REPORT TO: BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE - 26 FEBRUARY 2002

REPORT ON: INFORMATION AND RESEARCH SERVICE
                  BEST VALUE REVIEW 2000/01

REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

REPORT NO: 433-2001

1   PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1   This report indicates the manner in which the Information and Research Service provided within the Planning and Transportation Department has been reviewed and presents the conclusions further to consultation with key stakeholders and option appraisal.

2   RECOMMENDATIONS

           It is recommended that the Sub-Committee:

2.1   agrees the outcome of the review as contained in this report and specifically the following proposal.

           That the Information and Research Service continues to be operated and managed as currently, subject to the continuous improvements indicated.

2.2   Notes those areas identified for continuous improvement in Section 13 of this report.

3   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1   This review accounts for 2.85% (£240,000) of the Department's Revenue Budget and is 7.7% of the total review expenditure planned in this Department this year.

4   LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1   The review was undertaken from the perspective of Local Agenda 21, in particular, that resources are used efficiently and waste minimised.

5   EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1   There are no equal opportunity implications arising from this report.

6   DEFINITION OF THE SERVICE TO BE REVIEWED

6.1   The Information and Research Service as covered in this report is that based in the Policy and Regeneration Division of the Planning and Transportation Department.

6.2   The service is provided by the Information and Research Team, which has a total of nine staff, comprising the following posts:

           1 Team Leader, Information and Research
           2 Senior Planning Officers, Information and Research
           3 Planning Officers
           1 Senior Technician
           1 Technician

6.2.1   It should be noted that one of the Planning Officer posts is presently a job share.

6.2.2   One of the Planning Officer posts is a full-time secondment to the Geddes Centre, School of Town and Regional Planning, at the University of Dundee. This secondment is in relation to a significant part of the Community and Regeneration monitoring and evaluation responsibilities of the Division. A Best Value Review of this area of work was carried out in 1998/99 (Report No 292/1999).

6.3   The service focuses on land use, demographic, social and economic information that supports policy, strategy and monitoring and evaluation requirements.

6.4   The Information and Research Service is responsible for:

- providing information, research and statistical development and analysis to the Policy and Regeneration Division, Planning and Transportation Department and where appropriate, to assist other City Council Departments, neighbouring Councils, the general public and other external agencies with information requests;

- the effective and efficient establishment and maintenance of appropriate information systems to manage identified data sets;

- taking the lead role in certain identified Corporate information and research activities; such as SIMG (Strategic Information and Monitoring Group) and COSLA initiatives.

- providing a GIS (Geographic Information Systems) service to support the land use responsibilities in the division and department;

- carrying out surveys, which may be statutory, requested by Scottish Executive or Westminster Central Government, or internal to the Council or the department;

- supporting the needs of Development, Structure and Local Plan preparation and monitoring;

- supporting the information needs of Dundee Partnership activities;

- shared provision of a Technical Service to the Policy and Regeneration Division. Two of the three divisional technician staff are part of the Information and Research Team.

7   JUSTIFICATION FOR REVIEWING THIS SERVICE

7.1   This service was identified for review as the range of activities covered offers opportunities for assessment of priorities and identification of core essential functions and their resource allocation, both now and in the future.

8   REVIEW METHODOLOGY

8.1   **Review Team**

        The Review Team of four consisted of:

        Review Team Leader from Personnel and Management Services Department

        Lead Officer – (Team Leader, Information and Research)

        Two Senior Planning Officers – (Information and Research)

8.2   **The Process**

            The review was carried out through consultation with customers and stakeholders.

            Customers and stakeholders were involved in the identification of critical success factors
            and performance appraisal.

            Process benchmarking was identified as a suitable approach.   This involved the
            identification of discrete elements of the service that were suitable to compare with others
            who provide a similar service.

            The nature of the service meant that it was appropriate to compare with other local
            authorities. After initial contact with all local authorities in Scotland and assessment of the
            returns, three suitable authorities were contacted.

            Following the consultation a performance review was carried out prior to option appraisal.

            Further details of the process are given in the report sections that follow and in the audit
            file.

