



starting to  
modernise

# best value in education

a practical guide

Initial

Education  
Personnel

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**Professor Paul Corrigan**





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## preface

Providing Best Value is the aim for all who work in a service environment and to be told that you have 'delighted' your customers has to be the ultimate accolade. But how do we demonstrate that our service is at the optimum point where cost meets quality?

**Best Value** will place more and completely different pressures on Heads, School Managers and Education Officers. It will also bring rewards to all - including the communities that we serve. Fresh outlooks to some traditional responsibilities as well as providing (or demanding) a different approach to procurement are at the core of any Best Value initiative and the closer we examine the service in light of the '4 Cs' (Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete), the wider the repercussions are felt.

The provision of Public Sector services should be 'joined up' across the traditional, departmentalised approach. The local community, voluntary sector, private sector, local authority and other public services (the police, for example) should all be affected by the way in which the local education service is provided. Best Value demands that all stakeholders are involved - at least in consultation.

Best Value represents a significant challenge and a huge opportunity for all public service providers. Initial Education Personnel is committed to investing in the sector in which it operates and that is why this piece of research has been conceived and commissioned **with support in mind**.

Professor Corrigan has structured this document in such a way as to provide practical help for Education Officers, Headteachers and School Managers wishing to implement Best Value through best practice already in place in Education Authorities around the country. As such, I think it should prove invaluable to all involved with improving the quality of the provision of education services.

I hope that you find it a useful tool in developing Best Value alongside the broader modernising agenda.

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## executive summary

Within a month of this pamphlet's publication, local authorities will have a statutory duty to carry out Best Value reviews, within the next five-year period, for all their services.

The aim of this pamphlet is to be useful for those local authorities that are responsible for education services. Drawn from real local government experience, it contains practical information which should be of assistance. At the end of each section there are a range of action points.

This pamphlet takes a snapshot of where local authorities with education services are in this process in early 2000.

Best Value in education takes place against the backdrop of intense pressure from central government on local authorities to improve educational attainment. Given the national importance of this agenda, it is not surprising that local authorities with responsibility for education have concentrated on this.

- 1** It demonstrates what an enormous range of services exist within that overall category of education services. This range covers a full range of entire specialised different industries including catering, construction and financial services as well as the full range of educational services including youth work, education, social work and the provision of early years, let alone core business such as improving standards and achievements. Best Value provides local authorities with the opportunity to work through this range of different services starting with the question of whether the local authority should be providing them at all.
- 2** Whilst a long list of services have been reviewed, those that appear the most often are those which whilst there is an important addition that they make to education either through school meals, providing youth service or through transport, they are not the core services which directly drive up attainment. So far these have been rarely reviewed.
- 3** There are some distinct ways in which education services have been challenged both before and during Best Value. Over the last few years following the Education Reform Act and devolved budgets, some education services have had to be able to successfully 'sell' themselves to their customers – their schools. Compared to most local authority services, this is a real experience of having to meet customer's needs, since failure to do so can have severe consequences. It is also clear that in some parts of the country and for many services, there is no established market for education services. Therefore in those places and for those services, the challenge of competition is limited. Most local authorities with education services are following the corporate guidelines of their local authority with regard to carrying out the injunction to challenge as a part of Best Value. But some have developed some important innovative methods of challenge that are detailed here. Some of the best of these actively involve members in developing their scrutiny role in the modernised political management structure as a part of Best Value.
- 4** Again many local authorities are ensuring that their education services use the corporate guidelines on consultation, but others have developed very specific proposals to consult with their ultimate customer – the young person.
- 5** As mentioned above, the use of competition is limited partly by the recent simplistic view that has developed as a part of the history of Compulsory Competitive Tendering. In many places there is also the problem of a lack of a mature market sector for educational services. Both to develop markets and to enlarge their capacity to procure goods and services, local authorities need to build up their procurement skills.
- 6** Best value reviews within the education services have, as with most local authority services, taken place on a service-by-service basis. It will be important for the most useful application of Best Value to ensure that it is applied in a cross cutting way to include the organisation of service delivery across the local authority.



# chapter 1

## why Best Value?

From April this year local authorities, fire authorities and police authorities will be under a statutory duty to provide Best Value to their local people. In December last year the Government issued statutory guidance on how this duty would be carried out.

In the Best Value guidance there are five main themes:

- Ensuring that public services are responsive to the needs of citizens, not the convenience of service providers
- Ensuring that public services are efficient and of a high quality
- Ensuring that policy making is more joined up and strategic, forward looking and not reactive to short term measures
- Using information technology to tailor services to the needs of users
- Valuing public service and tackling the under representation of minority groups<sup>1</sup>

These tasks are far from easy. They require new ways of working from local government, which will have to affect every aspect of the services they deliver.

From April 2000, Best Value will be at the core of these new ways of working. For those local authorities that are education authorities these new ways of working must have an impact on those services as well.

Here it is important to define how we are going to talk about the education services for which local government is responsible. These services are often referred to as separate from the other aspects of local government, as 'local education authorities'. This is an unhelpful separation of one part of local government from the rest – housing services for example are not referred to as local housing authorities. In those local authorities that are responsible for education, legally it is the whole authority that is responsible for those services. In which case the whole authority is the local education authority.

This is more than a semantic issue, but locates the responsibility for education at the core of the local authority. This means that the same organisation that is legally responsible for raising education standards is also responsible for applying Best Value to its services.

This argument goes to the core of the political organisation of local government. At the moment British local government is organised around a series of different services. Alternatively we could have a series of separate authorities – one responsible for education, one for social services and another for the environment. The joint organisation is based upon the belief that there can and must be some synergy between these different authorities. Thus being an education authority alongside a social service one should mean important synergy for young people. Similarly being an authority with responsibility for libraries should affect policies on literacy for all ages and for leisure for play and youth, however, given the separation of different departments in local government this synergy between departments is not a necessarily regular part of local government activity.

For education departments and committees, and indeed for the relationship between central government departments, the separation is an important issue. All government has to work hard to remove itself from purely departmental approaches.

Best Value is an important part of this process. Not only does Best Value treat educational services in the same way as other services, but it also raises important questions about what the public really value that cuts across service and departmental boundaries.

It is clear from the research that went into this report that this will take some time to develop. Whilst the aspiration of Best Value is to raise the question of value across different departments, and indeed organisations, the current reality is most likely to take place reviewing service by service.

For education services, given the importance of education to both national and local government, it is not surprising that services have been reviewed within the overall envelope of education. However, as we see in Section 9, some local authorities have reviewed their education services in the light of wider authority wide goals, a realistic aspiration for all.



