

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

Meetings Held on 19 November and 10 December 2008

Membership:

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

INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE AND FINANCE REPORT

1. The Committee considered the Council's performance for the first six months of 2008-09 against the Corporate Plan 2008-11 and national performance indicators used externally to measure the Council's performance, taking account of the separate but complementary financial performance report, risk and progress against the action plans produced following the Crookall review. The Committee tested several aspects of performance and noted remedial action underway.

BUDGET MONITORING 2008/09

2. The Committee noted the Council's performance against revenue and capital budgets as at 30 September 2008 and an indication of the estimated outturn for the 2008/09 financial year. It sought assurances on several aspects of expenditure.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES SCRUTINY REVIEW

3. The Committee approved the findings of the scrutiny review of Information and Communication Technology Services.
4. The Committee had previously completed a review of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) Services in December 2006. In response to a request from the Audit and Corporate Governance Committee the Committee revisited that review.
5. The 2008 review found that there had been some significant changes affecting ICT Services since publication of the previous review. The 2008 review identified a number of areas covered by the original recommendations where it considered the original recommendations needed to be reinforced, strengthened or indeed added to, to reflect evidence considered during the review; some areas where work to implement the action plan was simply ongoing; and other areas where the Group considered the actions had been completed.
6. The Group's recommendations to the Executive are appended. A formal response is awaited.

HEREFORDSHIRE CONNECTS – PROGRESS REPORT

7. Further to the report to Council in July the Committee received a progress report on the Herefordshire Connects Programme. The Committee sought and received assurances on the Programme's progress.

ELECTORAL REGISTRATION SERVICES

8. The Committee has considered progress on implementing the electoral registration services action plan. The Committee has noted progress and has requested a report on the management of by-elections in 2008. A representative of the electoral commission is due to attend the Committee's scheduled meeting in March 2009.

USE OF CONSULTANTS

9. The Committee has considered the use of external consultants. The Director of Resources' review established that in 2007/08 the Council had 75 contracts covering the use of consultants. The total expenditure of £984,814 represented 0.3% of the 2007/08 gross expenditure of £310 million. This was based on the definition: "Consultancy is the purchase of advice to clarify a particular situation or problem with the intention of producing focussed advice on possible options. Consultancy does not cover interim arrangements to fill existing posts or longer term contracted arrangements with the Council's partners."
10. The Committee was advised that this was considered to be a good use of resources given the comparative cost of retaining specialist staff as full time employees when those skills were only required for ad hoc projects. The use of consultants could in some circumstances also be beneficial in transferring risk.
11. The Committee was also advised that comparative data across councils for the use of consultants did not exist but it could be stated that all councils would engage consultants for specific tasks. The reasons for doing so would probably be in line with those that the review noted: a need for specialist advice; lack of in house expertise or capacity; to address the outcome of external assessments or inspections and to provide validation or challenge.

SMALLHOLDINGS ESTATE STRATEGY REVIEW

12. In May 2008 Council was informed that the Committee had received a report on the current policy for the management of the smallholdings estate and discussed it at length, recommending that there should be an overarching review undertaken by the Executive.
13. The Executive has undertaken this review and provided the Committee with an opportunity to comment during the policy review process.
14. The Committee's view was sought on the extent to which the evidence provided in the report supported the rationale for retaining the smallholdings estate in the absence of a corporate priority that required disposal to be considered. Based on the assumption that the estate was to be retained the Committee's view was also sought on a new smallholdings estate strategy covering strategic aims, objectives and outcomes and the key principles for developing and managing the smallholdings estate.
15. The Committee agreed that the evidence provided in the report to it supported the rationale for retaining the smallholdings estate in the absence of a corporate priority that required disposal to be considered. They made specific points about the principle of encouraging career progression, including length of tenancy, provision of starter units and increasing the acreage of the estate if and when appropriate; and support and development for tenants tailored to their individual needs to enhance the prospects of progression.

16. The Committee was informed that Cabinet would consider the Committee's recommendations along with comments from the National Farmers Union and the Tenant Farmers Association which were being sought.

EXTERNAL HEALTHCHECK OF THE SCRUTINY FUNCTION

17. An external healthcheck of the scrutiny function by the Leadership Centre, which is also looking at the Council's governance arrangements as a whole and Member Development, took place in November, based on the Centre for Public Scrutiny's evaluation framework. A report on the scrutiny function and implications for the future scrutiny work programme will be prepared in response to the findings of that evaluation and is expected to be considered by the Committee in March 2009.

