

APPENDIX 2

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION IN CHALLENGING CURRENT APPROACHES TO SERVICE PROVISION

This Appendix is intended to assist with the **challenge** aspect of fundamental service reviews, as described more fully in Section 7 of the manual.

As part of each service review we must challenge:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- Should we be doing it?
- Should we do more or less of it?
- Is there a better way of doing it?

This Appendix offers a checklist of issues to be considered and questions to be asked and draws on various approaches to service review (including the EFQM Excellence Model). By assessing the service against the various criteria included in the Appendix, review teams will be able to form an overall impression of the service's strengths and weaknesses and of opportunities for improvement.

How to use this Appendix

The Appendix should be used as a checklist and source of questions **for every best value review**. The review team should determine the most relevant questions for the service under review and work through the issues raised in the Appendix in consultation with the management and staff of the service under review. Small discussion groups could be used for this purpose, as well as one to one meetings with key individuals. The following format for analysis might be helpful:

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT		
Key question	Findings	Recommendation
Have senior managers communicated a clear sense of direction for the service?		

Details of this analysis should be kept on the master file for the review, with relevant points being reflected in the review report.

BEST VALUE CHALLENGE: ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION BY REVIEW TEAMS AND SERVICE MANAGERS

Why is the service being provided?

- What evidence is there of a defined need for the service?
- Is the service mandatory or discretionary?
- If discretionary, is the provision of the service a policy priority for the Council given available resources? Has this been confirmed with councillors?
- How might things change in the future due to demographic, political or economic factors and what impact could this have on service provision?
- What would happen if we stopped providing the service?

How should the service be provided?

- Should the service continue to be provided in its current form?
- How are “best in class authorities” or alternative service suppliers providing the service? What can we learn from them?

Who should be providing the service?

- What are the relative advantages and disadvantages both financial and non-financial of in-house provision, partnership provision, buying the service in?

Leadership and Management

(Leaders will include both elected members and managers)

- Have senior managers communicated a clear sense of direction for the service?
- Do managers provide effective and regular briefings and is there a mechanism for senior managers to receive and act on feedback from these briefings?
- How do managers and politicians monitor the performance of the service?
- How do leaders recognise and appreciate people’s efforts and achievements?
- How do managers visibly demonstrate their commitment to best value and continuous improvement?
- What evidence is there of management action to achieve service improvements?
- How do leaders obtain feedback on their own performance (e.g. 360° appraisal)?

Policy and Strategy

- Does the service have clear aims, objectives and targets reflecting policies approved by elected members (through the service planning process)?
- Are overall service aims and objectives translated into operational plans for individual units within the service?
- Are service aims and objectives in line with the priorities identified in the corporate plan?
- Are policies and strategies regularly reviewed and updated?
- How successful is the service in achieving its aims, objectives and targets?
- Does the service have effective processes for looking forward and taking account of likely future changes in its planning and policy development?
- Have appropriate standards of service provision been identified and are they being met?
- How does the service consult with, and take account of the views of service users, partner organisations, local communities and staff in developing policy and strategy?

Customer Focus

- Are service users regularly consulted to test service satisfaction levels and identifying opportunities for improvement?
- What evidence is there that the service has acted on the results of that consultation?

Staffing and Skills

- How do staff perceive the service? – (Organise a SWOT session to find out)
- What do staff feel about communications upwards and downwards?
- Are there mechanisms for involving staff in helping the service to improve (e.g. regular staff meetings/surveys)?
- Does the service act on the results of staff consultation?
- Is there effective communication with staff at all levels?
- What factors emerging from staff consultations need to be taken into account in planning the future delivery of the service?
- How do staff numbers and skills compare with those of other relevant providers?
- Is there any significant sign of high rates of staff turnover and / or sickness? If so, what are the underlying reasons for this?

- Is there an effective system for planning the best use of staff resources (i.e. linking what staff do to key outputs and objectives)?
- Are staff appropriately skilled for the work they need to undertake or are there any significant skills gaps?
- Has the service fully implemented the corporate staff review and development system?
- Do managers feel they have the right levels of devolved responsibility?
- How do levels of delegation compare with those elsewhere?
- How are people's efforts recognised and rewarded?
- Are staff training and development needs being identified and addressed at all levels?
- Are staff encouraged to take part in other improvement activities (e.g. membership of professional groups, quality improvement initiatives)?