## chapter 2 the agenda for education

The government has staked its credibility on raising educational standards. It has set tough targets for improving literacy and numeracy and it wants local authorities that provide education services to assist in their delivery. Given this it is inevitable that local authorities with a responsibility for education will emphasise the standards agenda above all else. Indeed as the 1997 Labour Manifesto said, *'The judge and jury of LEA performance will be their contribution to raising standards'*. This is a clear injunction about what is and what is not important.

It is therefore very likely that every developmental resource within those education services will be spent on developing the standards agenda and their relationship with schools to achieve that agenda.

One of the first pieces of legislation introduced by that Government was aimed directly at raising educational standards. The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 gave local authorities a new duty to promote high standards of attainment. One of the methods of achieving this was to draw up and implement an Educational Development Plan and set educational attainment targets for each school and for the local authority as a whole.

Local authorities are carrying out this duty within the inspection framework of OFSTED. Over the first few months of the legislation it became clear that those local authorities that were felt to have failed their OFSTED inspection would be expected to take radical action to improve. By February 2000 a number have been working with consultants appointed by themselves and the DfEE to introduce that step change into the organisation. This has led to some radical change in some local authorities.

However important Best Value is, it is difficult to see it eclipsing the power of the DfEE standards agenda. That is why it is so important to link the two as strongly as possible.

The draft guidance for the Education Development Plan made this clear:

*'The combination of Education Development Plans and OFSTED inspections will provide a comprehensive system for ensuring that LEAs promote high standards in schools and will contribute to the Best Value review process for local government as a whole.'*<sup>2</sup>

It is vital to learn these lessons. If Best Value is going to become a core part of the culture of local authority education services, then it is important that Best Value allies itself strongly with the national core business of those education services – the raising of education standards. Otherwise it will become an unimportant add on, rather than one of the main management techniques that will ensure that all education services develop a cost and quality relationship which ensures that the core business is kept at the centre.

## **ACTION CHECKLIST**

*In your local authority, are your Best Value reviews aligned with the plan of work in your Educational Development Plan? If not, how can you embed Best Value into the EDP and the standards agenda?*

*Are the actions that flow from your other plans in education linked to the Best Value reviews? If not, ensure that the timetable that comes out of these other plans is meshed in with the Best Value timetable.*



## chapter 3

# the Best Value process and education services

Given the importance of the education standards agenda to the public as well as local and central government, if Best Value is to play any role it must also be able to demonstrate how it can work to improve education standards.

This is backed up by the interim report by Warwick University on the Best Value pilots. They commented that:

*'A number of pilots have also felt that there has been a legislative push towards a service based approach. They identify in particular the emphasis on the need for improvements to services and apparently service based guidance, and audit and inspection regimes.'*

This will inevitably include many local authorities that provide education services. However corporately minded local authorities may be, if they are under constant and direct pressure from a national department that **only** has a service industry perspective, then it is likely that they will be only interested in that limited service perspective. It is not therefore surprising that education services respond to the DfEE with some strength and to the DETR with less so. The same will be true of social service departments and the Department of Health.

A number of local authorities are demonstrating how you can bring together the two different aspects of change – Best Value and raising educational standards. As the Chief Executive of Coventry has said, *'The challenge is to bring the OFSTED regime, as it impacts upon local services and service providers, into the mainstream of Best Value's continuous improvement'*.<sup>3</sup>

Within those local authorities the strong corporate centre ensures that Best Value will play a corporate role within education services. Indeed for some local authorities the education standards agenda is not just a matter for the education services of the authority but must be reflected in the work of the entire authority.

It is important for local authorities with education services to ensure that they bring together the mainstream of their work with schools and the nature of Best Value. As Iain Roxburgh goes on to say: *'Certainly, to be worthy of the role in the future, the LEA will have to re-invent itself as an integral part of a locally determined framework for Best Value in local services'*.



## chapter 4

# 1997–2000: getting Best Value on the education agenda – the importance of review

Best Value is a tool for the public management of performance. It obviously enters the world of local government on the back of a wide range of different performance management tools. For some time now publicly accountable processes such as the Charter Mark scheme, a wide range of national inspection regimes and the Audit Commission have managed local government. Alongside this, there have been a wide range of internal performance management systems developed to work alongside the quality systems of ISOs, British Quality Foundations, Investors in People and many many more.

It would appear therefore that the field within which Best Value is to have an effect is a crowded one. However a recent study of local government found that there was a problem in the development of the 'evaluation culture' in local government.<sup>4</sup> Whilst there are a wide range of different programmes of performance management the difference in the application of Best Value is that it has to, legally, be applied completely across all the different services.

A number of local authorities have developed tool kits to assist all service departments to carry out reviews. This provides practical support for the education department in carrying out their reviews and also provides some form of corporate guidance to ensure that departments work together. In Sutton they have recognised the importance of this corporate approach.

### **Best Value in Sutton**

#### Introduction

The main part of this document, The Fundamental Service Review Form, is divided into the stages of the Best Value process. Each of the stages is broken down into its component tasks. All tasks must be completed, required information recorded and documentary evidence kept. The Best Value Review Group, made up of members of the Corporate Management Team, will inspect the progress made. They will ensure that tasks are completed to acceptable and consistent standards and with a view to satisfying the External auditor that the review has been carried out directly.

Some local authorities have incorporated the work of existing policy systems into their Best Value review – most notably the Business Excellence Model. For this to work successfully it is important that there is a corporate approach to its application with strong central support.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in *Improving public services Interim evaluation of Best Value pilots DETR 1999* p 43

### **Warwickshire uses the Business Excellence Model**

'Whatever approach is used it must ensure that the 4 Cs (Challenge, compare, consult and compete) are applied to every service at least once every five years and that this is done with an appropriate degree of rigour. This can be achieved in the following way:

- Apply the Business Excellence Model assessment process (including external verification) at corporate and departmental level and, where relevant, at individual service level.
- Where the assessment results in a low score, and or shows that service managers are not consulting stakeholders, failing to make rigorous comparisons with other organisations or failing to consider how competition might be used to improve performance, an improvement plan should be prepared to address those deficiencies by a prescribed date.
- Where the Business Excellence model score is particularly low, or where an Improvement plan has not been implemented, the service should be added to the programme for fundamental Best Value Reviews.

The results of the BEM assessments should be published and monitoring will need to be overseen by the Scrutiny and Review Committee.'

This is an important use of an established quality model and whilst it will not be able, by itself, to cover all the aspects of Best Value, it does in Warwickshire provide an important starting point for all the services in the Council.

