



BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN and PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Report of Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy)

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1. Purpose of Report

This paper presents for approval, at Appendix 1, a draft Best Value Performance Plan for 2001-02. Once approved it will be submitted to all Select Committees in January for comments. The Cabinet on 29 January 2001 will then be asked to approve the final draft for submission to full Council on 16 February for its approval.

In addition this paper advises the Cabinet of the outcomes of the public consultation strategy, as agreed by Policy Committee on 20 July 2000, and reports the results of citizens' panel research on quality of life and council tax issues.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The report outlines the process for producing the Best Value Performance Plan which covers all the activities of the County Council, sets targets for performance and sets out the Council's priorities.
- 2.2 This year the Plan has been arranged by promise, and the process involved both developing the promises and identifying their impacts. The process was aligned to the budget and service planning processes and took account of performance information. The final Plan will be further informed by the results of consultation.
- 2.3 The report outlines the content of the Best Value Performance Plan for 2001-02 and lists the promises for next year.
- 2.4 Reducing levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, developing on brown field rather than green field sites and working with the NHS to improve health and care were the top 3 issues reported to us through the survey of local people.
- 2.5 From the results of the consultation it can be construed that the majority of local residents continue to wish to protect services and are prepared to pay more council tax in order to do so.

1. Best Value Performance Plan – Background

- 1.1 This is the second year in which the County Council has to produce a Best Value Performance Plan, which covers all its activities, sets targets for performance, and sets out the Council's priorities for the future as well as being a vehicle for reporting outcomes of the Best Value Reviews.
- 1.2 A key improvement has been to arrange the Best Value Performance Plan by promise.
- 1.3 Cabinet in June 2000 chose the promises that they wished to explore as possibilities for the next financial year.

2. Process

- 2.1 During August and September senior officers worked with executive members to evaluate these possibilities, assessing the viability of a promise (and the wording used), any current or potential service impacts and opportunities and any resource implications.
- 2.2 This process was aligned with the budgetary process to ensure issues would be addressed with details of the resources available to enable targets and priorities to be delivered. The promises were linked to departmental strategic objectives, service plans and actions to be taken. Work also began to set performance indicators and targets to measure the promises.
- 2.3 The process also took account of current performance information.
- 2.4 Public consultation has included work with focus groups based on last years promises covering topics that the public might be interested in and with the Citizen's panel through a survey regarding policy priorities. See details from paragraph 4 on.
- 2.5 The next stage in the process will be the scrutiny of the Plan by Select Committees prior to further consideration by Cabinet. The Best Value Performance Plan will be considered by the County Council in February.
- 2.6 Consultation on the Plan with stakeholders and statutory agencies will take place.
- 2.7 A summary version of the Best Value Performance Plan for 2001-02 will be distributed through the Council's newspaper, Herts Direct, and will be available on the new website. In addition, the Plan will be available at public access points, e.g. libraries. Copies of the full Best Value Performance Plan will be made available to statutory and other key partners.
- 2.8 District Audit process

The Plan will be audited by District Audit with respect to its content, the extent to which it fulfils HCC's statutory obligations to publish a Plan and the extent to which issues identified in the 1999-2000 Audit Report have been addressed.

3. Content of Best Value Performance Plan 2001-02

3.1 The content of the work over the summer formed the basis of the Best Value Performance Plan. The key approach within the Plan is to show links between a promise, the actions taken to achieve the promise and how success is to be measured. All nationally set (and proposed) performance indicators have been linked to the promises, in addition to those devised as local indicators.

3.2 The Plan's outline content:

- Message from the Leader
- Hertfordshire Best Value Performance Plan (About the Plan)
- Our Promises to Hertfordshire for 2001/02
- Promise by Promise sections – objectives, actions, good news stories, performance indicators
- How we are improving (Herts Connect and the Best Value Review Process)
- Reports of Best Value Reviews
 - Transport
 - Coroners
 - Post & Couriers
 - Procurement
 - Education Traded Services
 - Asset Management
 - Interim reports
- Costs of Reviews
- Best Value Review Programme
- What Services Does Hertfordshire County Council Provide?
- Who are the County Councillors?
- Representing your interests
- Consulting the Community
- Consulting on the Plan
- Finance
- Contact Information
- How to receive the plan in different formats
- Appendix – Performance Indicators 1999/2000 actuals, not measured in 2000/01

3.3 The Promises for 2001-2

3.3.1 Our fundamental aim is to make sure that the people of Hertfordshire benefit from effective public services which meet their needs.