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE INDIVIDUAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

18. The work of the Committees is analysed below in accordance with the following two roles for scrutiny based on a University of Birmingham categorisation. Each Committee has also considered and rolled forward its work programme.

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	

	Holding the Executive to Account	Developing Policy
Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing 19 December 2008	Adult Social Services Annual Assessment and Performance Rating 2007/08 Chief Executive of Herefordshire Housing Ltd Adult Services and Strategic Housing Performance Monitoring Revenue Budget Monitoring 2008/09 Cabinet's Response to the Joint Scrutiny Review of the Transition from	Review of Housing Allocation

	<p>Leaving Care to Adult Life</p> <p>Safeguarding Adults</p> <p>Implementation of Frameworki</p> <p>Partnership Agreement with Midland Heart for the Provision of Learning Disability Services</p> <p>Progress of Personalisation of Care in Herefordshire</p> <p>Restructuring of Commissioning Functions</p>	
<p>Children's Services</p> <p>18 November 2008</p> <p>8 December 2008</p>	<p>Extended Schools in Herefordshire</p> <p>Early Years in Herefordshire</p> <p>Performance Monitoring</p> <p>Domestic Abuse</p> <p>Revenue and Capital Budgets</p>	<p>Appointment of Champions</p> <p>Special Educational Needs Funding in mainstream schools</p>
<p>Community Services</p> <p>12 December 2008</p>	<p>Revenue Budget</p> <p>Directorates Performance to September 2008</p> <p>Response to Scrutiny</p> <p>Review of the Edgar Street Grid Scheme</p> <p>Hereford City Centre Regeneration Strategy Presentation</p> <p>Flavours of Herefordshire Food Festival</p>	<p>Review of Community Engagement in Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership</p> <p>PACT Meetings</p> <p>The Charter for Herefordshire Councils</p> <p>Public Rights of Way</p>
<p>Environment</p> <p>24 November 2008</p>	<p>Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring</p> <p>Performance Monitoring</p>	<p>Carbon Management Performance</p> <p>Energy Consumption – Street Lighting</p> <p>Service Delivery Review</p> <p>On-street Parking Scrutiny Review</p>
<p>Health</p> <p>5 December 2008</p>	<p>Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust Update</p> <p>West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust update</p> <p>Herefordshire Primary Care Trust – Update</p>	<p>Falls Strategy</p> <p>Provider Services Review</p>

Strategic Monitoring Committee 17 November 2008 10 December 2008	Integrated Corporate Performance Report Budget Monitoring Herefordshire Connects Electoral Registration Services	Smallholdings Estate Strategy Review Information and Communication Technology Services – Scrutiny Review Use of Consultants

19. Issues of particular note include:

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

Allocation of Housing - The Committee has reviewed the allocation of housing, making a number of recommendations, as appended. It has requested that the Executive invite the Home Point Partnership to undertake a review of the Allocations Policy and the operation of Home Point with particular attention to the recommendations identified by the Committee. It has requested that the outcomes and recommendations from the Home Point Partnership Review be reported back to the Committee.

- **Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee**

Special Educational Needs (SEN) Funding to schools for pupils in mainstream schools is currently allocated based on four banded levels. Following some concern about a proposed change to the system for allocating Level 1 and 2 Banded Funding the Committee has formed a small Working Group to examine the range of delegated funding options and how the SEN/Banded funding system is meeting the needs of children and schools.

Domestic Abuse - The Committee received a report on progress made since 2006 in addressing the needs of children affected by domestic abuse in accordance with the action plan prepared following the 2005 Joint Area Review (JAR) of Children’s Services. The Committee has noted progress but called for regular update reports.

- **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

Community engagement in the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership - The Committee has completed a scrutiny review of community engagement in the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership. The recommendations to Cabinet are appended. A formal response is awaited.

PACT (Partners and Communities Together) Meetings - The Committee has also considered a report on the operation of the PACT meetings. The Committee has recommended that a key Senior Officer is needed within the Council and its partner organisations to focus the work of the PACTs and ensure that they report in a timely fashion; that consideration should be given to restructuring the content of the meetings, with greater engagement from Town and Parish Councils; and that consideration should be given to the name of the meetings in order to make it more approachable.

Public Rights of Way (PROW) – Following a seminar arranged at the Committee's request, the Committee has considered various pressures including access to and condition of the PROW Network, Definitive Map Modification Orders and Highways Act public path orders. The Committee was informed, amongst other things, that it is likely to take over 10 years to clear the current backlog of Modification Orders. With new applications being received at a rate of 7 – 8 per year, it is probable that there will continue to be a significant number of applications awaiting determination. The Committee has recommended that the Service undertake an urgent review of the backlog of Definitive Map Modification Orders with a view to eradicating the backlog within three years.

