

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

Meetings Held on 6 March, 10 March, 20 March and 28 April

Membership:

Councillors: PJ Edwards (Chairman), PA Andrews, WU Attfield, WLS Bowen, KG Grumbley, T.M. James, RI Matthews, AT Oliver, SJ Robertson, RH Smith and K Swinburne.

MANAGING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

1. The Committee has received a report on progress against the action plan developed as the Authority's response to the Audit Commission's audit of its performance management arrangements in the autumn of 2006, and the associated communications action plan. It noted that the action plan was now somewhat dated and substantially completed and the intention was to revise it to focus on the remaining tasks and changing performance management requirements. It was informed that these revisions would be incorporated into the forward looking preparation plan for the Comprehensive Area Assessment.
2. In discussing performance management generally the Committee questioned whether performance management is yet really embedded within the Council. It has been advised that there are elements of good practice within the Council but the approach is not yet consistent enough across all service areas. However, it was assured that the Council's performance management arrangements are improving and, crucially, overall year-on-year improvement against performance indicators shows service delivery is improving, albeit not as consistently as the Council would wish. The Audit Commission's latest Direction of Travel assessment confirms that progress has been made in most of the Council's priority areas.
3. The Committee's view is that evidence of effective performance management is at best somewhat patchy. Whilst recognising that the Audit Commission and other external Regulators expect the Council to demonstrate that the necessary systems and processes are in place to underpin performance in service delivery the Committee has emphasised that it is essential that the principal focus is not on the performance management process itself but on improvement in services. It is imperative that performance targets are relevant to this objective.
4. The Committee has been advised that under the recently approved performance improvement cycle for 2008 and 2009, it will have a much fuller opportunity to contribute to the setting of performance targets in the context of the development of the next corporate plan and associated budgets. It has also noted that the new national indicator set allows councils to dispense with several previously prescribed targets. However, it will still be important to set sufficient targets to be able to present a clear picture of the Council's performance across all service areas.

INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE REPORT

5. The Committee has considered the Integrated Performance Reports for the first 10 months of the year and the provisional outturn for the year.

6. The Committee has made a number of observations on these reports. It has particularly highlighted the strategic and operational importance of the procurement process and, given the report that there are capacity issues within this function, has formally supported the expansion of this role with an expectation that the executive address this in the near future.

COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT AND DIRECTION OF TRAVEL UPDATE

7. The Committee was informed of the Council's 2007 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and Direction of Travel statement issued by the Audit Commission on 7 February 2008.
8. The Council's overall CPA score, primarily relating to performance up to the end of March 2007, had fallen to 2*. The Audit Commission's assessment of the Council's direction of travel was that the Council was improving adequately.
9. The Committee had formally recorded its disappointment at the level of performance to date and has required a clear improvement plan to be submitted to it that would enable it to monitor progress towards achieving an improved judgment of "improving well".

HEREFORDSHIRE COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT PREPARATION PROGRAMME

10. The Committee has considered the proposed action plan to ensure that the Council, with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and its other partners is well-placed for the new system of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).
11. It has welcomed the objectives in the CAA preparation programme of improving well/having prospects for improvement in the direction of travel assessment in 2009-10 and of being consistently above minimum requirements, performing well in the use of resources assessment in 2009-10.
12. It has also noted the reference to the establishment of strengthened scrutiny arrangements to demonstrate through its work programme how the Scrutiny function's role contributes to the CAA process. A scrutiny development plan is to be considered at the Committee's next meeting.
13. However, the Committee considered that the Plan did not take sufficient account of the need to engage more directly with town and parish Councils. It has requested that the CAA programme be developed to better reflect this need for direct engagement and a more productive relationship to provide the basis for sustained community development.

DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2008-11

14. The Committee considered that there were a number of significant omissions in the draft plan and commented extensively to Cabinet. Cabinet considered the Committee's observations at length and agreed that the majority of them should be taken into account in revising the Plan.

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK AND CYCLE

15. 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. It has welcomed and endorsed these documents.

