

Cabinet – 23 March 2005

Resources Scrutiny and Performance Panel report on Best Value

Portfolio: Councillor John O'Hare – Deputy Leader

Service Area: All

Wards: All

Forward Plan: No

Summary:

This is a report of the Resources Scrutiny and Performance Panel that considered the recommendation of its Best Value Working Group on 3 February 2005. This report summarises the recent meeting and makes a number of recommendations.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

1. Reassesses the current best value review programme and confirms those of the areas that remain critical to the improvement plan of the council.
2. Revises the corporate criteria for deciding on best value reviews before the publication of the next best value performance plan
3. Evaluates the crime and disorder best value cross cutting review to extract any learning for Walsall MBC.

Resources and legal consideration:

Successful performance reviews require significant input of officer and member time to be successful. The corporate performance management service provides support to all reviews.

Citizen impact:

Performance Reviews are designed to improve services in Walsall and to ensure we provide the best possible performance and customer service.

Community safety:

None directly associated with this report.

Environmental impact:

None directly associated with this report.

Performance and risk management issues:

Service improvements made through Performance Review support improvements in performance in performance indicators, thereby contributing to continuous improvement in the Beacon Index.

Equality implications:

None directly associated with this report.

Consultation:

This report was prepared following a meeting of the Resources Scrutiny and Performance Panel on 3 February 2005.

Vision 2008:

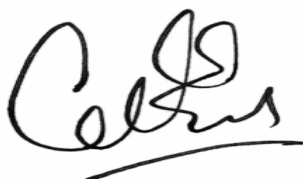
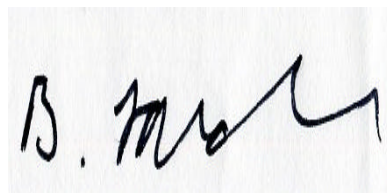
Effective performance reviews contributes to all of the Vision 2008 pledges.

Background papers:

Local Government Act 1999 Part 1
ODPM Circular 03/2003
Performance Plan 2004/5
Report to EMT 2 September 2004
Report to Best Value Working Group 12 January

Contact Officer

Mark Inglis Scrutiny Manager ext 2087
inglism@walsall.gov.uk

Signed:**Executive Director: Carole Evans****Date: 28.02.05****Signed:****Scrutiny Chair Cllr B Sanders****Date: 14.03.05**

1. Best Value Working Group

1.1 The Best Value Working Group considers issues relating to Best Value and reports back to the Resources Scrutiny & Performance Panel. Its remit is to:

- Consider and advise the panel on the following matters so that any appropriate recommendations to Cabinet can be made.
- Review the overall framework within which best value reviews are undertaken, completed and taken forward.
- Review the annual programme of planned best value reviews, how they are selected and prioritised within the plan.
- Consider the summary of outcomes of best value reviews, recommendations, conclusions and whether these are subsequently implemented.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the best value review process and whether it makes a difference.
- Identify improvements in the whole approach to best value reviews
- Identify any learning points from specific best value reviews which may or could be used to improve the process so that the Council's services improve continuously.
- Question officers and other stakeholders on the rational and allied aspects of the report and the underlying process and that this activity be undertaken with a view to ensuring the Council's approach to best value reviews is efficient and robust in making any recommendations for changes as required.

This report summarises the views of that working group.

1.2 The working group last met on 12 January to consider commencing a feasibility study comparing the approach of Walsall MBC with cross cutting reviews undertaken by other councils. It was noted that the requirement to review all services over a five year period had been revoked, enabling authorities to focus reviews on priorities arising from their CPAs and other requirements.

1.3 Key issues tend to cut across services. 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.

1.4 It was further noted that Walsall MBC had already successfully completed a number of cross-cutting reviews for example: Crime and Disorder.