- **Environment Scrutiny Committee**

Carbon Management - The Committee has considered progress on carbon management and in particular progress in reducing emissions to meet the Council's Nottingham Declaration target of a 20% reduction in carbon emissions by 2020 (1.25% per year); the current position in relation to fleet management of Council owned vehicles; responsibilities for reading meters in council buildings; and information in relation to the Local Area Agreement target (NI186) to reduce per capita carbon emissions by 4.9% (13.1% including national measures) by 2010. The Committee amongst other things requested a report on how the Accommodation Strategy can assist with meeting the Council's carbon management targets highlighting that, based on current information, the Committee are currently minded not to support the new Accommodation Strategy unless it is in line with the Council's 1.25% carbon reduction target. The Committee has also requested a report on how transport contracts for school/health/ social care/ public transport, including small fleet operators in the voluntary sector are co-ordinated and requested that when new building projects are planned that Property Services ensure that long term energy efficiency/carbon management issues are addressed.

- **Health Scrutiny Committee**

Herefordshire Provider Services Review – The Committee has noted progress on the Herefordshire Provider Services Review and is to receive a more detailed update. The review was initiated to propose models of care for health and social care services in Herefordshire that would deliver excellent outcomes and user/patient experience; refine the proposed models and identify the workforce activity and financial consequences, to guide investments and service development; and propose an organisational configuration that sustainably supports the delivery of the proposed models of care.

**PJ EDWARDS
CHAIRMAN
STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Agenda Papers of the Meeting of the Strategic Monitoring Committee held on 19 November and 10 December 2008

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ICT SCRUTINY REVIEW 2008

- a) That the following recommendations which are outstanding from the ICT Review of 2006 be actioned without further delay: (recommendation references are to the original 2006 report)

(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.

To be actioned in conjunction with new recommendation (t).

(c) A review of the financing of ICT Services is undertaken examining the way directorates account for ICT spend, base budget for ICT Services, as well as the corporate funding of ICT programmes.

To be actioned in conjunction with new recommendation (x).

(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.

To be actioned in conjunction with new recommendation (n).

(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.

To be actioned in conjunction with new recommendations (s) and (u).

(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.

To be actioned in conjunction with new recommendations (l) and (n).

(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.

To be actioned in conjunction with new recommendations (v) and (w).

- b) That the need for a fit for purpose, sustainable, secure and resilient replacement Data Centre at Rotherwas be addressed as a priority.

- c) The necessary investment required in order to build a new data centre should be leveraged by investigating the possibilities of using the

Community Network to provide increased broadband provision to the Rotherwas area.

- d) Principles of Information Security accreditation ISO27001 should be rolled out across the Council with certification being the eventual aim. Resource should be made available in each Directorate.**
- e) All Council owned laptops should be encrypted prior to commissioning.**
- f) Only Council approved and supplied memory sticks should be used on Council equipment and this policy to be enforced by the use of remote tracking.**
- g) The Executive is urged to ensure that all Directorates/Services are fully aware of their responsibilities and the subsequent consequences of not putting in place appropriate planning in respect of their IT requirements taking into account at all times Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity.**
- h) Use of the Community Network by the PCT should be strongly encouraged and supported.**
- i) The web site must be improved making it transactional (i.e. the ability to complete and submit forms on-line.) The customer interface should be AA compliant.**
- j) Wherever practical and reasonable web-based software applications should be AA compliant. If not practical an action plan to improve accessibility should be agreed.**
- k) The Council Intranet should be re-designed to make it easy for officers and members to use and promote good practice through a reliable and timely knowledge base, supporting effective decision-making.**
- l) Education and school web sites should be consolidated.**
- m) Corporate ICT capacity should be increased, on an 'Invest to Save' basis, to allow for development work e.g. web site, intranet.**
- n) The Executive should make it clear across the authority that all ICT services and equipment should be procured either through or in consultation with ICT Services. This includes the development of all web sites, which will be used to deliver Council Information and services so as to ensure compliance to Council and National Policies.**
- o) The importance of Information Security and the consequences of non-compliance should be highlighted to all schools.**
- p) The link-up to JANET (The Joint Academic Network) is supported and it is urged that phase II of this project be completed as a priority.**
- q) It should be communicated to schools that there is an imminent major upgrade to Broadband provision explaining the advantages that this will give them.**
- r) That a further review be undertaken of the current web site filtering process in place in schools.**

