying out BVRs in these service areas these risks could be properly identified and mitigated leading to service improvements and the Council being more clearly able to demonstrate value for money. Each individual review would require that a more detailed risk assessment be carried out.

- The Audit Commission considers that the Council is currently unable to demonstrate value for money as no systematic analysis of cost and performance data has been carried out. This was a general concern raised by the Audit Commission in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter published in March 2006. There is a need to develop a systematic approach to assessing and improving value for money. These BVRs could help the Council make progress in this area.
- Effective performance management is essential to delivering high quality services. These reviews could highlight limitations in the management information available and examine how effectively it is being used to improve the quality of services being provided.
- Consultation / Comments and Complaints. These are key to identifying customer needs and the quality of services to be provided. The Audit Commission inspection of Affordable Housing identified a need for the Council to make improvements in these areas.
- Diversity and equality issues. The Audit Commission, in the 2004/5 Audit and Inspection Letter (published March 2006) states that progress in this area by the Council has been disappointing. By trying to identify and make improvements through BVRs it would demonstrate to the Audit Commission that the Council is committed to making improvements, and this should then be reflected in the next 'Direction of Travel' Report.

ROBERT WOODSIDE
PRINCIPAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OFFICER

Background Papers: Report to the Executive 3rd March 2006 Best Value Review Programme 2006-07 (report number 245/05)