

SCRUTINY CONSULTATION

29/05 - **BENEFITS AND LOCAL TAXATION BEST VALUE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN – IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REVIEW:** The Chair introduced the Head of Revenues and Benefits, Mr Keith Simpson, who had attended the meeting to provide the Commission with a presentation in relation to the Benefits and Local Taxation Best Value Service Improvement Plan. Members were referred to a copy of the report circulated with the agenda in relation to the implementation progress review, which was to be read in conjunction with the presentation.

Mr Simpson referred to the purpose of the presentation, introduced the Benefits/Revenues/Support Systems and Systems Development Managers forming the Revenues and Benefits Senior Management Team, who had all contributed to the Service Improvement Plan and the improvement of the Revenues and Benefits Service. Mr Simpson then provided Members with some background to the Service Improvement Plan and highlighted certain aspects of the plan, including the 17 project themes running over a four year period up to 2007. The Plan was considered to be dynamic in terms of the review and updating mechanism which had been designed to meet changing needs and circumstances. Mr Simpson advised that the Plan had led to seventy nine sub-projects of varying size. The Commission was then referred to the key achievements during the period 2003 to 2005, both customer and non-customer facing, and then highlighted plans for 2005 to 2007 again, in customer and non-customer facing objectives. In conclusion, Mr Simpson advised that as a direct result of the Service Improvement Plan, there was now a stronger emphasis on customer service within the Revenues and Benefits section than ever before and coupled with this section's track record in delivering change, it was believed all the signs looked good for the future.

Councillor Simms, a Member representative of the Benefits and Local Taxation Best Value Review Steering Group led the Commission in thanking Mr Simpson for the presentation and his work and efforts in implementing the plan and leading the section to deliver the progress made to date.

The Chair then invited Members' questions on the presentation and improvement plan. It was noted that the Head of Revenues and Benefits was optimistic that the plan would be delivered on time, and that one of the main projects facing the authority at this time, the Customer Relations Management (CRM) System, would serve as a catalyst for further change within the Revenues and Benefits Section. Members also queried the increased use of technology by customers interacting with the authority to, for example, progress queries and pay bills. It was noted that in the future staff would be examining ways of assisting customers further still in contacting the Council using technologies such as the Council's website facilities and/or video telephones. Potentially these facilities would be far cheaper for the authority to employ when compared to the cost of establishing permanent staff resources in rural locations.

In conclusion, the outgoing Head of Revenues and Benefits, Mr Keith Simpson, referred to his impending retirement and having taken the opportunity to thank members and officers for their support over recent years introduced the new Head of Revenues and Benefits, Mr Steve Hoyes.

It was agreed that a further progress report would be submitted to the Commission in twelve months' time.

(5.32 pm – 6.20 pm)