

**MINUTES of the meeting of Strategic Monitoring Committee held at The Council Chamber, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 5th July, 2004 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:** Councillor T.M. James (Chairman)

**Councillors:** W.L.S. Bowen, A.C.R. Chappell, J.H.R. Goodwin, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, J. Stone, J.P. Thomas and W.J.S. Thomas

**In attendance:** Councillors Mrs. J.P. French, P.E. Harling, D.B. Wilcox and R.M. Wilson

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs P.A. Andrews, B.F. Ashton, and R.J. Phillips.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor TM James declared a personal interest in relation to the urgent item on Herefordshire Jarvis Services.

**3. (URGENT ITEM) HEREFORDSHIRE JARVIS SERVICES LIMITED**

In accordance with section 100B (4) b of the Local Government Act 1972 the Chairman agreed that the following item of business should be considered as a matter of urgency on the grounds that the Committee needed to be aware of developments relating to Jarvis PLC and the possible implications for the Council at the earliest opportunity.

*Councillor TM James declared a personal interest.*

**EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS**

**RESOLVED:** That under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12(A) of the Act, as indicated below.

**SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF EXEMPT INFORMATION**

The Committee was informed of uncertainty regarding the operation of Jarvis PLC, the parent company of Herefordshire Jarvis Services Limited to whom the Council had let a contract to deliver various services on behalf of the Council. It noted the potential implications and steps being taken to minimise any risk to the Council.

**This item disclosed information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the Authority).**

#### **4. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26th April, 2004 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

#### **5. HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY**

The Committee received an update on progress against the Council's Human Resources (HR) Strategy for the year ending 31st March, 2004.

The Head of Human Resources presented the report. He noted that the Strategy would need to be fully reviewed given the requirement that all local authorities should have a pay and workforce strategy in place by March, 2005. He commented on progress against each of the six priority areas, as outlined in the report.

The Committee raised a number of issues, noting from the replies that these were either being addressed or were under consideration. The issues raised are summarised below:

- Completion of Staff Review and Development (SRD) discussions: The Head of Human Resources commented that failure to meet the target was a question of prioritisation by Managers rather than resistance to the process. The need to devise a more appropriate format for part-time workers and some other groups of employees was acknowledged. He confirmed that the identification of transferable skills formed part of the SRD process.
- Equal Opportunities: The Head of Human Resources advised that the Council's response to these issues needed to focus in the short term on recruitment and selection techniques. There were longer-term issues about engaging with schools and colleges to encourage a wider range of applicants.
- Sickness Absence: Progress in reducing sickness absence was welcomed.
- Exit Interviews: The Head of Human Resources agreed to circulate an analysis to Members of the Committee.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

#### **6. HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL IMPROVEMENT PLAN - MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee considered a monitoring report on the Council's Improvement Plan.

The report to Cabinet on 3rd June, 2004 was appended to the report.

The Corporate Policy and Research Manager presented the report, noting that the overall picture was encouraging. The majority of actions had been completed, although further work was needed on internal communications. He highlighted the intention to incorporate improvement objectives into the priorities in the Corporate Plan.

In response to questions the following principal points were made:

- The Director of Policy and Community gave an update on the provision of Broadband within Herefordshire. She reported that BT had recently made an announcement revising its position on what infrastructure it would deliver, without a financial contribution from others. As things currently stood BT would not provide Broadband on its own account to the whole of the County. Negotiations were continuing and it remained the Council's aim that the whole County would benefit. A statement on the position would be issued to all Members.
- The Director of Policy and Community reaffirmed that a corporate information policy was now in place, requiring all IT equipment to be purchased through IT Services. The first step was to bring everyone up to a common standard. This would mean that requests from some services for further upgrades would be refused.

**RESOLVED: That progress in relation to the Council's Improvement Plan be noted.**

## 7. PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT UPDATE

The Committee was informed of the progress on the second Local Public Service Agreement which the Council was to negotiate with the Government later in the year.

The report to Cabinet on 1st July, 2004, which included the current scoping document it was proposed to submit to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) was appended to the report.

The County Treasurer reported that the scoping document had to be submitted to the (ODPM) before the end of July 2004. It was intended that a Seminar for Members would be held in late July.