### **SERVICES THAT HAVE BEEN REVIEWED**

As was explained in the methodology, we wrote to every local authority with responsibility for education in England and Wales and asked them about the services in education that were being reviewed up until this coming April and were being reviewed from April and beyond.

The table below lists those services that we were told had been or were about to be reviewed in years 1999/2000 and after April 2000. Given the way in which services are called different things by different authorities there will undoubtedly be some overlapping categories. Thus, a service called support for children in need in one authority may be 'special needs provision' in another. Even given this limitation there are some important issues that emerge from this data.

We had some 68 replies to the questionnaires and follow up phone calls. This is just under 40% of all the local authorities questioned. It is almost certain that the local authorities that replied would be more likely to have carried out a review or be planning to carry out a review than those who did not reply. All such surveys tend to hide organisations that are doing very little and therefore the survey cannot be representative in terms of adding up the replies and assuming the same is true for the whole country.

The table below lists the services that have been reviewed in the period up to April 2000 and will be reviewed in the period from then.

In the period up to May 2000, 116 services were being reviewed, compared to some 199 planned for the future. Given the size of the returns to the questionnaire and given the probable bias of those who returned as those who are more likely to be active than others, there are likely to be about 230 services being reviewed before this April and over 400 planned for the future.

The first point to make is that this represents an obvious quickening of pace among authorities and is likely to be replicated both among those authorities who did not answer and among the different departments within the same local authorities. Increasingly, local government realises that from April 2000, over the next five years, every single service will have to be reviewed – including education services.

	<b>Up to year 2000</b>	<b>2000 and beyond</b>
Administration services	–	3
Admissions admin. /placement planning	4	4
Adult basic skills	1	–
After school activities	–	1
Arts and leisure services	1	1
Attendance	1	–
Awards/grants	3	12
Behaviour support/exclusion	3	1
Black teacher strategy	–	1
Building management services	2	2
Building, cleaning and caretaking services	3	–
Capital building projects	–	1
Catering services	2	2
Children's services unit	–	1
Contracts and purchasing	2	–
Curricular services	–	1
Customer service	–	2
Early years	–	9
Education advisory/support services	5	5
Education business partnership	2	–
Education financial services	4	7
Education other than at school	1	2
Education psychology service	5	9
Education quality	–	1
Education welfare service	5	6
Educational development	–	2
English as an additional language	1	5
Equality support services	–	1
Free school meals administration	–	1
<i>Continued overleaf</i>		

<i>Continued from previous page</i>	<b>Up to year 2000</b>	<b>2000 and beyond</b>
Governor support services	5	5
Home-school transport	10	5
Improve standards/achievements	1	–
Information communication technology	2	2
Information management services	1	1
Inspection and advisory services	2	1
Insurance/risk management	1	–
Learning design	–	1
Learning support services	1	1
Library services	1	7
Lifelong learning/adult education	6	6
Management	1	7
Monitoring and intervention	1	–
Music	2	3
Outdoor education	1	1
Performance data management	1	–
Personnel	4	4
Placement services	1	–
Planning and development	–	1
Policy development	–	1
Primary support teaching service	1	–
Pupil and parent services	2	1
Pupil... unit and outreach	–	2
Repairs and maintenance of schools	2	5
Research and development	1	–
School improvement	2	5
School meals services	2	1
School place planning	–	1
SEN assessment	2	2
SEN general	6	14
SEN transport	3	1
SEN under 5s	–	1
Sensory impaired service	1	–
Student access	–	1
Support for children in need	1	–
Teacher appraisal	–	1
Teachers' centre	–	1
Theatre in education/performing arts	–	2
Traded services to schools	1	–
Training provision	–	2
Travellers educational service	–	1
Voluntary service grants	–	1
Youth service/youth and community	6	18

The second immediate point from this list is also interesting since it shows the enormous spread of services that are being provided by local authorities. Any private sector company that provided all these services would recognise that it is very difficult to keep the quality of all of them up to scratch the standard of the best. To provide everything from food, to transport, to repairs, to finance as well as services in direct relationship to education is a considerable task. This requires a very wide range of managerial and staff skills – wider than almost any private company can manage. Under these circumstances a private sector company would almost certainly decide to outsource those services that it manages less well and can be managed by other organisations.

Best Value provides senior managers and members in a local authority with an opportunity to ask the question about what is and what is not a part of the core business of the local authority.

It is therefore not surprising that, at least in the first few years, Best Value provides the senior management, both political and officer led, of local authorities with the opportunity to review those services that are related to the core business, but are not in the middle of that core. Thus over both periods of review time (up to April 2000 and beyond that date) some 24 authorities (just over a third) have decided to review their youth and community or youth services.

Over the 10 years since the passage of the Education Reform Act the central services in education have been under very considerable financial pressure. Over the last two years they have also been under pressure from central government to raise education achievement. It is therefore not surprising that about a third of local authorities would take an early opportunity to fundamentally review their youth service. For many years now the bulk of youth work has actually been provided by part time and voluntary workers who have been organised and some of them paid for by the local authority. Given that the local authority enables a lot of this provision rather than provides it itself, youth services are therefore a classic case for Best Value review.

Nor is it surprising that within the first period of time the most popular service to review is that of home school transport. Again this is a key service for getting many hundreds of thousands of children to school, but is it necessarily one that an education authority needs to **provide** itself. The local authority needs to ensure that it is provided, but may be able to leave the provision to others.

Each of them has a relevance to the core business of schools and education, but they have a semi-detached relationship to the direct provision of services to schools. The single fact that so many authorities 'chose' the youth service or the home school transport to review leaves one feeling that they want to know this service fits in with the other services they provide.

This may also mean that they represent separate and distinct services, which make themselves ready for review – whereas school improvement, one of the core businesses of the authority, is being reviewed by only seven authorities in our sample.

It would also appear that after April 2000 some activities will be reviewed that are less likely to have been reviewed in the 'pilot' years. The fact that up until April 2000, no authority has been looking into early years services, but 9 will be looking at it at some time after April, suggests that local authorities want to wait a while before tackling a service that has very broad implications across the work of the entire local authority.

The data on special education needs suggests a broad recognition that the method of delivering aspects of that service needs to be reviewed. Some aspect of that service was mentioned 29 times either at a general level or with regard to assessment and a specific group of pupils. Given the changes in the relationship between schools and the local education authority, it is not surprising that special education needs would need regular review to ensure that it fits in with these changing core arrangements.

One other area that is under review – especially in the future – is the awards and grants section. This is similar to the reviews that are being carried out by the corporate center of local authorities concerning the core services of revenues and benefits. That is they are looking at their 'back room' administration to see if there are any costs that can be stripped out of the process.

