

**This report may be of interest to: All members**  
**This report will also be submitted to the Best Value/CCT Sub-Committee.**

## BEST VALUE REVIEW GUIDE

Accountable Officer: Laura McGillivray, Head of Policy & Communications - MK252665

Author: Simon Willson, Service Review Officer - MK252694

### 1.0 Purpose

1.1 To seek members agreement and understanding of the Best Value Review process.

### 2.0 Summary

2.1 A Best Value Review Guide has been drafted to help assist officers undertaking Best Value Reviews (BVRs) in 2000/1. The guide will ensure that the Best Value statutory requirements and guidance are adequately fulfilled when undertaking a Best Value review as well as helping to provide a clear audit trail. This report gives an overview of this guide and draws members attention to its key aspects.

### 3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 To agree the overall methodology and approach of the guide as set out in paragraph 5;
- 3.2 To approve the evaluation criteria set out in **Annex B**; and
- 3.3 Members to receive a further report by 31 March 2000 on how they will be involved in Best Value reviews.

## 4.0 Background

- 4.1 As part of the Best Value framework local authorities are required to undertake a series of Best Value Reviews covering all services over five years. Members will already be familiar with the demanding requirements of these reviews and how they need to apply the 4C's of best value – challenge, compare, consult and compete.
- 4.2 The experience of our own reviews and that of the Best Value pilots has suggested that there is a clear need to provide officers with assistance when carrying out Best Value reviews. Developing a guidance document is potentially problematical as it needs to balance a range of factors and issues whilst ensuring that it is both practical and helpful.
- 4.3 In drafting the new guide a great deal of effort and research has gone into examining similar guides as well as learning from the experience of the pilot authorities and the evaluation of their approaches. It is clear that there is no right or wrong way to conduct a Best Value review but there are some clear do's and don'ts. The new guide has aimed to address these various points as well as to retain a strong practical focus.

## 5.0 Issues and Choices

### Milton Keynes' Approach To Reviews - A Summary

- 5.1 The Milton Keynes' model for conducting reviews is as follows:
- (a) Reviews will be undertaken by officers and managed by a core review team consisting of:
    - (i) review sponsor (from outside the directorate where the review is taking place);
    - (ii) lead officer (manager of the service under review); and
    - (iii) project sponsor (as review sponsor).
  - (b) In addition, review teams will consist of other staff from the service, key internal stakeholders and, where appropriate, specialist staff, for example Internal Audit, IT etc.
  - (c) To enhance the element of 'challenge' (fundamental to all BVRs) a 'reference group' will be established for each review. Its role will be to:
    - (i) challenge all aspects of the review;
    - (ii) act as a sounding board to test and develop ideas; and
    - (iii) provide an objective test for the evaluation process.
  - (d) Typically a review will last between 6-9 months and consist of 6 Phases - see **Annex A**.
  - (e) The review methodology will be based on:
    - (i) a diagnostic approach to setting out and analysing the current service;
    - (ii) how and what others do in comparison to ourselves;

- (iii) the development of options to bring about change;
  - (iv) a rigorous evaluation of the options for service improvement;
  - (v) an assessment who is best placed to deliver that service and the required improvements; and
  - (vi) writing a comprehensive action plan to implement the changes required.
- (f) 4 reports will be presented to members at key stages of the review:
- (i) at the end of Phase 1 setting out the terms of reference and key plans;
  - (ii) at the end of Phase 4 providing a summary of the key issues to date;
  - (iii) at the end of Phase 5 setting out the options for service improvement and a an evaluation of each option; and
  - (iv) at the end of Phase 6 setting out the action plan.

### The Review Guide

- 5.2 The review guide broadly follows each stage of the review with an introductory section setting out how to prepare for the review. Each section asks officers to undertake a range of tasks and provides them with guidance and advice on how to do these. The diagnostic approach is undertaken by officers being asked to answer a range of specific questions (these are presented in a series of boxes in the guide). At the end of each section there is a checklist to ensure officers have completed all the necessary tasks.
- 5.3 In addition, there are a series of annexes which either offer further advice or provide separate exercises for review teams to complete.
- 5.4 Prior to the review teams starting each phase they will be invited to attend a training session to be delivered by the Corporate Policy Team. This training will help re-inforce the guidance but also allow officers to discuss difficult issues and assess their progress. The first session takes place on 22 March 2000.

### Member Involvement In Reviews

- 5.5 This is a crucial issue and needs to be worked out in the context of the proposed democratic structures. A further report will be presented to members by the end of March.
- 5.6 However, it should be noted at this stage that separate reports will be presented to members at crucial stages of the review, two of these reports being relatively brief. The content of these reports has been spelt out in the guide and aim to provide maximum clarity of the key issues. Given the number of reviews we are required to conduct it is vital that members are allowed to focus on the key issues as quickly as possible.

## Evaluation Criteria

- 5.7 A key aspect of each review is to assess the options for service improvement. In order to do this an evaluation exercise based on two models has been developed.
- 5.8 The evaluation criteria cover a range of issues and members are asked to consider whether this will provide enough information to allow them to make decisions on the best option for service improvement. See **Annex B**.

## **6.0 Implications**

### 6.1 Environmental

Each review will be required to assess the environmental impact on any proposals for service improvement. Specific exercises to do this are included in the guide.

### 6.2 Equalities

Each review will be required to assess the equalities dimension on any proposals for service improvement. Specific exercises to do this are included in the guide.

### 6.3 Financial

The cost of conducting reviews will be met from existing budgets. Each review will be asked to specifically address the financial implications of any proposals for service improvement.

### 6.4 Legal

The Local Government Act 1999 and subsequent guidance sets out specific requirements for the conduct of reviews and how the audit and inspection requirements should be satisfied. If officers follow the review guide they should meet these requirements.

### 6.4 Staff and Accommodation

Best Value reviews will have a significant impact on staff. The review guide requires managers to obtain the views of staff as well as to keep them informed about the progress of the review. Trade Unions will be involved through the reference group as well as the usual processes of communication. Furthermore, review teams are asked to involve staff in the conduct of reviews as much as is practically possible.

## **7.0 Conclusions**

Agreeing an approach to how the Council should conduct its Best Value reviews is a major task in preparing for Best Value. The guide will be revised in the light of experience but currently represents a major step forward in delivering the modernisation agenda.

### Background Papers:

Local Government Act 1999, Part One

Best Value, DETR Circular 10/99