

MINUTES of the meeting of Strategic Monitoring Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 1st July, 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor T.M. James (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs. P.A. Andrews (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: B.F. Ashton, W.L.S. Bowen, A.C.R. Chappell,
J.H.R. Goodwin and J.P. Thomas

In attendance: Councillors J.W. Edwards, P.J. Edwards, Mrs. J.P. French,
R.J. Phillips and R.M. Wilson

5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor H. Bramer, Mrs M.D. Lloyd-Hayes and W.J.S. Thomas.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

7. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting which commenced on 9th June and reconvened on 15th June, 2005 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to recording Councillor W.L.S. Bowen as having been present on 15th June, 2005.

8. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING SERVICES - STAGE 3 REPORT

The Committee was asked to consider and approve the Stage 3 report and outcomes of the Best Value Review of Private Sector Housing.

A copy of the detailed review report considered by the Adult Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee had been circulated separately to Members of the Committee.

The Head of Strategic Housing Services presented the report explaining how the Review had been conducted to comply with the Best Value regime.

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

- It was acknowledged that whilst comparative data had been available for statutory areas of service, benchmarking had been more difficult in discretionary areas of service.
- The Committee discussed the work underway on energy efficiency, the difficulty in attracting specialist staff for enforcement work and the proposed employment,

in conjunction with the Primary Care Trust of an Occupational Therapist dedicated to housing activities.

RESOLVED: That the recommendation of the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee on the Stage 3 report of the Best Value Review of Private Sector Housing, that the in-house team be developed, be endorsed and the findings referred to the Cabinet Member (Social Care Adults and Health).

9. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF COMMERCIAL ENFORCEMENT - STAGE 3 REPORT

The Committee considered the Stage 3 report and outcomes of the Best Value Review of Commercial Enforcement.

A copy of the detailed review report considered by the Environment Scrutiny Committee had been circulated separately to Members of the Committee.

The Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards presented the report explaining how the Review had been conducted to comply with the Best Value regime.

The Committee noted the implications of the Hampton Review on regulatory inspections and enforcement for the Service; the conflict between national regulatory requirements and the wish to shape regulatory services to meet local needs and priorities; and how the Review proposed to increase efficiency by re-engineering the current services.

It was also noted that the Review had taken a significant amount of time and effort. It was suggested that the Committee should ask for a report on the future approach to the Best Value Review process, examining whether in conducting Best Value Reviews resources were being applied to the best effect.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the recommendation of the Environment Scrutiny Committee on the Stage 3 report of the Best Value Review of Commercial Enforcement, that the services are re-engineered to deliver more efficient services, be endorsed and the findings referred to the Cabinet Member (Environment) for consideration;

and

(b) a report be made to the Committee on the future approach to the Best Value Review process.

10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The Committee was invited to note the revised Performance Management Framework.

The report to Cabinet on 23rd June 2005 was appended to the report.

Attention was drawn to the way in which risk management was now embedded in the framework, the importance of verification and quality assurance systems and the performance management timetable.

RESOLVED: That the revised Performance Management Framework be noted.

11. INTEGRATED ANNUAL OUTTURN REPORT 2004/05

The Committee was invited to note the 2004/05 outturn information for Best Value Performance Indicators, the Capital Programme and Revenue Budget and to receive an update on strategic risks facing the Council.

The report to Cabinet on 23rd June, 2005 was appended to the report.

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

- Concern was expressed that the number of households receiving intensive home care was significantly below the upper quartile performance. In response it was stated that the executive was mindful of the situation. However, there was concern that in the Social Care area generally the additional investment which had been made did not appear to be improving service delivery as had been expected. This required further analysis.
- Performance in preparing proposed Statements of Special Educational Needs was also identified as having declined since 2003/04 and was again below the upper quartile. An assurance was given in reply that the matter was receiving attention.
- Performance in determining planning applications was below the 2003/2004 level and below the upper quartile. The Cabinet Member (Environment) reported that there was now a full complement of planning officers and he expected performance to improve.
- That the Housing and Council Tax benefit performance was also a cause for concern. The County Treasurer commented that the transition onto a new software system had had an adverse impact on performance in the short-term but improvements were now being made.

