

Committee	<b>Cabinet</b>
Date	<b>29 June 2004</b>
Report By	<b>Director of Transport and Environment</b>
Title of Report	<b>Best Value Review of Transport Service</b>
Purpose of Report	<b>To provide an opportunity for the Cabinet to comment on the report of the Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee.</b>

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

**The Cabinet is recommended to:**

- 1. note and welcome the report of the Scrutiny Committee; and**
  - 2. that in considering the report of the Scrutiny Committee, the County Council be recommended to welcome the main recommendations set out in the report and to approve the response of the Director of Transport and Environment to the recommendations and their implementation.**
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**1. Financial Appraisal**

1.1 This report has no direct financial implications for the County Council. However the techniques recommended to inform scheme selection will facilitate the development of annual works programmes which are better focused to deliver against national and local targets. In addition, through implementation of recommendation 6, we will develop sound and reliable information about the County Council's transport related assets, their value and the ability to quantify and measure the maintenance backlog.

**2. Background**

2.1 The County Council's Transport Service is in the process of a whole service review benefiting from a three stage inspection by the Audit Commission, one of the first of this type in the country. The findings of this inspection will inform the 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) refresh.

2.2 A Best Value Review Project Board was established to undertake a review of the Transport Service to help inform the third stage of the inspection by the Audit Commission. The Panel was concerned not to duplicate work carried out in previous scrutiny and best value reviews in this service area. Helpfully the scope of the review was adapted, and refined to take account of suggestions by the Audit Commission, to focus on the criticism of our performance embodied in the Government Office for the South East's (GOSE) decision letter on last year's Local Transport Plan Annual Progress Report (APR). This criticism has not been taken lightly and the range of actions taken to address this are reported elsewhere on this agenda, together with an emerging draft of this year's APR.

2.3 The Project Board has heard evidence from transport service managers about how individual schemes were selected and developed to deliver specific objectives. The Board has also compared how the airports company (BAA) and Southern Water determine their

programmes and seek a balance between conflicting priorities. They were helped throughout by Mike Palmer, a recently retired assistant director from Hertfordshire County Council, who gave an informal but independent perspective on the evidence as a critical friend.

2.4 Audit and Best Value Scrutiny Committee endorsed the Board's report on 17 June 2004 and provided additional comment and emphasis outlined at appendix 1. The response of the Director of Transport and Environment is attached to this report at appendix 2.

### **3. Commentary**

3.1 The Panel brought a helpful challenge to the approach employed for scheme selection. It has worked constructively with officers to understand the competing priorities and develop a more rigorous target led approach. The findings of the Committee broadly support the range of actions already taken to address the GOSE criticism. Its endorsement of the emerging departmental restructure, to improved 'joined up working' and accommodate the proposed approach to the future delivery of externalised services, previously approved by the Cabinet, is welcomed.

3.2 Specific recommendations, drawing on adopted practice of BAA and Southern Water, to inform scheme selection and development helpfully build on the range of actions already in hand to ensure that the prioritisation of schemes more closely reflects the respective contribution to objectives and targets.

3.3 The findings arising from the representative public workshop will help inform not only the third stage of the Audit Commission Inspection but also the development of the second generation Local Transport Plan due for submission to GOSE in July 2005

3.4 Significant improvements have been made over the last six months embodied in the day to day planning and delivery of transport improvements in the county. Early comment from GOSE, Department for Transport (DfT) and their consultants have indicated that this year's APR is shaping up well and already represents an improvement on last year's report. This should realise an improved Government rating, advised in December 2004, and I trust will reflect in the level of financial approvals granted for 2005/06.

### **4. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation**

4.1 The Best Value Review of Transport Services has brought a constructive challenge to this area of work. The Board's endorsement of the management actions that are being taken to further improve service delivery and their recommendations, which build on those, are welcome and seen as constructive for improving transport in East Sussex.

BOB WILKINS  
Director of Transport and Environment  
22 June 2004  
C29JUNE-BVR-TransportService

Contact Officer: Peter Hayward Tel. No. 01273 482136  
Local member: All

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Best Value Review Panel Report on Transport Service – June 2004.