More than anything it is the spread of different services that are under review that is most surprising.

#### **ACTION CHECKLIST**

*Given the considerable range and variety of education services being delivered by local authorities it is important that there is some rationale contained in the programme of reviews that are undertaken. Why have these services been selected and why have others not?*

*Also given this range of services a local authority needs to take a broad view of whether all of these services have to be provided by the local authority. The first part of the challenge of Best Value needs to take place at this stage at the very start of the process. Is it possible for one organisation to provide all of these services to the highest level of quality?*



# starting to modernise best value in education action checklists

## CHAPTER 2 – THE AGENDA FOR EDUCATION

- In your local authority, are your Best Value reviews aligned with the plan of work in your Educational Development Plan? If not, how can you embed Best Value into the EDP and the standards agenda?*
- Are the actions that flow from your other plans in education linked to the Best Value reviews? If not, ensure that the timetable that comes out of these other plans is meshed in with the Best Value timetable.*

## CHAPTER 4 – 1997-2000: GETTING BEST VALUE ON THE EDUCATION AGENDA CHECKLIST

- Given the considerable range and variety of education services being delivered by local authorities it is important that there is some rationale contained in the programme of reviews that are undertaken. Why have these services been selected and why have others not?*
- Also given this range of services a local authority needs to take a broad view of whether all of these services have to be provided by the local authority. The first part of the challenge of Best Value needs to take place at this stage at the very start of the process. Is it possible for one organisation to provide all of these services to the highest level of quality?*



## **CHAPTER 5 – CHALLENGE AND EDUCATION CHECKLIST**

- Are members involved in Best Value review actively challenging whether this service should be provided and if so how it should be provided? How does Best Value fit in with the scrutiny side of the new political arrangements? Have members made clear that they expect Best Value to be carried out without fear or favour for your in house services?*
- Are your schools actively involved in the challenge?*
- Are education services playing a full role in the published local performance plan?*
- How are you using the OFSTED data on schools and local authorities to act as a powerful challenge to performance of services?*

## **CHAPTER 6 – CONSULTATION IN EDUCATION CHECKLIST**

- Is the consultation that you are carrying out for the Best Value reviews of education services properly integrated within an authority wide consultation strategy?*
- Does your consultation have a real impact on how the review thinks about alternative methods of service delivery?*
- Do your consultation methods involve the ultimate customer, young people, at all or are they always consulted through the proxy of other customers?*



## CHAPTER 7 – COMPETITION IN EDUCATION CHECKLIST

- To what extent, since the abolition of CCT, have you reviewed the way in which your local authority approaches the private sector for assistance in delivering new forms of service delivery? Have you explored partnering arrangements or the Private Finance Initiative?*
  
- Have you discussed with other local authorities that have developed new relationships with the private sector how they have done this? Are there any direct lessons for you?*
  
- Has your local authority got the skills to develop a new procurement strategy for the 21st century? If not how will you get them?*
  
- To what extent can you facilitate the creation of a local market for the education services in your local area?*





## chapter 5 challenge and education

Best Value, and this pamphlet, is organised around four sets of processes called the 4 'C's: Challenge, Consult, Compare and Compete. All of these are important and the Government's Best Value guidelines take great pains to point out that unless a local authority takes all four seriously, then they probably will not be able to complete Best Value in a meaningful way.

However, there is one C that can be seen as **primus inter pares**. This is 'challenge'. If a local authority failed to really challenge the nature of the service it is reviewing it is very difficult to see how they could be seen to reviewing their work.

As the Government's Best Value guidance puts it:

*'Without the element of **challenge**, there can be no effective Review; it is the key to significant improvements in performance and without it authorities are unlikely to reach the targets which the Government will set for authorities, and those which are set locally. Challenging why and how a service is provided requires a fundamental rethink, asking basic questions about the needs that each service is intended to address and the method of procurement that is used. Challenge is therefore intrinsically tied up with the competition element as well as those of comparison and consultation'.<sup>5</sup>*

For those local education authorities that are responsible for education services, challenge is therefore important. As we mentioned above local authorities already feel challenged around their standards responsibilities and through their Educational Development Plan.

Alongside this most local authorities reviewing their education services reported that they were using the forms of challenge that were already intrinsic to the corporate Best Value regime.

We asked local authorities if in carrying out Best Value reviews or in planning to carry them out, are there any ways in which you have built a specific challenge about education into the way in which they work?

About half of the local authorities that replied did not feel that there was any way in which the education department specifically challenged the way in which education services worked. However several of them made the point that Durham County Council made: *'Challenge has been built into the corporate methodology for undertaking all Best Value reviews'* and Bromley: *'Challenge is an integral part of the process as it will apply to all reviews'*.

Harrow went further in specifying the questions raised and said, *'All reviews start from a challenge about whether the service is needed, whether it must be at the level or quality provided, how it might be provided in alternative ways'*. If carried out as a normal part of the corporate approach to Best Value such an approach would indeed be a dramatic challenge. This would commence with the question of 'Why do we deliver the service at all?'

There were, though, some interesting additions that they mentioned as specific to Best Value work in education.

As Brent put it entirely within the spirit of Best Value:

### **Brent**

'Yes. We have to question why the service is provided at all. Whether the LEA is the most appropriate and effective provider. Can it be provided differently? Can someone else provide a better quality service more efficiently?'

These challenging Best Value questions strike at the core of the way in which the LEA is organised. Is the LEA the most effective provider and who else may provide it differently or better?

Others made the point that, given the financial devolution to schools contained in the passage of the Education Reform Act, some education services have had to face an annual challenge for many of their services. This comes from the schools who decide to buy those services or not. Over this time, the independent buying power of schools for a growing number of education services challenges the capacity of those services customer by customer about whether the local authority should be the supplier of this service.

### **Barnet**

'The services are focusing on supply, what the customer (schools) want. For example, why include this service in the traded services portfolio.' (Completed reviews not yet available)

Of course schools are one of the main sets of customers within the education service and as such are well placed to understand the value that they put upon services provided by the local authority.

And in Tower Hamlets, they recognised that they had to challenge their existing services by looking at a range of other providers:

### **Tower Hamlets**

'Challenge will challenge how and why we provide services in education looking at all aspects of other providers, corporate public sector, voluntary sector and private sector partnerships.'

Similarly in Sutton the possibility of alternative delivering of the service through different means in existing partnerships models was closely reviewed.

### **Sutton**

'The main challenge in the SCOLA review was an evaluation of alternative models of delivery in the AE sector. Also the challenge provided by IT to the delivery of the service.'

