

Copy of the Auditor's Report to Worcestershire County Council on its Best Value Performance Plan for the Year Ending 31 March 2002

Certificate

We certify that we have audited Worcestershire County Council's best value performance plan in accordance with Section 7 of the Local Government Act 1999 and the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice. We also had regard to supplementary guidance issued by the Audit Commission.

Respective Responsibilities of the Council and the Auditors

Under the Local Government Act 1999 ('the Act') the Council is required to prepare and publish a best value performance plan summarising the Council's assessments of its performance and position in relation to its statutory duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement to the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The Council is responsible for the preparation of the plan and for the information and assessments set out within it. The Council is also responsible for establishing appropriate performance management and internal control systems from which the information and assessments in its plan are derived. The form and content of the best value performance plan are prescribed in section 6 of the Act and statutory guidance issued by the DETR.

As the Council's auditors, we are required under Section 7 of the Act to carry out an audit of the best value performance plan, to certify that we have done so, and:

- to report whether we believe that the plan has been prepared and published in accordance with statutory requirements set out in Section 6 of the Act and statutory guidance and, where appropriate, recommending how the plan should be amended so as to accord with statutory requirements;
- to recommend:
 - where appropriate, procedures to be followed in relation to the plan;
 - whether the Audit Commission should carry out a best value inspection of the Council under Section 10 of the Act;
 - whether the Secretary of State should give a direction under Section 15 of the Act.

Opinion

Basis of this opinion

For the purpose of forming our opinion whether the plan was prepared and published in accordance with the legislation and statutory guidance, we conducted our audit in accordance with the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice. In carrying out our audit work we also had regard to supplementary guidance issued by the Audit Commission.

We planned and performed our work so as to obtain all the information and explanations which we considered necessary in order to provide an opinion on whether the plan has been prepared and published in accordance with statutory requirements.

In giving our opinion we are not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of the information or the realism and achievability of the assessments published by the Council. Our work therefore comprised a review and assessment of the plan and, where appropriate, examination on a test basis of relevant evidence, sufficient to satisfy ourselves that the plan

includes those matters prescribed in legislation and statutory guidance and that the arrangements for publishing the plan complied with the requirements of the legislation and statutory guidance.

Included in the plan are the Council's estimates for the year ending 31 March 2001. Actual results for the year are likely to be different from the figures reported, because events and circumstances frequently do not occur as expected, and the differences may be material. To the extent that figures included in the plan are estimates, our audit work comprised an assessment as to whether the estimates made by the Council had been properly compiled in all significant respects on the basis of the assumptions stated by the Council, as at the date at which the plan was prepared.

Opinion

In our opinion, Worcestershire County Council has prepared and published its best value performance plan in all significant respects in accordance with Section 6 of the Local Government Act 1999 and statutory guidance issued by the DETR.

Recommendations on procedures followed in relation to the plan

Where appropriate, we are required to recommend the procedures to be followed by the Council in relation to implementation of the plan or the systems to support the production of future plans.

Basis of recommendations

For the purpose of making our recommendations, we conducted our audit in accordance with the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice. In carrying out our audit work we also had regard to supplementary guidance issued by the Audit Commission.

We planned and performed our work so as to obtain all the information and explanations that we considered necessary in order to enable us to determine whether or not to make recommendations in this report on the matters that came to our attention during the audit. However, our work cannot be relied upon to identify every weakness or opportunity for improvement. In particular, it has not necessarily covered the same areas as a best value inspection.

For this purpose, our audit included a review and assessment, and where appropriate, examination on a test basis of evidence relevant to:

- the adequacy of the systems set in place by the Council for collecting and recording specified performance information;
- the extent to which the procedures followed by the Council in relation to its best value performance plan comply with the performance management framework prescribed in the legislation and statutory guidance.

Recommendations

On the basis of our audit work, we consider that the matters set out below should be brought to your attention:

- The Council should develop and implement a corporate procurement strategy, setting out the corporate approach to procurement including more detailed guidance on applying the principles of competition to its best value work.
- The Council should consider the individual issues identified from the audit of performance information and ensure that they are addressed in time for the production of the next performance plan.
- The Council should develop a corporate approach and guidance on target setting and provides training for staff in this area to support them to perform this task more effectively.
- All service directorates should regularly review the implementation of the best value performance plan, including performance information trends, achievement of targets and implementation of action plans arising from best value reviews and inspections. Each service should subsequently report best value performance periodically to the Chief Officers Management Board.
- Clear responsibilities for performance management should be established at Executive and Scrutiny Member levels under the Council's new political structures. In particular, this should address responsibility for monitoring the achievement of performance targets and the implementation of action plans arising from best value reviews and inspections.

Recommendations on referral to the Audit Commission / Secretary of State

We are required each year to recommend whether, on the basis of our audit work, the Audit Commission should carry out a best value inspection of the Council or whether the Secretary of State should give a direction.

On the basis of our work:

- We do not recommend that the Audit Commission should carry out a best value inspection of Worcestershire County Council under Section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999;
- We do not recommend that the Secretary of State should give a direction under Section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999.

The certificate was signed by Steve Valentine on behalf of PriceWaterhouse Coopers.