

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**18<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2007**

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**TRANSPORT SERVICE - WHOLE SERVICE INSPECTION AND  
BEST VALUE REVIEW ACTION PLAN**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To:
  - (i) Present to Members the proposed Action Plan which takes forward the key recommendations of the Audit Commission's Inspection of the County Council's Transport service carried out during October 2005.
  - (ii) Ask Members to note that the outstanding actions arising from the Best Value Reviews of Passenger Transport and Highways Management have been incorporated into the Action Plan.
  - (iii) Ask Members to note that the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Economic Development will monitor progress against the actions and targets contained within the Plan.

**Background**

2. During 2004-05 Best Value Reviews (BVR) of both Passenger Transport and Highways Management were commissioned and carried out within the Environmental Services Department. These were separately reported to Members in April 2005. The conclusions and Action Plans from each were approved. Members were involved in each Review with Mr. J. Osborn acting as 'external challenge' to the Highways BVR with Mr. W. Moss and Mr. T. Chivers jointly undertaking that role in the Passenger Transport Review. Subsequently, this Committee requested sight of an annual progress report.
3. These Reviews were both commissioned against the backdrop of a growing reliance on Whole Service Inspections (WSI) by the Audit Commission. Indeed, Wiltshire had been notified in late 2003 that an Inspection of the 'Transport' service would be carried out in 2005. The Inspection would be broad in scope and include Passenger Transport, Highways, Traffic Management and Transport Planning. The BVRs were commissioned to provide a substantial portion of the County Council's portfolio of evidence.
4. During the latter stages of the BVRs the Council was notified of a change in the Audit Commission Inspection regime and was informed that the WSI would no longer be necessary owing to the Council's 'good' rating in the recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Due to the advanced stage of the Reviews it was decided to continue and proactively commission a voluntary 'light touch' Inspection. This was subsequently carried out by the Audit Commission officer originally earmarked to lead the visiting Inspection Team. The scope of this Inspection remained intact. The only difference was one of resourcing which did, of necessity, mean there was less detailed triangulation of evidence sources when forming conclusions and making recommendations. Nevertheless, it was a rigorous and exacting process which yielded a great deal of useful feedback, including positive recommendations for further service improvements.

## Main Considerations for the Council

5. The majority of the actions arising from the BVRs have either been completed or are ongoing.
6. Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) initiatives have been underway in both the Highways and Passenger Transport service areas over the last 18-24 months. These are at an advanced stage and fairly close to conclusion and should yield improvements in both the customer experience and in the efficiency and effectiveness of certain business processes. However, it should be recognised that such exercises are resource intensive and the need to direct staff resources to this corporate imperative has resulted in delays in implementing some of the low and medium priority actions in particular.
7. There is little indication of a return to a resource intensive Central Government inspection regime in the near to medium term. Rather, a risk assessment will be based on a new streamlined and standardised range of performance measures, with inspection being triggered by demonstrably poor performance rather than, say, every five years regardless of achievement. This is to be welcomed. However, in addition to seeking to maintain (and where possible improve) performance against a suite of performance indicators, the recently published White Paper from the Department of Community and Local Government does signal a clear strengthening of the citizen's role in maintaining and improving service delivery. Users' experiences of local service provision will gain more weight as residents acquire the formal power of petition via the 'community Call for Action'. This will present particular challenges for the services in question as local aspirations are often not aligned with performance measures established by the Audit Commission. The Action Plan (attached at **Appendix 1**) represents a range of improvement targets that will hopefully, resources permitting, improve performance against both forms of performance assessment.

## Key Messages from the Audit Commission Report

8. Whilst a conclusive performance categorisation of 'Fair', 'Good' etc. could not be provided owing to the voluntary status of the Inspection, the report states that *"the Service has a number of key strengths that compare favourably with typical descriptors of a good service used in the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) for a formal transport inspection."* The report also states that *"The Service has good prospects of improving in the future."*
9. Other points made and characteristics of the service highlighted include:
  - (i) Strong focus on corporate aims and objectives
  - (ii) Good at community engagement
  - (iii) Strategic approach to consultation and communication
  - (iv) Understands the needs of different groups of users and targets improvements
  - (v) Takes an evidence-based approach to decisions
  - (vi) Good prospects of improving in the future
  - (vii) Good track record of delivering improvement
  - (viii) Well trained, experienced and motivated workforce
  - (ix) Good at learning from others and from its own experiences