Other local authorities made clear that challenge would be provided through detailed help from the users of services who would be an active part of the process.

### **Derbyshire**

'The Review team will answer each challenge question before moving on to plan for the consultation. It is envisaged that this phase will involve a range of users covering both qualitative and quantitative data with an emphasis on the speed and accuracy of the Service. Challenge means looking for Service aims and objectives, costs, quantity and quality, service planning, service delivery and target setting. It must question whether a service is needed.'

Somerset used for each review the corporate objectives of the education service as a whole as a challenge. Since we do this in this department, the challenge is to show how it fits in with these corporate objectives.

### **Somerset**

'We will be challenging the extent to which the service contributes to the aims of Somerset Education; raising achievements, promoting lifelong learning and developing effective learning communities.'

Similarly, as we shall see below, some other authorities such as Manchester used the overall corporate objectives of the whole local authority to challenge the existing form of service delivery.

One local authority succeeded in linking a very strong challenge with the imperative of involving members in the Best Value review. They achieved this by linking their Best Value review with another aspect of the modernisation process, the development of member's scrutiny of performance.

### **Lewisham**

The main instrument for the Best Value review of education was the select committee concerned with raising GCSE achievements. It was cross party and chaired by a front line councillor. The committee also had the manager of the local supermarket as a full member since their supermarket was a consumer of the education system. The select committee met for five public meetings and spent an entire day working through a long set of recommendations. The members of the committee discussed education qualifications with the chair and director of education as well as other stakeholders in the local education system. Whilst there were members of the committee who had been on the education committee in the past, the bulk of the members were challenging education as backbenchers. Members felt empowered because they had come to grips with a difficult subject, and were able to make a real and original contribution. They pursued their own line of questioning rather than relying on officer reports. The real challenge was to maintain the one strand of challenge over several meetings and into the final report.

Lewisham's use of the scrutiny committee approach provides some important lessons for other local authorities that want to ensure a strong challenge to their services. The scrutiny system ensures that

members who are not directly involved in decision-making about education can challenge from a position that is outside of the department of education but very much inside the council. Importantly such a system takes place in public.

Many local authorities recognised the importance of members in the process of Best Value. As the Warwick research has said:

*'The first year of piloting has demonstrated that the Best Value framework is implemented most effectively in authorities that have a clear sense of corporate and service priorities and objectives which can guide the work of the review teams. Elected members have a key role to play in setting the overall framework and in establishing a culture in which it is possible for an authority to 'open up' to failures and mistakes'.<sup>6</sup>*

Some authorities ensured that members provided a strong challenge at every level. In Sutton this took place throughout the process: *'At key stages the review will come before members for decision'*. In Warwickshire, where the Business Excellence Model is in use as one of the methods of triggering a review, there was a clear recognition that on occasions, *'Fundamental Reviews would also be carried out if the following criteria were met – Matters of concern for political reasons'*.

One other very important innovation which, from April 2000 every local authority will have to use is the local performance plan. This plan will report on three issues.

- First it must report to the public on the way in which the local authority is addressing Best Value. Since, over 5 years, Best Value is going to affect every single service in the local authority, obviously this will include those education services that have been reviewed in the last year and those that will be reviewed in the next.
- Second, the local performance plan must publicise the targets that have been set for services by reviews. For education some of these will be taken from the education development plan and will further publicise these.
- Third, the local performance plan will report on how well past targets have been either met or missed and will have a commentary on this.

The local performance plan will become the main instrument of accountability for local authority services. It is because of its very public nature that it will provide a very important and public challenge to services as a whole and education services in particular.

A number of local authorities have published a draft plan in April 1999. These authorities will have learnt both how to construct the plan and how to publicise it. By that stage Camden were publishing their second draft performance plan and have used it successfully as a challenge to their services.

Everyone working in Best Value will be expecting an analysis of the fourth 'C', 'comparison', and how that is being developed in local authorities with education services. In fact we found that there was little different going on in education than in other services and did not pursue it. However, given the importance of the

material provided by the DfEE and OFSTED about comparative performance, we felt that it was important to provide one example of how that might be used.

Coventry has demonstrated an important way in which the local authority can utilise their OFSTED reports as a direct part of the Best Value comparison:

### **Coventry**

'In Coventry we compile an annual report, which takes the findings from OFSTED inspections of all Coventry schools and compares primary and secondary with our statistical neighbour LEAs and with the national averages. This report is a substantial document of 100 pages. It does not identify individual Coventry schools but enables an overall comparison to be made of Coventry's performance – and potentially a year-by-year comparison. Thanks to data supplied by OFSTED it enables us to make comparisons against every heading ... These comparisons are of special importance in guiding the LEA in terms of advice and support to schools'.<sup>7</sup>

This shows an interesting method of using and publishing within the Best Value framework the comparative material that is available to local authorities.


### **ACTION CHECKLIST**

*Are members involved in Best Value review actively challenging whether this service should be provided and if so how it should be provided? How does Best Value fit in with the scrutiny side of the new political arrangements? Have members made clear that they expect Best Value to be carried out without fear or favour for your in house services?*

*Are your schools actively involved in the challenge?*

*Are education services playing a full role in the published local performance plan?*

*How are you using the OFSTED data on schools and local authorities to act as a powerful challenge to performance of services?*



## chapter 6 consultation in education

It is simply not possible to meet the duty of providing Best Value to the public without strong interaction with them about what they do and do not value about services. Education services, just the same as all other local authority services, have many different customers. Sometimes it is obviously the pupils, usually it involves a more complex mix of parents and pupils and even more likely it will also involve institutions such as schools.

This means that for a service – for example the youth service – to know whether it is meeting Best Value or not, it is important to know what a complex range of different stakeholders experience as value about the service.

For the youth services the stakeholders would include:

- The young people who use youth services
- Those who do not use those services
- Schools and further education providers
- The criminal justice system
- Local businesses
- Local people

This intimidating list will involve very different sorts of consultation.

The Government has issued strong guidance on the issue of consultation in Best Value:

Section 3 of the 1999 Act requires authorities to consult a wide range of local and other interests as to the way in which they fulfil their duties to secure Best Value... These are complementary provisions which reflect the importance the Government attaches to the place of the citizen – as user and taxpayer – in Best Value, and to the role of the private citizen and voluntary sectors in contributing to the overall health of the local community.

Local authorities will need to address

- co-ordination with other Best Value authorities and other public bodies undertaking consultation at the same time
- within a broad framework of general principles, a mix of techniques available for the full range of services and consultees
- a process for selecting the appropriate approaches for each specific review
- arrangements for informing consultees of the purpose of the consultation, how the information they supply will be used, details of the timetable and decision making process and feedback on the outcome and the reasons for it.

