



## **New community-focused approach to competitiveness offered as solution for Government's Best Value review**

A new approach is needed to ensure local communities get the best possible council services, according to the Association for Public Service Excellence, which has put forward an effective model for continuously improving services.

APSE believes the review of Best Value – being undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government as it develops place-shaping guidance by the end of the year as part of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill – offers a good opportunity to develop a more effective model for improving services.

APSE, which has 260 members who deliver front-line council services across the UK, has developed the 'Competitiveness Continuum' model to promote debate about how councils can continue to improve services. The model is described in an e-pamphlet launched this week.

APSE's chief executive, Paul O'Brien, said: *"Local government operates in a rapidly changing society and to maintain public confidence it needs to be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. The Government's plans to reform Best Value must not mean a return to crude market testing of public services, but should concentrate instead on the long-term needs of local communities."*

The Competitiveness Continuum is a system that challenges and reviews service performance and compares data on how the wider market is performing against a council's current delivery option – regardless of whether the provider is from the public, private or voluntary sector.

Mr O'Brien says: *"It enables the complexity of local community needs to be addressed and choices to be made as to which are the most responsive, flexible, accountable and sustainable ways of providing services. Local authorities are then able to decide if they wish to pursue alternative options based on hard facts and the views of local people."*

The Competitiveness Continuum incorporates a performance management and assessment framework, input from elected members, business process analysis, benchmarking, market analysis, stakeholder perceptions and environmental considerations. It uses APSE's performance network, which is the largest voluntary benchmarking service for local government in the UK.

**To arrange an interview or for further information contact Mo Baines. Email: [mbaines@apse.org.uk](mailto:mbaines@apse.org.uk) or telephone 07971 843515.**

## **Notes to editor**

1) The Local Government (Best Value) Act 1999 applies to England and Wales and 'Best Value' in its legislative form was introduced to Scottish Local Authorities through the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 though Scottish authorities were already following non-statutory best value guidance. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill will pave the way for revised Best Value Guidance to be issued which many APSE member authorities believe could give rise to calls from central government to increase open market competition - a process that was discredited as a result of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) of Local Authority Services during the late 80s and throughout the 1990s

2) The e-pamphlet is the result of the comments and feedback from workshops of selected local government professionals on the topic of testing competitiveness from across the UK. This explores the existing approaches to competition in public services and puts the case for an effective new process of continuous improvement. A copy of the e-pamphlet is attached to this email for press use.

3) The model includes detailed analysis of; outcomes delivered for local communities, involvement of elected members and the role of local people as stakeholders in improving services.