

Meeting:	Scrutiny Committee
Date:	18 February 2002

37 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF BENEFITS. The Committee considered the report of the Benefits Best Value Review team regarding the outcome of the Benefits Best Value Review. Mr H Walker, Best Value Review Officer and Councillor Higgins, Chairman of the Review Team, were in attendance to answer Member's questions.

Members noted that during 2001 the Council's Information Technology Management contract with Securicor Information Systems required the Revenues and Benefits applications to move from mainframe to a local server environment, which was achieved in a very short space of time. This had diverted resources for a considerable period of time during the year. A range of important issues regarding the implementation that were being addressed to ensure that the Benefits section could return to and improve on previous performance levels.

The main considerations of the review included

- § Ways of improving the existing service
- § How best to provide the service
- § Identification of potential partnerships, future funding options and economies of scale
- § Benchmarking comparisons with other authorities, including detailed analysis of existing costs.

Members were advised that it was hoped that the recommendations would have the effect of:

- § Improving the in-house service as the recommended procurement option
- § Reducing the cost of running the service
- § Improving the Best Value Performance indicators by measures identified in the Improvement Plan (8.0)
- § Improving the management of staff
- § Strengthening and developing the services provide to stakeholders
- § Ensuring the best future procurement options are chosen for the service
- § Reducing benefit fraud in Eastbourne
- § Improving internal management information
- § Improving strategic management and service profile.

Members were advised that work currently being carried out on the Accommodation Strategy and East Sussex joint working meant that some improvements were deferred until their outcomes were known. A further important initiative was from the Department for Work and Pensions, which would be publishing a set of performance standards for Benefits in April 2002. Members noted that these would be important as it was

proposed that there would be a link to the amount of subsidy paid to an authority. The Committee was advised that these standards would play an important part in the way the service progresses during the course of the Improvement Plan, and therefore issues arising from the draft standards had been taken into account when producing the Plan.

Members agreed that the actions in the Improvement Plan would be extremely challenging.

Councillor Higgins expressed his appreciation on behalf of Councillor Mrs Pooley and himself for the efforts of Officers during the development of the Improvement Plan and throughout the Review.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be recommended to approve the Improvement Plan as set at 8.0 of the report.

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