

## **BEST VALUE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday 21 November 2001**

PRESENT:

Councillor HIGGINS (Chairman) Councillor TUNWELL (Deputy Chairman) and Councillors LACEY (as substitute for Taylor), LEGGETT, Mrs HEALY and STANBURY.

(An apology for absence was received from Councillor Taylor).

**34. MINUTES.** The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record, subject to an amendment to include '(as substitute for Higgins)' after 'WILLIAMS'.

**35. BENEFITS BEST VALUE REVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT.** The Committee considered the report of the Best Value Manager regarding the progress of the Benefits Best Value Review. Members were informed of the main areas that had already been covered, in depth, by the Review Team, which were detailed within the report.

Members also noted that parallel meetings had been held with the Benefit staff, who were also Team members, chaired by the Lead Officer. They had considered from a practitioner's perspective many of the topics covered by the Review Team, including, Procedures, Site visits / questionnaires and a user's wish list. Further meetings had been held with external companies, looking at competitive and partnership possibilities.

There were recent indications that Wealden District Council and possibly other East Sussex local authorities may be willing to re-open discussions with a view to joint working arrangements. A meeting had been booked for 9 November 2001. Visits to Guildford and Rother (internal and outsourced working respectively) were planned to allow the Team to look at other local authorities' best practices. These would not be complete until early December.

Members were advised that in view of the outstanding visits and associated discussions in respect of procurement issues indicated above, it was recommended that the final report be put to the 18 February 2002 Scrutiny Committee. This would also allow officers within the Community Finance division to deal with a number of post-implementation issues arising from the mainframe migration project.

**RESOLVED:** That the request that final report of the Benefits Best Value Review be reported back on 18 February 2002 be agreed.

**36. SPORTS AND LEISURE FACILITIES - PROGRESS REPORT.** The Committee considered the report of the Head of Sport, Recreation and Leisure regarding the progress of the Sport and Leisure Facilities Best Value Review. Members noted that an advertisement had been placed in Leisure press inviting Private Sector to express interest by 8<sup>th</sup> December for the management of and investment in, The Sovereign Centre, Devonshire Park Fitness Centre, Motcombe Pool, Prince's Park boating and mini golf and Strollers Café. To date, six potential investors had expressed an interest, and arrangements were being made to discuss options. An approach had also been made by the Wealden Leisure Trust.

**NOTED.**

**37. CLEANSING SERVICES - PROGRESS REPORT.** The Committee considered the report of the Head of Amenities regarding the progress of the Cleansing Services Best Value Review. Members noted that the initial review was now nearing its completion. The Lead Officer is to commence writing the final report, including Action Plan, during November 2001.

Members were advised that at their last meeting on the on the 26 September 2001, Committee agreed that the review should be completed in all other regards, but that the key challenges of

1. Identify options for delivering the service from 2003 onwards within the current cost envelope
2. Consider changes to the current service, including moving from back door collection to boundary collection
3. Consider moving to output rather than input based specification of street sweeping standards
4. Explore innovative options for achieving recycling targets without incurring high costs
5. Develop a robust action plan to deliver recycling targets

would be considered within the Best Value Review Action Plan and that a further key challenge, to explore joint provision with neighbouring boroughs, would be considered within the review.

The Best Value Review Group had determined certain recommendations set against the above key challenges that would be included in the final report.

Members were informed that the Best Value Inspectorate had agreed to a two-stage inspection in light of the amended programme, the second stage being six to nine months after the tendering process.

**RESOLVED:** That the Chairman write to the Best Value Inspectorate requesting a 'light touch' inspection in the first instance for the Cleansing review, and in addition also propose a second review that would also receive a 'light touch' inspection in the current financial year.

**38. FINANCIAL STRATEGY, ACCOUNTANCY AND INTERNAL AUDIT BEST VALUE REVIEW - PROGRESS REPORT.** The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer regarding the progress of the Financial Strategy, Accountancy and Internal Audit Best Value Review. Members noted that the progress of the Review Team to date as detailed within the report.