3.3.2 *To make Hertfordshire a better place to live and a prosperous place to work we will...*

- fight the loss of green fields by encouraging high quality building on previously developed land
- support the building of affordable quality housing to meet the needs of local people
- double the amount of household waste that is recycled by 2005 and continue to oppose incineration in Hertfordshire
- cut the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads
- save lives through raising awareness of fire safety

- continue to work with the police to reduce youth crime
- work with business to increase prosperity, protect jobs and improve standards of living for local people
- keep Hertfordshire working by improving the maintenance of our busiest roads

3.3.3 *To improve education to give children a better future we will.....*

- be one of the top five county education authorities in the country
- improve pupil achievement in Hertfordshire schools
- raise the educational achievement and educational participation of 16-19 year olds
- assist schools with lowest current levels of pupil attainment to make accelerated progress
- help people to continue learning throughout their lives

3.3.4 *To help people to help themselves and involve and serve the public we will....*

- fight for the interests of elderly and disabled people and ensure they have access to our services so that they can maintain their independence
- work with the NHS, voluntary organisations and other councils to improve health and care services
- improve employment prospects for disadvantaged people
- improve our support to children and families
- promote equality and improve access to our services, employment and buildings
- give local communities a better voice
- provide quality advice and information services
- give the public value for money by getting more efficient every year

3.4 There are a number of ‘gaps’ in the plan. Some information will not be available until January (such as the outcomes of consultation on Best Value Performance Indicators for corporate health). In addition work is continuing in a number of areas including target setting for next year, budgetary information and good news stories (which are shown as headlines only)

3.5 A number of gaps also exist in the wording of information relating to promises or where local indicators are being investigated, in all cases work is being undertaken to complete these sections. These gaps exist in Appendix 1 at:

page 13 – further text relating to affordable quality housing

page 13 – local indicators for this are being investigated

page 67 – news stories relating to assisting schools with the lowest current levels of pupil attainment to make accelerated progress

page 67 – local indicators for this are being developed

page 82 – further text relating to services for disabled people

page 89 – information relating to actions we will be making to work with the NHS, voluntary organisations and other councils to improve health and care services

page 89 - local indicators for this are being developed

page 93 – further text relating to support to children and families

page 107 – further text relating to listening to communities

page 110 – further details on providing quality advice and information services

3.6 The final version of the Plan will contain data to show how HCC compares with Shire Counties. At present the comparative data is provisional and is shown as Appendix 2.

3.7 Format issues are also being addressed including typeface, spacing and page layout

4. Public Consultation

4.1 In the summer Policy Committee approved a plan for public consultation on a range of issues including performance indicators, political structures, the budget and policy priorities.

4.2 This report serves as an update on all these areas of activity and specifically provides data on policy priority and budget consultations. This information is presented to members of the Cabinet as they debate the Best Value Performance Plan and Revenue Budget for 2001/2. The report will be complemented by a presentation from Ben Page, Director of MORI Local Government Research Unit on 18th December 2000.

4.3 The Consultation Plan:

4.3.1 This year the council is obliged to undertake a series of exercises as part of best value and modernisation.

4.3.2 Specifically, the council has been required to:

- Conduct a user satisfaction survey with a randomly selected sample of 1,100 residents.
- Conduct a comprehensive consultation exercise on the options for the future political management structure
- Seek the views of the public on quality of life issues in order to inform policy priorities within the Best Value Performance Plan
- Consult on council tax levels for the next financial year.

4.3.3 In addressing these needs, the county council agreed to a range of consultation and communications initiatives.

4.4 Consultation Processes:

4.4.1 User Satisfaction:

Following a competitive tender, a consortium of six local authorities within Hertfordshire has commissioned MORI. The company is conducting the research in accordance with government guidelines. The partnership approach has been designed to reduce costs and avoid duplication to members of the public.

Results of the survey are expected during January and will feed into the Best Value Performance Plan (Performance Indicators on corporate health).

4.5 *Political Structures:*

The launch edition of the county council newspaper, Herts Direct, included a centre page feature article on the issue of political management structures. This was designed to inform the public and local people who wanted more information were invited to call free for an information pack/questionnaire. Two hundred packs have been despatched and results of this survey and other research conducted with the citizens' panel will be reported to full county council in the New Year.

4.6 *Quality of Life Issues:*

4.6.1 A key message from the District Audit report on the 1999/2000 Performance Plan was that consultation with the public on core promises needed to be less prescribed and more deliberative.

