

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

Meetings Held on 22nd December, 2006 and 15th January, 2007

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.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

1. A scrutiny review of the Council's Information, Communication and Technology Services has been completed. The report has been submitted to the Cabinet Member (Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources). The recommendations are appended.

AUDIT OF LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

2. The Committee has received a report on the Audit Commission's recent Audit of the Herefordshire Local Area Agreement (LAA). The objectives of the Audit were to focus on three main areas: Governance arrangements, Financial Management arrangements and Performance Management systems.
3. The Committee has noted the progress being made by the Council and its partners in addressing the issues raised by the audit. The Auditor found no serious weaknesses or gaps in the arrangements being developed, and clear enthusiasm among partners to make the LAA process work. There were, however a number of specific points where the Auditor felt that more work could be undertaken. The Committee has considered these recommendations. It has noted that one of these was that the Council should clarify and publicise the role and purpose of the Council's overview and scrutiny function in scrutinising performance against the full range of LAA targets.

MANAGING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

4. The Committee was informed of the Audit Commission's re-examination in September 2006 of the Council's performance management processes, systems and procedures and the extent to which these are now embedded in the culture of the Council, as a follow up to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Joint Area Review in 2005.
5. The Committee has noted the audit's main conclusion was that the Council is making steady progress in strengthening its performance management arrangements and in embedding a performance culture. However, the report makes it clear that the Council still has a long way to go and needs to move even faster in future if it is to bridge the gap between itself and what the Commission has identified as best practice local authorities.
6. The Committee will consider how it wants to monitor progress against the action plan addressing the fourteen recommendations in the audit report. It will also consider whether there are any recommendations from the Commission to which it will wish particular consideration to be given as part of the overall Scrutiny work programme.

BENEFIT INSPECTIONS BY THE BENEFIT FRAUD INSPECTORATE

7. The Committee has received a report on two recent inspections of the Council's Benefit service by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate.
8. One of these, in July 2006, related to interventions work - the review of housing and council tax benefit claims that are in payment. Herefordshire had been selected for inspection because it was one of a number of councils that had not met the Department for Work and Pensions target for the number of interventions started during 2005. The Committee has noted the action taken in response to the recommendations of this inspection.
9. The other inspection was the 2006 Comprehensive Performance Assessment of the Service, the results of which were published in November, 2006. The Committee has noted the reasons for the Council's rating for this Service being reduced from 'Good' to 'Fair'. It was advised that based on the current performance the Benefit service was well on target to return to the 'Good' categorisation in 2007 and to meet the aim of achieving the 'Excellent' rating by 2008.

INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT

10. The Committee has considered and noted performance to the end of November 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. It has also noted progress being made against the Council's Overall Improvement Programme.

FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

11. The Committee has received an update on the Medium-Term Financial Management Strategy (MTFMS). This identified emerging areas of pressure for the 2007/08 budget and remedies to meet these areas of risk. It also set out approved Invest to Save and Invest to Mitigate proposals, Directorate base budgets and capital investment proposals.

ANNUAL OPERATING PLAN

12. The Committee has given initial consideration to the Annual Operating Plan 2007-08 and is to consider the Plan further at its meeting on 12th February alongside its consideration of the budget proposals.

PAY AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

13. Progress against the Strategy including key achievements to date and future challenges has been noted.

COMPLAINTS TO THE OMBUDSMAN (PLANNING SERVICE)

14. It was reported to Council in November that the Local Government Ombudsman had decided to issue Annual Letters for all Councils reflecting on complaints received by individual authorities and setting out any recommended action. In 2005/06 there had been a significant increase in the number of complaints about planning in Herefordshire, up from 15 in 2004/05 to 35 in 2005/06. The Local Government Ombudsman had 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.

15. In response the Committee requested an analysis of the complaints about planning. This advised that no findings of maladministration had been found against the Council. In addition there were no obvious areas of consistency in the various complaints (either type of application or type of complaint). To this extent there were no obvious areas which if improved/modified, would be reasonably expected to reduce such complaints in future years. The Committee has been assured that the situation is being monitored and that consideration is being given to whether clarifying the guidance to people wishing to object to proposals might help to reduce complaints.

IMPLEMENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF PLANNING (DEVELOPMENT CONTROL POLICIES

16. Following consideration of a number of possible themes for the scrutiny programme Members had expressed an interest in pursuing the scope for local discretion in Planning (Development Control) policies, noting implications of some decisions on adult social care provision and other Council priorities. The Committee has received a report noting that the planning system encourages balanced decisions which are soundly based in policy and which respect local character and distinctiveness. It has been advised that the forthcoming Local Development Framework should afford greater flexibility to reflect local aims.

