

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

Meetings Held on 15th September and 16th October, 2006

Membership:

Councillors: T.M. James (Chairman), Councillor Mrs. P.A. Andrews (Vice-Chairman), B.F. Ashton, W.L.S. Bowen, H. Bramer, A.C.R. Chappell, J.H.R. Goodwin, Mrs M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, J.P. Thomas, and W.J.S. Thomas.

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

1. The Committee has considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy both during the consultation process and following its conclusion. The Committee supported a robust, reasoned approach to making representations to secure fairer funding for the County based on clear statistical evidence and recommended that further consideration be given to the Council's communication strategy at a local level to ensure that the Council's financial position is effectively communicated to the public.
2. It is generally supportive of the Strategy whilst recognising that there will always be differences over points of detail.

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PROPOSALS: THE BASIS FOR THE CORPORATE PLAN

3. The Committee's views have been invited on three-year strategic budgets and associated service outputs and outcomes which will form the basis of the Council's Corporate Plan 2007-10. The Committee has noted the proposals and made no further observations at this stage.

CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION ON THE ROTHERWAS FUTURES PROJECT

4. The Committee called in the Cabinet Decision to enter into a co-operation agreement with Advantage West-Midlands in order to progress the Rotherwas Futures Project.
5. The project includes building the Rotherwas Access Road, the refurbishment of key buildings on Rotherwas Industrial Estate and two Phases of development. Advantage West Midlands have agreed to provide up to £9.5 million leaving a funding gap of £8 million towards which the report to Cabinet stated that the Council was seeking a developer contribution. That report also stated that, "the Council would need to underwrite any funding gap that emerged if this level of developer funding was not achieved or the cost model changed which could have consequences for the approved capital programme."
6. The reasons for the call-in were: lack of information on the funding shortfall and how this will be met; lack of detail of what phase 1 and 2 of the Rotherwas Scheme involves; and lack of information on what precautions have been taken in respect of inflation.
7. The Committee has examined these issues in detail and on the basis of the evidence presented to it has agreed that the Executive should not be requested to reconsider its decision to proceed with the Rotherwas Futures Project, but should be advised that the Committee requires regular reports on the progress with the financial negotiations associated with the project.

UPDATE ON ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERSHIP

8. The Committee has considered an update on action taken in response to the Committee's review of the Strategic Service Delivery Partnership. It has noted that a number of actions have now been completed and that progress is being made on the others.
9. In responding to the review Cabinet decided that consideration be given to engaging an external consultant to undertake a brief piece of work to verify a number of aspects of the services supplied by the Partnership including value for money under the partnership agreement. The Committee has been informed that expressions of interest have been received and are being evaluated. It is expected that the work will be completed within three months of engaging the Consultant. The Committee will consider a further progress report once these findings have been produced.

INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT

10. The Committee has considered and noted performance up until the end of July, 2006 against the Annual Operating Plan 2006-07, together with performance against revenue and capital budgets and corporate risks, and remedial action to address areas of under-performance. In doing so it has discussed the importance of getting a clearer understanding of what the performance indicators are really saying and putting them in context. This will be an ongoing issue for all the Scrutiny Committees.

EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY 2006

11. The Committee has noted the findings of the Survey.

PROGRESS ON EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

12. The Committee has been informed of progress in delivering the Council's statutory obligations on the equality agenda. It has been informed that the Council is on track to meet the criteria needed to reach level 2 of the Equality Standard by March, 2007. In 2007/08 it is intended to reach levels 3&4 of the Standard, bringing the Council in line with other authorities.

OMBUDSMAN AND COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS MONITORING

13. The Committee has noted that in 2005/06 there was a significant increase in the number of complaints about planning, up from 15 in 2004/05 to 35 in 2005/06. The Local Government Ombudsman has decided to issue Annual Letters for all Councils reflecting on complaints received by individual authorities and setting out any recommended action. In the 2005/06 letter to this Council he remarked that although complaints about planning had risen slightly across the Country in 2005/06 the Council may wish to consider whether special factors had caused the increase in Herefordshire. The Committee has requested a report analysing the complaints about planning.

WORK PROGRAMMES

14. The Committee has noted the Scrutiny Committees' current and future work programmes which are now reported to each Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis.

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE INDIVIDUAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

15. The work of the Committees is analysed below as far as practicable under the following five roles for overview and scrutiny: holding the executive to account, best value reviews, policy development and review, external scrutiny, and improvement (performance management and review), the first four of which are identified as key roles in the report on “The Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister”. Issues considered by the Strategic Monitoring Committee are listed for completeness.

Summary

16. The Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee met on 2nd October 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Scrutiny of Homelessness Every Child Matters Transition to Adult Life – Scrutiny Review
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Budget 2006/07 Performance Monitoring
Other	Work Programme

17. The Committee held a homelessness consultation event in October 2005, involving representatives from the Council and relevant agencies across the County. The event, which was held to facilitate the Committee’s review of homelessness, focused on exploring the main causes of homelessness in Herefordshire and considered opportunities for closer working arrangements in the future. A series of recommendations were agreed for submission to the Cabinet Member for Social Care Adults and Health, the Committee has received a report setting out progress in response to its recommendations. In pursuing its scrutiny of this important area of its remit a further event involving representatives from the Council and relevant agencies across the County is planned for November.

