

LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

EXECUTIVE

DATE: 16 AUGUST 2004

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT

FOR ACTION

NAME OF WARD ALL

REPORT TITLE : BEST VALUE REVIEW OF REGULATORY SERVICES

REF: ES-03/04-226

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the final report of the Best Value Review of Regulatory Services and the Action Plan arising from that Review.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Members note the conclusions of the Best Value Review and agree the Action Plan.
- 2.2 That the Quality of Life Scrutiny Panel in future review progress against the Action Plan

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Best Value Review raises no immediate financial implications. The Action Plan can be progressed within existing resources.
- 3.2 Options for savings, including efficiency savings, within the services concerned will be considered in the 2005-06 budget process.

4.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The review dealt with staffing issues in some detail, and both the Review Report and the Action Plan cover staffing issues. Other than these there are no immediate changes proposed that would have significant consequences for staff.

5.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Effective regulation and enforcement are important tools for managing adverse impacts on the quality of life of residents and visitors to Brent. Improved regulation and enforcement should lead to better quality of life.
- 5.2 All the service units involved in the review have an Environmental Management System accredited to ISO 14001.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no specific legal implications

7.0 DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Paragraph 8.6.4 notes the significance of the issue of ethnic monitoring of businesses. In addition there is some evidence of differential take up of these services amongst different ethnic groups and of differential satisfaction rates. Action Plan item 3.4 proposes the preparation of a programme of work to ensure that equalities in the delivery of these services are addressed in a coordinated way.

8.0 DETAIL

Best Value Review of Regulatory Services

- 8.1 A Best Value Review of Environment's Regulatory Services was undertaken between February and November 2003. The self assessment prepared by the Review Team was considered by an independent panel in December 2003 and January 2004. The panel reported their conclusions at the end of March 2004. Appendix 1 to this report is the self assessment adapted to take account of the panel's conclusions and recommendations. Appendix 2 is the Action Plan arising out of the review updated to show progress up to May 2004.
- 8.2 The service units within the scope of the review were Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health, Health Safety & Licensing and Trading Standards.
- 8.3 At the outset, it was expected that the Review would be inspected by the Audit Commission. However, in devising their programme for 2004 the Commission concluded that a Whole Service Inspection of Planning was needed to provide a score to input to the 2004 CPA. This inspection took place in June 2004. The preparations for that inspection unfortunately delayed the reporting of the Best Value Review and, to some extent, disrupted the implementation of the Action Plan.

Key Findings

- 8.4 The Review recognised the individual strengths of the five service units, each of which holds a Chartermark, and has a strong culture of continuous improvement, performance management and customer service. The Review therefore focused on the cross cutting areas common to the services where greater scope for improvement might be found.
- 8.5 To this end, a Business Working Group examined the relationship of the services with trading businesses and developers in the borough. A Customer Working Group focused on the scope for improving customer service. A Staff and Organisation Group examined the appropriate areas whilst a Finance & Performance Group undertook a range of benchmarking.
- 8.6 The key opportunities for improvement are set out in the Action Plan. To a large extent they are self explanatory. A few crucial issues are discussed below.

Recruitment & retention

8.6.1 All the services are having significant difficulty in recruiting and retaining sufficient professionally qualified staff. The pressures are London wide and actions are proposed including more flexible and/or enhanced remuneration, recruitment of graduate trainees, and the use of decision support and call handling systems to allow non-professional staff to free up the time of professional staff.

Information management and systems

8.6.2 The services depend on effective information systems and technology. They have ambitious plans for future improvement which will require ICT to support amongst other things greater remote and mobile working, integrated databases of business customers, links to the Customer Relationship Management system, and 'expert' decision support systems. Ensuring that there is sufficient capacity in-house to support this programme will be important.

Organisation

8.6.3 The review recognised the need to improve the co-ordination of the services offered to businesses and developers. It concluded that, in the first instance, this could best be achieved through improved communication, processes and systems rather than through organisational change (whether to reflect specific customer groups or particular kinds of processes). It will be important to keep the case for organisational change under review.

Equalities and diversity

8.6.4 The 2003-04 Race Equality Scheme identified 'enforcement' as a priority within Environmental Services. The review was hampered in its consideration of equalities issues relating to enforcement, which primarily relate to businesses, by the absence of a clear methodology for considering the "ethnicity" of businesses, and hence a considerable shortage of monitoring data. A decision has now been made to consider the ethnicity of the main contact in each relevant transaction to be the required information rather than to consider the ownership, or other characteristics (which may, of course, be multi-ethnic). This decision will be kept under review and if a better methodology is identified it will be adopted. For the present, this allows the collection of data to inform decision making.

9.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Details of Documents:

9.1 Regulatory Best Value Review file and supporting documents

9.2 Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact:

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