4.6.2 With this in mind, the county council has conducted a two stage consultation exercise using members of the citizen's panel. The panel is a group of 2,500 Hertfordshire residents. It is a representative sample in terms of age, gender, locality and social background. Initially a series of focus groups were held during September. These brought together people from various areas and backgrounds - to discuss quality of life issues.

4.6.3 Subsequently, all members of the citizens' panel were sent a questionnaire which asked them to rank the issues which they believed to be of most significance to their quality of life in Hertfordshire.

4.7 *Council Tax Levels:*

4.7.1 All members of the citizens' panel were consulted on budget issues. Specifically, members of the panel were asked to indicate which one of four options of tax increase (8%, 6%, 5% or 2.5%) they felt to be preferable.

4.8 *Results:*

4.8.1 *Quality of Life:*

4.8.1.1 The Focus Groups

In September 2000, MORI conducted three focus groups each based on 'new political structures' and the Council's priorities for 2001/02 with members of the Hertfordshire citizen's panel.

The Quality of Life focus groups identified there are gaps in the general public's understanding of some Council services (for example, few are fully aware of the Social Services provided by Hertfordshire) and they are more likely to prioritise aspects of services about which they know more about.

The areas which residents tended to highlight as particular priorities include:

Opposing development on green fields in the county and ensuring future development occurs on suitable brown-field sites where possible.

Ensuring future housing development meets the needs of the wider community (including low-income families, single adults, first-time buyers), not solely those on higher incomes.

Maintaining (and improving) the levels of educational attainment within Hertfordshire's schools.

Encouraging and enabling children to participate in increased sporting activities, both in and out of school hours.

Improving accessibility of lifelong learning through increased flexibility of courses where necessary.

Fighting any potential cuts in the funding of library services.

Enabling older people to have the choice as to how they wish to be cared for, whether it is residential care or support for continued independence.

Reducing levels of anti-social behaviour among younger people, through increased activities for teenagers.

4.8.1.2 The 'new political structures'

These focus groups reported how participants found it hard to understand the distinguishing features of the three proposed models of local governance. Although there are questions about the similarities with the current system, the leader and cabinet is chosen as the preferred option by the majority of people. However, this appears to be more in opposition to the mayoral options, than because of any particular perceived strengths of this option.

4.8.1.3 The Survey:

Local people were offered thirty-six options for enhancing their quality of life. From these and were asked to suggest which of these were most important in improving their quality of life in Hertfordshire.

	Top Ten Issues (No. 1 being the most selected)		Lowest Ranking Issues (No. 10 being least selected)
1	Reducing levels of crime and anti social behaviour	10	Better cultural facilities
2	Working with the NHS to improve health and care	9	Better consumer protection
3	Developing on brown field sites rather than green fields	8	Better waste disposal
4	Better maintenance of roads and pavements	7	Easier access to our services
5	Better support for local shops	6	Better support for business
6	More and cheaper buses	5	Improved nursery/pre school education
7	Better schools and education	4	More information about secondary admissions
8	More facilities for teenagers	3	Better support for community learning and adult education
9	Better services for elderly people	2	Better services for families
10	Cleaner environment (litter / grafitti)	1	More facilities for children under 13 years.

Source: 925 respondents to the Citizen's Panel Survey – November 2000

4.8.2 Council Tax Levels:

4.8.2.1 Members of the citizens' panel were given brief information about the implications of the tax increase options as follows:

<i>Council Tax Level</i>	<i>RESULT</i>
8% = maintenance of services and some growth	23%
6% = maintenance of services	39%
5% = some reductions in services	13%
2.5% = extensive reductions in services	7%
Don't Know/Not Stated	16%

Source: 925 respondents to the Citizen's Panel Survey – November 2000 (note that total does not add to 100% due to rounding)

4.8.2.2 In more general terms:

62% of respondents preferred to pay more to protect services (6% or more)

20% of respondents preferred to pay less and countenance reductions in services (5% or less)

4.8.2.3 Comparisons with last year:

In 1999 members of the citizens' panel were asked to indicate their preference from three council tax increase options as follows:

<i>Council Tax Level</i>	<i>RESULT</i>
7.7% = maintenance of services	55%
7.0% = some reductions in services	20%
5.5% = further service reductions	16%
Don't know/Not Stated	9%

Source: 1221 respondents to the Citizen's Panel Survey – November 2000

It can therefore be construed that the majority of local residents continue to wish to protect services and are prepared to pay more council tax in order to do so. However, compared to last year, a greater proportion of residents are unclear about their preference.

5. Financial Implications

The major production and printing costs for the Best Value Performance Plan will be reported in the final version of the document. The current estimate of costs is £5,000 (including design costs), provision is made in current budgets.