9   CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

9.1   **Stakeholders**

9.1.1   The stakeholders were selected based on those to whom a service has been provided or
            who have an interest in the service that is under review.

9.1.2   Stakeholders were identified in the following categories.

            Internal to the Council   -   Policy and Regeneration Division staff
                                       -    Planning and Transportation Department staff
                                       -    Other Council Departments
                                       -    Councillors

            External to the Council   -   General Public
                                       -    Other Local Authorities
                                       -    Scottish Executive
                                       -    Public Bodies
                                       -    Private Bodies

            Further details on stakeholders contacted are available in the audit file.

9.2   **Critical Success Factors**

            It was identified that two areas be considered as <u>possible</u> critical success factors.

            •   Quality
            •   Cost.

            Of these 'Quality' of service was considered the main factor.

            The Council's best value review approach also requires that 'Cost' is considered as a
            critical success factor.

9.3   **Quality**

Of the many definitions of quality, the one considered as a focus is:

"a quality service is one that meets the customer/stakeholder requirements"

It is clear that each stakeholder may have different requirements and we need to consider a range of issues that may contribute to quality.

To allow input from stakeholders, quality was sub-divided into a further six possible critical success factors as detailed below :-

- Accuracy of information
- Timeliness of Response
- Value for Money
- Polite and Courteous service
- Current/Up-to-date information
- Consultancy Advice Added

9.4 Cost

At present, the main cost for the service is in staff salaries and related costs. At present, the service only charges for a limited number of specific work items. The staff salaries are available in the audit file (Item 1).

The limited charges raised by items are as detailed below :

Population reports	£10
Housing Land Audit	£30
Map Production	£10 (Typically)

The annual income raised from these is small, usually between £100 - £150.

9.5 Consultation

To undertake the necessary consultation stakeholders' views on the possible critical success factors were gathered using a questionnaire (Audit File Item 2) and further supplemented by face to face discussion with internal stakeholders.

9.5.1 There was a 46% return rate from 140 questionnaires.

When broken down by category of stakeholder, the returns were :

Council Staff	57%	43 from 76 questionnaires
Councillors	28%	8 from 29 questionnaires
External	37%	13 from 35 questionnaires

The variation of return rate reflects the amount of regular direct contact each category of stakeholder has with the service.

9.5.2 From the returns, all criteria were considered important with none being rated below 3.3 on an importance rating of 1 low and 5 high. It was therefore decided appropriate to include all factors in the review.

A detailed breakdown of the responses is given in the Audit File (Item 3).

Cost had a rating of 3.5 out of 5 and quality was rated as 4.7 out of 5.

Taking a simplistic view, this may suggest that stakeholders view quality as more important than cost.

It is more likely that the view is influenced by the fact that at present, relatively few parts of the service raise direct charges and where this occurs the charges are relatively low.

9.5.3   The importance of each critical success factor is likely to vary considerably with the nature of the request and the priorities of the stakeholder. Specifically, stakeholders in the face to face consultation raised this point.

9.5.4   From the consultation, a few additional points were mentioned by stakeholders :-

a   Reliability of IS/IT equipment.
b   Ability to communicate with non-information people
c   Presentation of information
d   Enhanced use of graphics.

While these were seen as specific items that contribute to quality, they were not viewed as critical success factors in their own right.

9.5.5   One stakeholder gave specific written comment emphasising that certain requests require a partnership approach with the Council working with other information providers.

9.5.6   A stakeholder highlighted the fact that it is often the case that "you get what you pay for". This emphasises that there is a balance or trade-off between cost and quality. It is therefore vitally important that customers and the Information and Research service agree clear specifications.

10   PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Previously, information had not been gathered to allow a baseline measurement of quality.

10.1   **Initial Performance Appraisal by Stakeholders**

An initial appraisal of the service was established via a questionnaire sent to stakeholders (Audit File - Item 4). This allowed them to provide a rating of "very good", "good", "average" or "poor" on the approved critical success factors.

Item 5 in the Audit file provides a breakdown of the detailed responses.

Most stakeholders rated the service as "good" or "very good" for each of the critical success factors.

Overall quality of service was rated as "very good" or "good" by 94% of the respondents.

