

BEST VALUE SCRUTINY PANEL

10th May 2005 at 6 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Harris (Chair), Councillors Dolling, Johnston, Mead and Roden.

20 MINUTES (REF: 2.1)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1st March 2005 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21 UPDATE EXECUTIVE DECISIONS (REF: 8)

The Director of Scrutiny referred to Minute 17/05 relating to Best Value Performance Indicators Family Quartile Data 2003-04 and reported that the Executive at its meeting held on 9th May 2005 had decided:-

(i) That it be noted that the Best Value Scrutiny Panel would be monitoring those indicators set out on the list attached at Appendix A to the report (Ref: 8.1) during 2005/06.

(ii) That the Executive confirm that it would be addressing performance improvement in the areas set out at Appendix A to the report (Ref: 8.1) and would be applying the same criteria as the Panel in selecting which services should be monitored on an on-going basis, namely those genuinely deteriorating services and those services which fall into the lower quartile of performance as compared with other authorities in the family group.

He also referred to Minute 19/05 relating to Best Value Review of Engineering and Transport Vision and advised that the Executive at its meeting held on 29th March 2005 had decided:-

(i) That the recommendations of the Best Value Scrutiny Panel be noted.

(ii) That the Executive confirms that it regards appropriate consultation on major traffic schemes as an essential part of Engineering and Transportation work within the Council and welcomes the fact that this is being considered as part of the Best Value Process.

(iii) That the Executive disagrees with the Best Value Scrutiny Panel that there has been a lack of consultation on major traffic schemes by the Council and that there are any effects that need mitigating.

(iv) That the Executive believes that the actions being taken by the Council with regard to the two schemes dealt with at Appendix G to the Head of Engineering and Transportation report presented to the Best Value Scrutiny Panel were appropriate in the circumstances described.

(v) That the Executive awaits the final report of the Engineering and Transportation Best Value Review with interest.

The Chair expressed his disappointment at the decision of the Executive, as both he and another panel Member felt that consultation had been inadequate. However, the remaining Members of the Panel agreed with the Executive's decision and considered that the consultation undertaken on the scheme had been adequate.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

22 CORPORATE DIRECTORS MANAGEMENT TEAM UPDATE REPORT (REF: 9.1)

The Best Value Officer presented the Corporate Directors Management Team Update Report which included the latest position in respect of on-going Best Value Reviews.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

23 BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT PLAN – HOUSING REPAIRS AND CALL CENTRE – (REF: 9.2)

The District Housing Manager reported on the statistics for the repairs service within the Customer Service Call Centre.

The District Housing Manager stated the housing repair service had transferred to the Call Centre on the 14th December 2004. He reminded Members that from that date all repair calls from tenants had been taken by the Call Centre. Initially the Area Teams had dealt with repair reports made directly to the Area Teams. This temporary arrangement had now ceased and all telephoned repair calls were reported through the Call Centre. He explained that there were:-

- 473 missed calls from 14th to 31st December 2004
- 836 for January 2005.
- 816 for February 2005.

These missed calls were broken down as follows:-

- Abandoned calls where callers hang up soon after ringing as service was busy.
- Rejected calls where calls could not be answered due to lack of resources.
- Dissuaded calls where callers hang up when they heard the message that the call centre was busy and re-directed calls where callers were transferred to another service.

The Chair commented that the number of missed calls seemed very high and enquired what action was being undertaken to improve the situation.

The District Housing Manager advised that the Customer Service Centre were increasing the number of staff and the working hours to meet the customers' needs. The Chair enquired if there was a possibility of some of the calls being taken back by the Area Teams.

He advised that this was a possibility, however, it was pointed out that the Area Teams had lost some members of staff to the Customer Service Centre.

A Member commented that figures could easily be distorted and that it depended on the call types that were not being dealt with. Callers may hang up when they know they are in a queue and call back at another time when the service was less busy, which would inflate the figures.

The District Housing Manager in response to a question pointed out that tenants could call into the area housing offices or the one stop shop but that the numbers who have done so had been quite low. Most of the requests were made over the telephone. Mondays were the busiest days of the week as any problems that had been encountered over the weekend would be reported on the Monday morning, this would be the same for many other services. He also pointed out that only half of the calls in December had been reported which meant that performance had improved. If the 473 missed calls were aggregated across the whole of December, then over 900 calls would have been missed in that month. He advised that prior to the Customer Service Centre taking over the phone calls the Housing offices did not monitor the calls in the same way.

The Head of Policy and Performance confirmed that the Area Housing Teams would not have been able to know whether there had been any missed calls.

The Director of Scrutiny commented that this should be influenced by best practice elsewhere, calls fluctuate, and the Customer Service Centre should match staff resources to the volume of work. He enquired whether the Customer Service Centre was performing to a designed specification, and suggested that perhaps the Panel should be asking for a report on the overall performance of the performance of the Customer Service Centre.

