

MINUTES of the meeting of Strategic Monitoring Committee held at : The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 22nd December, 2006 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, H. Bramer, A.C.R. Chappell,
J.H.R. Goodwin, J.P. Thomas and W.J.S. Thomas

In attendance: Councillors Mrs. J.P. French, K.G. Grumbley and Ms. A.M. Toon

38. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs M.D. Lloyd-Hayes. The Leader of the Council also sent his apologies.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

40. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16th October, 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no suggestions from members of the Public.

42. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES - SCRUTINY REVIEW

The Committee considered the final report of the scrutiny review of Information and Communication Technology Services.

The Review had commenced in April 2006 following the Committee's consideration of a revised scoping statement. An interim report had been made to the Committee in June 2006.

The Review Group's report setting out the Group's approach to its task, its findings and recommendations was appended to the report.

The report was presented to the Committee. It was noted that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was an area of rapid change and that the report needed to be considered against that background. The report's recommendations were then discussed in turn, noting some minor amendments to paragraph references given alongside each recommendation.

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

- The Cabinet Member (Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources) thanked the Review Group for the report on what was a complex area. She added that it might be helpful to her if she could continue to exchange information with members of the Group in the future to keep them up to date with developments and to help her to promote an enhanced understanding of ICT issues within the Council.
- The review had commented on the relationship between ICT Services and the schools. Members discussed some of the issues raised by schools during the review, noting the dissatisfaction which some had expressed about some aspects of the Service. It was acknowledged that schools were important customers and that it was easier to retain existing customers than to attract new ones. The review noted that ICT Services had recently undertaken a further survey of schools the results of which would be due in the New Year. The Chief Executive commented that the nature of the Council's relationship with schools needed to change across the Council's activities as a whole in response to the changes in the Council's operating environment. It was likely that this would lead to a degree of tension on both sides which would have to be overcome. This process could take 2-3 years and would need to be managed carefully. The Council would need to communicate clearly to schools what the Council was trying to achieve.
- In response to a question about compatibility of ICT systems with other partner organisations the Director of Corporate and Customer Services commented that this was another area where the Council would have to be more robust to maximise the benefit for all, rather than accommodating every individual request.
- A member of the Review Group commented that the review had noted some shortcomings in the Council's own data collection. Ensuring that its own data was accurate would strengthen the Council's hand in negotiations with partners.
- The need for Directorates to comply with corporate ICT policies and for compliance to be enforced through the disciplinary process was discussed. It was noted that a consistent approach across the Council as a whole would be required and the role of Members in the disciplinary process was discussed. The Cabinet Member (Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources) reported that these issues were being considered, noting the importance of generating savings in corporate costs to reallocate to front-line services.
- It was confirmed that the review had considered how others were dealing with managing the technical interface with partners, data collection and the enforcement of corporate policies, citing in particular the visit to Waltham Forest Borough Council.
- Remote working and security of information were also discussed, again noting that the Council was seeking to share information with and learn from other Councils in developing arrangements.
- In relation to recommendation (c) it was confirmed that a review of the totality of ICT financing was proposed.
- In relation to recommendation (f) which referred to providing, "dedicated public relations support" to the Head of ICT Services the Director of Corporate and Customer Services commented that support was available from within the

Corporate Communications function. It was stated that the review had identified the need for ICT Services to improve its communication and suggested that there was a need for someone to manage communication for ICT Services on a regular basis. It was proposed that the recommendation should be amended to refer to the provision of communications/promotion support.

- Recommendation (h) which referred to the provision of ICT training was discussed emphasising the importance to the organisation of getting effective arrangements in place.

RESOLVED:

THAT (a) the findings of the review of Information, Communication and Technology services, as amended at the meeting, be approved for submission to the Cabinet.

- (b) the Executive's response to the Review including an action plan be reported to the first available meeting of the Committee after the Executive had approved its response;**

and

- (c) a further report on progress in response to the Review then be made after six months with consideration then being given to the need for any further reports to be made.**

The meeting ended at 11.15 a.m.

CHAIRMAN