- s) It is strongly recommended that all school employees that connect to the Council network have to attend ICT Induction training as proposed for Council employees in recommendation (u).**
- t)** Immediate action be taken to clarify the provision of ICT services to schools and that clear roles and responsibilities are identified between ICT and CYPD.
- u)** All Council personnel and Members should have mandatory IT training at commencement of employment or on taking office. The level of training required should be assessed by use of questionnaire. ICT Training should be a matter of Continuous Professional Development across the authority.
- v)** Human Resources and Job Evaluation should revisit IT salary scales taking into account the relevant market forces as well as the financial consequences for the Council of not being able to recruit into key positions. The adoption of a pay scale for technical ICT staff may be appropriate.
- w)** Consideration should be given to a policy whereby staff are asked to reimburse to the Council a specified percentage of training costs if they decide to leave the Council's employment within a specified period of time from receiving the training.
- x)** The Executive should ensure that the proposal that Corporate ICT Services be funded from base budget from April 2009, be properly reflected and taken account of in budget proposals.
- y)** 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.
- z)** A further report on progress with respect to the Review 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 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND DRUGS PARTNERSHIP

- Improve relationship with Town and Parish Councils taking into consideration resource implications and likely outcome.
- Town Council Champions created as the anchor between the partnership and newly formed Local Community Safety and Drugs Forums.
- PACT meetings could be a valuable tool, but the review had deep concerns as to how well they are working. A separate review should be undertaken, possibly via Local Area Member Briefings to improve PACT meetings.

Items to be considered:

- “Ownership” – should PACT meetings be owned by Herefordshire Council, Police, Town or Parish Councillors or a combination of all four?
- Improving feedback and using this as an opportunity for communication
- More effective advertising of meetings
- The Drug and Alcohol Forums become the Local Community Safety and Drugs Forums with a lead Community Support Officer, and additional funding sought for the forums to address the wider issue of reducing crime.
- That partnership officers are involved in the parish plan process to ensure community safety is included in the production of effective plans.
- To continue engagement with “hard to reach” groups and investigate linkages with other council, partner and voluntary sector consultation initiatives.
- That the new community pride grants for the county include support for small initiatives that aim to design out crime.
- The importance of feedback is emphasised to all officers and partners both to improve community engagement and to address perception of crime. All opportunities for giving feedback should be exploited e.g. PACT meetings, Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Watch.
- Public engagement is a valuable tool to improve public safety and public services by truly understanding the needs of residents. A separate review should be undertaken to evaluate the quantity and quality of the consultation and public engagement events that are taking place or likely to take place within the whole Council.

OUTCOME OF THE REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATION

The review identified/wished to highlight the following issues/findings from its investigation.

- There is an imbalance in housing supply which leads to increasing pressure in the system for allocating scarce affordable housing.
- Recognises the high levels of overcrowding in the county.
- Recognises the success of the Home Point 'Talking Brochures' concept and encourages wider use of video guides and other visual media within the Authority.
- Recognises the amendments to the Allocations Policy in 2004 have successfully impacted upon the efficiency and service provided to qualifying Aftercare Leavers.
- Supports the need for a dedicated officer to focus on vulnerable customers at Home Point.
- Supports increasing the minimum overall percentage of affordable housing in new developments.
- Supports increasing the minimum percentage of rental accommodation for new affordable housing.
- Supports the concept of a Housing Contact Centre / One Stop Shop approach to meet the wide ranging housing needs in the county.

The review identified the following items which it believed should be considered in the course of devising amendments to the allocations policy and / or the operation of Home Point.

- Consider amending Allocations Policy to enable a percentage of properties to be advertised / allocated with a preference to existing Home Point Partnership tenants within Herefordshire currently under occupying their properties to release homes for larger families.
- Review the difficulties experienced by customers with multiple bedroom eligibility policies within the Partnership. Investigate the feasibility of introducing a Common Policy / or a standard Home Point Bedroom Eligibility Policy to improve customer service.
- Review the Partner contribution model to ensure costs are fairly distributed within Partnership.
- Strengthen the Allocation Policy to ensure adapted properties are let to applicants with a suitable medical need.
- Investigate the impact of the Allocations Policy on applicants wishing to Foster.
- Investigate the impact of the Allocations Policy on ex-service personnel.
- Investigate within new development whether applicants with special needs can be identified and allocated directly to specific adapted properties.
- Investigate the feasibility / need of whether a degree of preference could be introduced for a small percentage of properties to combat worklessness.
- Investigate possible sources of funding for a Home Point officer to concentrate on vulnerable customers.

In regard to the nature of the Home Point Partnership, the review felt that the Home Point Partnership Board was the most appropriate vehicle to consider and develop options for improvement.