
REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2003

Chair: * Councillor Jean Lammiman

Councillors: * Nana Asante (4) * Omar (3)
 * Mitzi Green * Pinkus
 * Ingram * Seymour
 * Lavingia (5) * Thammaiah
 * Myra Michael (1) * Versallion

* Denotes Member present
 (1), (3), (4) and (5) Denote category of Reserve Member

PART I – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL
RECOMMENDATION I – Best Value Performance Plan 2003/2004

Your Committee was reminded that the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) formed part of the Council's statutory policy framework and, as such, was required under the Budget and Policy Framework Rules of the Constitution to be referred to the Committee for consideration prior to adoption by Council.

The Committee received a reference from the Cabinet meeting on 17 June 2003 which referred the Best Value Performance Plan 2003/2004 to the Committee for examination. The Committee also received a report of the Executive Director (Organisational Development) to which the Best Value Performance Plan 2003/2004 was appended.

The report set out the context and structure of the BVPP 2003/04, and sought the Committee's views on options for the structure of the BVPP 2004/05. It also highlighted changes to the published performance data in the light of internal and external audits. Additionally, a 'traffic light' system had been devised in order to assess progress against Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). This could be used to inform the scrutiny bodies' future work programmes by highlighting areas they might wish to explore further. It was appended to the report, and Members' views on it were also sought.

At the meeting, it was reported that issues were still emerging from the audit of the BVPP, and the external auditors had not therefore issued their opinion on it. An officer undertook to inform Members, however, of the outcome of this in due course. In addition, a tabled document was circulated which reviewed the approaches taken to the structure of the BVPP by London Boroughs rated 'excellent'. BVPPs from several authorities were also circulated.

The structure of a BVPP from a London Borough rated 'excellent', which was organised by themes with BVPIs integrated into relevant sections, was commended. With regard to Harrow's BVPP 2003/04, a Member was concerned that there were no discernible links between BVPIs showing a downward trend and the measures being taken to improve them, as set out in agreed Improvement Plans. Officers acknowledged this, and suggested that if the Plan was organised by themes, this would be easier and it would give an opportunity to address issues that may not be reflected by the statutory indicators.

The way in which Harrow's BVPP had been produced this year was queried. Officers advised that this year's Plan had been produced centrally with information gathered from Departments. They acknowledged the limitations of this approach, but advised that it had been a consequence of the timescale for producing the Plan - the revised requirements relating to the content of the BVPP had only been issued in March – and of the transition in the Council's organisational structure. However, the Council now had several months in which to improve the process in time for producing next year's Plan. Officers would be seeking in the longer term to integrate the BVPP and the Corporate Plan into one document which would then feed into Departmental Service Plans.

Members stressed the need for the production of the BVPP to be a corporate exercise. They also supported, in principle, taking a themed approach based on corporate priorities, but felt that a lot more detailed work needed to be done on the proposed structure for next year's BVPP and, in particular, on links to other plans.

In response to a query from a Member, it was advised that the indicators set out in the BVPP were statutory indicators set by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, together with the Council's LPSA targets and some local indicators relating to community safety. There were some other local indicators in place, but not all of these were well developed. Members urged officers to develop more local indicators in order to monitor the performance of issues important to the Council.

With regard to the traffic light monitor, this was welcomed. There was some concern, however, that it may cause Members to miss some issues arising. Whether the monitor was adding value as a management tool and was effectively identifying appropriate issues was queried.

In response, officers acknowledged that the monitor had limitations, because it gave a snapshot of performance across the range of national indicators, limited in scope, and not the full picture. However, it was stressed that the monitor was designed only to provide an overview of performance, and to highlight in broad terms the areas Members may wish to explore further. It was felt that, for those purposes, it was a useful management tool. At a Member's request, an officer undertook to ensure that the monitor was available electronically.