10.2   **Performance Indicators**

Prior to this review, there was no formal feedback from customers. A customer feedback system is suggested in the Continuous Improvement section where targets are set against the ratings from such a system. The customer feedback is gathered using the section detailed in the following.

PART C		
Customer Feedback	Completed by:	Date: / /

By circling the appropriate value, please rate each of the following from 1 (low) to 10 (high) (please rate **all** the items and avoid using not applicable (n/a) wherever possible. Testing has shown that customers view overall satisfaction as broader than quality of service therefore please complete 1 and 2 even if you rate them the same. Items 3, to 8 are specific items that contribute to quality and are an integral part of our assessment and improvement process).

		Low									High	
1	Overall Satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
2	Overall Quality of Service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
3	Accuracy of Information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
4	Timeliness of Response	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
5	Value for Money	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
6	Polite and Courteous Service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
7	Current Up-To-Date Information	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
8	Added Consultancy Value	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A

Table 1 below outlines the performance indicators for this feedback (lines 1-8) and also for the completion of other major work items (lines 9-12). The results from the customer feedback form is used later in Section 13 to set targets for continuous improvement.

TABLE 1 – Performance Indicators

	Critical Success Factor	Performance Indicator
1	Overall Satisfaction	Customer rating
2	Overall Quality	Customer rating
3	Accuracy Information	Customer rating
4	Timeliness of response (Information received on time)	Customer rating
5	Value for money	Customer rating
6	Polite and Courteous Service	Customer rating
7	Current Up-to-date information	Customer rating
8	Added Consultancy Value	Customer rate
9		Completion of Annual retail survey and audit
10		Completion of Annual Employment Land survey and audit
11		Completion of Scottish Vacant & Derelict Land Survey and audit and Scottish Executive returns
12		Annual Employment Survey (AES) return to Scottish executive

11   METHOD OF COMPARISON

11.1   The following sections outline how this comparison was carried out, some key issues raised and possible areas to be considered in Section 13 on continuous improvement.

Six work areas which reflected the existing mix and spread of activities and the divisional structure were selected. These are :-

- Employment Land Information
- Housing Land Information
- Vacant and Derelict Land Information
- Retail Information
- Property Information
- GIS (Geographic Information Systems)

11.2   The departmental location and staff responsible for these elements of the service in other Scottish Local Authorities were identified. Where possible this was carried out by e-mail. The audit file gives details on these findings.

11.3   After investigation of the arrangements for information and research activities in other local authorities it was clear that few, if any, had a similar set up to that at Dundee. This was not the result of any unusual arrangement at Dundee City Council, but more a function of the wide variety of duties within the service and how they are split among departments in local authorities. This situation makes precise benchmarking difficult.

The document used to gather this information and the results are available in the audit file (Item 5).

11.4   Based on a return from 24 of the 32 local authorities and stakeholder input, the Best Value Team identified five areas of the service where comparison would be most appropriate. Item 1 was selected as this was seen as an item that cut across all work of the Team. Items 2, 3 and 4 were areas where a statutory return was required as part of each. Item 5 reflects a developing area with a considerable influence on new opportunities and approaches.

1   Ad-hoc Requests
2   Housing Land Audit
3   Retail Audit
4   Employment Land Information
5   GIS/Mapping

11.5   From the local authority returns it was identified that process benchmarking with the three other authorities A, B and C was appropriate.

11.6   Each of the three Councils was contacted and agreement was given to proceed with process benchmarking by telephone and discussion with appropriate staff. From the returns referred to in section 11.2 the appropriate staff in the other Councils who dealt with the five areas were identified.

11.7   Staff within the Dundee City Council Information and Research Service who had knowledge of, and responsibility for each area, identified in Section 11.4, contacted the relevant responsible staff in the other three Councils.

11.8   Structured questions were prepared to assist with the telephone interviews and on completion of each area, a briefing report was completed highlighting the important points and in particular focusing on areas of possible improvement.

These reports are available in the Audit File (Item 6).

