

Best Value Improvement Board

TITLE	Author	ITEM NO	Date
Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 – April-June 17 Update	Afazul Hoque Interim Service Manager Strategy, Policy & Performance		14 th June 2017

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides the first update on the Council's Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 covering the period April-June 2017. It details progress against the 5 areas of Communications, Property, Elections and Grants and the 26 actions found within the Improvement Plan. The Directions from the Secretary of State for Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) requires the Council to submit quarterly update reports and the first submission will need to be submitted by 10am on 30th June 2017.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Board is asked to:

- Consider and comment on the draft update report attached as Appendix 1
- Consider and agree any revised milestone timescales in the Improvement plan.

3. **DETAILS OF REPORT**

- 3.1 The Council as part of its final submission to the Secretary of State for DCLG submitted a Best Value Improvement Plan 17-18 and outlined proposals to set up a Best Value Improvement Board to drive sustainable improvement across the organisation by providing oversight, support and challenge. The Secretary of State wrote to the Council on 28th March 2017 stating that he has revoked the Directions issued on 17th December 2014 and removed the Commissioners that were involved in the governance of the Council. The Secretary of State also issued new Directions which will be in force until 30th September 2018.
- 3.2 The new Directions require the Council to undertake the following:
- Submit quarterly reports on all outstanding actions in the Best Value Action Plan and Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 to the Secretary of State. The first report to be received by 10am on 30th June 2017;

- Set up an independent review of achievement against the Best Value Action Plan and Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 to be submitted to the Secretary of State by 1st August 2018;
- Set up a new Best Value Improvement Board, chaired by the Mayor, with cross party representation and external representatives to provide suitable challenge to improve all Council activity.

3.3 The Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 has 5 key priority areas comprising 26 strategic actions. These priorities areas are a continuance of those found in the Best Value Action Plans arising from the original Secretary of State's Directions. The Plan demonstrates continued implementation where previous activities could not be implemented before the Directions expired as well as continued improvements.

3.4 During the period April-June 2017 work has continued to deliver the milestones in the Improvement Plan. Regular updates have been provided to Corporate Leadership Team and all activities have been incorporated within individual Directorate Plans to ensure focus remains on delivery.

3.5 The Council has successfully recruited 7 senior officers including the Statutory Monitoring Officer who will be starting with the Council on 3rd July 2017. This provides long term stable leadership to drive forward delivery of the Council's priorities and improvement journey. The Clear up Project report has been completed and recommendations have started to be implemented and will be reported to Cabinet in June 2017. Communications with internal and external stakeholders are continually being developed and a Communications Strategy for 2017-18 has been developed which will support this work.

3.6 Extensive work has been undertaken with staff including through a staff survey, focus groups and staff conference to refresh the staff values. The discussions have helped shaped how staff want the Council to operate in the future and ensure our focus remains on delivering the Council's key priorities as outlined in the Strategic Plan. Staff groups have also been set up to drive forward the Council's Smarter Together transformation programme with the Senior Officer Boards leading on delivery of the programme.

3.7 An ADASS peer review has been completed of adult social care commissioning and this is a positive account of outcome based commissioning. In addition an Adults Social Care Improvement Board has been established as a time-limited Board to both instigate new activity and coordinate various practice and performance improvement activities already taking place in Adults' Social Care. The main purpose of the Board is to drive up standards in relation to performance and practice and so improve outcomes for vulnerable adults in the borough. There are four broad areas of focus:

- Performance – which will include a focus on performance against the key outcomes identified in the Directorate Plan, and associated measures and data
 - Practice – improving safeguarding practice will be a key feature
 - Culture – adopting a strengths-based approach with a focus on prevention and demand management
 - Capacity planning – a key strand of work will be around our workforce and its development
- 3.8 A draft Improvement Plan has been drafted to take forward the recommendations from the Ofsted inspection of Children’s Services and a Children’s Services Improvement Board has been established led by an Independent Chair. The Improvement Plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Education in June 2017.

4. **COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

- 4.1 The Best Value Improvement Plan is a priority for the Council, and requisite resources have been identified within the budget in order to deliver the outcomes. Any additional resources required to deliver any of the activities will need relevant authority before commencing.

5. **LEGAL COMMENTS**

- 5.1 The Council is a best value authority within the meaning of Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. As a best value authority, the Council has an obligation under section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness” (the best value duty).
- 5.2 Where the Secretary of State is satisfied that an authority is not meeting its best value duty, the Secretary of State may: (1) direct the authority to take action to bring itself into compliance with that duty; (2) direct that specified functions be carried out by the Secretary of State or a nominee and that the authority follow the Secretary of State’s instructions and provide such assistance as may be required (Local Government Act 1999). In accordance with this power the Secretary of State gave directions to the Council on 17 December 2014, 29 April 2015 and 6 May 2015. Revised directions were also given on 16 January 2017.
- 5.3 Although those Directions have now been revoked and the specified functions which were carried out by the Commissioners on behalf of the Secretary have been returned to the authority, the Secretary of State issued fresh directions to the Council for it to take specific action which were considered necessary or expedient to secure the

Council's compliance with its best value duty without specifying that specified functions be carried out by the Secretary of State or a nominee. These include setting up a new Best Value Improvement Board, chaired by the Mayor, with cross party representation and external representatives to provide suitable challenge to improve all Council activities.

- 5.4 The directions are enforceable by the Secretary of State, who may seek an order in the High Court requiring the Council to remedy any breach. In the circumstances, it is appropriate for the Council to take steps to comply with the directions and to monitor its compliance with the directions. In that regard, the report provides the first update on the Council's Best Value Improvement Plan 2017-18 covering the period April-June 2017. It details progress against the 5 areas of Communications, Property, Elections and Grants and the 26 actions found within the Improvement Plan.
- 5.5 When taking action in response to the direction, the Council must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and the need to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (the public sector equality duty). Compliance with this duty has been a feature, to the extent relevant, of the Council's action in response to the directions.
- 5.6 There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.