

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

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**REPORT OF THE IMPROVEMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE  
6 JULY 1999 & 8 SEPTEMBER 1999**

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**NOTE:** A copy of the reports mentioned below have been sent to all members of the Improvement and Review Committee and other members who have requested them. Further copies are available from Janet Purcell, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Telephone: 01992 555562).

**1. IMPROVEMENT AND REVIEW WORK PROGRAMME****1.1 The new requirement of Best Value**

The government has introduced legislation to be effective from April 2000 which will require local authorities to provide 'Best Value' and continuous improvement in the delivery of their services. To ensure Best Value local authorities will be expected:-

- To **challenge** why and how a service is provided.
- To **compare** performance (with other authorities, with other public sector bodies and with the private sector), across a range of relevant indicators, taking into account the views of both service users and potential suppliers.
- To **consult** with the local taxpayers, service users and the wider business community in the setting of performance targets.
- To **compete**, as a means of securing efficient and effective services.

The Act requires local authorities to develop a programme of reviews covering all services over a 5 year period. These fundamental performance reviews will apply the four C's listed above and will lead to the setting of targets on quality, cost and efficiency for each of the services.

Authorities will be expected, as part of the performance review process to make early in-roads into areas of significant weakness. In addition to setting performance targets, the reviews will outline potential changes to the structure and delivery of services and action plans and how targets/ changes would be achieved.

The Committee, in July, welcomed the legislation, but regretted that there has been no recognition of the additional costs being imposed on local authorities.

## **1.2 Audit and Inspection**

The Audit Commission will have an enhanced role in inspecting and auditing Best Value. In addition to their own programmes in these areas the Commission will be accountable for co-ordinating the work of the existing government inspectorates e.g. Ofsted, the Social Services Inspectorate, the new Housing Inspectorate and the Home Office Fire Service Inspectorate. The aim is to ensure that the external inspection and audit function embraces the work of these inspectorates and does not lead to duplication and lack of coherency.

District Audit will be assessing and giving guidance on the authority's overall implementation of Best Value. Their role will be to

- Check that the annual performance plan and the Best Value review action plans have been drawn up and the targets set according to statutory requirements.
- Ensure that the service targets are realistic, but at the same time stretch the authority.
- Audit the integrity of the performance data relied on.
- Where there are serious shortcomings, recommend follow up action by the Audit Commission's Best Value Inspectorate or by the Secretary of State.

## **1.3 Role of the Improvement and Review Committee**

The Improvement and Review Committee were established by the County Council on 18 May 1999 to provide member oversight and management of Best Value and specifically

- To ensure, through an on-going programme of Best Value reviews, that the Council provides effective and cost efficient services to the population of Hertfordshire.
- To make recommendations to the Council and other Committees on the necessary changes to policy, structure and practice to achieve the requirements of Best Value and to monitor their implementation.
- To review and monitor the implementation of the strategic performance indicators for the Council's services as approved by the Policy Committee.
- To oversee the Council's programme for quality standards and benchmarking.

It was agreed that the Committee would manage their programme of reviews by establishing Member Review Groups (one per review). The membership of these groups can include any member of the County Council (but should not be chaired by a member of the committee responsible for the service under review). Each review group will have a Lead Officer and will call upon other officers or external expertise as required (see Best Value Methodology at 2 below).

## **1.4 Pilot Projects**

A number of reviews of services were already underway before the requirements of Best Value had been announced by Government. Some of these reviews had member involvement whilst others have been within departments, as part of the process of managing and improving services; or as elements of the Herts Connect Project (for example the review of Transport and the review of Multi-Agency Working with Children with Disabilities and SEN).

The establishment of this Committee has provided an opportunity for member oversight of these reviews and to pilot Best Value before the Five Year Programme of Reviews starts in April 2000.

One major area of work has been the Review of Services to Children and Families, involving Social Services and Education. A Member Review Group was established by the this Committee in July to oversee this review. [ Since the September meeting of the Committee the Review Group's recommendations to develop a coherent single framework for all schools, children and family services have been approved by the Policy Committee. A new Children, Schools and Families Panel will be developing the policies, structures and working protocols for the new services, taking account of the findings of the multi-agency review of Children with Disabilities and SEN ].

