

REPORT OF CORPORATE AND FINANCE REVIEW PANEL

(Meeting held 21 June 2001)

1. FINANCE DIRECTORATE – BENEFIT FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS - BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2000/01 (MINUTE 42) (REPORT B)

The Panel have received a Best Value Performance Plan for 2000/01 for the Benefit Fraud Investigation Section of the Audit Services Unit. The Review utilised the “exceptional performance” review methodology.

The Review determined that the service was low cost and high performing.

The report defined progress for the year and actions and targets achieved against the Service's Performance Plan derived from the Best Value study.

The Council's Senior Investigations Officer has primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of benefit fraud under the direction of the Audit Manager. This Council has a strong fraud deterrence policy and will prosecute offenders, with the support of Legal and Democratic Services, where the evidence supports Court action.

Following the re-organisation of the Finance Directorate, the Benefit Fraud Investigation Unit works solely within Audit Services. The work of the Unit is still strongly supported by the Council Tax and Housing Benefit administration and Exchequer Services.

The national Weekly Benefit Savings system (WBS) sets fraud targets for each Council, to act as a mechanism to reward anti-fraud activity. New Forest District Council has consistently achieved its WBS targets, and in 2000/01, the savings achieved amounted to £519,636, against a target of £282,876. This resulted in a generated subsidy of £72,921 obtained from the Benefits Agency.

Members also noted figures relating to fraud referrals for 2000/01 and a notional financial surplus of £440,000 for benefit fraud detection in the same year.

As part of the Council's successful Beacon Status application for Council Tax and Housing Benefit administration, the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service presented a number of Best Practice Workshops for Councils nation-wide. Not only was this an opportunity to share working practices, but it facilitated valuable contact and networking.

The panel noted the introduction of the Council's Fraud Hotline in October 2000, which had been another valuable source of fraud referral.

Further improvements in performance had been achieved through the dedication and motivation of the Fraud Team and the support offered by officers and Members.

2. REVIEW OF ACCIDENTS AT WORK – COMMERCIAL SERVICES (MINUTE 49) (REPORT I)

The Panel considered measures for the prevention and monitoring of accidents at work for the Commercial Services Group.

The Policy and Resources Committee in October 2000 had expressed concerns at the increasing level of accidents in Commercial Services, especially within the Cleansing section. The matter was discussed by the Commercial Services Safety Panel in November and a special Working Party was set up to address the problem and report back.

Accident statistics were analysed over a three-year period. A number of conclusions were drawn from the statistics and measures suggested to monitor and reduce accidents in the Commercial Services workplace. The measures included the categorisation of type of accident to enable a more meaningful interpretation of the statistics; production of accident figures on a monthly basis; pre-employment questionnaires to highlight any existing medical problems thus avoiding risk of injury; post accident interviews to investigate accidents and prevent reoccurrence, and liaison with other local authorities and organisations to share knowledge and experience and compare accident statistics.

Members welcomed these new measures and praised the Working Party for their efforts.

3. WORK PROGRAMME (Report L, Minute 52)

The Panel had initially fixed their Work Programme in January and it was thought appropriate to revisit it following fixture of Panel Meeting dates, and in the light of developments over past months

The panel made a number of adjustments and requested some additional items.

Members discussed the effectiveness and remit of the panel. The Chief Executive explained that a review of the scrutiny function needed to be undertaken in the near future, in order to identify improvements in the light of experience. In the meantime it was agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the panel, in consultation with the Chief Executive, prepare a report for the September meeting on the future operation of the Panel.

The Work Programme for the ensuing year is attached as Appendix 1, and will be revised at every Panel meeting.

RECOMMENDED:

That the work programme attached at Appendix 1 to this report be adopted as the basis for the work of the Panel for the year 2001/02

**Councillor C A Wise
CHAIRMAN**

CORPORATE AND FINANCE REVIEW PANEL

SUGGESTED WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITISATION

20 SEPTEMBER 2001

Future operation of Panel
Financial reporting to members
Developers Contributions – How the Community might more readily benefit
Financial Strategy and Estimate Review Procedure
Annual Accounts – Report on Revenue Performance
Annual Employee Report
Annual Employee Training Report
Best Value Scoping Document – Accountancy
Administration
Graphic Design

Dibden Bay – Costs

25 OCTOBER 2001

Corporate Charging Policy – Further Report
Review of grants awarded to outside bodies and organisations
Annual report Exchequer Services – Performance and Plan
Early retirement Policy Review (including costs and benefits)
Performance Review – Offices and Depots

22 NOVEMBER 2001

Best value Final Report – Graphic Design

24 JANUARY 2002

Best Value Final Report – Information Services
Democratic Services – Workload under new Organisation

21 MARCH 2002

Members' Financial Training
Financial Management Accounting System – Review
Costs incurred from road closures

JUNE 2002

Partnerships with Parish Councils
Financial Implications of appeals by Council against Planning Decisions
Review of Restructuring of Finance Directorate
Best value Verification Report – Administration

ITEMS TO BE ALLOCATED

LSVT

Asset Review

Commercial Services – Business Development Opportunities

Corporate Business Development Opportunities

Performance Indicators

Appeals made by the Council against Planning Decisions – report on financial implications