SMALLHOLDINGS ESTATE POLICY AND WORKING PRACTICES

16. Council was advised in February that the Committee had requested a full review of the Council's policy on the management of the smallholdings estate.
17. The Committee has received a report on the current policy and discussed it at length. Its conclusion is that the smallholdings estates policy no longer meets its expressed aims, does not reflect current reality and is incomplete and inconsistent. It has therefore recommended that there should be an overarching review undertaken by the Executive which should, amongst other things, address the many issues of concern identified during the Committee's debate.

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY OPTIONS APPRAISAL

18. The Committee has received a briefing paper on the office accommodation strategy options and formed a Working Group to consider this in detail with the intention of reporting back to the Committee's next meeting.

REVIEW OF ICT SERVICES

19. In response to a request from the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee, the Committee has agreed to revisit the review it carried out in respect of ICT Services in 2006.

REVIEW OF BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES, FINANCIAL PROCEDURE RULES AND CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES

20. Revisions to the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules and to changes to the time by which Councillors must submit written Questions for Council were approved by Council on 7 March.
21. The Chairman of the Strategic Monitoring Committee summarised the Committee's views expressed at its meeting on 6 March to Council on 7 March, confirming that the Committee supported the proposed revisions.
22. However, the Committee also recommended that consideration be given to the following points in the further work to be undertaken in reviewing the Constitution: the need to streamline the process for approving future revisions to the Constitution, the respective roles of Cabinet Members and officers and the respective roles of the individual Cabinet Member and the collective role of Cabinet.
23. The Committee also called for the amount of paperwork being provided to Members to be reviewed to facilitate business like decision-making. This issue has been a matter of continuing concern to the Committee and is discussed in more detail below.

QUALITY AND VOLUME OF REPORTS TO MEMBERS

24. The Committee has commented on a number of occasions on the need for the Council's documents to be written in plain English so that they are clear and

Members and the public can readily understand them.

25. The Committee has reiterated its general concern about the volume of information being presented to Members. It acknowledges that this appears in part to be in response to the findings of the Crookall report, reviewing ICT contractual and governance arrangements. However, the presentation of such large quantities of material could negate the desired objective of ensuring that Members are properly informed. There is concern that rather than being better informed there is a danger the volume of information is becoming overwhelming, making it difficult for Members to focus on the key issues and what it is that Members are being asked to determine. It is essential that a balance is struck so that the pertinent facts are presented to Members supported by relevant, but not excessive, information.
26. In a recent informal meeting of Members of the Committee the strength of feeling on the importance of providing relevant information to Members was further reinforced. Members agreed that reports needed to be concise. However, there was also a consensus that they needed to contain better, more convincing analysis particularly in respect of weighting the pros and cons of the various options. Some reports currently contained unargued assurance that there were no alternatives, which the Committee believed was rarely the case. Concision could still be achieved by making reference to more detailed supporting papers, where appropriate, to which Members could then refer if they wished.

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE INDIVIDUAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

27. The work of the Committees is analysed below in accordance with the following two roles for scrutiny based on a University of Birmingham categorisation.

Holding the Executive to Account	Developing Policy
Questioning members of the Executive	Pre-Decision Scrutiny – commenting on decisions about to be made
Call-ins – Scrutinising decisions before they take effect	Policy Reviews and Development
Scrutinising decisions after they are made	External Scrutiny
Management of Performance	Health Scrutiny
Ensuring Corporate Priorities are Met	
Budget Scrutiny	
Community and Area Scrutiny	

28. The business considered by the Scrutiny Committees is set out below. Each Committee has also considered and rolled forward its work programme.

	Holding the Executive to Account	Developing Policy
Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing 19 March 2008	Revenue Budget 2007/8. Performance Monitoring. Service Plan.	Assessment of 18-64 Year Olds' Future needs and Services: Mental Health and Physical Disabilities.