In conclusion performance in relation to homelessness, the social care budget and performance in determining planning applications were highlighted as areas which should be subject to more detailed scrutiny.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the report be noted;

and

(b) performance in relation to homelessness, the social care budget and performance in determining planning applications should be subject to more detailed scrutiny.

12. LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT

The Committee was invited to note progress towards developing the second Local Public Services Agreement (LPSA2) with the Government and receive an update on performance against the targets in the first round LPSA (LPSA1).

The report to Cabinet on 19th May, 2005 was appended to the report.

The Assistant County Treasurer presented the report drawing attention to the projected level of Performance Reward Grant the Council could expect to receive from LPSA 1, and the ongoing negotiations with partners and Government offices for LPSA2.

In terms of the cost of LPSA 1 the County Treasurer advised that no specific costings had been made because resources had been expended on activities that were in any event the Council's priorities.

In relation to LPSA 2 it was noted that one of the targets related to tackling anti-social behaviour and proposed that this needed to be scrutinised as part of the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the approach to tackling anti-social behaviour scrutinised as part of the work programme.

13. ANNUAL EFFICIENCY STATEMENT - 2004/05

The Committee received a report on the Council's Backward Looking Annual Efficiency Statement (BLAES) looking back over 2004/05.

The report to Cabinet on 9th June, 2005 was appended to the report.

It was noted that there had been no formal corporate exercise carried out by the Council as part of the 2004/2005 budget to identify cash efficiency savings for 2004/05 and the BLAES, which had had to be prepared for submission to the Government, had proved difficult to construct. The production of a forward looking Annual Efficiency Statement (AES) had been required by the Government for 2005/2006. This clearly set out savings to be achieved during the current year and would make the preparation of the BLAES for 2005/06 less problematic and a key report. The Committee emphasised that the AES 2005/06 would require careful monitoring by the Committee as the year progressed.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and progress in making the savings set out in the 2005/2006 Annual Efficiency Statement be the subject of regular reports.

14. PAY AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Committee was asked to note the Council's Pay and Workforce Development Strategy 2005-8, and operating plan for 2005-6.

As requested by the Committee an appendix to the report had been prepared providing detail on the proposals to improve recruitment arrangements.

The Head of Human Resources presented the report explaining the basis on which the Strategy had been prepared.

In response to questions he commented that the Strategy did contain proposals for developing employees skills. However, the Authority had a low turnover of staff and could not meet the aspirations of all employees for promotion, especially at management level. He also confirmed that the Council was seeking efficiencies at every stage of the recruitment process.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

15. HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received a report on actions taken during the last year on Health and Safety issues.

The Head of Human Resources outlined the action which had been undertaken to improve the health, safety and well-being of the workforce, including the management of sickness absence.

The Committee expressed concern about the level of sickness absence, whilst noting the management action which had been taken. It received an assurance that further work was being carried out to separate out long-term sickness from the statistics and identify the percentage of days lost which this represented.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

16. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered how to develop strategic scrutiny reviews as part of its work programme.

The report noted that the Committee had previously identified a need to scrutinise ICT services and the operation of the Council's contract with Herefordshire Jarvis Services. It was suggested that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman should give consideration to the scoping of the Reviews and composition of Review Groups.

RESOLVED: That scoping statements and the appointment of Review Groups be finalised following consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

17. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AT HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

The Committee considered a proposal to increase public participation at all of Herefordshire Council's Scrutiny Committee meetings along the lines piloted by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee reported on the arrangements piloted at that Committee's last meeting. A protocol which had been used to govern the new arrangements was appended to the report.

The consensus was that it was important that the Scrutiny Committees were able to operate flexibly and responsively. Rather than adopting a prescriptive approach it was therefore proposed that each Committee should determine how best to encourage public participation in its work, drawing on the experience of the other Scrutiny Committees.

It was also noted that the inter-relationship of the Community Forums and the Scrutiny Committees required further consideration.

RESOLVED: That each Scrutiny Committee take responsibility for seeking to encourage public participation in its work.

18. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY REPORT

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

The meeting ended at 12.50 p.m.

CHAIRMAN