

**BEST VALUE REVIEW : IMPROVING ACCESS TO SERVICES  
(Report by Director of Commerce and Technology & Head of Policy)**

**1. Introduction**

1.1 The Access to Services Best Value Review was one of the early reviews which examined wide-ranging (or cross-cutting) themes based on the Council's objections rather than individual services.

1.2 The services included in the review were —

◆ **physical access (or channels) to services —**

- receptions and offices
- telecommunications
- website and electronic communications
- mobile or community based services

◆ **strategic or policy approach —**

- Communications & Consultation Strategy
- Equalities Strategy

1.3 Issues associated with transportation were excluded from the scope of the review as they were being dealt with by a separate Best Value Review.

**2. Review Process**

2.1 The adopted process for undertaking a review of this nature is —

- ◆ to scope the review, carry out initial investigations and prepare an "As Is Statement" drawn from relevant service plans, strategies and policies;
- ◆ to discuss with a Member Group, appointed by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel, the "As Is Statement" and to agree the objectives of the review;
- ◆ to carry out a 5Cs analysis (compare, consult, compete, challenge and collaborate);
- ◆ to discuss progress of the review with the Member Group (during the review Members allocated to the review met on three occasions to undertake the "light touch" review of progress); and

- ◆ to agree with Members a final report and improvement plan for submission to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet.

2.2 When this review started, a number of initiatives were already under way, which meant that it was not practicable or appropriate to follow the standard process. Specifically, the Access Project (latterly the Customer First Programme) was already underway. Its remit matched the scope of the Best Value Review in terms of the physical access or channels to our services. It was decided that this project would effectively carry out the investigations and the 5Cs analysis and that the Customer Service Strategy – a key output from that project – would form the “As Is Statement”. In addition, work was already underway to revise and enhance both the Communications & Consultation and Equalities Strategies to ensure that the Council had the right strategic direction in terms of the way it provided and communicated information about services.

2.3 The Customer Service Strategy, adopted by the Council in June 2003, provided a Service Improvement Plan for the ways in which we provide access to our services. The Strategy is now being implemented through the Customer First Programme and Members – via the Programme Board, the Overview & Scrutiny Panels and the Cabinet – have been involved in decisions about implementation of the improvements to the way we provide access to our services. The Customer First Programme includes provision for regular monitoring and evaluation by Members.

2.4 In late 2002 and early 2003, the Council adopted revised and enhanced Equalities and Communications & Consultation Strategies, including detailed action plans. Since that time, work has continued to deliver the action plans and to continually improve and update our strategic approach in line with new requirements and best practice. Early in 2005 the Council will be invited to review both the Strategy documents and to adopt new action plans.

2.5 The recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment highlighted issues associated with the way the Council provides access to services, communications and aspects of equality as areas for development. These issues have been included in the recently agreed Improvement Plan and will provide an opportunity for Members to review progress in the achievement of these improvements.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1 Due to the timing of the review and the initiatives that were already under way, the Access to Services Best Value Review did not follow the established pattern for other Best Value Reviews. It was decided early in the process that it would be inefficient to slavishly follow a process, in parallel with existing work that was already being undertaken.

3.2 The Access Project used consultation and gathered significant information about local people's preferences for accessing services; it initiated a challenging and competitive element to identifying the best ways in which we can improve access, undertook extensive comparison with the work of other local authorities and public bodies; and identified means of collaboration to improve services. The resultant Customer First Programme effectively provides a Service Improvement Plan for the way we can improve the processes of providing better access to our services.

#### **4. Recommendations**

4.1 In these circumstances, Members are asked to "sign off" the Access to Services Best Value Review.

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#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Customer Service Strategy available from the Head of IMD, C Hall, 01480 388116

Equality Strategy and Communications and Consultation Strategy: available from Head of Policy, 01480 388005