18. In conjunction with Members of the Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee a review is to be undertaken of transition from leaving care to adult life. This will look amongst other things at the exchange of information between schools and Social Workers, to consider whether plans have been put in place with the Council’s partners, how those would work in practice and to confirm that the Council is fulfilling its Corporate Parent role.

19. The Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee met on 6th October, 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	The 14-19 Strategy Progress on the Joint Area Review Improvement Plan Every Child Matters Transition to Adult Life – Scrutiny Review (as part of report on work programme)

External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	
Other	Work Programme (including discussion of involvement in Every Child Matters Transition to Adult Life – Scrutiny Review)

20. As referred to above the Committee is to participate in a review of transition from leaving care to adult life with the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee.
21. The Committee has also noted progress on the Joint Area Review Action Plan.
22. It has requested firmer detail on the strategy for the education of 14-19 year olds to enable it to monitor progress.
23. The Community Services Scrutiny Committee met on 18th October (reconvening on 20th October) and on 8th November 2006. It will consider the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	Call-in of Cabinet Members' Decision on relocation of Ledbury Tourist Information Centre Annual Report from Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration and Strategy)
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	CCTV in Herefordshire Churchill House Museum and the display of the Brian Hatton art collection
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Update on Progress with High Town Refurbishment Community Services Division Budget Performance Monitoring
Other	Work Programme

24. The Committee held an evening meeting in Ledbury on 18th October to consider the decision of the Cabinet Member (Community Services) and the Cabinet Member (Resources) to relocate Ledbury Tourist Information Centre from its current site in the Homend, to the Master's House in Ledbury. The decision was called in, 'In view of public concern to seek confirmation that appropriate consultation has been carried out about the proposed relocation of the Tourist Information Centre and that the proposal is feasible, financially viable, value for money and the best solution.'
25. The meeting was attended by some 40 Members of the Public and the Committee heard evidence from a number of key parties including the Mayor of Ledbury, the Chairman of the Ledbury and District Tourist Association and the Chief Executive of the Ledbury and Area Development Trust who proposed that a Business Plan for the Master's House should be prepared. The Committee adjourned having heard all the evidence, reconvening on 20th October at Brockington. The Committee has agreed to recommend the relocation of Ledbury Tourist Information Centre to the Masters House be deferred for twelve months and the lease on the Centre's current premises in the Homend be extended until 28th February 2008; and that 50% of the cost towards the development of a business plan, up to a maximum of £15,000, be granted to the Ledbury and Area Development Trust.

26. The Environment Scrutiny Committee met on 25th September, 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	-
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Review of the Travellers Policy Review of Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire Hydropower Briefing
External Scrutiny	Safety on the A49 and A465 Trunk Roads
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Capital Budget Revenue Budget Performance Indicators
Other	Work Programme

27. The Committee has approved a scoping statement for a review of household waste recycling in Herefordshire, one of the themes identified by the Strategic Monitoring Committee in its recent discussions on the content of work programmes.
28. It has also nominated a small team to review the draft travellers policy before it is passed to the Cabinet Member (Environment) for approval.
29. The Health Scrutiny Committee met on 5th September, 2006 and 12th October 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	
External Scrutiny	Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust – Foundation Trust Status Specialist Children’s Services Development “A Stronger Local Voice” A Framework for Creating a Stronger Local Voice in the Development of Health and Social Care Services. Scrutiny Review of Communication in the Local Health Service Scrutiny Review of GP out of hours Services Director of Public Health’s Annual Report
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	
Other	Work Programme

30. The Committee is responding to the current public consultation exercise launched by the Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust inviting views on the Hospitals Trust seeking Foundation Trust Status.

31. The Committee will also be responding to a statutory consultation exercise on the possibility of developing a central building for specialist community services for children with developmental problems/disabilities.

32. The business conducted by the **Strategic Monitoring Committee** at its meetings on 15th September, 2006, and 16th October, 2006 is summarised below.

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	Review of the Strategic Service Delivery Partnership – Cabinet Response Call-in of Cabinet Decision on the Rotherwas Futures Project
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Medium Term Financial Management Strategy Three Year Proposals: the basis for the Corporate Plan Review of the Provision of School Places
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Integrated Performance Report – July Employee Opinion Survey 2006 Progress on Equality and Diversity Ombudsman and Complaints and Compliments Monitoring 2005/06
Other	Scrutiny Improvement Plan. Work Programmes. Scrutiny Activity.

**T.M. JAMES
CHAIRMAN
STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Agenda Papers of the Meeting of the Strategic Monitoring Committee held on 15th September and 16th October, 2006.