



MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 15th August 2002

Title: Member Involvement in Best Value Reviews

Report of: Town Clerk and Chief Executive

Report reference: TC 160/02

Summary

It is vital that members and officers take equal ownership of Best Value, and Best Value reviews in particular, if it is to become a more effective improvement process in the future. This report sets out the various levels at which members can be involved in reviews and describes the information that, as a minimum, they should be presented with throughout the course of a review and beyond. It is for individual members and Committees to decide and instruct officers on how they wish to be involved in the early stages of any review.

In addition, a draft checklist is attached, which should help Members ensure that, right at the start of any review, the important issues have been addressed. It is proposed that this checklist be used by Members at each review's 'scoping session'. It will also be useful as a monitoring document throughout and after the review.

Recommendations

1. That Members consider the report and suggest additions or amendments where appropriate
2. That Members trial the draft checklist when scoping the Strategic Housing best value review, and instruct Officers as to whether they would like to formalise the system

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1. Background

It is apparent that Best Value reviews are sometimes failing to adequately involve elected members. This is particularly important with regard to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees since these committees have a constitutional responsibility for Best Value reviews. It is vital that these committees take some ownership of both the process and the outcomes of Best Value reviews. More generally, members should be considered to be the champions of public interest and, therefore, a vital part of any Best Value process.

It is the joint responsibility of members and officers to ensure that members are involved in a meaningful way in all reviews. The main mechanisms for involving members will vary from review to review, depending on the subject and scope. The main ways of involving members are listed below. It must be stressed that these suggestions are not exhaustive and any useful mechanism for involving members should be considered. But members must always be involved.

2. Member Involvement at Individual Level

It is for members to choose how far they are involved at an individual level. It would be most appropriate if the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee is encouraged to nominate a member for involvement at the beginning of the review. An appointment of an individual as 'champion' of a particular review does not remove the requirement for members to be involved at a group level. Involvement for individual members would be at one of the following levels: -

2.1 Full Involvement: Team Member with Active Role

- Attends all team meetings (usually approx. 2 hours fortnightly)
- Undertakes tasks outside those meetings, eg policy drafting, project management, consultation, research etc
- Follows up team queries with members
- Acts as member 'Champion' for review

2.2 Partial Involvement: Team Member with Advisory Role

- Attends all team meetings (usually approx. 2 hours fortnightly)
- Does not undertake tasks, but contributes advice and suggestions
- Follows up team queries with members
- Acts as member 'Champion' for review

3. Member Involvement at Group Level

Member involvement at Group level should consist, at least, of the following tasks at identified stages during the review. This will be supplemented by any member involvement at an individual level: -

3.1 Strategic Overview Stage

The strategic overview stage (also known as the scoping stage, although scoping the review is only part of it) 'kick starts' the whole review. It is vital that officers give members comprehensive information on the service(s) under review and it is equally important that members give clear instructions to officers on what issues should be considered as part of the review.

Officers must present members with background information about the service(s) to be reviewed. This presentation should be right at the beginning of the review process and the information within should be sufficient to give members a clear idea of: -

- how the service is performing at the moment;
- where the strengths and weaknesses are and any gaps in the service – to identify opportunities for significant improvement;
- what the officers' views are for the future direction of the service, based on local, regional or national trends;
- any current partnerships or partnership potential;
- the costs and staffing levels of the service
- consultation and comparison information (if available) to identify public priorities and relative performance

Members need to decide and clearly communicate: -

- Whether they agree with the above
- What their priorities are for the service
- What issues they want the review team to investigate
- Where they think the service is now in terms of quality and performance
- Whether they think the whole service should be provided by Carlisle City Council
- Whether they think only parts of the service should be provided by the Council
- Where they would like to see the service in a few years' time in terms of quality, cost and performance
- Where the review should stop (ie does it stray into any other areas?; does it ignore some aspects of the service?)
- What are the key issues for the review? What do members want the team to focus on in particular?

Following on from the 'scoping' of the review, the level and extent of member involvement in the review should be detailed in the first progress report to the parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Clearly, where consultants are employed to assist with a review, it is important that the need for, and recommended methods of, member involvement are detailed in the brief.

3.2 During the Review

It must be ensured throughout the review that the relevant Overview and Scrutiny committee retains a sense of 'ownership' of the review. This will lend strength both to the process and the outcomes of the review.

