

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN (BVPP)
WORKING GROUP

24 May 2006

PRESENT:

Councillor B Hoare (Chair)
Councillor M Hill
Councillor A Roy

Thomas Hall Corporate Manager
Dale Phillipson Corporate Manager
Tracy Tiff

1 APOLOGIES

None.

2 MINUTES

Subject to the following amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2006 were approved: -

The timetable was **constrained** due to the corporate priorities not as yet being set.

3 ACTIVITY SCOPE

The activity scope was approved as amended by the BVPP Working Group. Copy attached to the minutes.

4 REPORT BACK FROM WITNESS EVIDENCE

Councillor Roy advised that she had met recently with D Robertson, Performance Manager, and a meeting was arranged for Friday 26 May with A Smith, Unison Secretary. Information from the meeting with D Robertson was circulated.

The main points from the meeting with D Robertson were:

- Dramatic improvement in performance activity
- Data collection now takes place regularly via the repository
- Performance Indicators and general performance is discussed at management meetings
- Currently, the main sticking points with the process are: -
 - Corporate Plan process
 - Need to bottom out what are and what are not priorities

- Need for an annual consultation process
- Need for summaries of the consultation of what people are telling the Council
- Need to collate information on consultation, audit and political manifestos
- Need for an agreed methodology in defining plans on the basis of the data/evidence and allocated responsibility
- The Improvement Board receives performance information on a monthly basis

The BVPP Working Group commented: -

- All Councillors should receive performance information. The recommendations of the final report could include that all Councillors be sent a monthly email containing a link to the performance information.
- That an email be sent to Councillor Palethorpe, Chair of the Constitutional Working Party, the Solicitor to the Council and the Meetings Officer that “ *it has been ascertained that the main sticking points at the moment with the production of the BVPP are the Corporate Plan process and the need to bottom out what are and what are not priorities.*”

The Working Group also ascertained the need for an agreed methodology in defining plans on the basis:

*Service performance and Audit information
Information from Public Consultation
Political priorities*

Currently there seemed to be no clarity that there was political accountability of the process-taking place (hopefully taking place well) or trigger mechanism and managerial responsibility of the process taking place at all. This was seen to be particularly salient in light of the operational input of this be spread across seemingly four managerial areas of the Council:

*Corporate planning
Performance
Citizen engagement
Financial control*

A request would be made that the above be included onto the agenda for the next Constitutional Working Party.”

- There is a need for corporate priorities to be set sooner in the process, for example medium term business planning, so that the BVPP process can commence earlier.
- There is a need for a longer term Corporate Plan to inform the BVPP which needs to take into account views from the consultation process, audit and the Political manifestos.

- There is a need for a vehicle to ask Cabinet to put a weighting on the Authority's corporate priorities.
- Ownership of the agreed methodology in defining plans could be delegated to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

ACTIONS: (1) That the recommendations of the final report include that all Councillors be sent a monthly email containing a link to the performance information.
 (2) That an email be sent to Councillor Palethorpe, Chair of the Constitutional Working Group, copy to the Solicitor to the Council and the Meetings Officer, as detailed above.
 (3) That details of the interview with A Smith, Unison Secretary, be given to the next meeting.

5 BEST VALUE GUIDES

Councillor Hill advised that he had looked at the Annual Plan for Kent County Council and the Performance Plan for Winchester City Council. Both had major differences in format from that used by Northampton Borough Council. Copies of Councillor Hill's findings were circulated.

Councillor Hill had obtained a copy of *the Strategic Vision – The University of Northampton 2005-2010* and it was requested that copies be obtained for the BVPP Working Group.

The main points from Councillor Hill's research were: -

- Winchester City Council includes its concept of 'the Golden Thread', a concept also used by Northamptonshire County Council, to explain how plans and strategies dovetail each other.
- Winchester did not use the traffic light system for assessing success or failure but uses a two-aspect happy/sad face analysis. The happy face means that the Council has exceeded its target or is in the top quartile, a sad face that it is not.
- Northampton Borough Council's BVPP is considerably longer than that of the other two authorities.
- The Northampton plan, by comparison with the other two, is poorly written and less well presented. A more outward looking document is needed.
- There could be a case for NBC producing a short document on its achievements and vision, similar to that produced by the University of Northampton.

The BVPP Working Group commented: -

- It would be beneficial to produce both an internal BVPP, an easier to comprehend, user-friendly version for the general public and a general summary document. In addition a summary page of headlines summarising the key objectives should be produced.
- There is a need for all 47 Councillors to use the BVPP as part of their engagement as a Councillor. Councillors need to be educated on the value of the BVPP. A question and answer sheet "What is the BVPP" could be produced for Councillors to complete when the BVPP is approved at Full Council on 26 June 2006.

ACTIONS: (1) That copies of *the Strategic Vision – The University of Northampton 2005-2010* be obtained for the BVPP Working Group.

(2) That the recommendations of the final report include the production of both an internal BVPP, an easier to comprehend, user-friendly version for the general public and a general summary document. In addition a summary page of headlines summarising the key objectives should be produced.

(3) That a draft questionnaire and answer sheet 'What is the BVPP' be produced for the next meeting which would be further developed for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14 June 2006.

6 BVPP PROCESS FOR FUTURE YEARS

D Phillipson, Corporate Manager, advised that: -

- First draft of this year's Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) had been produced based on examples of good practice.
- The draft was more descriptive than previous years.
- The process was further ahead this year than last; 85% of required targets had been met. Actions were in place to chase the remainder.
- Each BVPP contains three years of targets; two years have already been obtained for this year's BVPP.
- The Council will be in a better position in respect of its BVPP process next year. This year it is constrained to a tight timetable mainly due to the priority areas not as yet set.
- The Council is obliged to report on its Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) in its BVPP, reporting of LPIs is discretionary.
- Advice needs to be sought from the auditors whether local performance indicators (LPIs) should be included in the BVPP.
- The Audit Commission looks at Local Authorities' BVPIs and does not give credit for good LPIs.
- As part of the Council's performance management process, quarterly performance reviews (QPRs) are carried out. Three years of targets are shown in QPRs.

- There is a strong medium term financial strategy in place which is informed by: -
 - Local Area Agreement (LAA)
 - Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
 - Crime and Disorder
 - Performance Management Framework
 - Council's budgets

The BVPP Working Group commented: -

- Advantageous to start the BVPP process early in January. The targets for the previous two years could be considered to ascertain if they were the right targets for the third year.
- Target setting for the third year should be carried out before the outturn, so that everything is not carried out in the period directly after the outturn.
- LPIs can often show the Council in a stronger position and can balance against poor performance.
- This Working Group needs to look at how useful last year's BVPP was, whether it informed people, and what improvements could be suggested. A comparison of last year's BVPP with this year's would also be made.
- The Working Group should be issued with a hard copy of the first draft of this year's BVPP.

ACTION: That D Phillipson, Corporate Manager, circulate paper copies of the first draft of this year's BVPP to the Working Group.

7 Date of next meetings

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Tuesday 30 May commencing at 3pm in the Holding Room at the Guildhall.

The final meeting would be held on Wednesday 14 June 2006 commencing at 12noon in the Holding Room at the Guildhall. The Working Group would finalise its report for submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting later that evening.

The meeting concluded at 1.30pm