The Highways Maintenance Review has also been overseen by a Review Group and they will have reported their findings to this Committee on 25 November.

In addition to these reviews the Committee have agreed three Best Value pilot reviews. These are Asset Management (including property), Education Traded Services and Post Room Services. [Member Review Groups have now been established for each of these and the reviews of Asset Management and Post Room Services are underway].

Officers have also been asked to undertake a review of the Community Support Teams (within Social Services) and expect to report the findings to the Committee in March 2000.

## **1.5 Best Value Review Programme**

The legislation requires the County Council to have a five year programme of Best Value reviews. The Committee in July received an indicative five year review programme which had been developed by officers using a range of methods, such as the Business Excellence Model, and assessment against the following criteria:-

- importance to citizens and users
- priority for members
- potential for better use of resources
- potential for performance improvement
- evidence of staff dissatisfaction.

The Committee considered the programme in detail at their meeting in September by which time officers had given further consideration to their service priorities and the

factors that would influence the timing of reviews such as proposed legislative changes, inspectorate visits and reports, and contract renewal dates. The impact of these factors was taken into account in agreeing the programme. An explanation of the reasons for the choice and priority given in the programme and the agreed programme itself are attached. The programme has now been agreed by the Policy Committee and is included in the Local Performance Plan which is the subject of public consultation.

Any public responses arising from this consultation suggesting changes to the priorities in the review programme will be considered at the meeting of the Improvement and Review Committee on 20 January 2000.

The final draft version of the Local Performance Plan will be presented to the Policy Committee on 27 January 2000 before approval at County Council on 15 February 2000.

The Improvement and Review Committee on 15 March 2000 will then finalise the five year review programme and agree the size of the member review groups for the reviews in Year 1 2000/2001 and the timetable of work for that year.

## **1.6 Keeping the Programme up to date**

Whilst the requirement is for the County Council to publish a five year programme it is likely that there will be a need to amend proposals in the later years to take account of public views, any statutory changes, inspectorate reports or in response to a change in the performance of a service. The programme will need to be reviewed and updated.

It is also anticipated that future review programmes will be more readily informed by a number of factors which will be introduced in support of best value. These will include national and local performance indicators which have yet to be announced. The future programme will also be influenced by the following

- the outcome of public and stakeholder consultation
- feedback from the result of visits by statutory inspectorates and their joint inspections with the Audit Commission
- the analysis of performance indicators
- the outcome of benchmarking information
- benefits and lessons from earlier reviews and other authorities
- new legislation in changes to statutory requirements.

## **1.7 Financial Implications**

The support required to resource individual reviews will vary depending on the scale and complexity and will need to be determined as part of the planning and preparation. Whilst many of the staff involved in reviews will be engaged in the work of their departments, for some reviews it will be necessary to second or fund the lead officer or external challenge and support roles.

A fund of £1.5 million has been set aside for capital receipts to support Herts Connect for a three year period and a proportion of this will support the reviews.

## **2. REVIEW METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Guidelines for carrying out Best Value Reviews**

The Committee, at their meeting in September, approved a set of guidelines for carrying out Best Value reviews. This meets the Audit Commission requirement that each local authority should have a standard framework for carrying out Best Value reviews to ensure a consistent approach.

Hertfordshire has developed its own “Guidelines for carrying out Best Value reviews” for members and officers. The guidelines build on the County Council’s previous experience of undertaking reviews (Whole Organisation Review, Transport Review, Major Service Reviews etc.). They also draw on good practice in other authorities, particularly those identified as Best Value pilots. The guidelines are designed to provide a framework that delivers continuous improvement, leaves room for innovation and development without being prescriptive about how reviews are carried out. The emphasis is on achieving year-on-year improvements to services rather than conforming to a detailed blueprint.

### **2.2 Principles behind the guidelines**

A copy of the guidelines is available from Janet Purcell, Tel: 01992 555562. They set out the steps involved in the review process and what methods are available.

