

MINUTES of the meeting of Strategic Monitoring Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Thursday, 20 March 2008 at 9.30 a.m.

Present: Councillor PJ Edwards (Chairman)
Councillor WLS Bowen (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: PA Andrews, WU Attfield, KG Grumbley, TM James,
RI Matthews, AT Oliver and RH Smith

In attendance: None

86. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors SJ Robertson and JK Swinburne. Councillor RJ Phillips (Leader of the Council and Councillor JP French (Cabinet Member Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources) also sent their apologies.

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

88. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meetings held on 6 March and 10 March 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following words being added to the last line of bullet point 2 on page 5 the of the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March (Minute 78 Integrated Performance and Finance Report): "with the assistance of the appointment of a Joint Chief Executive."

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

There were no suggestions from members of the public.

90. MANAGING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The Committee received a report on progress against the action plan developed as the Authority's response to the audit of its performance management arrangements in the autumn of 2006, and the associated communications action plan.

The report to Cabinet on 21 February was appended.

The Head of Policy and Performance (HPP) reported that the action plan was now somewhat dated and substantially completed. Following the meeting his intention was to revise the action plan to focus on the remaining tasks and changing performance management requirements. These revisions would be incorporated

into the forward looking preparation plan for the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- A plea was made for the Council's documents to be written in plain English so that they were clear and Members and the public could readily understand them.
- The amount of information being presented to Members and the level of detail was also discussed generally. In this case the HPP said that circumstances had led to a number of performance related reports appearing together on the Committee's agenda for 10 March, some of which had had to be carried over to this meeting. The revised performance Improvement cycle was designed to lead to a regular flow of reports.
- A general concern was expressed that the volume of information being presented to Members, in part in response to the findings of the Crookall report, reviewing ICT contractual and governance arrangements, could achieve the opposite to the desired objective. There was a danger that rather than being better informed the overwhelming volume was making it difficult for members to focus on the key issues and what it was that Members were being asked to determine. It was essential that a balance was struck so that the pertinent facts were presented to Members supported by relevant, but not excessive, information.
- It was questioned whether performance management was yet really embedded within the Council. The approach to performance management within the Police Service was commented on and it was suggested that this seemed more robust and embedded. The HPP said that the Council's performance management arrangements were improving and, crucially, performance indicators showed service delivery was improving too. There were elements of good practice within the Council but the approach was not consistent enough across all service areas. He was aware of the Police Service's system of monthly challenge meetings and, although it was not practical to replicate this given the significantly wider range of Council services, the Council's performance improvement cycle incorporated elements of that type of approach, drawing on peer challenge and the use of comparators.
- Concern was expressed that a considerable resource seemed to be being devoted across the Council to managing the performance management process. It was important that the principal focus was on improvement in services and that performance targets were relevant to this objective. The HPP said that the Integrated Performance and Finance Report demonstrated that performance in service delivery was improving in most priority areas, as recognised by the Audit Commission in its 2007 direction of travel statement. The Audit Commission and other external Regulators expected the Council to demonstrate that the necessary systems and processes were in place to underpin performance in service delivery. The Committee had the opportunity to contribute to setting performance targets in considering the Corporate Plan. He noted that the new national indicator set allowed councils to dispense with several previously prescribed targets. However, it would still be important to set sufficient targets to be able to present a clear picture of the Council's performance across all service areas.
- In response to a further question about individual accountability for performance including in particular that of Directors and the Chief Executive the HPP confirmed that appropriate processes were contained in the performance improvement framework. He also noted the role played by the strengthened

Staff Review and Development process in identifying how individuals were to contribute to achieving targets.

- In relation to recommendation 4 of the action plan which dealt with the integration of Members into the Council's performance management arrangements the HPP confirmed that the Improvement and Development Agency guide on performance management had been issued to Members and a seminar held on the subject. Work was continuing to reach agreement with partners on the preparation of a local guide for Members reflecting those longer term performance management arrangements across the County.

RESOLVED: That evidence of effective performance management was at best somewhat patchy and the Committee looked forward to the full adoption of plain succinct English and would hope that in future plans the volume of information might yet be reduced provided its quality is not compromised by this action.

91. **HEREFORDSHIRE COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT PREPARATION PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the proposed action plan to ensure that the Council, with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and its other partners was well-placed for the new system of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).

