

**20 MARCH 2000**

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

## **MEMBERS AND THE BEST VALUE REVIEW PROCESS**

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### **1 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To set out how Member involvement in the Best Value review process will operate under the new democratic structures.
- 1.2 This report has been written in the context of the proposed new democratic structures for the Council and draws extensively on the experience of the Best Value pilot authorities, and on advice from the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Audit Commission and the Improvement and Development Agency.

### **2 Summary**

- 2.1 The scheme for the new political management structures of the council has been developing over the past few months.
- 2.2 This report examines this issue in relation to Best Value and sets out proposals for how the Executive might manage Best Value Reviews (BVRs).

### **3 Recommendations**

- 3.1 That the proposed model for handling BVRs be approved.

## **4 Background**

- 4.1 A report to Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting held on the 15 February 2000 and a subsequent report to the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting held on 8 March 2000 started to map out how members will be involved in BVRs. Neither of those reports examined in detail the role of the Executive in BVRs or how members will be consulted more widely during individual reviews.
- 4.2 The Best Value Sub-Committee agreed a BVR methodology at its last meeting and requested that it should receive a further report detailing how members would be involved in the review process.

## **5. Issues And Choices**

- 5.1 To date there is a general acceptance that the Executive will commission, lead, carry out, agree and implement BVRs, whilst the scrutiny committees will receive, scrutinise and comment on review findings and periodically monitor their progress in implementation.
- 5.2 The report to the Scrutiny Commission on 8 March 2000 addressed how the scrutiny committees might handle their work programme in relation to BVRs. It accepted that it would not be involved in the review process but would scrutinise review reports and action plans prior to implementation. However, such an arrangement would not affect the right of scrutiny bodies or individual members to 'call-in' a decision at any point.
- 5.3 It is now necessary to consider how the Executive will handle BVRs and ensure the method by which Members will be more widely consulted on individual reviews. It is recognised at this stage that the Executive may wish to vary these arrangements in due course, however, as BVRs are due to start later this month it is thought important to have arrangements in place now rather than wait for the new Executive.
- 5.4 A proposal on how the Executive might handle reviews is set out below.
- A Lead Executive Member will be assigned to oversee each BVR. They will maintain regular contact with the Project Sponsor, the Core Review Team, the Service Review Officer and any other Executive member as appropriate. Where he/she chooses to become more directly involved in the review this, and the nature of their involvement, will be established at the outset of the review.
  - The Lead Executive Member in discussion with the Project Sponsor and the Service Review Officer will determine how the review will involve members more widely. Options will include:

- (a) As part of the reference group;
- (b) An informal member group which will meet with the review team at key stages of each review. This is likely to mirror some or all of the 4 report stages to the Executive (see below);
- (c) By inviting written comments to be submitted to the review team.

The approach adopted will vary between reviews. It is envisaged that members will be more extensively involved in the more contentious reviews.

- The process for consulting members will be set out in the review consultation plan which will be approved by the Executive Lead Member at the outset of each review.
- The Lead Executive Member will receive four written reports at key stages of the review:
  - (a) Report 1: Short report, spelling out membership of the review team and terms of reference. Copies of the project plan, consultation plan and communication plan will be attached.
  - (b) Report 2: This report contains three elements. A summary of the current service, an explanation of the gap between the service and 'the best' and an outline specification for the 'new' service.
  - (c) Report 3: The key report spelling out all the issues and possible solutions
  - (d) Report 4: A report detailing the action plans

The Lead Executive Member will bring the terms of reference and reports 3 and 4 to the Full Executive for approval. At his/her discretion the Lead Executive Member may also bring other significant issues to the attention of the Executive concerning any individual review.

- Once review reports have been agreed by the full Executive (or another delegated body, for example a cabinet Committee) they will be implemented by the Executive and subject to formal scrutiny in due course. Where a review report proposes major policy changes, the Business Management Group will be asked to decide whether the report should be referred to the Assembly for approval.
- The Executive will receive six monthly reports on the progress of each review and action plan.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Environmental**

Each review will be required to assess the environmental impact on any proposals for service improvement.

## 6.2 Equalities

Each review will be required to assess the equalities dimension on any proposals for service improvement. The Executive and scrutiny committees will be asked to examine these.

## 6.3 Financial

The cost of conducting reviews will be met from existing budgets.

## 6.4 Legal

The requirement to establish new democratic arrangements will soon become a legal necessity when the Local Government Bill is passed and becomes law. However, the Local Government Act 1999 requires councils to undertake BVRs, the outcomes of which will have to be approved by Members.

## 6.5 Staff and Accommodation

BVRs will be undertaken by officers and the core team will work closely with the Lead Executive Member to ensure reviews are completed successfully. The reviews will be supported from within existing resources.

## 7 Conclusions

The success of BVRs will be very dependent on the effectiveness of members in agreeing and implementing review recommendations. By developing a robust decision making process under the new democratic structures it will help to ensure that this happens effectively.

### Background Papers:

Local Government Act 1999, Part One

Best Value, DETR Circular October 1999

Policy & Resources Agenda 15 February 2000

Scrutiny Commission Agenda 8 March 2000