The Chair commented that the service was marginally better since the introduction of the Customer Service Centre but not good enough as targets did not seem to have materialised. It was felt that a general report on the Call Centre and Customer Service Centre performance would be a good idea.

Resolved: That the Acting Director of Corporate and Customer Services be requested to submit a report in respect of the Call Centre and Customer Services Centre in terms of value for money and performance in relation to targets to a future meeting of the Best Value Scrutiny Panel.

24 BEST VALUE IMPROVEMENT PLAN – RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS

The District Housing Manager stated a review of rechargeable repairs was needed to provide a clear policy that could be implemented and that consultation would need to take place with Tenant groups. The policy review on recharging tenants was due to start in August and following consultation with tenant groups a report would be available in November.

The Director of Scrutiny suggested that the report for rechargeable repairs be presented to the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee on completion.

Resolved: That the report for rechargeable repairs be presented to the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committee on completion.

25 BENEFITS ASSESSMENT AND COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION – PROGRESS REPORT AND UPDATE (REF 9.4)

The Head of Revenues stated that the final council tax collection rate for 2004/05 was 92.9% and that current benefits work coming into the section was being turned around in 5/6 days. However that was not reflected in the BVPI in 2004/05 because of the backlog of work in the first nine months for the year.

The Director of Scrutiny asked if the assessment of benefit applications was now up to date.

The Head of Revenues advised that some of the claims that were old were incomplete and would need to stay in the pending tray awaiting further information, once the claims were complete the problem should be rectified.

The Director of Scrutiny asked if the benefits would be up to date in 2 or 3 months time and if so what the impact would be on council tax recovery.

The Head of Revenues stated that there should be an improvement in the council tax collection rate next year.

A Member stated that Officers should be congratulated on the substantial improvement on the benefits backlog situation. He enquired about the council tax collection figure for the 4th quarter.

The Head of Revenues pointed out that he could not give figures for the 4th quarter as the figures were incremental throughout the year and that he would pass on Members' congratulations to all the staff who worked in council tax collection.

The Chair asked if the change of working practices and devolution of customer contact to the Customer Service Centre and Call Centre was still an issue which needed to be addressed.

The Head of Revenues replied that this was not an issue as some of the calls were now being dealt with by council tax staff who had the skills and techniques needed to deal with people in default.

The Chair commented that it seemed we had transferred the resources and skills, and now certain calls had been transferred back to Council Tax.

A Member asked if the on-going problems the department had experienced with Pitney Bowes had now been resolved and how far performance was improving following the problems with the bailiffs.

The Head of Revenues stated that he had met with Pitney Bowes and explained the needs of the service and that the situation was being monitored. There was now a high level of bailiff activity with both internal and external staff and the overall council tax arrears had reduced by 21.4% in the previous financial year which was an improvement in performance in this area.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That the Head of Revenues be instructed to continue to monitor performance and report back to the Best Value Scrutiny Panel on a quarterly basis.

26 JOINT ADAPTATIONS TEAM UPDATE (REF: 9.5)

The Environmental Health Manager (Renovations and Disabilities) reported that funding had now been secured to enable the Joint Adaptations Team and the Occupational Therapists to co-locate.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

27 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF YOUTH SERVICE – PROJECT PLAN AND SCOPE (REF: 9.6)

The Principal Youth Service Manager reported that a decision had been made at the Best Value Scrutiny Panel to commence a review of the Youth Service in April 2005.

He reported that the review would cover the following services provided and administered by the Youth Service:-

- Key youth centres
- Part time youth centres
- Detached youth work, youth projects and youth programmes.

Together with the support provided by the Youth Service to:-

- Schools and the wider Luton Borough Council Children and Learning Service.

- Voluntary Youth Sector
- Other Key Youth Services.

It was pointed out that the key issues for the review included:-

- Costs of the service.
- Quality of the existing facilities
- Alternative methods of provision
- Review of the deployment of resources throughout the service.
- Communication and involvement
- LBC Youth Service and other services for young people.

The Chair asked if the Youth Reference Group would include a critical friend.

The Principal Youth Service Manager stated that a critical friend had been engaged who had previously run the Youth Service for Manchester, and there were other critical friends involved as well.

The Chair asked if all issues raised in the pre Ofsted Report Health Check were included as part of the scope for the Review, and was advised that they had been included.

The Chair pointed out that the coverage of the service was not uniform.

Members were advised that the deployment of services would depend on the vision for the services. That the National Youth Service Standard for Unitary Authorities required that 85% of young people should live within 30 minutes walk of a youth centre.

A Member enquired whether an Outreach worker should be employed as an alternative method of provision for those young people who would not wish to visit a youth centre.

It was pointed out that the service had a Detached Work Team and that a Detached Work Forum had been set up to broaden the scope across the Borough. A service level agreement was also being set up with Connexions.

A Member asked about encouraging young people to continue in further education to enhance their employment prospects.