The way in which the target had been set for BVPI 49 for 2002/03 was also queried, as it was noted that this was far in excess of the 2001/02 outturn. An officer undertook to investigate this, but advised that he was aware of cases where the target was set on the basis of unaudited outturn data, and the 2001/02 outturn was subsequently changed following audit. Members stressed the need to ensure the quality of data used to inform target-setting.

In conclusion, Members felt that, overall, the traffic light monitor was good. A few minor amendments were requested, namely that there be a legend on each page, and that further explanation be provided as to the meaning of the horizontal arrows. It was also pointed out that some Members were colour-blind, and officers were therefore requested to consult on the format of the monitor. Officers confirmed that the monitor would be continually refined, and added that they would also be exploring the development of quarterly monitoring. In light of this, the Chair asked whether the monitor could be updated quarterly and submitted to each Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. Officers advised that it would be meaningless to report some PIs on a quarterly basis because the data on which they were based was not produced quarterly, such as those PIs based on exam results or triannual assessments. Officers undertook, however, to explore areas where it would be meaningful to report quarterly.

Resolved to RECOMMEND:

That the Best Value Performance Plan 2003/04 be approved.

(See also Minutes 96 and 100).

PART II - MINUTES

95. **Attendance by Reserve Members:**
RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Members:-

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Blann	Councillor Lavingia
Councillor Ann Groves	Councillor Omar
Councillor Marie-Louise Nolan	Councillor Nana Asante
Councillor Osborn	Councillor Myra Michael

96. **Declarations of Interest:**
 Councillor Pinkus declared a personal interest in agenda item 8(a), "Reference from the Cabinet, 17 June 2003: Key Decision – Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) 2003/4", by virtue of being a member of the Best Value Advisory Panel.

Councillors Nana Asante, Mitzi Green and Seymour declared personal interests in agenda item 11(c), Review of Housing Benefits, by virtue of having relatives who were in receipt of housing benefits.

RESOLVED: To note the declarations of interest made by Councillor Pinkus in respect of agenda item 8(a), and by Councillors Nana Asante, Mitzi Green and Seymour in respect of agenda item 11(c), and that they participated in the discussions and the decisions on those items.

97. **Arrangement of Agenda:**
RESOLVED: That (1) agenda items 8(a), "Reference from Cabinet, 17 June 2003: Key Decision - Best Value Performance Plan 2003/4", and 9, "Best Value Performance Plan 2003/2004", be considered together;

(2) all items be taken with the press and public present.
98. **Minutes:**
RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2003, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.
99. **Public Questions/Petitions/Deputations:**
RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put or petitions or deputations received at the meeting under the provisions of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules 8, 9 and 10 respectively.
100. **Best Value Performance Plan 2003/04:**
Further to Recommendation I above, it was

RESOLVED: That (1) officers note Members' comments on the structure of the BVPP for 2004/05;

(2) officers note the Committee's comments on the traffic light monitor;

(3) the changes to the BVPIs, as set out in Appendix C, be noted.

(Note: See also Recommendation I and Minute 96).
101. **Comprehensive Performance Assessment - Progress Report:**
At its last meeting, the Committee had considered the Council's Improvement Plan in response to the Improvement and Development Agency's review and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), and had agreed that it should receive quarterly progress reports on the implementation of the Plan. The Committee now received a report of the Executive Director (Organisational Development) which provided an update on the progress of the Plan's implementation.

At the meeting, the Executive Director gave a verbal update on some of the tasks outlined in the Plan, on which there had been further movement. In particular, she reported that advertisements had been placed for the remaining Director posts and the appointment of the new senior management team was scheduled to be completed by mid-November; the Corporate Plan would be submitted to both the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November; and the ICT strategy was currently in draft with officers, but would be reported to Cabinet in October or November and then to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.