The guidelines have been drafted by a group of senior managers with experience of reviews. They are based on the following principles that reviews must:

1. Report to Members at each stage of the review
2. Challenge what we do and how we do it, utilising appropriate external challenge from the private and public sector.
3. Consult with users, citizens, and staff on current and expected performance
4. Compare with and learn from the best performers
5. Embrace fair competition
6. Produce clear and measurable targets for improvement
7. Produce clear plans for achieving targets
8. Identify responsibility and deadlines for action
9. Report to Members on progress towards achieving targets.

The member review groups will determine the appropriate external challenge and consultation requirements for the particular review.

The guidelines also contain suggestions for good practice in carrying out the different stages of the review process. These suggestions are based on the experience of the Best Value pilot authorities and recommendations from the Audit Commission and include suggestions for resourcing reviews, producing terms of reference, project planning, documentation, collecting baseline information, and selecting methodologies.

### **2.3 Consultation and Challenge**

The Best Value regime requires evidence of challenge and consultation to be included in the review process. The challenge element can be provided from within the County Council and from external sources in the public or private sector and will be the subject of agreement with each Member Review Group.

Consultation has been widely used by Hertfordshire County Council in recent years. The Council has utilised a variety of methods of consultation such as public meetings, household leaflet drops, questionnaires and community exhibitions. More recently the Council has adopted the use of Citizens Juries and a Citizen Panel, independently selected to be representative of the wider community of Hertfordshire in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic profile. Small demographic groups have also been used to support focus groups on Herts Connect, the future of library services and highways maintenance.

The requirement for yet more extensive consultation has required the County Council to establish a strategic approach to consultation. This approach aims to co-ordinate efforts so that the County Council the County Council is able to:-

- identify the range of public consultation across the authority
- ensure that consultation overload and duplication are avoided
- maximise the potential connections

Guidance is being developed on how to conduct good and robust consultation and should be used by those conducting reviews.

Lead officers will identify, in liaison with the Member Review Groups, those actual and potential stakeholders with whom consultation is necessary and then determine the most appropriate consultation process.

The Committee have agreed that member review groups be encouraged to seek appropriate external support to assist them in their deliberations and recommendations.

### **2.4 Applying the guidelines**

The experience of the Best Value pilots will be used to revise the Guidelines in time for the start of the formal review programme in April 2000.

All reviews will be subject to evaluation in accordance with Audit Commission guidelines. The evaluation will focus on outcomes of the reviews including the extent to which service improvements or savings were identified and the plans put in place to achieve them. It will also look at the extent to which reviews have included robust external challenge, the involvement of Members, adequate consultation and benchmarking and have tested competitiveness, as well as the appropriateness of methodologies used.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The Committee have approved the "Guidelines for carrying out Best Value Reviews" for use by the review groups. These will be kept under review and amended in the light of experience with the pilot reviews and revisions reported to the Improvement and Review Committee.

**Iris Tarry  
Chairman  
County Hall  
Hertford**

**8 September 1999**

**Draft Five Year Review Programme**

Year 0 (1999/2000)	Year 1 (2000/01)	Year 2 (2001/02)	Year 3 (2002/03)	Year 4 (2003/04)	Year 5 (2004/05)
Services for Young people (A programme to be agreed following the current Children and Families review)					
Education and Social Services have indicated when it would be appropriate to review the various activities as they are currently structured					
Highways Maintenance incl TSC Mouchel Websters Highground	Waste Management	Adults in Need – Services for elderly and Physically disabled	Adults in Need – Services for people with Mental health or learning Difficulties		Highways Maintenance incl TSC Mouchel Websters Highground
LEA Services to Schools – Education Traded Services (excl curriculum and advisory services)	Coroner, Magistrates Courts	Lifelong Learning	LEA Services for schools - Standards & Curriculum incl School Mgt & Organisation - Staff & Training	Regulation, Registration Inspection & Licensing	LEA Services to Schools – Education Traded Services (excl curriculum and advisory services)
Asset Management	Transport	Community Safety	Strategic Planning & Settlement Strategies	Community Advice & Information	Asset Management
Postal Services	Contract Management & Procurement	Environment Protection & Sustainability	Standards of Fire Cover	Services to Minority & Disadvantaged Groups	Postal Services
	Information & Communications Technology	Communications	Finance Services & Systems	Legal Services	
	Fire Service Communications & Control	Employment of People/ Personnel	Management of the Authority	Administrative & Secretarial Services	
	*Outsourced Services				
	ITnet Facilities Management & PCs office support	Buildings Cleaning	ITnet Managed Financial Services (incl Pensions)	Grounds Maintenance	
		Vehicle Maintenance			

