

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 16 DECEMBER 2002 AT 2.00 P.M.

Agenda item No.

11

BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN: PROMISES AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Report of Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy)

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Executive Members:- Bernard Lloyd and Robert Ellis

1. Purpose of the report

This report asks members to consider whether any changes need to be made to the current promises in the Best Value Performance Plan 2002/3 in the light of the findings of public consultation on spending priorities and the promises and in the light of the financial context within which the promises agreed for 2003/4 must be delivered.

2. Conclusion

The findings of public consultation reveal that the County Council's existing BVPP promises are broadly consistent with the public's views on what the Council's priorities should be. Members may however wish to amend promise wording. As part of this year's public consultation exercise, members of the Hertfordshire Citizens' Panel were asked to prioritise the existing promises. Members may wish to present the 2003/4 promises to reflect with the public's order of priority and may wish to consider the public's priorities when determining the level of resources to be allocated to the delivery of the promises.

3. **Background**

- 3.1 Members agreed a process and timetable for the publication of the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) 2003/4 at a Cabinet meeting on 16 September 2002. The final BVPP 2003/4 is due to be approved at the County Council meeting on 20 May 2003. As the BVPP is based on the Council's corporate priorities known as promises, members are asked to consider at this stage whether it is necessary to make any changes to the existing promises set out in the BVPP 2002/3 as follows:

Promise wording 2002/3	Member Working ref
To make Hertfordshire a better place to live and work	
Work with the community to protect and enhance our environment	1
Fight the loss of green fields and avoid, wherever possible, development on green areas in our towns by encouraging buildings of high quality on previously developed land	2
Support the building of affordable quality housing to meet the needs of local people	3
Double the amount of household waste that is recycled by 2005 and avoid the use of incineration in Hertfordshire.	4
Improve the condition of our roads	5
Cut the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads	6
Save lives and prevent injuries through raising awareness of fire safety	7
Reduce youth crime by working with the Police and other agencies	8
Work with business to increase prosperity, protect jobs and improve standards of living for local people	9
To offer children a better future	
Ensure children at risk of harm are identified early and given support so they make maximum progress	10
Improve educational outcomes, as measured by Key Stage results	11
Assist schools with the lowest current levels of performance to make accelerated progress	12
Help people to continue learning throughout their lives	13
Ensure that all children benefit from the diversity of schools within Hertfordshire	14
Enable parents and carers to understand and support their children's learning	15

Enhance provision for gifted and talented pupils both in school and through experiences which complement their work at school 16

To help people to help themselves C

Work with the NHS, voluntary organisations and other councils to improve health and care services 17

Fight for the interests of elderly and disabled people and their carers. We will help them to maintain their independence and get easy access to our services. 18

Improve employment prospects for disadvantaged people 19

Promote equality and improve access to our services, employment and buildings 20

Make it easier for people to get the advice and information they need from us 21

Give local communities a better voice to tackle local problems 22

To give the public value for money by getting more cost efficient every year D

3.2 In deciding whether any changes to the promises are necessary, members should take account of the findings of public consultation on spending priorities and the current BVPP promises and should take account of the financial context within which next year's promises will need to be delivered. If any new promises are agreed, new performance indicators will need to be developed to enable progress in delivering the promise to be measured.

4. Findings of public consultation on spending priorities and BVPP promises

4.1 At its meeting on 16 September 2002, the Cabinet decided that the public's views on spending priorities be sought using the October edition of the HertsDirect newspaper and the HertsDirect website and that a postal survey of the independently established Citizens' Panel and four focus groups be carried out to seek views on the BVPP promises and further examine views on spending priorities. This report advises on the outcome of this consultation.

4.2 5,903 Hertfordshire residents returned the questionnaire on spending priorities in the October edition of the HertsDirect newspaper by the closing date of 15 November 2002. A further 546 residents completed an on-line version of the same questionnaire by the same date. A questionnaire asking the same questions on spending priorities and some additional questions regarding the BVPP promises and Council Tax levels was mailed out to the 2,139 members of the Hertfordshire Citizens' Panel on 25 October 2002. 1,622 questionnaires were returned by the closing date of 20 November 2002. MORI held four focus groups, with each attended by 9 to 11 people from the Citizens' Panel, on 3 and 4 December to explore people's views on spending priorities in more depth.

