

MINUTES of the meeting of the Strategic Monitoring Committee held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on 1 April 2003 at 2.00 pm.

Present: Councillor R.J. Phillips (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs. J.P. French (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: B.F. Ashton, Mrs. L.O. Barnett, Mrs. P. Robinson, R.V. Stockton,
J. Stone, J.P. Thomas

In attendance: Councillors CE Grover – Cabinet Member (Environment), TM James – Leader of the Council.

88. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

89. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

90. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10th February, 2003 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

91. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HUMAN RESOURCES – STAGE 4 REPORT

Further to its consideration of the Stage 3 report in October 2002 the Committee was asked to consider the Improvement Plan resulting from the Best Value Review of Human Resources.

The Interim Head of Human Resources presented the Improvement Plan. He outlined the consultation undertaken within the Council and the contribution made by Bulmers as the external experts. The improvement plan identified six improvement areas and set out actions to achieve the targets set out for each area.

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

- It was suggested that, as drafted, it was difficult to see how progress towards achieving the targets set out in the Plan could be monitored. In reply the Interim Head of Human Resources commented that the targets in the Improvement Plan did not readily lend themselves to measurement. A number of statistical measures were included in other documents in particular the Human Resources Strategy.
- The proposals for regular briefings for Members were welcomed. It was suggested that consideration still needed to be given to enhancing Member involvement in and oversight of human resources issues.
- That there was an absence of any costings. In response it was acknowledged that whilst there were Service Level Agreements with Directorates the issue of costs would be addressed as part of the Plan.

- That the question of outsourcing would be a matter for future consideration. The focus at this stage had been on reshaping the service so that it would be able to respond to the challenges presented by any future review along those lines.
- In relation to the recommendation that the Head of Human Resources should be located at Brockington the Chief Executive confirmed that this would be a matter he would wish to discuss with the Head of Human Resources when appointed.

RESOLVED: That the Improvement Plan be noted.

92. TRANSPORT CROSS-SERVICE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION TARGETS AND MILESTONES

Further to its request in February the Committee was informed of the key targets and milestones to be achieved in implementing the recommendations of the transport cross-service review.

The Director of Environment reported on progress and reiterated why for practical reasons a revised policy towards discretionary transport, if approved, could not be implemented before September 2005.

RESOLVED: That the targets and milestones for the implementation of the transport cross-service review be endorsed.

93. WORK PROGRAMMES

The Committee considered the work programmes adopted by the individual Scrutiny Committees.

It was reported that a number of additions had been made to its programme by the Education Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 26th March. It was noted that the work programmes would provide a suggested basis for scrutiny work over the rest of the year. Account would need to be taken in due course of any amendments to the Council's Constitution, for example, any change to the role of programme panels.

The Education Committee's work programme provided for a review of the Education budget. In response to a question the Chief Executive confirmed that, as proposed by the Committee in February, an overall examination would be undertaken in the new Council of every budget head and service and action would be taken to ensure that a consistent approach to this exercise was agreed.

RESOLVED: That the work programmes be noted.

94. LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT

The Committee considered an updated schedule setting out progress towards achievement of the Council's Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA).

The Policy Officer reported that the schedule contained details of those targets for which the Committee was responsible. The next report would include a full monitoring report with the year-end figures for each target.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- That industrial action by firefighters had not had an effect on achievement of the target with which the Fire Service was directly involved. However, it should be borne in mind that the target involved rather small numbers, creating the

possibility that a small number of incidents could have a significant impact on progress.

- It was confirmed that, despite the fact that there was now to be an all-postal ballot for May 2003, the target in relation to improving voting figures had been renegotiated but would continue to be based on the area covered by the three wards referred to, rather than the County as a whole
- That although the pump priming funding had only now been received account had been taken of this in the budgeting process. Its late receipt had not therefore had any detrimental impact on service budgets in the interim. Progress in negotiating a draft basket of indicators to measure increased cost effectiveness was noted.
- That details of the initiatives to increase the quality of community consultation would be included in the next report.
- That the target in relation to the number of young people involved in local decision making would be assessed by a survey. Reference was made to a recent event on the subject of involving young people and an assurance was sought that the messages from the event would be captured. The Director of Policy and Community undertook to discuss how best the views of the event could be fed back to Members.
- The Director of Policy and Community stated that it was expected that the revised target of 31st March, 2004 for the delivery of services electronically would be achieved. Interim arrangements had been made to address the departure of the IT Services Manager.