11.9   Key points from comparison reports were used to identify areas of continuous improvement reported in Section 13.

11.10   **Cost Comparison**

As has been previously stated, there is considerable variation between authorities in the manner in which information and research is carried out and the staff resources available.

For most local authorities, there are presently very few, if any, occasions when charges are made for information and research service work. Most work is the result of requests for analysis, advice or data collation for internal use or for clients to whom charges have traditionally not been made.

All three authorities contacted in the process benchmarking part of the review reported that they viewed the analysis and provision of information as part of their work remit and not one where anything other than printing and production charges were recovered.

Therefore, no direct comparison for the total 'Cost of I & R Service' is possible.

11.10.1   **Hourly Rates**

Although no work item has arisen in the last two years, for which an hourly rate has been used, the information and research service has until recently had a published hourly rate of £30 per hour. This has been recently reviewed and is now set at £35.00 per hour.

This rate was established with reference to the staff charges produced by the Finance Section of the Planning and Transportation Department and detailed in the Audit File (Item 1).

Dundee   £35.00 per hour.
Authority A   Rarely charges. Recently charged £18 per hour.
Authority B   Do not charge for work on an hourly rate basis.
Authority C   Do not charge for work on an hourly rate basis.

Investigations suggest that the other authorities contacted have not agreed on an hourly rate as either such work does not arise or traditionally, most work has been charged on a basis of covering the cost of materials used rather than time spent.

Dundee has taken a thorough approach to defining the hourly rate. It is best value to review work requests to identify when such charges should apply.

11.10.2   **Housing Land Audit**

The case of the production of the Housing Land Audit is worthwhile highlighting.

All authorities compile a Housing Land Audit, which provides a factual statement of land supply of sites within each local authority.

The document is used internally to the Council and as part of a formal return to the Scottish Executive.

In addition, it is supplied to external agencies, consultants and other interested parties. The costs are as given below.

Dundee   £30.00
Council A   £10.00
Council B   £20.00
Council C   £15.00

The work behind the production of this document is substantial and the information it contains is valuable.

Although the charge Dundee makes is higher than elsewhere, we are confident that the level of charge made by Dundee is good value for money and in keeping with the best value approach.

The difference in charging between authorities either reflects a different approach to charging in other authorities and/or the fact that charges may not have been updated for some time.

12   OPTION APPRAISAL

12.1   Following performance review and the comparisons made, the options considered were:

12.1.1   continue to provide the operation and management of the service as it exists, subject to the improvement actions identified in Section 13;

12.1.2   consider the provision of the service by the private sector;

12.1.3   consider the provision of the service elsewhere in the Council.

12.2   **Option a**

Continuing with the existing Information and Research Service management and operation is the recommended option.

The skills base, communication channels and the ability to respond to issues and priorities on a daily basis is unlikely to be achieved by alternative arrangements.

The continuous improvement areas detailed in Section 13 will be tested or implemented and the progress and results of these actions will be subject to annual review.

Among the continuous improvements consideration is given to reducing or reassigning certain minor elements of the service to provide a more effective and efficient service dealing with core priorities.

The other options are rejected as not feasible or unsuitable as indicated in the following sections.

12.3   **Option b**

This option is not feasible as the major elements of the service are required as an integral part of the operation of the Policy and Regeneration Division and the Planning and Transportation Department.
The successful operation of the service depends on an intimate knowledge of the day to day needs and working of the Planning and Transportation Department and other Council Departments. This knowledge is not something that could be provided by the private sector.
The service involves considerable communication and discussion with staff from across the Council. This could not effectively be carried out by the private sector.

12.4   **Option c**

This option is not thought feasible as the major elements of the service are required as an integral part of the operation of the Policy and Regeneration Division and the Planning and Transportation Department.

The skills, knowledge and experience required to carry out the service is not likely to be available outwith the Policy and Regeneration Division and the Planning and Transportation Department.

It would not be best value to consider restructuring within Dundee. However, It should be noted that the Council's initiatives in response to 'Modernising Government' and 'Joined-up Government' should provide opportunities for common data sets and shared information between departments.

13   CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The option appraisal suggests that continuing with the existing Information and Research Service management and operation is the recommended option. This section identifies how that service can be improved and sets targets and/or dates for action and future review.