We will return to these bullet points later in Section 9. At the moment it is important to stress the weight that the Government puts upon serious and appropriate consultation for Best Value.

Nearly all education services in local authorities that we surveyed either followed

- the corporate guidelines, as in Durham, where, *'The requirement to consult all relevant stakeholders is in corporate methodology. Format of consultation will be one of first issues to determine in undertaking review'*. This is recognition that the education service is an important part of their local authorities' approach to Best Value
- or were using orthodox methods of consultation.

For some the intention was there but they had not yet started. In Bromley they said, *'Consultation will be a key part of each review; not yet started'*, a response that recognises the early days of the whole process.

Over half mentioned that they were consulting with clients using questionnaires including Brent, *'Mostly through postal survey'*, and Medway, *'Questionnaire'*. The fact that this is such an orthodox method of gauging opinion of stakeholders does not invalidate it. Well designed and administered with a view to their representativeness, a questionnaire can provide important base data about what stakeholders think about a service.

Others added to this including Bridgend: *'The consultation will be via structured questionnaires and focused interviews'*. In this latter case there is recognition of the limitation of questionnaires. As we saw in our own survey they are useful for providing base line data across a wide range of different organisations. It is often important to back up this quantitative data this with some face-to-face interviews.

In fact most of those that mentioned questionnaires like Lincolnshire, *'Mainly through a questionnaire, but also through a participatory appraisal exercise'*, placed this method in that wider context with other forms of more qualitative work. This is important additional data since it demonstrates the requisite approach by local authorities to the issue of consultation. Authorities carrying out Best Value reviews must develop an approach to consultation that properly searches out the different ways in which stakeholders themselves wish to be consulted. As we have mentioned above, given the range of different stakeholders, it will be important to use a range of measures rather than any single capacity.

Most authorities used questionnaires to specifically target groups of customers and users of their services. For example in Derbyshire they had used, *'Consultation with service users, schools, parents, pupils, other departments and agencies'*, demonstrating a recognition that there was a wide range of different stakeholders involved here, and each of them needed specific consultation.

In Wirral they not only used the orthodox approaches but also recognised that, to reach for example young people, they had to go beyond these techniques and reach out specifically to where they were. They used *'Questionnaires, citizen's panel, open nights in youth clubs, external agencies, surveys'*. The citizen's panel here is an important addition to the other spread of techniques. Over the last few years local authorities have started to establish citizen's panels to provide them with a long-term understanding of attitudes and opinions of their local people. A panel is set up as a statistically representative group which – usually every 3 months or so – is sent questionnaires through the post on issues of importance.

This goes beyond the specific customers of the services that many other questionnaires can reach and treat this group of local people as citizens, asking them about the experiences across a wide range of services and issues. It will include people who use and do not use the service. This is a superior relationship to a one off questionnaire since the council can send to each member of the panel a report on the results of the previous questionnaire and any activities that have sprung from it. This ensures a good long-term relationship of involvement and usually means that the proportion of people who return the questionnaire is considerably higher than a one off survey.

In Camden they used the results of their questionnaire as a benchmark:

### **Camden**

The review of the school meals service puts the customer first. There were concerns that the current service, although cheap, did not offer Best Value. The review surveyed parents and pupils (both users and non-users of the service) in a representative sample of eight schools. The key findings are

2.7% users were always dissatisfied

21% said they were generally satisfied

55% were usually satisfied

Most people wanted to see an increase in the number and range of choices each day; they wanted catering and school staff to be more pleasant and helpful; and food serving temperatures to be increased.

Some local authorities went to special lengths to involve those people who do not use their services, wanting to find out why. Thus in Sutton, in consulting on their adult education service, they carried out a very wide range of different consultation techniques and specifically included work with non-users:

### **Sutton**

'We consulted current and past students, stakeholders such as public bodies and representatives of minority groups, people with disabilities and their carers, the student council, residents in general, staff and Trades Unions, Governors and elected members. We also held a focus group among non-users of the adult education service.'

Other local authorities used their established management procedures and meetings to place Best Value on these agendas. They were both ensuring that their day-to-day stakeholders were consulted as well as placing Best Value and issues around Best Value on the agenda of the management of the local authority and its partners. Thus in Hampshire whilst using established consultation methods such as MORI they also ensured that they used their '*management partnership*', and in Kirklees alongside focus groups they also used their meetings with, '*Head teachers and governing bodies and through standing arrangement*'.

Several authorities stressed the importance of involving the prime groups of customers – the headteachers – in any consultation. In Somerset, '*There will be headteacher representation on review learning, linking back to our headteacher associations in addition to any other consultation*'. Obviously with any Best Value review of any school based service this is essential.

This is an important issue for education services that is different from other local authority services. Following the 1988 Education Act, testing whether the services are of value to the customer has become a normal part of the interaction of some education services with schools. Every year the local authority has to

demonstrate to a wide range of schools as customers that some services are valuable and if they are not the schools will not buy them.

Therefore for some local authorities the established mechanism of the use of delegated budgets will provide the fulcrum for consultation on Best Value. In Dorset, *'Predominantly with a focus group of head teachers set up in 1998 to oversee increased delegation of support services, then all reviews sent in draft to all heads and governors'*. In Barnet they were to ensure that in those services which were sold to schools ('traded services' as they were referred to) there was a proper market place called a *'traded services fair'* as well as *'a consultative conference including a questionnaire'*.

This is an important issue for the development of Best Value in local government. The education service for many of its services has a head start of decades in understanding how to develop market and client relationships and how to manage that market. Over the next few years as Best Value rolls out to the whole local authority the lessons from education in this area will be of importance to those other authorities.

Local authorities recognised that their staff are also a major part of the Best Value review and they too will need consultation. In Barnet they were organising this through a *'Diagonal slicing – meetings with staff at all levels'*. This provides the local authority with a detailed understanding of the way in which different staff feel about their services and the review. A 'diagonal slice' of staff ensures that staff not only from different services but also from different parts of the hierarchy have their say. Other local authorities mentioned, alongside other methods of consultation, the importance of the trades union. In Stockton on Tees there were, *'Different forms of consultation used in all reviews, and we also have a formal trade union consultation procedure'*.

This is important. In evaluating the lessons from the pilot scheme the Warwick research team make the following point: *'Many of the pilots have stressed that whilst structures and processes have been important, the key challenge facing them has been to find ways of developing a culture which supports and rewards managers and front line staff who are seeking continuous improvement'*.<sup>8</sup> It is not possible to develop such a culture without actively involving and consulting staff.