With regard to the tasks set out in the Improvement Plan relating to the role of elected Members, it was noted that the Council was in discussion with the University of Birmingham to provide tailored training programmes for Members. In response to Members' queries, the way in which this organisation had been selected was outlined. Members expressed concern about the role of the Member Development Panel in this initiative. Additionally, the need to procure training from a variety of sources was emphasised. The Chair requested that, in future, all issues relating to Member Development be referred to the Member Development Panel. The Executive Director also undertook to provide the Chair with information on the budget for the training.

A Member felt that there was a general issue about how the Council acquired expertise. It was suggested that there was a need for a change in the culture of the organisation, in relation to issues such as secondments, and getting in expertise from other private and public sector organisations and the community. In response, the Executive Director reported on a number of schemes being developed within the Council, in particular the Council's participation in a secondment forum established by the Audit Commission, and the development of e-learning.

RESOLVED: That (1) the progress report proforma attached to the officer report at Appendix A be noted;

(2) a further report be made to the November Committee meeting detailing progress over the next quarter;

(3) the Executive Director (Organisational Development) ensure that all issues relating to Member Development be referred to the Member Development Panel.

102. **Progress Reports on Reviews - Members' Verbal Updates**(i) **Review of Budget Processes:**

The Lead Member for this review, Councillor Ingram, gave a verbal update.

The pre-scoping day for the review had been held the previous day, and two broad streams of work had been identified. The first stream of work would be a review of processes, and would be led by Councillor Ingram. This stream would examine budget-setting and accounting and the links with performance management and monitoring. The second stream was loosely termed 'communications' and would examine the appropriateness and presentation of information used in the budget process, including the information used by officers, and the information presented to Members, stakeholders and the public. Work on this stream would be led by Councillor Versallion. In order to maximise the use of resources, however, evidence for both streams would be gathered jointly where appropriate. Mechanisms to collect data would include visits to other authorities, a questionnaire, and one-to-one interviews. The timescale for the review had yet to be determined but it was anticipated that an interim report would be produced in January or February 2004.

The Chair commented that the pre-scoping session had been a very valuable day, and that the IDeA consultant supporting the review had been excellent. The two external co-opted members of the Review Group also added value to the review. She suggested that the scoping document for the review of budget processes, once produced, be approved by the Nominated Members of the Committee via the Urgent Action procedure. This was agreed.

(ii) **Review of the New Harrow Project:**

The Chair, who was leading this review, reported that a further meeting of the Review Group was being arranged for October. The purpose of the meeting would be to consider what should be examined as part of the next phase of the review, the timescale and resourcing. It was proposed that there should be a half-day pre-scoping session for the next phase of the review, facilitated by the IDeA, in order to identify ways forward in terms of evidence-gathering; this would also be discussed at the Review Group meeting.

(iii) **Review of Housing Benefits:**

The Lead Member for this review, Councillor Ingram, gave a verbal update.

The Member reported that there had been a lot of staff changes in the Housing Benefits section, and it had recently undergone a BFI inspection. In light of this, it had been agreed that the Review Group would not do any detailed scrutiny work until after the BFI had reported, but would maintain a watching brief. A training session had been held for Members on how housing benefit claims were processed.

However, the BFI had now reported, and its report was not positive. The report and the action plan formulated in response would be submitted to Cabinet in October, and then to the November meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for examination. In addition, it was proposed that the Review Group meet again with officers to discuss a number of issues of concern. In particular, the backlog of claims, which had been reduced to around 3,000 cases, had risen again to over 8,000 cases. There was a need to know at what point managers sought Member involvement. Members of the Committee raised other issues relating to this, and the Chair requested that they forward details of the issues to Councillor Ingram for raising at the Review Group meeting.

RESOLVED: That (1) the scoping document for the review of budget processes be approved by the Chair and Nominated Member of the Committee via the Urgent Action procedure; and

(2) the verbal updates be noted.

(Note: See also Minute 96).

