

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
RESOURCES, PROSPERITY, PARTNERSHIP
AND CONSULTATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 21 MARCH 2002 at 10.30 a.m.**

SCRUTINY OF BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Strategy)

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To scrutinise the BVPP in comparison with other authorities Performance Plans.

2. Summary

2.1 This report covers:

- 2.1.1 Analysis of Performance Plans and good practice for Plans from the Audit Commission.
- 2.1.2 Changes to Best Value Plan in the light of the White Paper *Strong Local Leadership - Quality Local Services*.
- 2.1.3 Future scrutiny and comparison of performance with other authorities.

3. Analysis of Performance Plans

- 3.1 Detailed guidance is produced on an annual basis for producing the BVPP. HCC met the guidance requirements for 2001/02 and received an unqualified report from District Audit.
- 3.2 District Audit concluded for Hertfordshire: 'The Plan is a well presented document with targets clearly linked to the Council's underlying strategies. Although there is a commitment to continuous service improvement, which is part of the Council's culture, this needs to be supported by a robust approach to performance information. The Council has demonstrated a commitment in the year to developing ownership of best value within departments in order to improve integration into the Council's activities.'
- 3.3 Most of the 34 Shire Counties also received unqualified reports. A number of recurring themes were identified, some of which were relevant to Hertfordshire. For example for Hertfordshire Audit concluded that we need to 'Demonstrate that priorities and targets are cascaded through all levels of the Council: to improve integration into business activity.' This recommendation applied to a number of Authorities. In a number of areas Hertfordshire's plan

compares favourably with others. Examples include the link between promises and service plans and our culture of continuous service improvement.

- 3.4 In addition to complying with legal requirements the Audit Commission highlights the following as good practice:
- Good presentation and design with diagrams, clear, accessible style.
 - Clear communication avoiding jargon, with readable, meaningful narrative.
 - e-version providing easy access and use.
- 3.5 The plan for 2002/03 has made a number of improvements to address some of these points including the style adopted in the summary, improvements in the on-line version and further information to put performance results into context.
- 3.6 Audit Commission selected examples of Council plans that demonstrated this good practice and these are included in Appendix 1.

4. Changes to the Best Value Plan in light of the White Paper

- 4.1 In the White Paper DTLR confirmed that the BVPP "will remain central to our performance framework". The plan should focus on communicating information about the authority's aims, objectives and performance.
- 4.2 A significant change is that the target audiences are now seen as members, officers, partners and stakeholders rather than the general public. This is likely to impact on the approach adopted for next year's plan.
- 4.3 In addition the White Paper changed the date of publication of the full plan to the 30 June (which will apply to us in 2003). This will bring it into line with the planned date for publication of annual financial statements. The BVPP summary will continue to be published in March and will be integrated with the council tax leaflet from next year.
- 4.4 The White Paper also outlines Comprehensive Performance Assessment for upper tier authorities. These will be completed by December 2002. The BVPP will be the vehicle for the improvement plan after the assessment. As Hertfordshire is a *pilot* CPA authority we will be working closely with the Audit Commission to ensure that the performance information in the BVPP is used effectively in our self-assessment and their evaluation of our performance.

5. Future scrutiny and comparison with other authorities

- 5.1 Within the BVPP data comparing our performance with other Shire Counties is provided. Members may wish to scrutinise our performance compared to other authorities as part of next year's scrutiny of the BVPP.

- 5.2 In 2002/03 the programme for scrutiny of the BVPP will continue with the detailed scrutiny of a specific promise at each meeting and the provision of quarterly monitors to members.
- 5.3 It is suggested that a further report is provided to the committee when new guidance about plans is produced.

APPENDIX 1

Examples of good practice

Lancashire County Council - Informal, succinct, with good visuals.

Derwentside District Council - Lots of colour, graphics and photographs. Packs a lot of information into 31 pages.

London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority - Easy to read, simple, plain language. Interesting and informative.

Hastings Borough Council - Very user friendly. Easy to read and understand. Very honest regarding the councils' failures. ("This is all about"...."last year we"...."this year we will")