

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT OF THE IMPROVEMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE
20 JANUARY 2000**

NOTE: A copy of the report mentioned below has been sent to all members of the Improvement and Review Committee and other members who had requested it. [See also item 4 of Policy Committee 27 January 2000 on the Local Performance Plan and Budget and consequent papers to this Council meeting.] Further copies are available from Janet Purcell, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. Telephone: 01992 555562.

1. BEST VALUE REVIEW PROGRAMME**1.1 Background**

This Committee's report to the County Council meeting on 30 November summarised the activity of the first two meetings of this new Committee and their progress in preparing for Best Value. An essential part of the preparation has been the drafting of a five year programme of Best Value reviews to start from April 2000. A draft programme was produced by the Committee in September and has been the subject of consultation using the Citizen's and Staff Panels.

1.2 Outcome of consultation*Citizen's Panel*

The Citizen's Panel welcomed the concept of Best Value and, in responding to a question about the criteria for selecting services for review, they suggested criteria similar to those used in developing the draft programme:

Citizens' Panel

most cost
importance to citizens and users
priority for members
poor performing services

staff dissatisfaction
no equivalent

HCC Criteria

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

The Citizens' Panel appreciated the need to review across traditional service boundaries and to focus on the services to the individual or client group. They also understood the priorities as presented to them but considered that the focus should be on the major services, which account for a larger share of the Council resources, rather than on the smaller services, or services they were not familiar with. It was explained that authorities were in fact required to review all activities, large and small.

Staff Panel

The Staff Panel also agreed in principle with the criteria used for selection but considered that priority should be given to those services already planning change, i.e. Education and Social Services and that the lowest priority should be given to statutory services.

Staff were keen that Best Value was used to focus on reducing waste and duplication and felt that qualitative elements were more important than pure cost reduction. There was also concern that the performance indicators were appropriate.

Overall there was support for the programme especially having ICT in Year 1 as this was seen as being critical activity in the effectiveness of the authority.

1.3 Review Programme

The Committee have agreed that, subject to the addition of APS in Year 2 of the programme, the programme should be included in the Best Value Performance Plan. *[The programme was approved by the Policy Committee on 27 January and is included in the Local Performance Plan which is also subject of report to this meeting of the County Council.]*

The reviews for Year 1 (2000 - 2001) will be:-

Contract Management and Procurement
Transport
Coroners and Magistrates
Fire Service Communications and Control
Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
IT Facilities Management and PC office support
Waste Management

Each of the reviews will be overseen by a member review group of seven members (except for the review group for Fire Service Communications and Control which will have five members). The reviews of ICT and IT Facilities Management and PC Office Support will be overseen by one member review group.

1.4 Preparation for Best Value Reviews

The pilot reviews have indicated that significant advantage can be achieved by early preparation and the collection of data prior to the commencement of the review itself. The guidance on the management of reviews is therefore being updated to identify both the activities and timeframe in which they should be carried out.

A timetable for the reviews has been prepared but, wherever possible, the commencement dates will be brought forward with a view to ensuring there is adequate time for the review groups to meet and report to Committee in accordance with their final reporting dates.

To assist the process, initial meetings of the review groups will take place during the review preparation phases, so that the groups can consider external challenge arrangements, agree terms of reference and the scope of reviews and set meeting dates.

1.5 Monitoring of the programme

Both the Citizen's and Staff Panels recognised that it is likely that the programme will be amended in later years to take account of the benefits and lessons from earlier reviews and more refined benchmarking. As mentioned in this Committee's report to the last meeting of the County Council, the programme will be monitored and the priorities reviewed in the light of experience and in response to changes in the performance of services, public perception, new legislation and inspectorate reports.

**Iris Tarry
Chairman
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Hertford**

20 January 2000