

REPORT TO: Organisation Improvement and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Commission

DATE: 16 April 2007

DEPARTMENT: Resources

REPORTING OFFICER: Head of Revenues & Benefits (*Steve Hoyes*)

SUBJECT:
**BEST VALUE REVIEW OF BENEFITS AND
LOCAL TAXATION**

WARDS AFFECTED: None specifically

FORWARD PLAN REF: Not applicable

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report is to bring the commission up to date on progress on how one of the service-specific Best Value reviews initiated by the Council in 2001 can best be progressed in terms of development of individual activities and future monitoring and reporting.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the report be received and the progress made on individual elements of activities be noted.

2.2 That in the future, progress on the issues which comprise this review continue to be monitored and developed through the relevant portfolio holder and co-ordinated through the regular monitoring and review of the corporate plan.

3.0 RECOMMENDED REASONS FOR DECISION

3.1 To ensure there is a clear and explicit method of assessing progress and handling reviews of the various activities covered by this review.

3.2 To bring the position into line with the revised Council approach in co-

ordinating services.

4.0

ALTERNATIVE OPTION CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED FOR REJECTION

- 4.1 To continue with the same management and monitoring approach. This is rejected because it would duplicate existing channels of control (leading to inefficiency) and would measure progress against a five-year-old baseline rather than the current needs of the service and of our customers.

5.0 BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Council embarked on a Best Value Review of Benefits and Local Taxation in 2001, as part of its formal agreed programme in responding to statutory obligations to review service performance. It was conducted by a number of officers across departments who reported to a steering group of Members and stakeholder organisations. The review was the subject of detailed external inspection, and culminated in a comprehensive service improvement plan agreed by Cabinet in September 2003 which laid down the perceived development path for the forthcoming period of years. Two members of Scrutiny were included in the work of the original steering group, and a detailed half-term progress report was submitted to the Resources Scrutiny Commission in September 2005.
- 5.2 Since then of course, the Government has changed its approach to the way it assesses service performance through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) framework, and these earlier Best Value reviews are no longer appropriate. Instead, delivery of Best Value is part of the duty on all councils to seek to continually improve services in a joined-up way in line with local priorities in the council's Strategic and Corporate Improvement Plans (2005/08), with external audit and assessment provided by the Audit Commission through the CPA process.

6.0 PROGRESS ON THE REVIEW

- 6.1 Appendix 1 highlights the main features of progress on the review. It is clear that a great deal of the original plan has been achieved and the service is greatly improved as a result.
- 6.2 Increasingly it has become evident that some of the specific actions defined in the 2003 service improvement plan were aspirational rather than realistic in the face of limited resources. In addition, over this period, various changes in priority have taken place (eg Government policy changes centrally, or major new IT systems developments locally) which have made the plan increasingly obsolete in part.
- 6.3 Those items which are still ongoing have been included as part of service and departmental/corporate plans, along with the ambition of managers for other significant service improvements in ways not foreseen in the 2003 plan.

7.0 RECONFIGURING MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING

- 7.1 The methodology for managing and monitoring described in 5.0 above was expensive in officer and stakeholder time. Whilst there were clear initial and ongoing benefits realisable from this co-ordinated and customer-focussed approach, the evolution of best value into a more strategic high-level assessment of the Council's performance and corporateness does offer a clear opportunity to transfer this process into more efficient management structures.
- 7.2 As mentioned in 6.3, the ongoing service improvement actions have already been subsumed in the established processes for service and departmental/corporate plans. Defining objectives and progress against the service plan and against key Best Value Performance Indicators are the subject of regular report and review by the Cabinet Member Resources. A joined-up approach is achieved by the corporate plan and the monitoring of key priority actions. It is therefore proposed to discontinue the previous additional process of separate service improvement plan reviews.

Background Papers – None.

OFFICER CONTACT: Please contact Steve Hoyes if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted at Scottsdale House, by telephone on 01423 556414, or by eMail steve.hoyes@harrogate.gov.uk

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT / POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

		Implications are		
		Positive	Neutral	Negative
A	Economy		✓	
B	Environment		✓	
C	Social Equity			
i)	General		✓	
ii)	Customer Care / People with Disabilities		✓	
iii)	Health		✓	
D	Crime and Disorder		✓	

If all comments lie within the shaded areas, the proposal is sustainable.