103. **Urgent Action:**

RESOLVED: To note and, insofar as is necessary, to confirm the following Urgent Action taken with the approval of the Nominated Members since the last Ordinary meeting of the Committee:-

Recommendation 1 of the Special Meeting of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 24 July 2003: Consultation on Proposals for Mount Vernon Hospital – Meeting to Discuss Possible Direction and the Setting Up of a Joint Committee

Approval was given to Recommendation 1 of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee Special meeting on 24 July 2003, relating to Harrow's participation in a Joint (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee to consider the consultations on the proposals for Mount Vernon Hospital.

104. **Change in the Reserve Membership of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee:**

RESOLVED: To note the change by the Conservative Group in its Reserve Membership of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee, as set out below:-

Current Reserve Member:

1. Councillor Mrs Champagnie

Replacement Reserve Member

1. Councillor Vina Mithani

105. **Scrutiny Involvement in the Budget Process 2004/2005:**

The Chair, having raised this as an item of Any Other Business, drew Members' attention to the timetable for the budget process set out at Appendix 2 to the report on the Information Circular. The timetable stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the initial budget proposals at its meeting on 27 January 2004. The Chair reported, however, that she had made representations for the Committee to be involved in the budget process earlier, and the Chief Executive had agreed that it should join in the process from October. The Chair and Vice Chair would be discussing how the Committee could best be involved in the process at that stage.

106. **Establishment of a Scrutiny Unit:**

The Chair, having raised this as an item of any other business, reported that a Scrutiny Unit was formally being established within the Organisational Development Directorate. The Chair stated that she was disappointed that scrutiny would no longer come under the auspices of Internal Audit, and that Members had not been consulted on the move to Organisational Development, but she was nonetheless delighted that the Unit was being established.

The Scrutiny Support Officer introduced Laura Shewfelt, a new scrutiny officer, to the Committee. She also reported that Heather Smith from Committee Section would shortly be joining the Scrutiny Unit on secondment. Laura Shewfelt would be supporting the Lifelong Learning and Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-Committees, while Heather Smith would be supporting the Health and Social Care and Strengthening Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committees. Temporary part-time administrative support for the Unit would also be recruited. As a result of the secondment, however, Committee Section would no longer be providing support to scrutiny reviews; this would be done wholly by the Scrutiny Unit. In order to provide the most effective support, scrutiny officers would not therefore be producing formal minutes of Review Group meetings.

Further to earlier discussions around Member development issues, and in response to a question from a Member, the Scrutiny Support Officer confirmed that the IDeA had previously raised the possibility of Members applying to be included within the national pool of Members involved in supporting the IDeA peer support programme. This was seen as a further potential avenue for Members to acquire information and expertise from the practices of other Authorities.

It was agreed that further information on the opportunities provided by the IDeA peer support process should be sought.

RESOLVED: That officers refer the issue of potential Member involvement in the IDeA's pool of Members to support its programme of Peer Reviews, to the Member Development Panel.

107. **The Development of the New Directorates:**

The Vice Chair reported that at the joint meeting of the Lifelong Learning and Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committees the previous week, Members had received a report of the Executive Director (People First) which set out the organisational structure of the new Directorate. She suggested that each of the Directorates should be requested to produce a structure chart for the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in November. This was agreed. The Chair added that she would be making a request to the Chief Executive that the Executive Directors attend meetings of the Committee, as and when required.

Additionally, it was reported that the joint meeting had referred two issues to the November Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. It was felt that cross-cutting

issues should henceforth be dealt with by the Committee, in order to avoid the need for additional meetings of the Scrutiny Sub-Committees.

RESOLVED: That each of the Executive Directors be requested to submit a structure chart to the next meeting of the Committee.

108. **Meeting of the Scrutiny Chairs:**

The Chair, having raised this as an item of any other business, reported that it was intended to hold a meeting of the Chairs of the scrutiny bodies, to discuss the scrutiny bodies' workloads and resources for scrutiny. She undertook to report back to the next meeting of the Committee.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.32 pm, closed at 9.27 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR JEAN LAMMIMAN
Chair