4.3 All responses were analysed by MORI and the key findings are as follows:

- most respondents think that services should be maintained or improved rather than cut
- care for elderly people, tackling crime and disorder and education were most likely to be prioritised for service improvements
- libraries, consumer protection and public transport were least likely to be prioritised for service improvements
- respondents' comments suggest that they believe the Council's first priority should be efficiency savings rather than cuts to services if budgets are reduced.

4.4 Members of the Citizens' Panel were asked what they thought the Council should do if it was necessary to increase Council Tax by 5% to avoid service cuts and if it was necessary to increase Council Tax by 13% to avoid service cuts. Responses were as follows:

Percentage of residents who think the Council should:	5% Council Tax increase	13% Council Tax increase
Make service cuts	11%	23%
Maintain existing service levels	45%	49%
Make improvements	39%	19%
Don't know / no opinion	5%	9%

4.5 This issue was explored further with members of the focus groups. Most residents were of the view that, even if it was necessary to increase Council Tax by significantly more than 13% to avoid service cuts (e.g. by 20%), the priority should still be to maintain existing service levels. There was, however, declining support for paying more Council Tax to fund service improvements if a very high Council Tax increase was necessary to avoid service cuts. Most residents wanted to be assured that the Council was operating as efficiently as possible if another high Council tax increase is necessary.

4.6 Members of the Citizens Panel were also consulted on the existing BVPP promises. They were asked to prioritise the promises for each of the three themes. The promises were prioritised as follows with % indicating overall preferences. Panel members were given the opportunity to select up to 4 priorities for each theme:

To make Hertfordshire a better place to live and work

Reduce youth crime	63%
Fight the loss of green fields	56%
Double the amount of household waste that is recycled by 2005 and avoid the use of incineration in Hertfordshire	49%
Support the building of affordable quality housing	37%
Cut the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads	32%
Improve the condition of our roads	31%
Work with business to increase prosperity	28%
Work with the community to protect and enhance our environment	25%
Save lives and prevent injuries through raising awareness of fire safety	10%

To offer children a better future

Ensure children at risk of harm are identified early and given support	82%
Assist schools with the lowest current levels of performance	58%

Enable parents/carers to support their children's learning	47%
Ensure that all children benefit from the diversity of schools	43%
Enhance provision for gifted and talented pupils	42%
Help people to continue learning throughout their lives	41%
Improve educational outcomes	26%

To help people to help themselves

Work to improve health and care services	83%
Fight for the interest of elderly and disabled people	76%
Give local communities a better voice to tackle local problems	57%
Make it easier for people to get advice and information	46%
Improve employment prospects for disadvantaged people	45%
Promote equality and improve access to the Council's services	14%

4.7 These priorities are consistent with the priorities identified by residents in previous consultation exercises and are consistent with the areas identified as spending priorities as outlined above. Similar priorities were also identified by members of the focus groups.

4.8 All members have been invited to a presentation by Ben Page of MORI on 12 December 2002 on the consultation findings. A more detailed report by MORI on the consultation findings will be sent to Cabinet members before the Cabinet meeting on 16 December.

5. Implications of findings of public consultation on the promises

The County Council's existing promises appear to be consistent with the public's views on what the Council's spending priorities should be. As the public have prioritised the existing promises, members may wish to present next year's BVPP promises in accordance with the public's order of priority and to allocate more resources in respect of those promises which have been identified as priorities by the public.

6. Financial implications

The report on the County Council's budget 2003/4 included on this Cabinet agenda sets out the financial context within which the promises must be delivered.

Background information

MORI report on Hertfordshire Priorities Consultation Oct –Dec 2002 (to be published on 12 Dec 2002)