Members need to be updated regularly on progress and have an opportunity to influence the review. There should be a written progress report, presented by the review team leader, at every relevant Overview and Scrutiny meeting during the life of the review, with a thorough discussion of the issues raised in the report.

It is, therefore, particularly important that this report is written in a form which enables members to meaningfully engage with the review. Although Officers should make recommendations in any reports, members should not simply be asked to 'agree the contents and recommendations' of a progress report. Any significant issues encountered by the Best Value review team should be thoroughly discussed at Overview and Scrutiny. It might be helpful if the discussion of these issues is based on a question and answer approach; for example: -

"How can we get partners more involved in this area of work?"

"How could we use our resources differently to achieve better performance?"

"What should be our priorities for action in our improvement plan?"

Members must also be involved as consultees in the review, which might be on an individual interview or group workshop basis, depending on member preferences and the subject matter of the review. The relevant Overview and Scrutiny Chair and Portfolio Holder(s) should be interviewed as a matter of course. The form and extent of further member involvement should be directed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3.3 After the Review

The most important part of a best value review is action planning for improvement. The large amount of time spent on a review is wasted if there are no opportunities for significant improvement recommended and carried out. An action plan should be for a five year period, with the first two years set out in detail, the remaining 3 years may have broader actions and targets. The plan should make it clear to members the actions that will be taken to achieve specific improvements, it will tell members who will undertake each of these actions, when they will start and finish and, where possible, say how much each action, or set of actions, will cost. Action plans should be updated and progress reported to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a 6-monthly basis.

The information in Improvement plans needs to be SMART. In other words, it needs to be: -

- **Specific.** The improvement plan should set out exactly what tasks will be undertaken to achieve improvement. Vague references are not enough. Members should know from reading the action plan exactly what is going to happen. It should also set out which

officer(s) are going to be responsible for ensuring that individual actions are carried out.

- **Measurable.** The action should be clearly defined and performance targets set so that progress can be monitored and it will be clear in the future whether the improvement has been achieved. Where possible, costs should be attached to actions.
- **Achievable.** There is no point suggesting performance targets that are beyond the capabilities of the organisation to achieve; however, at the same time, targets for improvement should be challenging and not set too low.
- **Realistic.** Actions should be within the gift of the Council to achieve and should be within the bounds of possibility to achieve.
- **Timebound.** There should be a start and end date applied to improvement actions wherever possible. This is especially important for actions early on in the improvement plan period.

Best Value Review Members' Checklist

Stage:

Strategic Overview

| Strategic Overview Question | Y/N? | Comments |
|--|------|----------|
| X-cutting reviews allow you to make significant improvements in services but they need more work at the planning stage: - • Why has this review been chosen? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are customers suffering as a result of service fragmentation?• Are there gaps in provision?• Is there a need to improve/update policies/partnerships?• Will a restructure/new processes bring savings and/or improved performance?• What are the key strengths & weaknesses? | | |
| • Do the services have a clear policy direction? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the service(s) have a current policy?• Linked to priorities in City Vision/Corporate Plan?• Does it reflect national/regional policies or are changes required? | | |
| • Is it clear what the services should deliver for customers & how their different needs will be met? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the review focussing on users?• Are non-users being considered?• Who are the users and can they be categorised into discrete groups with differing needs?• What are the key issues for users?• What are the gaps between need and provision? | | |
| • What are the key quality/cost/performance issues for the service? For example: - | | |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service availability – right thing, right time, right place? • Access to and quality of information • Quality of service - clear expectations, reliable delivery, responsive to needs? • Consistency of service –same quality, reliability in different areas • Comparability – Are performance and cost good value? Where are we within our family group? • Partnership working – how well do we work together to provide a joined up service in this area? Who are our partners? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are partners being involved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they committed to the review? • Do they agree with the problems identified by the team? • Do they attach the same priority to those problems? • Are they committed to action to resolve them? • If not, how does the team intend to try to secure their involvement? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications for other policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can this review help drive the e-government agenda? • Are there any environmental implications? • Are there any crime & Disorder implications? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do officers/Members have the capacity to complete the review? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it clear what the review needs to achieve? • What resources are available, in terms of staff time and money? • Which partners/external challengers will contribute to the review? • Will this be enough to complete the review within the timescale and, if not, how will the team focus on review priorities? | | |