\* Reviews for catering and property services to be included later.

## **BEST VALUE REVIEW PROGRAMME**

There are a number of factors which impact on the priority of the review programme, these include ongoing changes to service delivery, proposed legislative changes, inspectorate visits and reports and contract dates. The impact of these factors is outlined below.

### ***Year 1 (2000/2001)***

#### *Services for Young People*

The scale of these services mean that any review programme will extend across a number of years. [ It is, however, appropriate to await the outcome of the work of the Children, Schools and Families Panel on the reconfiguration of Education and Social Services. [*The timetable for completion of this first stage of work is April 2000.* ]

#### *Waste Management*

There are sound operational reasons to support this being carried out in Year 1. Work is currently in hand with Districts on delivering a Joint Waste Strategy. This, if adopted, could inform the review and have the benefit of checking back through the 4 C's process but importantly the review would feed into the contract renewal programme for significant elements of the existing service e.g. Container Service, 2001, operational contract for household waste sites, 2003.

#### *Coroner & Magistrates Court*

Both Coroner and Magistrates Court are services which we are required to fund but our control is limited by law. It will provide a useful review to determine what scope for manoeuvre in achieving better value for money there is in such statutory controlled services.

#### *Transport*

This review is programmed to consider the progress of the Transport Review carried out as a pilot of the Whole Organisation Review and consider the potential to seek further benefits.

#### *Contract Management and Procurement*

In Hertfordshire there has been general agreement that a mixed economy of provision and working with partners is the right way to achieve the most effective delivery of services. It is clear too that, in achieving Best Value, the Government is also keen to support this approach. There is therefore much advice and guidance being produced to compliment the Best Value legislation concerning a strategic approach to procurement and the adoption of best practice in purchasing and contract management. The Minister for Local Government and Housing recently endorsed these matters, on a platform shared by our own Chief Executive, in which the clear message was that good procurement practice and performance is at the heart of Best Value. Hertfordshire is widely regarded as being at the forefront of development in these disciplines. Nevertheless this is a key area for the delivery of Best Value given that the vast majority of service delivery is achieved by some form of contract. It is therefore logical that a review of purchasing and contract management practices across the authority be carried out sooner rather than later.

Additionally early inclusion in the programme would support the reviews of individual contracts included in the programme.

#### *Information and Communications Technology*

The main reason for carrying out this review in Year 1 is that it allows us to conduct it in conjunction with the review of ITnet Facilities Management and PC Support. All aspects of the County Councils ICT arrangements would therefore be reviewed concurrently.

#### *Fire Service Communications and Control*

A Fire Service Circular issued on 3 September has required this review to be included in the first year of the programme.

#### *ITnet Facilities Management and PC Support*

In year immediately prior to contract renewal.

### ***Year 2 (2001/2002)***

#### *Adults in Need – Services for elderly and physically disabled*

Services for Adults in Need have recently been the subject of a series of reviews. The recommendation is that these services be split into two separate elements conducted over a two year period. Services for elderly and physically disabled is a high priority with the public.

#### *Lifelong Learning*

This is currently a relatively small area of activity not affected as are other Community Information services by the introduction of Gateway. It is therefore logical to carry out this review at an earlier date. It will also allow the impact of the Government's Lifelong Learning initiative to be considered at an early stage.