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE INDIVIDUAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

17. 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

18. The **Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee** met on 1st December, 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	Scrutiny Review of Services for People with a Learning Disability – Cabinet’s Response
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Future Social Care Needs for Older People and Adults with Learning Disabilities in Herefordshire Local Authority Responsibility for Provision of Care in Registered Settings Accessing Minor Adaptations
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Budget 2006/07 Performance Monitoring
Other	Work Programme

19. The Committee has carefully considered the substantial review of future social care needs of older people and people with learning disabilities and the services needed to meet them. The Committee has expressed concern to Cabinet about the current ICT systems for data collection and analysis. It has emphasised the importance of

developing appropriate, effective and compatible ICT systems, including with the Primary Care Trust, as part of the development of the proposed Public Service Trust. Recognising the importance and complexity of the issues raised by the review and that these will require careful consideration the Committee has also advised Cabinet that every Councillor needs to be made aware of these issues and kept informed.

20. The Committee has also welcomed the Executive's response to its review of services for people with a learning disability.
21. The **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee** met on 15th December, 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Change for Children in Herefordshire Behaviour and Discipline Management in Schools Scrutiny Review
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Revenue Budget Monitoring Report Improvement and Annual Assessment of Performance
Other	Work Programme

22. Having being advised of the Change for Children progress overall, including extended schools and the recent Education and Inspection Act 2006, as applied to school transport, the Committee has questioned and noted a range of issues including the criteria for locating Children Centres and the method of funding distribution under the Extended Schools programme. The Committee also noted that the implementation of the Council's denominational transport policy had not revealed any particular concerns. While the Act made changes to travel arrangements for pupils from low-income families, the Committee noted that, due in the main to the large distances between Herefordshire schools, it was anticipated that this would have little or no impact on school travel arrangements in the County.
23. The **Community Services Scrutiny Committee** met on 20th December, 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	Annual Report by Cabinet member (Rural Regeneration and Strategy)
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Review of the Support for Museums and Heritage Centres
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Performance Monitoring
Other	Work Programme

24. A Review of the Support for Museums and Heritage Centres in Herefordshire has been completed. The report has been submitted to Cabinet. The recommendations are appended.
25. The Committee called in the Cabinet decision to relocate the Hereford livestock

market. A range of interested parties, stakeholders, Council Officers and Members gave evidence to the Committee which considered the issue for over 5 hours.

26. After hearing all the evidence and debating it the Committee unanimously backed the selection of the Griffiths site that Cabinet had identified as its preferred site. However, it made a series of recommendations concerning the need for road improvements and transport links; investigation into increasing the rent of Hereford Market Auctioneers; the involvement of local residents and Members in pre-planning consultation; and for high quality buildings and landscaping. The Committee's recommendations were considered and accepted by Cabinet at its meeting on 18 January 2007.
27. The **Environment Scrutiny Committee** met on 4th December, 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	-
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Policy Statement for the Use of the Rivers Wye and Lugg Draft Travellers Policy Scrutiny Review of Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Capital Programme Revenue Budget Good Environmental Management Review Performance Indicators
Other	Work Programme

28. The Committee considered the draft policy statement for the use of the rivers Wye and Lugg as the basis for public consultation. The draft statement set out the strategic background to the use of the rivers, general policies on the Council's approach to the use of the two rivers and operational policies covering those aspects over which the Council had some powers and responsibilities. Having noted that the draft policy statement attempted to address broad issues rather than individual user or access rights, the Committee recommended the document to the Cabinet Member (Environment) as the basis for consultation.
29. The **Health Scrutiny Committee** met on 7th December, 2006 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Specialist Children's services Development Update on the Development of Stroke Services in Herefordshire Palliative Care Public Service Trust
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	
Other	Work Programme

30. The Committee has responded to the formal consultation exercise conducted by the Primary Care Trust, supporting the development of a central building for specialist community services for children with developmental problems/disabilities.
31. The Committee has also discussed the proposals being developed by the Council and the Primary Care Trust for the development of a Public Services Trust for Herefordshire enabling closer strategic management and co-ordination for the delivery of key public services in Herefordshire.
32. The business conducted by the **Strategic Monitoring Committee** at its meetings on 22nd December, 2006, and 15th January, 2007 is summarised below.

