

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

Meeting Held on 13th October, 2003

Membership:

Councillors: T.M. James (Chairman), Councillor Mrs. P.A. Andrews (Vice-Chairman) W.L.S. Bowen, A.C.R. Chappell, J.H.R. Goodwin, Mrs M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, D.C. Short MBE, J.Stone, J.P. Thomas, W.J.S. Thomas.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN

1. The Committee has considered the first monitoring report on progress in respect of the Herefordshire Council Improvement Plan 2002-2005, put in place following the outcome of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).
2. The Committee has noted that, as reported to Cabinet, the majority of actions have either been completed or are fully on track for completion by the target date.
3. The Committee sought and received explanations of action being taken to address significant issues that could affect the timing and performance of the Plan and other areas where issues had arisen but which were not expected to impact on the achievement of the overall Plan.

LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT

4. The Committee has also considered an analysis of the half term progress towards meeting the targets in the Council's Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA).
5. Overall performance is mixed and explanations for the reasons for that, some of which are beyond the Council's control, have been noted. It was also noted that many of the targets are based on performance purely in 2004/2005 and some targets are sensitive to single, major incidents.
6. The Committee was advised that the Cabinet had asked for advice on what targets were thought to be achievable so that consideration could be given to allocating resources to those areas to secure as much performance reward grant as possible. It has noted that regular monitoring reports are to be made.
7. It has also noted the considerations informing the next round of LPSAs.

HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AND PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS REPORT

8. The Committee has received a report on progress in implementing the Herefordshire Plan. This is in accordance with the Committee's decision in September 2001 that, in order not to lose sight of the breadth of the Plan, the Committee should receive, at least on an annual basis, a report bringing together key activities/themes which are being progressed or emerging.
9. It was also requested at that time that individual Scrutiny Committees should receive six monthly reports setting out progress to date, work in hand and future timetables. Where Cabinet Members are responsible for more than one ambition Scrutiny Committees should examine composite reports.
10. Member support and involvement in delivering the Herefordshire Plan is an essential element of success and the Plan has been developed using a number of dedicated events with Herefordshire Council Members.

11. Members of the Executive are charged with receiving regular reports on the progress of the Herefordshire Plan generally and the contribution of the different parts of Herefordshire Council to the achievement of individual Ambitions. Wherever possible Executive Members should be integrated into the work of the Ambition Groups.
12. The Ambitions are as follows indicating the Cabinet Member within whose remit the ambition falls and the Scrutiny Committee responsible for scrutinising progress towards achieving the ambitions.

Ambition	Cabinet Member	Scrutiny Committee
Improve the health and well-being of Herefordshire People	Social Care and Strategic Housing	Health Social Care and Housing
Reduce crime and disorder and make Herefordshire safer	Leader	Strategic Committee Monitoring
Tackle poverty and isolation in Herefordshire	Leader	Strategic Committee Monitoring
Encourage communities to shape the future of Herefordshire	Community and Social Development	Social and Economic Development
Develop Herefordshire as an active, vibrant and enjoyable place to be	Community and Social Development	Social and Economic Development
Protect and improve Herefordshire's distinctive environment	Environment	Environment
Provide excellent education, training and learning opportunities in Herefordshire for all ages	Education Community and Social Development	Education Social and Economic Development
Meet Herefordshire's accommodation needs	Social Care and Strategic Housing	Social Care and Housing
Support business growth and create more and better paid work in Herefordshire	Economic Development, Markets and Property Rural Regeneration	Social and Economic Development
Develop an integrated transport system for Herefordshire	Highways and Transport	Environment

13. The Audit Commission's Corporate Assessment of the Council in December 2002 commented that "the Plan has provided the focus for partnership working and has contributed significantly to the Council being able to attract significant external funding to deliver projects tackling local priorities, such as rural access and pockets of deprivation in Hereford City. In this respect the Plan has enabled the Council to punch above its weight as a small low-funded authority." The Committee has noted that the performance in delivering the Plan will be important in the context of the next Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PROGRESS REPORT

14. In accordance with the monitoring arrangements referred to above the Committee has received the annual report 2002/2003 and progress update from the Herefordshire Community Safety Partnership, responsible for delivering the ambition in the Herefordshire Plan of reducing crime and disorder and making Herefordshire safer.
15. The report stated that the targets were being met effectively apart from that for vehicle crime, a target which the Government has acknowledged to be problematic.
16. The Committee focused on the approach towards securing Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. It was suggested that few Orders had been obtained and that more work needed to be done to involve families in the process. The complexities involved and the implications for and sometimes conflict with other national and local policies were, however, acknowledged.
17. In advance of Government requirements the Community Safety Partnership has already merged with the Drug Action Team and the report referred to actions undertaken to combat drug related problems. Having expressed concern about the significance of drug misuse in Herefordshire the Committee has welcomed a proposal that a briefing be held on this subject for all Councillors.