### *Community Safety*

The last year has seen a number of changes and proposed changes to the legislative responsibilities of Fire Authorities under the Fire Safety function. In addition to the emphasis of the Service's fire prevention initiatives is clearly in Community Education and Community Fire Safety. Once all the changes to the legislation have been received and the implications of them on the service considered in full, we can then move forward on how we embrace Community Safety in its entirety. This will inevitably involve partnerships and collaboration projects with among others, Police, Social Services, Environment and Education Departments.

In considering all these changes, it is felt appropriate to have Community Safety in Year two of the Five Year Plan in order to allow the changes to be assimilated into any revised form and/ or shape of service delivery. There are also a number of other disparate elements within Community Safety using the most appropriate time for fire safety as the focal point is the most economical way of bringing these elements together.

### *Environment Protection and Sustainability*

The review covers a range of activities, many of which will be affected by significant Government policy initiatives such as Access to the Countryside. Whilst it is not essential to review these activities in this year, the scale of resource input to service reviews, mean it is only practical to embark on one major service review per year. Thus it is programmed for this year to accommodate other Environment related reviews.

### *Communications and Employment of People/ Personnel*

The co-ordination of other support services reviews with those of related outsourced services, restrict the availability of timing for other support service reviews if the review programme is to be balanced. Thus, these two reviews have been phased in Year 2.

### *Vehicle Maintenance and Buildings Cleaning*

In year immediately prior to contract renewal.

## ***Year 3 (2002/ 2003)***

### *Adults in Need – Services for people with mental health or learning disabilities*

This is the second phase of the two year programme of reviews of Adults in Need.

### *LEA Services to Schools*

These reviews are programmed for Year 3 of the review programme so that there can be an evaluation of the impact of any actions implemented post-inspection from OFSTED in 1999. It can also serve as preparation for the next inspection cycle. It may well be the case, with OFSTED and other inspections that evidence and recommendations inform the ordering of the review programme in later years.

### *Strategic Planning and Settlement Strategies*

Phasing of this review in Year 3 provides the core team involved in the Structure Plan Review to complete their work, prior to commencing this Best Value Review.

### *Standards of Fire Cover*

The last major review of Standards of Fire Cover was undertaken in 1997. Although the recommendations were not adopted in full, a review five years from that date is an appropriate timescale. It is also anticipated that prior to the next review being started, the Home Office are expected to have issued guidance on a new approach to Standards of Fire Cover. This will be based on a risk assessment approach and will focus more on weight of attack to incidents rather than speed of attack as is the current practice. Should the Home Office introduce the new methodology earlier than planned it may be necessary to reschedule this review, which will be a major piece of work.

### *Finance Services and Systems*

This review is programmed to coincide with the review of the outsourced Managed Financial Services, to ensure that all aspects of the County Council's finance arrangements are reviewed concurrently.

### *Management of the Authority*

As with other aspects of the reviews of support services, this review has been fitted in between those reviews which are related to outsourced services.

### *ITnet Managed Financial Services (incl pensions)*

In year immediately prior to contract renewal.

## ***Year 4 (2003/2004)***

### *Regulation, Registration , Inspection and Licensing*

This range of activities could be reviewed at any stage in the programme but at present it is considered appropriate to place it later in the programme to allow priority to be given to other service activities.

### *Community Advice and Information*

This review is timetabled later in the programme to allow the effect of restructuring and in particular to enable the full impact of the Gateway services following their introduction. The effect on existing Community Information services of the phased introduction of the Gateway will not be fully realised until 2002/03. The contract for the call centre has a review date in 2003/ 2004.

### *Services to Minority and Disadvantaged Groups*

One of the factors to be addressed in all reviews is equity of access and equal opportunities. This review is therefore timed for later in the programme to provide the opportunity to benefit from the outcome of other reviews and allow a summary overview to be taken.

### *Legal Services and Administrative and Secretarial Services*

These support services which are not linked to outsourced contracts have been programmed into Year 4 of the draft programme to balance the programme. It will also allow the impact of the Intranet developed as part of the Gateway in the administrative processes of the County Council.

### *Grounds Maintenance*

In year immediately prior to contract renewal.

## ***Year 5***

Replicates the pilots programmed for the current year (1999/2000) but it is anticipated that other follow up reviews or new reviews may be programmed at a later date.