7 April 2008	Learning Disabilities Services Improvement Plan – Progress.	
Children’s Services 21 April 2008	Children and Young Peoples Plan 2008-11. Capital Budget Monitoring Revenue Budget Monitoring Performance Digest – Quarter 3.	Swimming Provision in Hereford City and Surrounding Area. Wyebridge Academy: Progress Report. Kington Children’s Centre Nursery.
Community Services 18 April 2008	Revenue Budget Monitoring. Performance Monitoring. Arrangements for Christmas Lights in Herefordshire. Broadband Issues in Herefordshire. Exceptions Report on Action Plans for: Cultural Services Inspection; Review of Hereford City Partnership; The 18-35 Review; Museums and Heritage Centres Review.	Review of Tourism with specific reference to Tourist Information Centres. Scoping Statement for a Review of Community Engagement of the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership.
Environment 25 February 2008 31 March 2008	Good Environmental Management. Transport Asset Management Plan. Service Delivery Review. Commercial Vehicles and Trailers Permit Scheme for Household Waste Sites. Review of Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire; Executive Response to Scrutiny Review. Capital Budget Monitoring. Revenue Budget Monitoring Performance Monitoring.	On Street Parking Review. Review Group report on the Herefordshire Travellers’ Policy
Health 5th March 2008 19 March 2008		Local Delivery Plan. Three Counties Cancer Network – Radiotherapy Options. Assessment of 18-64 Year

3 April 2008		<p>Olds' Future needs and Services: Mental Health and Physical Disabilities.</p> <p>Annual Health Check Third Party Commentaries.</p> <p>Strategic Review of Provider Services.</p> <p>Local Involvement Network Progress.</p> <p>Provision of Services for Children with Special Needs.</p>
<p>Strategic Monitoring Committee</p> <p>6 March 2008</p> <p>10 March 2008</p> <p>20 March 2008</p> <p>28 April 2008</p>	<p>Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Direction of Travel</p> <p>Integrated Performance and Finance Reports</p> <p>Managing Performance Management</p> <p>Herefordshire Comprehensive Area Assessment Preparation Programme</p> <p>Performance Improvement Framework and Cycle</p> <p>Call-in of Cabinet Decision on Herefordshire Connects – Executive Response</p>	<p>Review of Constitutional Issues</p> <p>Smallholdings Estate Policy and Working Practices</p> <p>Draft Corporate plan 2008-11</p> <p>Office Accommodation Strategy Options Appraisal</p> <p>Review of ICT Services</p> <p>Definition of Senior Citizens in Council Policies</p>

29. Issues of particular note include:

- **Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee**

In conjunction with the Health Scrutiny Committee the Committee has considered proposals for the development of high-performing health and social care services by 2012 to meet the expected future needs of 18-64 year-olds in Herefordshire with mental health problems and physical disabilities. The Committees made a number of recommendations to Cabinet which Cabinet agreed should be taken into account in the course of implementing the new patterns of services.

Both the Committee and the Health Scrutiny Committee have also been informed of the strategic review of provider services and are to receive progress reports.

- **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee has considered the alternatives for making provision for school swimming in Hereford City and informed the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) of their preferred option. The Committee has recommended the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) that works within the budget of £72,500 to reopen the St Martin's Pool be undertaken, once

sufficient schools had committed themselves for a 3 year period at a level of charge, which would cover the net costs; and that a wider review of the financing of the pool be undertaken to ensure that it can operate within budget.

The Committee has considered the proposal to close Kington Children's Centre Nursery, 3 Gravel Hill, Kington. The Committee was informed that two possible options had now emerged to continue a nursery and has recommended the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) to reconsider the proposed closure of Kington Children's Centre Nursery if a viable alternative option can be found.

Following its call-in of Cabinet's decision in September 2007 to progress the Wyebridge Sports College Academy Project, the Committee continues to monitor the project through a working group it has appointed to consider issues of concern if they arise.

- **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee has completed its review of tourism in the County with specific reference to Tourist Information Centres. The review was undertaken as a result of an Audit Commission report that had highlighted the need for a way of measuring the effectiveness of tourism in the County and ensuing value for money from its tourist information centres. The recommendations to be submitted to Cabinet are appended.