Alongside all of these different forms of consultation there are some very important innovations at the core of some local authorities' Best Value processes. For example in Camden they have produced a specific guide on how they can consult young people as customers of education services. There are a wide range of different experiences and techniques being developed here which may be important for other education services.

### **London Borough of Camden**

Camden's plan committed the Council to regular consultation through Panel and other regular consultation. Children's views count too. Camden produced a pioneering guide to consulting and involving young people, and have worked with them to draw up a strategy for young people in Camden. Schools Councils are being developed in every Camden school. A new website has been launched and touch screen kiosks are being piloted.

Sunderland has gone one stage further. The Best Value review is about the provision of services for young people. Indeed, as a Best Value pilot, the analysis of their services for young people is one of their key Council objectives for their whole approach to Best Value. But early on they recognised that they were not consulting young people at all since they did not have the skills or culture to do so.

### **Sunderland**

Sunderland decided to set up a programme of training and development of young people employed by the Council to become advocates for their peers. This involves other local partners such as trade unions, the local business community, police and probation service. The training programme aims to develop the abilities of these young people through

- developing the communicating skills to manage meetings and make presentations
- team building and developing personal confidence
- developing listening skills and being able to communicate views to others
- training in parenting skills
- training advocates as peer mentors for young people

This is an important recognition of how far local government is from entire groups of the people it is meant to provide services for. Sunderland have recognised this and have realised that there needs to be a very special effort in overcoming this separation.

Returning to Lewisham's select committee on educational qualification and attainment, they developed a wide range of different techniques of consultation.

### **Lewisham**

Lewisham's select committee commissioned a full range of consultation. The committee held five meetings in public and heard evidence and questioned a number of witnesses.

There were reports and presentations on stakeholder and community consultation, including conference, focus groups, questionnaires to parents, governors and heads, and a residents and citizen's panel survey.

There were also witness statements and evidence from a wide range of people in Lewisham and other localities.


This group of members recognised that they also needed to make a special effort to reach young people. Rather than expect them to give evidence to the Select Committee, they also met themselves with a group of young people in a much less formal setting.

## **ACTION CHECKLIST**

*Is the consultation that you are carrying out for the Best Value reviews of education services properly integrated within an authority wide consultation strategy?*

*Does your consultation have a real impact on how the review thinks about alternative methods of service delivery?*

*Do your consultation methods involve the ultimate customer, young people, at all or are they always consulted through the proxy of other customers?*



## chapter 7 competition in education

For much of the last twenty years Compulsory Competitive Tendering has dominated the way in which local authorities have related to the private sector. For those services that were subject to CCT, they experienced being forced out into the market.

Inevitably these services, and generally local authorities as a whole, came to see the private sector as a sort of enemy which was 'at war' with the public sector. Given that CCT formed such a core relationship for local government, it is not surprising that the relationship between local authorities and the private sector should be so problematic.

Within local education services this was compounded by the effect of the Education Reform Act. Here, increasingly as finances were devolved to the schools, more and more education services had to recognise that the schools were indeed customers who had the right and the budget to decide to buy local authority services or not.

It is against this backdrop that those local authorities that provide education services are now expected to embrace competition. Not surprisingly this is not enthusiastically taken up by a broad number of local authorities.

*'Many pilots have decided to give in-house teams the opportunity to improve and to use open competition only where they prove unable to meet the targets for improvements set in performance plans... Some authorities have attempted to 'rebuild' relationships that had been damaged under CCT. However progress in developing new forms of contracting has been slow'.<sup>9</sup>*

The Warwick interim report recognises the impact of CCT on the development of competition in Best Value and notes how few authorities had developed new approaches to competition.

There are some that have used Best Value to develop these new approaches. Whilst as a result of a Best Value Review we have no evidence of a direct education service having been outsourced, in Lewisham they have developed a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) for their catering service. Since catering will include the provision of school meals this is indirectly an education service and has released new investment directly to school buildings.

Similarly in Surrey they have developed a long-term partnership with the private sector to develop a lifestyle centre.

### **Surrey Life Style Centre**

A private sector partner is to build and develop a lifestyle centre which will include health and leisure activities but a learning centre as well. It will be under joint management with the District Council.

Not surprisingly one of the main aims of involving competition in the delivery of services is to free up financial resources to reinvest in education. At a time of restricted budgets this is a very real part of Best Value. In Newham they believe they have not only improved their catering services but have saved £300,000 a year through market testing.

## **Newham**

Newham School meals will save £300,000 per year over three years by phasing out transport kitchens and by increasing income from growing take up and market testing.

However, for most local authorities delivering education services, their Best Value reviews have not yet led to new forms of competition. For most it appears the relationship with the private sector has been developed alongside benchmarking with other local education authorities.

For example, in Bridgend they will ensure that *'comparisons will be made with how services are delivered in other LEAs'*. There is a similar approach in Middlesbrough where, *'It is proposed to develop various focus of comparisons e.g. benchmarking to support competition within reviews, both at a corporate and service level'*.

Whilst in Nottinghamshire they explicitly mention the fact that this will be extended to the commercial sector: *'We will benchmark with other LEA and commercial suppliers'*.

One important aspect of the whole issue of competition is the extent to which a market does or does not exist in particular education services. It is simply not possible to develop a competitive relationship if there is not a market for certain services. In most parts of the country a market in catering and building services has existed for some time, but there are few that have a market in, for example, Special Education Needs assessment. In other core services such as inspection and link advisers there may have been some development of a market in some locations but not in many.

Under these circumstances, however powerful the belief is that they want to turn to a market, there just may not be an opportunity. As Blaenau Gwent explained, *'Other than where there is an alternative provider or a potential partner – there has been no explicit 'market''*. Without such a market competition can have no real part to play.

And again as Harrow explained, *'All projects are tested against any available alternative providers'*. Here the stress is on any available providers, suggesting again that there is not a vast range of private suppliers around.

Under these circumstances, if markets in some education services are to fully develop, some organisations are going to have to help their national and local development. In another part of local government, the community care sector, the local authorities have successfully assisted in the development of those markets. In the next few years it will be necessary for local authorities to assist in market making. Obviously for as long as local authorities continue to suffer from the 'them and us' view of the private sector, this is unlikely to be very easy.

Even in those areas of service or localities where there is a market, the local authority is going to have to develop a greater role in analysing and managing markets. For nearly all local authorities this will require them to develop new skills and capabilities. To achieve a modern relationship with the market it will be necessary to choose the type of competition appropriate to the particular context and not to be limited to the idea of in house service versus outsourcing.