AUDIT SERVICES ASSURANCE REPORT 2002/2003

18. The Committee has received a report on Audit Services activity during 2002/03 and the Council's overall level of internal control. The report also highlighted areas which had been identified as being of concern. It was, however advised that these issues had now been addressed.
19. The Committee emphasised the need to ensure that recommendations made following audits were implemented and had been assured that a robust process is in place to establish that this was the case, although currently compliance may not be confirmed until the report for the subsequent year. This will be borne in mind as part of the continuous development of the audit process.

EXTERNAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION PROGRAMME

20. The Committee has been advised of the Audit Commission's approach to the revised external audit and inspection programme.
21. Whilst the focus of Best Value inspections has changed significantly since their first introduction, they have not, contrary to the impression in the local government press, been abandoned in their entirety. They remain an important focus of the Audit Commission's Programme although there are now other significant elements involved following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.
22. The most significant of those is the Improvement Programme agreed following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

23. The Committee noted that the programme was draft and some inaccuracies and timings still needed to be revised with the Audit Commission. Once finalised the framework could be used to inform the priorities of the Scrutiny Committees.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING – CORPORATE HEALTH

24. In accordance with the performance management arrangements the Committee has received a report on performance for the first four months of 2003/2004.
25. Performance against the National Best Value indicators is analysed by the Audit Commission and used as part of the Council's overall Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The frequency of collection of data for these indicators and arrangements for their consideration by the Scrutiny Committees have been noted.

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

26. Details of spending as at 31st July 2003 for each Programme Area together with the projected outturn for 2003/2004 have been reported to the Committee. Areas of concern were discussed, noting that careful monitoring and appropriate action where necessary will be required to ensure the 1% limit on overspendings for the Council as a whole is not exceeded at the year end.
27. The Committee sought clarification of the effect on the Council's financial position of the Housing Stock Transfer and the resources available to the Council as a consequence. It has requested that a statement clearly setting out the position be sent to all Members.

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE INDIVIDUAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

28. 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). Issues considered by the Strategic Monitoring Committee not all of which are dealt with above because they arise from its role in fulfilling its remit to scrutinise individual programme areas, rather than being of Council-wide significance, are listed for completeness.

Summary By Programme Area

Education

29. The Education Scrutiny Committee met on 23 September 2003 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	Special Educational Needs Provision and Support Services – Stage 1

Policy Development and Review	School Workforce Remodelling Training and Support of Governors Home to School/College Transport – Discretionary Areas of Policy
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Year 2003 provisional results for Herefordshire Schools Performance Indicators Sickness Absence Capital budget Revenue Budget
Other	

30. The Environment Scrutiny Committee met on 26 September 2003 and 21 October 2003 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	Call-in – car-parking charges
Best Value Reviews	Implementation of Improvement Plans Commercial Enforcement Progress Report
Policy Development and Review	
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Sickness Absence Capital Budget Revenue Budget Performance Indicators
Other	-

31. The Health Scrutiny Committee met on 8th October, 2003 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	Not applicable
Policy Development and Review	Making Partnership Work for Patients, Carers and Service Users – a consultation Choice Responsiveness and Equity

External Scrutiny	Work of the Community Health Council
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	
Other	Work Programme Training Programme

32. The Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee met on 29 September 2003 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	Cabinet Member presentation on policy issues
Best Value Reviews	Carer Support – Stage 3 Adoption and Fostering – Stage 1
Policy Development and Review	Audit of Services following the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Extra Care Housing Development Delayed Transfers of Care and Reimbursements
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Performance Statistics Revenue Budget Herefordshire Plan Ambition Groups
Other	Work Programme

33. The Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee met on 4th September 2003 and 2nd October 2003 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	Presentations by Cabinet Members for Community and Social Development, Rural Regeneration and Smallholdings, and Economic Development Markets and Property
Best Value Reviews	Improvement Plan Monitoring
Policy Development and Review	Draft Strategic Framework for Libraries Access to Services in Kington and Surrounding Areas

	Policy on Festivals
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Revenue Budget Adult learning Inspectorate's inspection of the Adult and Community Learning Service Performance Indicators Regeneration Funding Streams Herefordshire Plan Ambition Group Staffing Numbers
Other	Engagement of Expert Witnesses

34. The business conducted by the Strategic Monitoring Committee at its meeting on 13th October, 2003 is summarised below.

Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	Carer Support – Stage 3 Transport – Implementation Plan
Policy Development and Review	
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Herefordshire Council Improvement Plan Local Public Service Agreement Herefordshire Plan and Partnership Progress Report Community Safety Progress Report information and Communications Technology Improvement Plan Audit Services Assurance Report External Audit and inspection Programme Performance Monitoring – Corporate Health Land Charges Revenue Budget Monitoring Capital Programme Monitoring
Other	

T.M. JAMES
CHAIRMAN
STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Agenda Papers of the Meeting of the Strategic Monitoring Committee held on 13th October, 2003.