Arising from a presentation to the Committee in December on the Rotherwas Futures project the Committee called for a report on Broadband provision to the Rotherwas estate and more generally in the County as a whole. The Committee has considered the broadband issues in the County and urged Cabinet to urgently address the issue of broadband provision to the Rotherwas Estate and the County, to acknowledge that this is of a high priority to the County, and to initiate a survey to establish the actual current level of provision in the County.

- **Environment Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee has completed a review of the Herefordshire Travellers Policy. A draft policy has been referred to the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing).

The Committee has received the Executive's response to the Scrutiny Review of Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire and an update on the current position. It has noted that whilst in some aspects the review had now been overtaken by events there were elements that would inform the ongoing review of the waste contract. The Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) intends to hold a member seminar of waste issues in the next few months. This will be followed by a report to the Environment Scrutiny Committee on the key issues.

- **Health Scrutiny Committee**

In addition to the work with the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee and notification of the strategic review of provider services referred to above the Committee has submitted its commentary on the Primary Care Trust, Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust and West Midlands Ambulance NHS Trust in response to the Healthcare Commission's Annual Health Check.

The Committee has also considered the Three Counties Cancer Network's (Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire) (3CCN) proposed expansion of radiotherapy services. The Committee has endorsed the Hereford County Hospital option for extra radiotherapy services provided on a satellite basis and asked the Three Counties Cancer Network to consult on this preferred option. It has strongly endorsed the National Cancer Strategy recommendation that no patient should have to travel more than 45 minutes for cancer

treatment and has therefore supported development of a treatment facility at Worcester as the next subsequent phase of development after that recommended at Hereford.

**PJ EDWARDS
CHAIRMAN
STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Agenda Papers of the Meetings of the Strategic Monitoring Committee held on 6 March, 10 March, 20 March and 28 April 2008.

Recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Tourism with Specific Reference To Tourist information Centres

- 11.1 Continue to provide Tourist Information Centres (TICs) at or close to the main centres of tourist activity in the County, notwithstanding reductions and changes in patterns of use. Utilisation and effectiveness to continue to be monitored via footfall and cost per visitor data.**
- 11.2 Retain direct control over tourism information services. Never combine the functions of a TIC with those of an 'Info in Herefordshire' office.**
- 11.3 Meet the challenges posed by rising expectations and modern means of communication, and the drive for greater VFM, with a new 'hub and spoke' structure for the delivery of tourist information.**
- 11.4 Establish a central hub, co-located with a principal TIC, staffed by 2.25 fte staff plus the TIC supervisors. Its functions to comprise:
 - 11.4.1 The centralised handling - to common higher standards of promptness, comprehensiveness and professionalism - of all remote enquiries.**
 - 11.4.2 The formation of a centralised facility for the maintenance and provision of brochures etc relating to destinations beyond the County boundary, thus facilitating the updating of this information whilst eradicating multiple holdings and, most importantly, freeing valuable storage and display space at the TICs.**
 - 11.4.3 The potential for centralisation of some peripheral TIC functions such as accommodation, bus and theatre etc bookings.**
 - 11.4.4 The provision of a central resource facility for the TICs.****
- 11.5 Constitute the central hub and its co-located 'spoke' TIC as an exemplar facility.**
- 11.6 Bromyard Centre to become a Tourist Information Point with better internal and external signage, a more obvious telephone for enquiries and, as a trial the installation of a window mounted touch-screen information facility.**
- 11.7 Enable the Kington TIC to remain in its present location and refurbish the building's fabric and decoration providing this can be done from within existing budgets.**
- 11.8 Complement each of the other 'spoke' TICs with 2.5fte paid staff plus any available volunteers.**
- 11.9 Move Hereford TIC from its current location to new and less costly premises as close as possible to the historic city centre.**
- 11.10 Find alternative accommodation for Leominster TIC in a central location as soon as possible.**
- 11.11 Agree with Visit Herefordshire that the latter will take the lead in all aspects of the marketing of tourism in and to the County.**
- 11.12 Explore with Visit Herefordshire how best to develop and improve the linkages between marketing information.**
- 11.13 Seek to make improvements to the contents, user-friendliness and updating of website information.**
- 11.14 The proposal for a hub and spoke structure should be monitored closely and a review and report prepared after the first year of operation.**