RESOLVED: That the LPSA schedule be noted.

95. LAND CHARGES

The Committee reviewed progress in improving Land Charges response times to standard search requests.

The report set out the latest position and measures which had been put in place to improve the situation. However, it was noted that securing long term sustainable improvements was dependent upon Information Communication Technology and in particular the establishment of an electronic database. The County Secretary and Solicitor added that the fee for the full search had been increased from £90 to £120.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- In response to questions it was confirmed that the financial resources were available for ICT development and reiterated that the difficulty lay in accessing historic information. It was proposed that further reports should identify targets for the capture of historic data for the required period.
- The County Secretary and Solicitor advised that provided that it could be guaranteed that the full searches were conducted within the required timescale demand for the full search would continue and the increase in the fee could be sustained.

RESOLVED: That the position be noted and reviewed in six months time with the report to identify targets for capturing the required data to enable progress to be measured.

96. SPACE UTILISATION IN BUILDINGS AND COMPARATIVE ENERGY AND WATER USE IN 2001/02

The Committee considered space utilisation in buildings and comparative energy and water use.

Following consideration by the Environment Scrutiny Committee of the Council's energy and water consumption the Committee received detailed data, circulated as a separate document, on energy and water consumption and use of office space in twenty-five of the Council's major buildings. The Head of Property Services commented that whilst comparisons were difficult the data had highlighted some anomalies. It was proposed that these would now be examined and action taken where possible to reduce overhead costs. It was also proposed that the information would be used to support the Council's asset management plan and the targets set by the GEM system (good environmental management).

In the course of discussion the information was welcomed and it was noted that it would also be useful information for the in-depth review of property. It was also suggested that similar comparative information on schools would be useful for the Committee and of benefit to schools and School Governors. The Head of Property Services undertook to investigate and report back.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the report be noted and it be recommended that the information contained in the detailed data sheets be used to reduce overhead costs;

and

(b) it be recommended that the information be used to support the GEM target on energy management and the asset management process.

97. PERFORMANCE MONITORING – CORPORATE HEALTH

The Committee considered a report to Cabinet on corporate performance indicators for the period 1 April 2002 – 31 January 2003 and reviewed the proposed improvement activity.

RESOLVED: That corporate performance for the period 1 April, 2002 – 31 January, 2003 be noted.

98. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2002/03 TO 31 JANUARY 2003

The Committee considered the Capital programme forecast for 2002/03.

The report stated that monitoring systems and procedures continued to be refined and improved and these improvements would be reflected in the future development of the capital programme. The County Treasurer confirmed that it was not expected that any resources with conditions attaching to their expenditure would be lost.

It was requested that a report be made on the breakdown of expenditure on the housing stock transfer.

RESOLVED: That the position be noted and a breakdown of expenditure on housing stock transfer incorporated in a report to a future meeting.

99. REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW – IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

Further to the report in November, 2002 the Committee considered progress against the Improvement Plan.

The report provided information on the exceptions to the programmed progress, during the first year of the plan; details of the revisions and additions to the improvements planned for the coming year; and the revised Improvement Plan for 2003/04.

The Assistant County Treasurer (Revenue and Benefits Services) explained the basis for the amendments which had been made.

RESOLVED: That the implementation of and the revisions to the Improvement Plan be noted and officers congratulated on the progress made.

100. SCRUTINY ACTIVITY REPORT

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

(In closing the meeting the Chairman thanked the Committee for their work over the past three years and commented on the learning process the Committee had experienced and the further work which remained to be carried out by the new Council.)

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm

CHAIRMAN