
REPORT TO:	Environment Services Committee	AGENDA ITEM: 10
DATE OF MEETING:	27 th May 2003	CATEGORY: DELEGATED/
REPORT FROM:	Deputy Chief Executive)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	John Birkett (5742)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Development Control Best Value Implementation Plan	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE: G

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Members note the findings of the Best Value Inspectors
- 1.2 That the inspector's recommendations and any unfinished business from the Best Value Implementation Plan be rolled up into a forthcoming revision of the Planning Service Plan.
- 1.3 That the suggestions put forward in paragraphs 3.5 – 3.7 be accepted and pursued.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To consider the findings of the Best Value Inspectors after their follow up visit to the Council.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Best Value Inspectors inspected the Development Control service in October 2001 and judged the Service to be a fair, one star service with no prospects of improvement. They made a number of recommendations, which fell into two broad categories, addressing shortcomings at a corporate level and, secondly, within the Development Control service delivery itself.
- 3.2 The Council reflected these recommendations in a revised Implementation plan following on from the inspection. Inspectors have returned to check on progress in meeting their recommendations and in delivering the implementation plan. Their findings, conclusions and recommendations on this follow up visit are contained in Appendix A.
- 3.3 In summary the inspectors commend the Council on the progress it has made but remain concerned about certain areas both at a corporate and service delivery level. This has resulted in further recommendations as follows:
 - ◆ Establishing procedures for public speaking at Development Control Committee meetings, drawing upon the experiences of other Councils and of customers. If

necessary this could be a pilot for wider work on speaking at other council committees, by June 2003.

- ◆ Establishing ways of regularly capturing and evaluating customer comments about the service and building this into 'day to day' service delivery, by June 2003.
- ◆ Working with customers to identify potential improvements to the service and ways of implementing these.
- ◆ Making the Development Control Charter more accessible to the public through using the content in a more tailored way. Promoting the Charter and monitoring the effect that this may have on the service. Reporting performance against charter targets to the public by April 2003.
- Ensuring that the Council can demonstrate the delivery of value for money to local people through the procurement strategy. Particular attention should be paid to completing the work the council is undertaking on procurement by September 2003

- 3.4 Bearing in mind some disagreement with the findings of the first inspection, officers' initial re-action to the follow up letter was that it was unduly harsh in the light of the good performance reported and progress in meeting their initial recommendations. The Inspectorate has confirmed, however, that their overall intention was to be complimentary.
- 3.5 Officers are in daily touch with our customers on a free and easy basis and we receive fairly frequent commendations for the quality of our care for customers as well as the reasonableness of the Council's overall approach. Accordingly, officers continue to take the view that the inspector's concern about our ignorance of what customers want is misplaced. Nevertheless, the opportunity arises for further gauging of what customers think in the form of the questionnaire laid down in the Government's Best Value Performance Indicator that we are required to complete this year. Further examination of how to deliver a better orientation to customer demands may also be necessary to demonstrate Best Value but for the moment we are concentrating on answering the PI. To this effect officers will be attending a seminar hosted by CIPFA on 8/5/3 to learn the best way to proceed.
- 3.6 We reported to the inspectors that the issue of Members of the Public speaking to the Development Control Committee is being addressed as part of the modernising agenda. This will help to ensure that the equity and resource implications are fully addressed at the corporate level. There are also very considerable issues to be tackled in the division at present, associated with the need to replace the main computer software, effect an office move and deliver the CPA agenda and the Local Plan. Therefore the inspectors suggestion that a trial of public speaking be established in the Development Control Committee is considered not to be the best way forward at the moment.
- 3.7 Delivering the Procurement Strategy is being picked up as part of reviewing the Policy and Best Value Service Plan. Other recommendations made by the inspectors can be subsumed into a revision of the Planning Service Plan, rather than revising the implementation plan. This will keep the process more simple and easy to follow and therefore to deliver

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 None directly.

5.0 Corporate Implications

5.1 The issues discussed here are part of an ongoing programme for delivering Best Value at a corporate level.

6.0 Community Implications

6.1 Further community involvement will follow from questioning customers as to their views on and suggestions for the service.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 The process of inspection has focussed minds on service delivery, revealed a good level of success in meeting PI's and customer expectations despite low resource levels and presented fresh challenges for improvements, many of which are in hand already. The focus is shifting toward more involvement in CPA but this will not replace the need to demonstrate best value. Husbanding resources to deliver the wider agenda will require much from staff.

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