It was agreed that the service needed to address accredited learning in courses such as CLAIT.

Councillor Dolling enquired about the setting up of private sector partnerships.

A Member pointed out that young people needed to be involved in meetings so that they were able to direct issues that were important to them, and

Members reminded Officers of the Youth Parliament. Members appreciated that young people often did not like attending meetings, but if meetings were structured in such a way as to involve young people in the decision making and use of the services then usually those types of meetings were quite successful.

The Chair suggested setting up groups at schools as part of the schools activities.

Resolved: That the Scope of the Best Value Review of the Youth Service and Project Plan be noted.

28 ENGINEERING AND TRANSPORTATION BEST VALUE REVIEW – OPTIONS ANALYSIS (REF: 9.7)

The Head of Engineering and Transportation reported on the progress of the Engineering and Transportation Best Value Review and draft Options Analysis report for approval.

The Head of Engineering and Transportation reported on the options set out in the report and explained that the preferred option had been set out in bold.

The Chair pointed out that more time was needed to consider the content of the report before options were decided and decisions made.

The Head of Policy and Performance added that the Head of Engineering and Transportation had produced a very detailed report that required wider discussion before being passed to Executive and suggested that a meeting to discuss the options in more detail be arranged.

The Chair agreed and welcomed the opportunity to have a wider discussion about this topic.

Due to the significant issues which required consideration it was suggested that a special meeting of the Environment and Non-Executive Functions Scrutiny Committee be arranged and that Members of the Best Value Scrutiny Panel be invited to attend and participate in the discussion along with the Executive Member(s) with Portfolio responsibility for Engineering and Transportation.

Resolved: (i) That the Director of Scrutiny advise CDMT that the original recommendations should stand and not be changed until the due process has been completed.

(ii) That a meeting of the Environment and Non-Executive Functions Scrutiny Committee be arranged to discuss the report in more detail, and that Members of the Best Value Scrutiny Panel, and the Executive Member(s) with Portfolio responsibility for Engineering and Transportation be invited to attend the meeting and participate in the discussion.

(iii) That Members of the Best Value Scrutiny Panel be requested to advise the Head of Engineering and Transportation of any queries or questions to be raised at the meeting as soon possible.

29 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING (REF: 9.8)

The Head of Policy and Performance presented a report which was a follow up from the previous Best Value Scrutiny Panel meeting where the Committee had asked her to identify services where poor or deteriorating results had been identified. Regarding the performance indicators that related to crime the Head of Policy and Performance enquired whether the Police should be requested to report. She also enquired whether individual departments should be examining the performance indicators that had poor or deteriorating results and whether these should be discussed at the individual committees.

The Chair agreed with the Head of Policy and Performance and agreed that the Police should be invited to report to a future Best Value Scrutiny Panel meeting. He suggested that it would be worth the Panel looking at the overall situation in the same way as the Best Value Review, and then as a result to make recommendations to the appropriate scrutiny committee.

Resolved: (i) That the Director of Scrutiny in consultation with the Head of Policy and Performance be requested to include reports on those services with poor or deteriorating indicator results into Work Programmes within the Best Value Scrutiny Panel Work Programme.

(ii) That the Head of Policy and Performance be instructed to invite a representative of Bedfordshire Police to attend an appropriate meeting of the Best Value Scrutiny Panel to report on the deteriorating Performance Indicators.

30 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2005/06 (REF: 9.9)

The Head of Policy and Performance reported on the details of the forthcoming Best Value Performance Plan for 2005/06 which local authorities were required by statute to publish by 30th June each year.

She sought the views of the Panel as to how they would wish to be consulted on the final contents of the Best Value Performance Plan for 2005/06.

It was agreed that a copy of the Best Value Performance Plan should be sent to all Members of the Panel who would then submit their comments to the Head of Policy and Performance.

Resolved: That the Head of Policy and Performance be requested to circulate a copy of the Best Value Performance Plan 2005/06 to all Members of the Best Value Scrutiny Panel for their comments.

31 BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CHILDRENS SERVICES 0-10 (REF: 9.10)

The Head of Children and Family Services presented the Best Value Improvement Plan for the Review of Children's Services 0-10.

The Chair stated that this report could now be taken to the next stage and reported to Lifelong Learning and the Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committees before being recommended to the Executive.

Resolved: That the Improvement Plan for the Best Value Review of Children's Services 0-10 be noted and commended to Lifelong Learning and Social Inclusion Scrutiny Committees for approval.

32 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (REF: 9.11)

The Director of Scrutiny distributed copies of the Work Programme for the next municipal year. He advised Members that the Best Value Performance Indicators would be entered into the Work Programme but agreed with the Head of Policy and Performance that flexibility was needed to arrange the additional items.

The Head of Policy and Performance stated that she appreciated the Best Value Scrutiny Panel Committee's flexibility in arranging the meeting with the Police.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

(Note: The meeting ended at 8.45 pm)