## **ACTION CHECKLIST**

*To what extent, since the abolition of CCT, have you reviewed the way in which your local authority approaches the private sector for assistance in delivering new forms of service delivery? Have you explored partnering arrangements or the Private Finance Initiative?*

*Have you discussed with other local authorities that have developed new relationships with the private sector how they have done this? Are there any direct lessons for you?*

*Has your local authority got the skills to develop a new procurement strategy for the 21st century? If not how will you get them?*

*To what extent can you facilitate the creation of a local market for the education services in your local area?*



## chapter 8

# working across the local authority

Warwick University's interim analysis of the Best Value pilots found that *'the experiences of the pilots suggest that on the whole service or function based reviews have been the most straightforward because they are aligned with departmental or service management structures. Reviews addressing cross cutting issues, the needs of particular client groups or communities have tended to be more difficult'*.<sup>10</sup>

Our research would back this up. Whilst the methodology of gathering data directly from chief education officers is likely to concentrate on services within a single department, we found little evidence of 'cross cutting issues' being attempted.

Some local authorities developed their reviews of education services successfully outside of the service 'box'. For some this took place through the focus on a locality. Here a local authority recognises that whilst they may be delivering a set of services from different departments, these are experienced by residents of a locality as 'the council'. Our organisation of service delivery into different departments is our business and of no interest to the public consumer. Under these circumstances an analysis of how the locality experienced a range of services provides a genuine cross cutting theme.

In some cases such as Middleton in Leeds these included education services:

### **Leeds**

'The Best Value pilot focused on the locality of Middleton. A Forum was created and successfully agreed the issues to focus on, which included education, and to pilot a local community plan. There have been workshop discussions on how to involve local people in life-long learning opportunities that are available and we are working with parents to improve behaviour and educational attainment of children'.

Here then educational services for life long learning and for pupils at schools have been identified by local people as a crucial part of their local service focus. As such they are reviewed together with other services.

In other local authorities their cross cutting reviews have taken place by ensuring that services that are taking part in Best Value reviews have to address not just their own concerns, but also the overall aims of the Council. Most local authorities now have overall mission statements or a set of corporate objectives. These are created in order to provide coherence to the overall work of the authority and can therefore act as a useful guideline for all Best Value reviews.

In Manchester for an education service to be successfully reviewed it must demonstrate how it not only meets the specific objectives set by the service itself but also show how it can meet the overall objectives of the council.

## **Manchester**

The Best Value guidance makes it clear as its last part of guidance that there are Corporate Issues that must be addressed.

'Corporate Issues Key Questions

- What cross-departmental thematic and/or area based issues have arisen from the review?
- What implications for corporate policies and/or strategies have been identified?
- What are the implications for this corporate review?

Guidance points

- Issues where solutions are outside the scope of single departments
- Issues where there are clear advantages to a cross departmental or corporate approach
- Inter/multi agency issues'

*Manchester Best Value Standards and Guidance*

In Manchester therefore, every local authority review of services is challenged by these corporate approaches to service delivery. This ensures that every review has to take that on board.

This is obviously happening in other local authorities, as when questioned about the specific way in which education services were being challenged by Best Value, Poole replied that, *'All services are to be reviewed with cross cutting themes to inform on Best Value'*.



## chapter 9

# the future and Best Value – some practical issues

The development of Best Value within local authority education services is in its early days. Yet there are some important patterns that are emerging from which we need to learn. These have been assembled as a set of action points at the end of many of the above chapters.


We will not reiterate them here, but we will underline the important point, which ensures that education services are Best Value reviewed alongside the other local authority services.

This strikes at the heart of the question of whether education services have a part to play in the multi-purpose local authority. Those people, who believe in the nature of multi-purpose local government, do so because they believe that it is important for different services to contribute together to improve the life chances of people in the locality. This can only be achieved if the local authority does indeed deliver its services within a coherent whole. If the education services are delivered entirely separately from the other services delivered by the local authority, then the question of ‘why deliver these services through local government?’ has not been answered.

As Best Value develops it will become increasingly obvious that reviews that take place service by service will fail to raise wider cross cutting issues of service delivery to the public. Whoever their customer is, whether it is the general public, schools or young people themselves, local authorities provide a broad range of different services to the same people. These are often experienced simply as ‘the Council’ and the way in which local government splits them up into very different services may be helpful for us but often has no meaning for the public.

Therefore, whilst service by service reviews are a useful starting point for the development of Best Value, only rarely will they be able, from within a single service, to understand how Best Value as a whole can be delivered to the public. This is a difficult matter for most local government, since so much of it is organised within a departmental approach to services. This is especially the case with education services since the department they are usually organised within, the education department, has a greater history of separation from the rest of the local authority than others.

Only by overcoming this separation can local authorities succeed in ensuring that they have a corporate approach to raising education standards for all.



## appendix 1 methodology


We used a variety of methods to provide the material for this pamphlet. Over the last two years a number of different organisations have been involved in enlarging our understanding of how Best Value has been developing. Most notably Warwick University have been carrying out an in depth research project on how the different pilot authorities are developing Best Value. We discussed this project with them and asked for their advice about which local authorities had something interesting to tell us about their work on education services in Best Value.

Over a similar period, the Office for Public Management itself has been working with a very wide spread of local authorities on Best Value and we have used this knowledge to inform the pamphlet. Our work with local government over this period helps to form the overall framework of the report.

As the enactment of the legislation approaches in April 2000, we have an in depth understanding of what Best Value means to local government and how it is being implemented. The author has also written a pamphlet in June 1998, which linked Best Value and the Educational Development Plan and had been issued as a basis for a series of regional seminars on Best Value with local education authorities in England, attended by about half of the local authorities that deliver education services in the country

To supplement this we wrote to all local education authorities in England and Wales with a brief questionnaire asking for information on the services they had reviewed or had planned to review under Best Value legislation and also if there was anything different they had been working on in the fields of challenge, consult and compete. We also followed this up with phone calls asking for more detailed information.

Overall we received about a response rate of over a third to that questionnaire and follow up calls.



**From April 2000 local authorities will have a statutory duty to carry out Best Value reviews within the next five year period for all their services.**

**Initial Education Personnel have commissioned this study with the aim of producing a pamphlet which will be useful to those local authorities with responsibility for education services.**

**Drawn from real local government experience this study takes a snapshot of where local authorities with education services are in this process in early 2000.**

**It examines examples of good practice by authorities who are already engaged in reviews of their education services and contains practical information and action points which will be of assistance in assessing the development of such reviews in each authority.**

**It is an invaluable guide to every local authority with responsibility for Best Value in education.**