Members were advised that the next meeting of the review team would be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. Mike Dwyer, until February this year our Acting Chief Finance Officer since the previous summer, would be attending to give a presentation on the strengths and weaknesses of the Council's Finance function. Mike's presentation, together with initial feedback from the challenge workshops as well as some options/proposals for structural review, would be the main items to be dealt with at the third meeting.

Members noted that beyond that a fourth meeting was planned for mid January with a fifth, and likely final, meeting set for early February 2002.

**NOTED.**

**39. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF COLLECTION SERVICES - MONITORING REPORT.** The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Financial Management regarding the progress of the Collection Services Best Value Review Improvement Plan. Members noted that good progress had been made in implementing the approved Best Value Improvement Plan. Five of the six actions would be implemented by the end of this financial year. More importantly, key service objectives and cost reductions would be delivered. Further gains in Collection Services were likely in future years as the full benefits from this review, together with those, which may arise from other reviews, were implemented.

Members were advised that an initial meeting had been scheduled with the Best Value Inspectorate to discuss the findings of the desktop inspection of Collection Services. Members requested a report back to the Committee regarding the outcome of this meeting in January 2002

Members requested a report regarding the timetabling of the full closure of the cash office at 1 Grove Road in March 2002.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the outcome of the meeting to discuss the findings of the Best Value Inspectorate meeting also be reported back to the Committee in January 2002.

(2) That the timetable for the closure of 1 Grove Road cash office be reported back to this committee in March 2002.

**40. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF LEGAL SERVICES - MONITORING REPORT.** The Committee considered the report of the legal Services Manager regarding the progress of the Legal Services Best Value Review Action Plan and recommendations for Future Improvement. Members noted that appendices 1 and 2 outlined the extent of progress made to date. The majority of targets set for implementation of the approved Actions and Implementation Plans had been met.

Members were advised that it was unlikely that the Service would be ready for the “dry run” of Lexel compliance by 31 January 2002. This was primarily due to work undertaken in connection with the case management and data collection capabilities of existing software. The revised target for commencement of the “dry run” was 1 April 2002, with the Service being ready for assessment by external assessors by 1 September 2002.

Members were also advised in August 2001 the councils of Reigate & Banstead, Sevenoaks, Tandridge and Wealden had advertised the fact that they were working together on options for joint working and procurement.

The Legal Services Manager had contacted the lead authority in advance of the closing date of 7 September 2001, advising that Eastbourne wishes to participate in this process. A full response was still awaited.

**RESOLVED:** (1) That the revised date for the 'Dry Run' for compliance with Lexel standards be agreed.

(2) That the Leader of the Council be requested to approach the authorities indicated above with a view to establishing whether the possibility of joint commissioning of Legal Services in East Sussex could be progressed.

**41. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SEAFRONT GARDENS - MONITORING REPORT.** The Committee considered the report of the Director of Tourism and Leisure regarding the progress of the Seafront Gardens Best Value Review Action Plan. Members were informed that progress was being made in achieving a balance between seasonal bedding areas and perennial sustainable plantings whilst retaining Eastbourne's reputation for excellence in our seafront gardens.

The management and supervision of the gardens was being challenged to determine whether more responsibility could be given to the contractors to both deliver and monitor the quality of the service and standards of work. Efficiency had been improved with a direct e-mail link to Brophy. There had been financial savings on the introduction of more perennial plantings improving the overall economy of the seafront gardens.

**NOTED.**

**42. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING - MONITORING REPORT.** The Committee considered the report of the Retirement Services Manager regarding the progress of the Retirement Housing Action Plan. Members were informed that all of the actions highlighted in Appendix A had commenced and had been highlighted within the Housing Management Division service plan for 2002. Those actions requiring additional work would be included in the service plan for 2002. The Committee noted that the Supported Housing issues were being addressed.

**43. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC.**

**RESOLVED:** That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting as otherwise there was a likelihood of disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972. The relevant paragraph of Schedule 12A is shown beneath the item.

**44. SUMMARY OF CONFIDENTIAL PROCEEDINGS FOR INFORMATION.**

a) **CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2001.** The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2001 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

(Exempt information reason – Para 9 - Terms of a proposed contract).

**NOTED.**

The meeting closed at 5.50 p.m.

**F B A HIGGINS**

**(Chairman)**