1.5 At present there is a consultation for a revised CPA process that may impact on the role of Best Value Reviews. Further details of this will be reported when they become available in the normal way

- 1.6. The current Best Value review programme has 7 reviews. With Best Value reviews no longer assessed independently, the difficult and time consuming task of cross cutting reviews lies with council officers.
- 1.7 The most recent guidance is that a Best Value Review should only be included in the programme if it is critical to improvement planning. So the reason for using resources to carry out a review must be justified in terms of the outcomes that are likely to be achieved. Typically councils now choose three or four annual reviews rather than the previous twenty or more. Reviews are likely to be important where:
- There is a need to improve performance on a shared or local priority; or
 - Authorities are unclear whether a service is still needed or whether its contribution is effective; or
 - There is prima facie case for a new service or new configuration of an existing service; or
 - There is evidence that the costs of a service are significantly out of line with comparable services elsewhere; or
 - There is a clear opportunity to work with other local authorities to deliver common services, through for example, new technology
- 1.8 The ODPM feel that nationally too much focus has been on ensuring compliance with the process of carrying out reviews at the expense of outcomes and improvements. The scale and focus of reviews should reflect the importance of the service, the issues facing it and the associated risks and opportunities for improvement. Therefore councils should concentrate resources where there are the biggest challenges and opportunities for service improvement.
- 1.9 Weak, poor or fair authorities have to have a programme that satisfies the Audit Commission and other inspectorates that key areas of weakness are being addressed.
- 1.10 Best Value reviews are no longer inspected. As such and there is no agreed inspection regime for any best value review. They will be assessed in terms of their outcomes and impacts on citizens and in terms of delivering the councils CPA improvement priorities. It is the issues and outcomes that are important in the new inspection regime, not the review process itself.

WALSALL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

From: LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE –
17 FEBRUARY 2005

To: CABINET

Taxi/Private Hire Liaison Group

A copy of the notes of the meeting held on 27th January, 2005 was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4) With regard to the proposed Walsall Civic Quarter:-
 - (a) that it be recommended to Cabinet that Upper Bridge Street be used as a feeder taxi rank and that Cabinet be requested to cost out a traffic light system for informing taxis using the feeder taxi rank that spaces were available in Lower Bridge Street; and
 - (b) that Cabinet be requested to look at the provision of a taxi rank in the Town Wharf area to help develop this part of the Town Centre.

WALSALL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

From: TAXI/PRIVATE HIRE **To:** CABINET
LIAISON GROUP –
27 JANUARY 2005

Walsall Taxi Federation

(a) Ranks

A plan of the proposed Walsall Civic Quarter as part of the Walsall Quality Streets Initiative was circulated:-

(see annexed)

Mr. Alan Goodman, of Urban Regeneration, was in attendance for this item.

Mr. Goodman said that the proposals for the Civic Quarter were agreed by Cabinet on 19th January, 2005. A Traffic Order for moving the taxi rank in part from Leicester Street to the west side of Lower Bridge Street would now be advertised. The loading bay near the HSBC bank in Lower Bridge Street would remain but would be smaller.

Mr. Goodman said that consultants had been appointed to help draw up the draft Traffic Orders. The Traffic Orders would be published as soon as possible and would be followed by a consultation period. If no statutory objections or significant objections from consultees were received, work on the scheme would begin in early June, 2005.

Councillor Rochelle queried the loss of car parking at the side of the Town Hall in Leicester Street.

Mr. Goodman said that alternative car parking had been identified in the basement of the Civic Centre. Planning and enforcement files that were presently stored there would be relocated to create extra space for car parking. He said that it was necessary to move car parking from the west entrance of the Town Hall in Leicester Street to create the planned Leicester Square and to make a proper entrance for the Town Hall, thus increasing its use for functions.

Mr. Goodman said that the disabled car parking spaces in Darwall Street would be lost but an alternative 40 spaces would be created in the vicinity. There would be a barrier in St. Paul's Street to access delivery to buildings in Darwall Street but this would be closed after 10.00 a.m. to prevent other access.

Councillor Rochelle queried how the overflow taxi rank in Lichfield Street would operate.

Mr. Goodman said that the overflow taxi rank shown on the map opposite the Town Hall in Lichfield Street would only operate after 11.30 p.m. as it would otherwise conflict

with the buses using the stops there. He said that it should not have appeared on the plan as "taxi rank overflow".

