NOTES OF MEMBERS' FORUM ON THE BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN
THURSDAY 8 MARCH 2001 - IRELAND ROOM, COUNTY HALL

Present:

Members: Audrey Bainbridge, Mary Baldwin, Hugh Carey, Bill Chapple, Pam Crawford, Steve Kennell, Peter Lawrence, Jeremy Ryman, Brian Stenner

Officers: Helen Barnes, Gerry Batchelor, Rebecca Cooper, Sean Nolan, Aidan Shutter, Chris Williams

Apologies were received from John Cartwright, Trevor Fowler, John Oakes, Ken Ross, David Shakespeare, Janet Relfe

Bill Chapple introduced the forum as an informal session to help further develop the Local Performance Plan and to seek the views of Members to feed into the Cabinet meeting on 12 March.

The aim was to present the Plan to the County Council on 22 March to enable the Authority to meet the statutory requirement of publication by 31 March.

Chris Williams explained that the Authority was reaching the final draft stage for the Plan. However there is still the facility for changes after the Cabinet meeting and if necessary the chance to make final amendments after the full Council meeting on 22 March. There is however only a small window of opportunity due to the printing requirements for the plan.

Chris Williams added that Best Value and the Council's Local Performance Plan, together with the new modernising arrangements must be seen together as the primary way in which the Authority will deliver the Best Value regime required by the legislation. In effect, the Local Performance Plan is a public, accountable statement that seeks to engage local people.

This year it was intended to produce the Plan in three main versions:

1.   A hard copy of the full Plan

2.   An Internet copy of the full Plan

3.   Summary information contained within a County newspaper, distributed to all households.

Peter Lawrence commented on the auditor's view that there were still some problems with the quality of data and systems that the County Council is using.

Chris Williams explained that he was making two policy changes to the Plan. They are:

1.   The bringing forward of the supporting policies from the appendices to the main Plan text (within each portfolio);

2.   There would be a further examination of the flagship projects to ensure that they are fully outcome based and consistent between portfolios.

Peter Lawrence stressed the need if possible to make the link between the Council's policies and the resources it has available. This was another area pointed out by District Audit following their previous audit of the Council's Local Performance Plan. Sean Nolan said that the service plans were one way in which the budget and policies are brought together.

The following is a list of potential amendments to the Plan, both in terms of policy and editorial.

1. An improvement (if time permits) of the link between policy and resources available.

2. Full financial details to be included on the website.

3. Budget summary improvements within the Plan.

4. To change/amend the paragraph referring to Policy Steers in the financial section.

5. To check that all the flagship project outcomes are measurable to allow sensible reporting of progress in next year's Local Performance Plan.

6. To change the 'headings' that refer to "procurement" to "purchasing".

7. An overall, editorial check for spellings and other grammatical corrections.

8. To include the page numbers of the various sections on the contents page.

9. In the Foreword section, to change the reference to "committed to quality" to the strategic aim of "a top-performing Council".

10. In the introduction, to change the paragraph relating to "reviewing services" to ensure it is clear that all services are reviewed within a five year rolling programme.

11. In the 'Tell Me More' section, to correct the spelling of Buckinghamshire and to consider changing the headings from a question approach to a fact approach.

12. Within the 'Overview of Our Performance' section to put the top-performing Council where the Council is actually the highest performer and to consider the possibility of sub-headings to relate the particular areas of performance to the specific portfolios.

13. Within each portfolio section it was agreed to include an e-mail address at the end of each section for the portfolio holder. Within the Internet version this would be directly linked.

14. On the general subject of flagship projects, it was discussed whether they would be numbered according to which strategic aim they support. If time permits, it would be desirable to undertake this exercise.

15. Hugh Carey asked about the insertion of pictures of service users rather than of the portfolio holders themselves. Whilst this was acknowledged as possibly making the Plan more readable etc., there was insufficient time to include them at this stage. The group also considered whether a small montage of pictures could be included solely on the front cover. However it was agreed that the front cover should remain as per the draft.

16. To remove wherever possible all acronyms and jargon from the plan.

17. To include a glossary of technical terms in the front of the document rather than the back or in an appendix.

18. Bill Chapple said that wherever possible both percentages and the actual figure should be stated for completeness.

19. Peter Lawrence asked whether the financial tables could state both gross and net expenditure so that the full picture of the Council's overall spend could be given. This was accepted as a point for future plans, but there was insufficient time to include it within this Plan.

20. Steve Kennell asked whether the financial table could be fitted onto one page. It was agreed that this would be done, as it would be easier to read and understand.

21. Peter Lawrence asked that the financial table headings should be consistent, particularly on the smaller table which breaks down the budget by portfolio area. Also, on page 53, to change the reference to "3% of net expenditure".

22. To raise the issue of e-commerce within the purchasing section as a major initiative for this area.

23. It was noted on page 58 that some of the consultation dates are missing, specifically consultation for the minerals local plan, the merger of Berryfield and Icknield schools, the merger of Greenway and William Durrant schools, the consultation on domiciliary care accreditation and the consultation on the early years and childcare development plan.

24. It was also agreed to ensure that the newspaper has on its front page a reference to the Local Performance Plan information which will be in the centre pages.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

Aidan Shutter
Policy Support Officer
9 March 2001