13.1   **Customer Feedback Targets**

As mentioned previously, a baseline figure must first be established to set targets for improvement. Therefore, the first continuous improvement action is :

a   Introduction of Customer Feedback Reporting

Based on this, targets have been set for a baseline position in 2001 –2002. These targets will be reviewed in light of the monitoring information gathered.

Table 2 below sets out the rating targets for the critical success factors and their associated performance indicators.

TABLE 2 :- Rating Targets

	Critical Success Factor	Performance Indicator	Target
1	Overall Quality	Customer rating	At least 80% rating 5 or above
2	Accuracy Information	Customer rating	At least 80% rating 5 or above
3	Timeliness of response (Information received on time)	Customer rating	At least 70% rating 5 or above
5	Polite and Courteous Service	Customer rating	At least 80% rating 5 or above
6	Current Up-to-date information	Customer rating	At least 80% rating 5 or above
7	Added Consultancy Value	Customer rating	At least 80% rating 5 or above
8	Value for money	Customer rating	At least 80% rating 5 or above

The nature of the requests we receive and the influence of unforeseeable changing priorities suggests that 3 - Timeliness of response should have a target set initially at a slightly lower but acceptable level of 70%.

13.2   **Annual Audits and Surveys**

b   Complete Major Surveys on Time

This action identified major work items that must be carried out and agrees to meet the deadlines for these. As the actual deadline dates vary from year to year, the target is a simple but often demanding one to meet all returns on time. The dates will be set and monitored on an annual basis and reported back in each review.

The work items included are given in Table 3.

TABLE 3 :- Reporting Targets

Critical Success Factor		Performance Indicator	Target
Quality of Service	(	Completion of Annual retail survey and audit	On time
	(((	Completion of Annual Employment Land survey and audit	On time
	((((	Completion of Scottish Vacant & Derelict Land Survey and audit and Scottish Executive returns	On time
	(((	Annual Employment Survey (AES) return to Scottish executive	On time

13.3 Process Benchmarking Improvements

This section identifies improvement actions from the process benchmarking along with target dates.

13.3.1 Ad-hoc Requests

c   *Introduction of a formal Work Request System with integrated customer feedback with immediate effect.*

This system will include major 'ad hoc' requests as well as more regular work projects. It is expected that this will provide the following benefits :

Clearer specifications.
Opportunity to monitor and evaluate work items.
Assist with programme planning.
Allow customer feedback.

d   *Delegate specific items of work to named individuals.*

Record this via the annual staff appraisal process in September/October 2001.

13.3.2 Housing Land Audit

e   *Define and establish a process to allow recording of new planning application information throughout the year, noting amendments and committee decisions as they come in.*

Establish this system by September 2002.

f   *Define a formal process to obtain information directly from the Building control Section by September 2002.*

13.3.3 Retail Audit

g   *Carry out a full survey every two years and introduce surveys for major and large retail developments every six months from 2002 onwards.*

h   *Integrate the retail database management system with the GIS system by the end of 2001.*

i   *Produce a booklet on 'Major Retail and Leisure Developments' by December 2001.*

13.3.4 Employment Land Audit

j   Extend the system to include the collection of data, presently not recorded, on land that becomes available for development and is then developed between the annual surveys.

A formal process to be defined and implemented by March 2002.

k   Provide an integrated GIS interface to the employment land information system. To be completed by March 2002.

13.3.5   Geographic Information Systems

l   Expand access to the GIS system to all staff within the Policy and Regeneration Division by December 2001.

This will include installation of software and training.

m   Raise the awareness of and skills in using GIS more widely in the Policy and Regeneration Division.

To be completed by December 2001.

14   CONSULTATION

14.1   The Director of Planning and Transportation, Director of Finance, Director of Support Services and Director of Corporate Planning, have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report.

15   BACKGROUND PAPERS

15.1   Best Value Submission to the Secretary of State for Scotland, December 1997. Policy and Resources Committee, 11 December 1997

Alex Stephen
Chief Executive

4 September 2001

KW/IMB/EJ

Dundee City Council
Tayside House
Dundee