Mr. Ali said that when Members had discussed and agreed Option 4 as a solution at the last meeting, they had been told that there would be space for 8 - 9 taxis in Lower Bridge Street and a feeder rank opposite the Town Hall on Lichfield Street. This rank would be used as the main rank after 11.30 p.m.

Mr. Goodman said that it would not be possible to have a taxi rank in this section of Lichfield Street during the daytime because of the buses and pelican crossing there. The only space for a feeder taxi rank would be further along Lichfield Street. He stressed that there was no ideal solution. The taxi drivers would be losing the spaces in Leicester Street but Lower Bridge Street was a better site for them and this was the trade off.

Councillor Rochelle said that he recognised that Lichfield Street would be the main taxi rank after 11.30 p.m. However, during the daytime, he questioned how taxi drivers using any overflow taxi rank would know when there was spaces available in the Lower Bridge Street taxi rank.

Mr. Goodman suggested the possibility of a telephone link between Lower Bridge Street and Lichfield Street.

Mr. Corlett said there could be a problem with a feeder rank in Lichfield Street as taxis coming down from Upper Bridge Street would be able to jump the rank. They would not know that there were taxis already waiting in Lichfield Street and this could lead to disputes.

Mr. Ali said that, at present, taxi drivers had ten spaces in Leicester Street but would have only nine in Lower Bridge Street. He said that they could not afford to lose one space. With de-regulation in April, 2005, there would also be an increase in taxi numbers. He said that when Option 4 had been discussed previously, they had been told that they would have an overflow taxi rank in Lichfield Street where the bus stops were presently located.

Councillor Rose supported this view and said that the Group had agreed to Option 4 on the basis that there would be a feeder taxi rank there.

As a point of information, Councillor Rochelle said that although Cabinet had approved the proposals for the new Leicester Square, he had been advised that the Cabinet Portfolio Holders wished to have the views of the Group about proposals for the relocation of the taxi ranks in Walsall Town Centre.

Mr. Corlett pointed out that Cabinet had only approved moving the taxi rank from Leicester Street to Lower Bridge Street. There had been no mention of taxi feeder ranks in the Cabinet's resolution. He queried whether any consideration had been given to creating a taxi rank at the top of Park Street, near the New Art Gallery, to serve that part of the Town Centre. There were new shops there and future developments were planned at Town Wharf.

Mr. Ody questioned whether it would be possible to use the taxi rank outside the Kentucky Fried Chicken Take-Away in Upper Bridge Street as a feeder rank during the daytime.

Councillor Robinson suggested that a traffic light system could be installed there to indicate when there were spaces available at the taxi rank in Lower Bridge Street. There was support for this suggestion from several Members.

In answer to points raised about the effect of de-regulation, Mr. Corlett said that 35 applicants had applied for licences from 1st April, 2005. They were all new vehicles. It had taken over two years to put the previous number granted into service. On past experience, therefore, he considered that new vehicles would come into service over a two to three year period. He also said that it must be borne in mind that the Act stated that Local Authorities may create taxi ranks but this was not compulsory as hackney cabs were allowed to ply for hire by touring the streets.

Mr. Ali said that unlike Birmingham, this was not easy in a town like Walsall with only three to four main streets. Taxi ranks could help congestion and he did not think it an unreasonable request to ask the Council to provide a taxi rank.

In summing up the discussions, the Chairman said that there was only a problem with an overflow taxi rank during daytime. He supported the proposal to use Upper Bridge Street as a feeder rank with the installation of a traffic light system. He said that it would be expensive but that it would overcome the problem.

It was **agreed** to recommend to Licensing and Safety Committee:-

- (1) That it be recommended to Cabinet that Upper Bridge Street be used as a feeder taxi rank and that Cabinet be requested to cost out a traffic light system for informing taxis using the feeder taxi rank that spaces were available in Lower Bridge Street;
- (2) That Cabinet be requested to look at the provision of a taxi rank in the Town Wharf area to help develop this part of the Town Centre.