The Head of Policy and Performance presented the report. He drew attention to action 4.12 of the Plan referring to the establishment of strengthened scrutiny arrangements to demonstrate through its work programme how the Scrutiny function's role contributed to the CAA process.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- In response to a question about the resourcing for scrutiny the Head of Legal and Democratic Services informed Members of recent recruitment to Democratic Services and the resources allocated from all Directorates to supporting Scrutiny. The closer working arrangements with the Primary Care Trust and recent legislation would necessitate consideration of the future role of scrutiny and the support it required.
- That the Plan did not take sufficient account of the need to engage more directly with Parish Councils. The only reference to Parish Councils appeared at action 2.3: establish stronger more effective links with neighbourhoods and parishes. The entry at 2.3 of the Plan also referred to Parish Plan action plans being made available to services. However, very few Parish Plans had been prepared and the perception was that the Council's response to those that had been had been low-key.
- Action 8.1 referring to the communication of the CAA programme made no specific reference to Parish Councils and should do so.
- The Head of Legal and Democratic Services noted that a lot of the Council's communication to the Parish Councils was through Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC). He added that the Parish Agreement setting out the Council's working relationship with HALC and Parish Councils generally was

currently being reviewed and might be something Members would like to scrutinise.

- Members observed that not all Parish Councils were Members of HALC and that the extent to which HALC was considered representative of all views was debatable. Whilst it might be convenient for the Council to seek to communicate through HALC it was essential that there was more direct engagement with individual Parish and Town Councils. It was proposed that the CAA programme should be developed to reflect this point.
- The Head of Policy and Performance said that it was recognised that action needed to be taken to develop the relationship with Parish Councils. He suggested that in addition to considering the Parish Agreement the issue of the Council's wider working relationship with Parish Councils might also be something worth scrutinising.

He added that account had been taken of the Parish Plans that had been submitted to the Council and Service Plans should reflect aspects of them.

He also noted that partners were to be consulted on the draft CAA programme and confirmed that this consultation would include Parish and Town Councils.

- The objectives in the CAA preparation programme of improving well/having prospects for improvement in the direction of travel assessment in 2009-10 and to be consistently above minimum requirements, performing well in the use of resources assessment in 2009-10 were welcomed.

RESOLVED: That the Comprehensive Area Assessment programme be developed to better reflect the need to engage more directly with Parish Councils.

92. DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2008-11

The Committee was invited to comment to Cabinet on a draft of the Council's Corporate Plan 2008-11.

An updated version of the Plan had been circulated to the Committee on 14 March 2008. Page numbers quoted below relate to this revised document.

The Head of Policy and Performance (HPP) presented the report. He reported that the Plan, which was a rolling 3 year Plan, would set the key direction for the Council. He highlighted how the Council's themes and top priorities related to the Herefordshire Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement, as set out on p6 of the Plan and the Planning Framework as set out on p7. He noted that because of the way the Plan was now drafted there was no longer a need to produce an Annual Operating Plan as a separate document.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- One Council Priority read: "Affordable housing to meet the needs of local people". It was suggested that, reflecting the approach at national level, the priority should read to provide "**decent**" affordable housing.
- That in addition to the Plan referring to closer working with the Primary Care Trust the importance of the Police delivering its targets in partnership with the

Council needed to be highlighted.

- Noting the priority of achieving value for money concern was expressed about the Extra Care Housing Scheme at Rose Gardens Hereford. It was suggested that the amount of public money, from various sources, expended on the Scheme did not represent value for money when compared with what might have been provided by the private sector for the same level of investment. It was proposed that the Committee should receive a report on the Scheme and review its value for money and whether there were any lessons to be learned for future schemes.
- That sections of the report that looked back rather than forward (for example p23-27, 32-34 and 38-56) and appeared rather to be seeking to promote and publicise achievements in the previous year sat uneasily within the Plan. Noting the HPP's comment that the Plan had to report back on what had been achieved as well as looking forward it was suggested that backward looking sections might be set out as an appendix to the Plan.
- That there were a number of places where the Plan was unclear. Examples given were the diagram on p 7, the box on the left hand corner of p29, and the presentation of p40 (appendix D) where the fact that further data was awaited in a number of cases made the information unusable.
- That no reference was made to the Schools Review at pages 9, 24 and 58 where it seemed appropriate to do so.
- That the document paid insufficient attention to the role of Parish and Town Councils (p6, 12 and 16 were cited.)
- That appendix c (how satisfied are our residents with what we do and what we provide) overall showed a significant decline in satisfaction and this needed to be commented on and addressed.
- It was questioned why one of the key actions alongside the key commitment in 2008/09 and 2009-11: "the number of adults killed or seriously injured in road accidents to be reduced" referred to working in partnership with the Highways Agency to take action on trunk roads, but made no reference to work on B roads.
- It was suggested that indicator NI 21 which read "dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local council and police" needed to be rephrased.
- That it would present a truer picture if appendix b to the Plan, the Council budget, set out the total spend available to the Council, rather than the net revenue budget and the capital programme.
- That it was essential that the key commitments listed for 2008/09, p8-21 of the Plan, were deliverable. Confirmation was sought that Directors had approved the relevant commitments. The HPP said that the Corporate Management Board had approved the commitments after consultation with individual Cabinet Members. Some work remained to be done to reflect the final draft of the Local Area Agreement. Members proposed that further work should be undertaken to make certain that the commitments were achievable.
- It was asked whether it was appropriate on p8 of the Plan to portray key Stage 4 results in 2007/08 as an achievement, given that the target had not been met.