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Scrutiny Review of Information and Communication Technology Services Financial Strategy Update Annual Operating Plan Implementation and interpretation of Planning (Development Control) policies
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Audit of Local Area Agreement Managing Performance Management Benefit Inspection by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate and change to Benefit Intervention Integrated Performance Report Pay and Workforce Development Strategy Complaints to the Ombudsman
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 22nd December, 2006 and 15th January, 2007.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

- (a) Responsibility for the line management for all the authority's ICT staff should be placed within the ICT Services Division and implemented with immediate effect.**
- (b) Consideration is given to the control for ICT expenditure being placed within the ICT Services Division subject to overall responsibility being held by the Director of Resources.**
- (c) A review of the financing of ICT Services is undertaken examining the way directorates account for ICT spend subject to recommendation (b) above, base budget for ICT Services, as well as the corporate funding of ICT programmes.**
- (d) A council-wide policy should be developed and implemented that provides for greater standardisation of desktops and server infrastructure and that ICT Services should have the responsibility for the management and control of this policy ensuring that it provides equipment and software to meet the requirements of the post rather than the wishes of the individual. Further, that this policy provides all ICT assets are corporate and not the possessions of individual services or staff. In effect this means that ICT assets will not be relocated with individuals but rather that individuals will be relocated to existing assets.**
- (e) The existing ICT procurement policies and procedures, including taking positive action to address non-compliance, are enforced. Further that the appointment of the Strategic Procurement & Efficiency Review manager will progress the need to develop the council-wide procurement policy.**
- (f) Consideration is given to dedicated communications/promotion support to the Head of ICT and the means by which this might be delivered.**
- (g) As part of the corporate review of SLAs the ICT Service ensures that the ICT SLAs are clearly worded, and describe clearly the range of services to be provided, charges and any relevant financial arrangements and are communicated to all relevant officers and issued no later than the start of each financial year moving forward.**
- (h) The responsibility for providing ICT training and its procurement be centralised under the management of the ICT service. As part thereof, the identification of ICT training needs should be formalised as part of induction and recorded.**
- (i) The options for offering a variety of income generating services to local partners not covered under existing SLAs are explored.**
- (j) Improvement to the implementation of project management throughout the authority continues and the interface between Corporate Programmes and project delivery within Directorates is strengthened.**
- (k) That the feedback from schools be analysed and an improvement plan prepared to address the many concerns identified, with a view to ICT Services becoming the preferred provider of services to schools funded and maintained by the Local Authority.**

- (l) A single website for all council services is developed ensuring consistent branding and access to services for all. Further that the website should consider the potential for a single, obvious directory of contacts for all council services.**
- (m) The options for “growing own talent” through training and the use of a form of “golden handcuffs”, possibly by means of recouping the cost of training should the individual leave the authority within a given period, be explored by Human Resources.**
- (n) The Executive's response to the Review including an action plan be reported to the first available meeting of the Committee after the Executive has approved its response; and**
- (o) 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.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE CENTRES IN HEREFORDSHIRE

That:

- (a) consideration should be given to reverting to the title 'Museum Services' to identify the service currently known as Heritage Services;**
- (b) as Museums, Libraries and Archives are grouped together nationally, it should be considered that the three services should be grouped in the same Herefordshire Council division to enable easier cross discipline partnership;**
- (c) all Herefordshire Council Museums and those independent Museums with the capacity to do so in the County should be encouraged to complete the Museum Associations Accreditation process;**
- (d) Hereford Heritage Services should research and consider the possibility of converting to single entity trust status;**
- (e) if Hereford Heritage Services does convert to a single entity trust then any funding agreement with Herefordshire Council should be long-term;**
- (f) it is to be hoped that the Museum Development Officer project will continue through the support of the West Midlands Hub and Museums, Libraries and Archives;**
- (g) independent museums in the County should be reminded that they can apply for Community Grant Funding;**
- (h) it should be made possible for Museums to apply for longer term Community Grant Funding than the one year agreements currently available;**
- (i) the possibility of a partnership insurance scheme for the Herefordshire Museums Forum members should be explored. This could be pursued by the Museum Development Officer on the Forum's behalf;**
- (j) a small hiring collection should be established to loan objects along the lines of the Reading Corporate Loans scheme;**
- (k) a formula should be developed to measure Heritage's impact on both tourism and also to demonstrate its social and economic impact; and**
- (l) preventative measures should be taken to protect Kington Museum from being struck by reversing lorries to a nearby store.**