

MINUTES of the meeting of Strategic Monitoring Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Wednesday 2 December 2009 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor PJ Edwards (Chairman)
Councillor WLS Bowen (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: PA Andrews, ME Cooper, TM James, RI Matthews, PM Morgan, AT Oliver and PJ Watts

In attendance: Councillors JP French (Cabinet Member – Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources.)

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors AE Gray and KG Grumbley. Apologies were also received from Councillor RJ Phillips.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

29. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

30. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

There were no suggestions from members of the public.

31. ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

The Committee received a presentation on the key principles informing the new accommodation strategy.

The Head of Asset Management and Property Services (HAMPS) gave the presentation. He explained that the Joint Corporate Property Strategy was one of the first combined Council and National Health Service property strategies in the Country. The development of the Strategy had taken account of the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Use of Resources assessment, the Government's Operational Efficiency Programme (OEP) and the Total Place assessment. He emphasised that the Strategy was flexible to allow account to be taken of future change.

The aims were to achieve a hub and spoke model for administrative offices, a strong shared administrative centre based at Plough Lane, a series of co-locality offices based around the Market Towns and Golden Valley, better ways of working and improved outcomes for local people.

The benefits would be Asset/Property Rationalisation, lower total capital investment/expenditure needed, a reduction in reactive repairs and maintenance over 3-5 year cycles, a reduction in the growing backlog of maintenance liabilities, capital receipts from asset disposals for redirection to priorities, a reduction in annual running costs, lower costs for property and facilities management support services, carbon footprint reduction and safeguarding and improvement of local services.

The intention was to submit the Strategy to the NHS Herefordshire Board and Cabinet in mid-December and then to begin to implement the Strategy.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- Asked about the timetable for implementation the HAMPS explained that the Strategy covered all property, not just office accommodation, and included a number of major projects. The projects within the office accommodation section would take 3-5 years to complete.
- Clarification was sought on the acquisition of the Plough Lane site. The HAMPS confirmed that the contract was to be signed within the next few days.
- It was requested that a new name should be found for the Plough Lane site.
- It was asked whether it was sensible to dispose of assets in the present market. The Director of Resources said that the Council had a duty to get best value and careful consideration was given to the timing of disposals.
- The HAMPS confirmed that joint working with the NHS was taking place. The options appraisal had looked at the scope to share office accommodation in particular. The savings identified to date did not take into account NHS savings.
- Asked about CO2 emissions and travel to work plans the HAMPS said that a mapping exercise was being undertaken looking at where people lived and the impact of office changes. He noted, however, that 18,000 homes were to be built over the next few years which would have implications.
- The HAMPS confirmed that the intention with new buildings was for them to achieve a sustainability rating of very good or excellent and provide the most sustainable buildings possible within the limited resources available.

RESOLVED:

That: the development of the Joint Accommodation Strategy be endorsed, whilst highlighting the importance of close working with partners, the importance of exploring all modes of transport to new office locations and the need to find a new name for the Plough Lane office.

32. INTEGRATED CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered a report on performance for the period April-September 2009-10 against the Council's key indicators and associated projects and programmes in its Annual Operating Statement 2009-10.

The report to Cabinet on 26 November was appended.

The Corporate Policy and Research Manager (CPRM) presented the report. He noted that the format of the integrated corporate performance report had been revised, taking

account of comments made by the Committee on 19 October and views expressed by Cabinet and officers.

He commented that performance against the affordable housing target now had better prospects and that performance against target NI 159 (Initial assessments for children's social care carried out within seven working days of referral) had improved significantly and was now ahead of target. On the other hand street cleanliness targets were not on track, or improving on the previous year, but remedial action was in hand.

There had been significant improvement in relation to the Local Area Agreement targets. The majority of LAA indicators were on track, and remedial action was being taken in respect of others, particularly as regards healthier communities and older people, for which action plans were now in place or being developed.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- Concern was expressed about performance against a number of the education attainment targets as set out on page 28 of the agenda papers. It was proposed that the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee should investigate performance against these targets in more detail.
- Concern was also expressed about the provision of affordable housing it being observed that even achieving the target would only go a small way towards meeting the need for such housing within the County. It was noted that the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee would be giving further consideration to this issue in the New Year.

The Director of Resources commented that the possibility of using the site of the former care home, Elmhurst, in Hereford for affordable housing was being investigated. However, it would be important to ensure that value for money was obtained.

- Further to questions asked by the Committee in October about performance against the local indicator on customer satisfaction the CPRM reported that he had reviewed the survey methods and was satisfied that the approach was robust.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the report and points raised by the Committee be noted; and

(b) performance against a range of education attainment targets as set out on page 28 of the agenda papers should be referred to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee for further investigation

(The Committee adjourned between 2.55 pm and 3.30 pm to discuss informally some of the outcomes of the change transformation programme 2009. A number of change champions attended to present and discuss their work.)

33. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2009

The Committee considered September's budget monitoring information, an indication of estimated outturn for both revenue and capital budgets and treasury management activities in the first six months of 2009/10.

The Head of Financial Services reported that the projected overspend had reduced from £556k to £400k as at the end of October. There were significant projected overspends

on the budgets for the Children and Young People's and Integrated Commissioning directorates. Recovery plans had been put in place. The projected overspend on the Children and Young People's budget had reduced from £945k to £500k.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- Clarification was requested on the over expenditure on children taken into care, noting that the budget set by the Directorate had not reflected realistic expenditure levels based on the previous year's costs. It was agreed that a briefing note would be provided.
- The number of debts written off was questioned. The Director of Resources replied that whilst every effort was made to collect debts sometimes it was simply not possible. Performance in debt collection remained good compared with other local authorities.
- It was noted that on the current projections all of the social care contingency reserve would be used. The Director confirmed that if there was an overall underspend that money could be allocated to the contingency fund. The funding position for 2010/11 was as yet unclear but the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy did not provide for a social care contingency reserve. He added that the level of the General Reserve was higher than provided for in the current Strategy but he did not propose to reduce it given the financial pressures likely to be faced.

The Committee noted the position.

34. SCRUTINY OF EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The Committee considered a proposal to scrutinise an aspect of external communication.

A scoping statement for the review was appended to the report.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) the scoping statement for the review as appended to the report be approved as the basis for the review, subject to refinement at the first meeting of the Review Group; and**
 - (b) the Councillors PA Andrews, PJ Edwards, TM James and PJ Watts be appointed to serve on the Review Group with an invitation to be extended to invite a fifth Member from one of the other Scrutiny Committees to join the Group; and**
 - (c) the Review Group be authorised to appoint a Chairman of the Group.**

35. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

RESOLVED: That the current work programme serve as a basis for further development.

The meeting ended at 4.45 pm

CHAIRMAN