The Chief Executive commented that LPSA 2 was a complex process and the requirements of the Government Office for the West Midlands were making it difficult to ensure the desired level of Member involvement. The initial bid had been made based on the needs of the local partnership. The current draft submission revised in the light of ODPM guidance remained broad based. It was important to consider what was achievable in terms of specific targets for the priorities identified and Members views were, at this stage, invited on the broad principles.

He added that it was proposed that it was intended to propose to Cabinet that any Performance Reward Grant from the first Agreement should be invested in LPSA 2 rather than allocated to Services, for what would be one-off projects.

In the course of discussion the following principal points were made:

- The submission identified the growing proportion of older people in the County as the overarching structural issue facing the County. The Chief Executive acknowledged that changing the demographic structure of the County, for example through improved educational and employment opportunities, was outside the scope of the LPSA. However, within the parameters of the process a case could be made for a submission based on addressing those issues affecting the quality of life for an ageing population.
- That more analysis was needed of the economic effects of older people entering the County and whether this was necessarily detrimental.

- A Member suggested that, together with older people, children in care were a particular concern. It was noted that the submission excluded issues relating to those within formal education pre 16 and children in care which were being addressed through other measures.
- In response to questions the Chief Executive explained new inspection arrangements that would apply to Social Care Services for Children, Education and Youth Services, known as a Joint Area Review, and how it was thought this would link into the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
- Concern was expressed regarding the difficulties faced by young people in villages buying homes. It was noted that this was a national issue outside the scope of the LPSA. The Chief Executive observed that attempts in other parts of the Country to control purchases had not proved successful because existing owners had not accepted the way in which this adversely affected the value of their land.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

## **8. HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AND PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee was informed of progress in implementing the Herefordshire Plan.

The report described the background to the Plan, the current monitoring arrangements and Member involvement; work undertaken and work in progress. It was noted 2005 was the Plan's mid-point and that, as agreed when the Plan was developed, there was to be a fundamental review of the Plan over the remainder of 2004/2005 with the aim of having a final Plan in place by 31st March, 2005. The Committee's decision to conduct an analysis of the Council's input into the Plan would feed into this process and further reports would be made to the Committee.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- That the impression remained that whilst there was a lot of strategic activity there was less evidence of quantifiable achievements making a difference on the ground.

The Director of Policy and Community replied that there had been a number of practical achievements. One example was the funding received for Race Equality work which the Council would have been unable to secure without the assistance of partners.

- That it would be helpful if all Members were kept informed of tangible developments in their ward as a result of the Partnership's work, and were more involved in contributing to the aims of the Plan.
- The Chief Executive commented that the Committee should not overlook the way in which the Council could tailor its activity to meet the aspirations of the Plan. The Corporate Policy and Research Manager suggested that in reviewing the Corporate Plan consideration could be given to clarifying the Council's contribution and possible ways of measuring that contribution.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

## 9. PERFORMANCE REPORTING - NATIONAL AND LOCAL BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee considered the Council's performance against Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for 2003-2004.

The report noted that, in line with the Council's wish to integrate planning and performance management, performance against national and local BVPIs was to be published as an annex to the Council's Corporate Plan. The complete set of indicators was appended. This included overviews summarising performance against the National Performance Indicators and the Corporate Health Performance Indicators.

The Corporate Policy and Research Manager commented that the overviews needed to be treated with caution because they did not weight the relative importance of indicators, nor did they show by how much targets were being missed or surpassed. It should also be borne in mind that the indicators were not an end in themselves and provided a starting point for consideration of the level and quality of service provision. There was scope to integrate the targets more closely with the Corporate Plan and focus more selectively on the key strategic ones.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- It was asked why BVPI 3 (satisfaction with services) and 4 (handling of complaints) and BVPI 74 and 75 (satisfaction with housing services), which were important to the Public, had not been collected in 2002/2003. In reply it was indicated that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister required these to be calculated on a three yearly basis. However, Cabinet had indicated that it required an annual survey and this would be carried out in future years.
- The Cabinet Member (Audit and Performance Management) reported that each Cabinet Member had been asked to review indicators within their portfolios.
- The Chief Executive noted that some national indicators were not necessarily appropriate for Herefordshire. It was therefore advantageous to have local indicators to demonstrate that, if not meeting the inappropriate national indicator, the Council was meeting the local one which reflected local need.
- That further consideration was being given to how best to present performance information and some of the targets themselves to ensure that the clearest and most accurate picture of performance was given.