The HPP said that whilst the Council had not met the ambitious target set by the Government performance against local measures was good and had improved.

- It was suggested that pages of the Plan listing key performance indicators for each of the Corporate Plan Themes might be removed to make the document more succinct. The HPP acknowledged that there would be some duplication with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) which would be removed when the LAA position was clear.
- That there was insufficient reference in the Plan to the urgent need to address the issue of waste collection and disposal.
- The validity of the reference on p8 of the Plan that 31% of young people felt that Herefordshire Council gives them the opportunity to influence decision making was questioned. The HPP said that this finding was from a statutory survey, was statistically valid and had been produced by young people themselves.
- The HPP acknowledged that some of the actions in the Plan were not the Council's direct responsibility but reflected the Council's wider community leadership role and the importance of strong relationships with its partners.
- That under each of the Corporate Themes consideration should be given to providing some analysis, explanation and context.
- It was suggested there were gaps in the Plan, citing the absence of any reference on p14 in the theme relating to economic development and enterprise, to the new livestock Market, and need for a new river crossing and outer relief road. The HPP replied that the Plan was consistent with the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Some items were therefore not included because they were not currently affordable within the current financial plans.

In conclusion the HPP said that the length and depth of the debate had demonstrated Members' interest in effective scrutiny and constructive input into the Council's future actions. All of these points would be considered as the Plan was finalised, noting that Cabinet was to consider the Plan on 27 March before Council considered it in May. Even then allowance would have to be made for the final decisions on the Local Area Agreement.

RESOLVED:

- That (a) Cabinet be advised that further work should be undertaken with Directorates to ensure that the commitments in respect of the seven key themes are appropriate and achievable;**
- (b) Cabinet be advised that there appear to be a number of significant omissions in the current draft of the Corporate Plan which the Committee believes should be addressed before the Plan is submitted to Council for approval;**
- (c) a report be submitted on the Rose Bank Garden Scheme reviewing its value for money and whether there were any lessons to be learned for future schemes.**

93. PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK AND CYCLE

The Committee was invited to comment to Cabinet on a draft updated performance improvement framework for the Council together with an associated two-year performance improvement cycle.

The Head of Policy and Performance presented the report. He noted that the new proposed framework reflected developments since it had been last updated in March 2007. A lot of the framework concerned operational and managerial matters but there were elements relating to the role of Members. He drew attention to those elements relating to the scrutiny function emphasising the role for scrutiny in testing the robustness of plans, the effectiveness of performance management arrangements and the delivery of high quality services.

He drew particular attention to the increased opportunities for member scrutiny of proposals for future years provided by the two year cycle and also the proposed strategic consultation in the autumn

Members welcomed the proposed approach.

RESOLVED: That the draft performance improvement framework and the associated two-year performance improvement cycle be welcomed and endorsed.

94. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION ON HEREFORDSHIRE CONNECTS - EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

The Committee was advised of Cabinet's response to the recommendations made by the Committee following the call-in of Cabinet's decision on the acquisition of the preferred technology to replace the current client systems used within both Adult Social Care and the Children and Young People's Directorate and the Committee's consideration of a consolidated report on the Herefordshire Connects programme.

It was noted that Cabinet had approved the revised submissions and the Committee's further recommendations.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet's response to the Committee's recommendations be welcomed and endorsed.

95. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

It was noted that in the view of its earlier discussions the following issues needed to be reflected in the work programme: Monitoring progress against the Comprehensive Area Assessment reparation programme; ICT issues registered in the corporate risk log (as part of revisiting review of ICT); and a report on the Rose Bank Garden Scheme, as highlighted for possible consideration during discussion of the Corporate plan earlier in the meeting, reviewing its value for money and whether there were any lessons to be learned for future schemes.

It was also proposed that the Community Services Scrutiny Committee should consider scrutinising the Parish Agreement.

The possible need to scrutinise the Government's proposed Post Office closure programme was also raised.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the Work Programme as amended serve as the basis for further development; and

(b) the Community Services Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider scrutinising the Parish Agreement.

The meeting ended at 11.44 a.m.

CHAIRMAN