10. The final report is largely positive and encouraging. There are, however, a number of points made where there was perceived room for improvement. These include:
- (i) The lack of an Asset Management Plan (AMP) and Highway Network Plan
  - (ii) Scope for improvement in the use of the Council's website
  - (iii) The continued use of manual ordering systems
  - (iv) Lack of a resourced plan to replace the Wigglybus service post 2007
  - (v) Some lack of proactivity in publicising both the services delivered by the authority and their achievements/success stories

#### Service Response

11. Upon receipt of the report officers began to address the concerns and recommendations without delay. Many of the areas for improvement identified above are no longer included in the Plan as they have been completed. The following actions have either been completed or are near completion.
- (i) The County Council's AMP (incorporating the Network Plan) will be published in April 2007.
  - (ii) The Council's website has been improved markedly over the last year. Transport and Highways service information has been greatly enhanced and this continues to be augmented by additional information made available as an integral part of both Passenger Transport and Highways BPR exercises. These will see the introduction of on-line transactions throughout 2007 as the corporate tools are procured, in particular the e-forms software due to be available from April 2007.
  - (iii) Electronic works ordering has been introduced in parallel with the new Highways Term Contracts for Works and Consultancy.
  - (iv) A resourced plan for the post 2007 Wigglybus service is currently under development, with a proposal being made to the Wigglybus Advisory Panel in January 2007.
  - (v) Publicity has been driven jointly by both service and corporate imperatives. Examples include the new corporate Parish Newsletter and the Highways Services A-Z which is available both on-line and in hard copy. Other improvements include the expanded role of the Service Information Officer and the inclusion of that officer in high profile project teams to further both communications and publicity. Plans are currently in place to further promote the role within the main service areas.

#### Best Value Reviews - Outstanding Actions

12. Some actions from BVR remain outstanding and have been incorporated into the integrated Action Plan. Many of these are ongoing activities rather than geared towards a definable end product and are recorded as such. Some of these actions are set out below.
- (i) Development of a 'hub' based approach to local transport provision in rural areas. This has been piloted but funding constraints have precluded a wider rollout to date. A comprehensive review of Passenger Transport Networks and procurement is to be undertaken during 2007.

- (ii) Development of an annual consultation programme to measure local stakeholder satisfaction with highways works and gauge local priorities. To ensure effort is not duplicated it is intended to integrate this activity into the Listening to Communities initiative to develop single Community Area Forums for each of the Council's 20 community areas. Pilots are due to start in the near future.
  - (iii) Develop an action plan to halt the deterioration of the Unclassified Road Network by March 2011. This will be incorporated into the development of the Council's first AMP to be published in 2007.
13. The six headings in the attached Action Plan, eg 'Vision and Coherence', reflect the KLOE adopted in consultation with the Audit Commission and used to produce the Council's initial Self-Assessment Report. All outstanding actions from the BVRs have been grouped within these for convenience.
14. It is intended that the Action Plan will be subject to six monthly reporting to the Department's Management Team with an annual update report provided to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Economic Development.

#### **Environmental Impact of the Proposal**

15. Environmental impacts differ greatly with the actions contained within the Plan. Therefore, each should be considered individually by appropriate owners. This report and its proposals have no additional impact.

#### **Risk Assessment**

16. Each action should be assessed independently. This report and its proposal carry no additional risk.

#### **Financial Implications**

17. Financial implications of actions contained within the Plan will be presented to Members where necessary. This report carries no additional implications.

#### **Options Considered**

18. The County Council invited the Inspection and this proactive move was welcomed by the Audit Commission. The report and recommendations will be available for any future Audit Commission Inspection. The Action Plan is the Council's internal response to the recommendations and it is important that the Council is seen to progress the Plan where resources permit. To not do so would damage the good track record achieved by this authority in managing and implementing improvements in service delivery.

#### **Reason for Proposal**

19. To streamline monitoring of progress by Members of the 'Transport' improvement programme.

## **Proposal**

20. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes that:

- (i) The outstanding actions arising from the Best Value Reviews of Passenger Transport and Highways Management have now been incorporated into the integrated Transport Action Plan.
- (ii) The Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Economic Development will monitor progress against the actions and targets contained within the Plan.

## **GEORGE BATTEN**

Director of Environmental Services

Report Author

**JOHN GEARY**

Projects and Process Manager

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**The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:**

None