**RESOLVED: That the Council's performance against the Best Value Performance Indicators for 2003/04 be noted.**

## 10. RESULTS OF 2003/2004 BVPI SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Committee considered the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) Satisfaction Survey results for 2003/2004.

The report stated that the survey had been undertaken during September to November 2003 by postal questionnaire. The 3,200 residents surveyed had been selected randomly from a list of 5,000 addresses supplied to the Council by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which had also prescribed the format of the survey.

Comparison with the previous survey in 2000/2001 was difficult because the results for 2003/2004 had been weighted to reflect the County's population whereas those for 2000/2001 had not. It was not clear what might have influenced the responses. Cabinet had suggested that measuring satisfaction levels annually might prove a more useful tool and Officers were considering how this might best be done.

**RESOLVED: That the results of the Best Value Satisfaction Survey 2003/04 be noted.**

#### **11. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS MONITORING 2003/2004**

The Committee was informed of the figures for complaints and compliments recorded, including complaints determined by the Local Government Ombudsman and the Complaints Panel for the year ended 31 March 2004 and the first Quarter of 2004/2005 with comparative data.

The Head of Customer Services and Libraries commented that both the number of complaints and the number of compliments had increased. This indicated that action to make it easier for people to comment had worked.

He expressed the intention to separate formal and informal complaints to assist in the overall analysis and noted work planned to bring forward corporate proposals on improving access to corporate information in other languages. In response to a question he agreed to provide clarification to Members on the significant reduction in complaints in the first quarter of 2004/2005 compared with the first quarter of 2003/2004.

The County Secretary and Solicitor reported with regard to complaints to the Ombudsman that it remained the case that there had been no findings of maladministration against the Council since its establishment. She was monitoring the response times to the Ombudsman's first enquiries on a complaint to ensure that this remained acceptable. Given the thousands of transactions the Council engaged in, she considered the Council had a strong record.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

#### **12. FINAL REVENUE OUTTURN 2003/2004**

The Committee was informed of the final revenue outturn position for 2003/2004.

The report to Cabinet on 1st July, 2004 was appended to the report.

The report noted that the underspending of £3.5 million carried into 2004/2005 was significantly higher than expected. This was partly because anticipated spending had been delayed and partly because an over-cautious approach had been taken in forecasting the end of year position, highlighting potential overspendings while assuming carry forwards would be spent in year.

It was acknowledged that it was important to recognise that a proportion of the underspend was already committed, for example some £1 million in the case of the Education Directorate. However, the Chief Executive reported that he had requested an analysis of the carried forward underspendings. He wanted to clarify the extent to which expenditure was required for, and committed to, ongoing work or whether the demand on the relevant budget was no longer present. This would assist the Council in assessing what flexibility it had to reallocate its resources. He emphasised that it remained important to retain some flexibility and avoid returning

to a situation where Directorates felt compelled to spend their entire budgets by the year-end.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**13. STRATEGIC AUDIT PLAN 2004/2005 - 2007/08**

The Committee was informed of the position with regard to the Strategic Audit Plan.

The report to Cabinet on 6th May, 2004 was appended to the report. Appendix 1 to the report to Cabinet summarised audit time and audit activity at a strategic level; appendix 2 showed a summary at service level; and the detailed Strategic Plan formed appendix 3.

The County Treasurer commented on the reduction in the Plan to realign it to available resources. He advised that the revised plan was manageable and appropriate, although it should be noted that there were no contingency provisions built into the Plan.

He also noted that a change in External Auditors' practice, whereby greater reliance was placed on internal audit work, had created additional pressures. He advised that he had taken steps to ensure that the Council could meet its obligations.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**14. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY REPORT**

The Committee noted the work being undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees.

The meeting ended at 12.40 p.m.

**CHAIRMAN**





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