Performance/Results

- What are the key measures of this service's performance and what do they tell us? For example:
 - Is the service setting itself SMART targets and is it meeting them?
 - Is the service performing well against nationally or locally set performance indicators?
 - Does user feedback indicate the service is performing well?
 - Has the service entered for/won any performance awards (Charter Mark, Business Excellence, liP) or should it think about doing so?
 - Would the service be successful if it submitted a beacon bid – if not what are its perceived weaknesses?

Resources

- How do service expenditure levels (e.g. spend per head of population) compare to those in other authorities?
- Is there evidence of regular and effective budgetary control?
- Is there evidence of budgetary pressures and if so what action needs to be taken to address them?
- Are opportunities to generate income or other external funding being effectively pursued?
- (For internal support services) Are we operating an internal market for this service, or should we be doing so?
- Are buildings, equipment and other assets effectively managed to ensure they are used to best effect?

- Is the service exploring lease / hire / buy options for expensive equipment?
- Is the service making the most effective use of new technology (e.g. to improve the efficiency of processing, to enhance information use / provision, or to improve communication)?
- How does the service keep abreast of new technological developments?
- Does the service have an IT strategy?

Systems and Processes

- Do comparisons with key performance indicators suggest that the Council's processes or systems are less efficient than those of other organisations? If yes, detailed comparisons of key processes (with those of other providers) will need to be undertaken to identify opportunities for improvement
- Is there scope to make better use of IT to improve the efficiency of processes?
- What can the service learn from systems and process in other authorities? - How do the "best in class" authorities do things?

Structures

- How do service organisation structures (political and officer management structures) compare with those of other providers in the public, private or voluntary sectors and what scope does this suggest to revise structures (e.g. flatter management structures)?
- How might structures need to change to take account of other changing circumstances (e.g. increasing trends towards partnership working)

Internal Support Services

- Are service level agreements in place, or should they be?
- What is the basis of charging for the service? Are charges to users clear and agreed?

Style and Culture

- How well do the service and its ways of working reflect the Council's corporate style and culture objectives:
 - Customer focus
 - Continuous improvement
 - Personal development
 - "Can do" culture
 - Freedom within boundaries
 - Partnership working
 - Corporate working

Partnership Working

- Would it be more effective and efficient to enter into a partnership arrangement with others in the public, private or voluntary sectors to provide this service?
- Are partners regularly consulted on opportunities for improvement?
- Does feedback from partner organisations indicate issues that need to be addressed in the future delivery of the service?

Innovation

- What mechanisms does the service have for thinking ahead and introducing innovation into future service delivery?

Impact on Society

- What impact is the service having on the local community and is this in line with service objectives? If not what changes to service delivery might be required? (Indicators might include feedback from surveys, or changes over time in relevant performance indicators e.g. recycling rates)

Community Safety

- Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which requires the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area? How can the service contribute to achieving this?

Sustainability

- How does the service contribute to the three key characteristics of a sustainable community?
 - protecting and enhancing the environment
 - meeting social needs
 - promoting economic success

(Note the sustainability checklist shown at Appendix 3 may be helpful in assessing the service's contribution to the Council's sustainability objectives).

Corporate working

- How effectively is the service perceived as working on corporate, inter-departmental, and cross service issues

Cross-service issues

- What contribution is the service making to cross-service issues (lifelong learning, community safety, environment, economic development, health and social well being, social exclusion)

Media Coverage

- What evidence is there of positive / negative media coverage of the service?
- Could the service do more to promote a positive public image through the media? (Contact the press office for help with this)

Purchasing / Suppliers

- What steps is the service taking to ensure that bought-in goods or services represent good value for money?
- Does the service purchase goods or services in accordance with the Council's approved procurement strategy?

Equalities

- Has the service set targets for progressively meeting each level of the Local Government Equalities standard and are targets being achieved?
- How is the service performing against the equality checklist set out at Appendix 4?