

**NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE
BEST VALUE WORKING GROUP**
held at the Council House, Walsall, on
Tuesday 12th January 2005,
at **2.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor Anson
Councillor Griffiths
Councillor Underhill

Officers:

David Stockton – performance improvement manager
Mark Inglis – scrutiny manager
Stuart Bentley - scrutiny support officer

APOLOGIES AND INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor Turner was unable to attend due to illness. Stuart Bentley was introduced to the panel as a new scrutiny support officer and David Stockton was introduced as a representative of the performance management team.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

No interests were declared.

NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 17TH AUGUST 2004

These were accepted as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

CROSS CUTTING BEST VALUE REVIEWS

Mark Inglis spoke to the circulated document, stating its nature as a feasibility study comparing the approach of Walsall MBC to cross cutting reviews with other councils. Mark Inglis stated that he had included background material on best value (from 1999). He noted that 'Key Issues' do tend to cut across service areas, but although Central Government give very little guidance in this area, the basic best value methodology remains the same, in terms of the 4C's (compare, challenge, compete and consult). With this in mind, an exercise that compared the approach of Walsall MBC with other councils would be unlikely to provide any definitive evidence for improving cross cutting reviews

and it was recommended that this option not be pursued. It was further noted that Walsall MBC had already successfully completed a number of cross-cutting reviews for example Crime and Disorder.

Currently, Best Value reviews are changing. Under CPA level 'good' there are no requirements to undertake specific Best Value reviews as tailored performance reviews, which are less prescriptive, will be able to fulfil the review need. However, the Best Value methodology may still be useful.

The current Best Value review programme has 7 reviews (down from 9). With Best Value reviews no longer assessed independently, the difficult and time consuming task of cross cutting reviews lies with council officers. However, the question was raised as to whether these were 'critical'. If they are not 'critical' then this raises the question as to how they appeared on the list. Some clarification of the assessment criteria may be required.

Councillor Anson and Councillor Griffiths both asked if the Working Group was necessary. Mark Inglis stated that the group was 2 years old and had done good work and it was for members to determine the future work of the group. Dave Stockton suggested that it was critical to revisit previous reviews comparing cross-cutting and single reviews to assess their effectiveness. Councillor Underhill noted that most of the reviews listed on the current plan were linked to Citizens First and asked what effect this would have on the groups' ability to scrutinise them. Mark Inglis replied that there was insufficient detail about partner performance measures for an appropriate response to be made. Dave Stockton stated that the partners would probably seek performance level indicators at the outset of the contract and then liaise / negotiate with the performance management team. Councillor Underhill and Councillor Anson both repeated their concern over the lack of council performance management involvement in Citizen first. Mark Inglis noted these concerns but stated that it was very difficult to undertake Best Value reviews on outsourced services. Councillor Underhill stated that these services should be subject to Best Value reviews in order to make sure they were delivering the appropriate service to the public. There would be a formal monitoring procedure and it was likely that some sort of penalty clause could be invoked by underachievement. Dave Stockton further stated that the Performance Management Network would be involved.

Recommendation

1. the working group does not seek detailed comparison with other councils regarding cross cutting reviews for the reasons outlined in the report.

It is recommended that the executive

1. reassesses the current best value review programme and confirm those of the areas that remain critical to the improvement plan of the council.

2. revise the corporate criteria for deciding on best value reviews before the publication of the next best value performance plan
3. evaluate the crime & disorder best value cross cutting review to extract any learning for Walsall MBC.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Dave Stockton presented an overview of the new information system currently being negotiated. He outlined the benefits in both data collection and the ease and effectiveness of use of the data collected. He showed the possible impact of the system on project management and CPA, where it could be used to pinpoint areas of weakness much earlier in the municipal year so as to be able to implement corrective actions in a much timelier manner. It was noted that this system would be key to achieving 'Excellence' within Council services.

Councillor Anson enquired as to the cost of implementation. Dave Stockton stated that the current quotes ranged from £50,000 to £125,000 upfront costs with something in the order of 20% per annum thereafter for maintenance and software updates. Councillor Anson and Councillor Griffiths agreed it was probably worth the investment.

Recommendation

It was recommended that an abbreviated version of this presentation be made to the whole Resources Scrutiny and Performance Panel

NEXT STEPS FOR WORKING GROUP

It was agreed that it was worthwhile continuing the working group on a quarterly basis with additional meetings if required. It was further agreed that the workgroup look at the Corporate Criteria for Best Value reviews and also scrutinise Quarter 3 and quarter 4 performance data in light of the presentation given by Dave Stockton.

Recommendation

It was recommended that the group next meet in April/May.

Chairman:

Date: