

MINUTES of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 15 March 2010 at 9.30 am

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

Councillors: PA Andrews, ME Cooper, KG Grumbley, TM James, RI Matthews, PM Morgan and AT Oliver

In attendance: Councillor PD Price (Cabinet Member – ICT, Education and Achievement)

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors AE Gray and PJ Watts. Apologies were also received from Councillor JP French (Cabinet Member – Corporate and Customer Services) and RJ Phillips - (Leader of the Council.)

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

17. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

A member of the public suggested that following the introduction of the new Council Constitution it would be helpful if a guide could be produced setting out key changes from the old constitution.

It was agreed to request the Constitutional Review Working Group to give consideration to the publication of simple guide to the Constitution and a list of frequently asked questions and answers.

19. INFORMATION COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY SERVICES UPDATE

The Committee considered a progress report on Information Communication and Technology (ICT) service issues, requested following the scrutiny review of ICT and subsequent updates.

The Joint Director of ICT presented the report in accordance with the Committee's request in September 2009 for a six monthly update. He highlighted the following points:

- The Data Centre Refurbishment at Thorn office centre had been completed. The estimated cost was within budget.

- The contract for the community network had been re-let on a three year contract and would generate at least £720k savings over that period. This sum would be available for investment into improved services within the context of the Council's overall finances.
- The encryption project had encrypted 92% of the originally identified ICT devices. It was planned to complete the encryption programme by the end of the financial year.
- The technical measures to connect the Council and NHS Herefordshire networks had been completed. The development of an overall information sharing protocol between the Council and NHS Herefordshire and detailed information sharing agreements for individual services was ongoing.
- A number of ICT systems had been decommissioned reducing duplication and costs. The Joint Director of ICT would circulate a chart to the Committee showing progress in decommissioning.
- A summit was planned for later in the month to take forward the improvement of the broadband service in the County.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- The Joint Director of ICT was asked for assurance that the requirement that ICT equipment be procured centrally was being adhered to. He commented that procurement was being managed by the central procurement team and an improved relationship between ICT services and directorates was also helping to ensure that equipment was procured centrally.
- Asked about progress in implementing the interface between the Social Care Framework system with the Council's finance system to enable commitment accounting, the Joint Director said that work was ongoing but it was taking longer than had been expected to implement the project and, as yet, a confirmed date for completing this work could not be provided. In response to a question on the ability for staff to access systems remotely and whilst mobile, he commented on trials of technology that were taking place, the relatively poor mobile coverage and steps being taken to increase the number of locations where staff were able to access systems.
- Concern was expressed that the Civica system which would allow Planning Services to scan plans had not yet been implemented. The Joint Director replied that he had recently given this work greater priority but could not at this point provide an implementation date.
- Questioned about take up by schools of ICT services, the Joint Director reported that he considered relationships with those schools currently contracting to use Council ICT services had improved, with new services being provided to them. Meetings with Headteachers using Council ICT Services were being scheduled every two months rather than quarterly.
- It was stated that Members continued to have difficulty accessing the Council intranet. It was proposed a member of the Committee be nominated to discuss this practical issue in further depth to identify and resolve the apparent problems.
- In relation to the Herefordshire Connects Programme the Director of Resources commented that this was now subsumed within the Shared Services project.

However, the accounts for the project were still held separately and an outturn report would be made at the end of the financial year.

- The Joint Director confirmed that a programme for encryption of ICT devices was being undertaken by NHS Herefordshire in parallel with the programme for encryption of Council devices and would be completed by the end of the financial year.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the progress report be welcomed:

(b) a further progress report be made in 6 months time, noting in particular ongoing work on the interface between the Social Care Frameworki system with the Council's finance system and Civica software packages; and

(c) Councillor WLS Bowen be deputed to discuss access to the intranet for Members to identify and seek to resolve the apparent problems.

20. INTEGRATED CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered performance for the period April-December 2009-10 against the Council's key indicators and associated projects and programmes in its Annual Operating Statement 2009-10.

The report to Cabinet on 18 February 2010 was appended.

The Corporate Policy and Research Manager (CPRM) presented the report, focusing on the highlights as set out at paragraphs 7-8 of the report. He highlighted the following additional information:

- Whilst performance in relation to target NI117, 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) was behind target it should be noted that, despite the recession, performance had slightly improved compared with the previous year and was better than both regionally and nationally.
- That it appeared that performance against target NI132 (timeliness for social care assessments) may well now be achieved, However target NI133 (timeliness of social care packages) would not be met, staff resources having had to be diverted to the safeguarding of vulnerable people in some residential homes.
- In relation to both Children's Services and Adult Social Care it should be noted that progress was being achieved at the same time as measures were having to be taken to control expenditure to reduce projected overspending.
- It was now appeared likely that the target for NI156 (Households in temporary accommodation) would be achieved.
- Despite an increase in the use of the county's libraries, performance against the wider measure NI9, which included a wider range of library services was significantly behind target.
- Performance against the Local Area Agreement (LAA) indicators was improving overall and action plans were now in place and being implemented for all indicators.

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

- A concern was reiterated that, further to the Committee's consideration of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in February 2010 the pages in the report listed a number of significant projects, for example the relocation of Hereford Library and the extension of the refurbishment of the City Centre, but stated no funding was identified. If there was no funding it seemed misleading to list the projects as commitments in the way that they were.

The Director of Resources commented that the approach being followed was consistent with that of other local authorities. It provided an indication of where the Council would allocate resources if they were to become available.

- In response to a query about the thoroughness of assessments undertaken in relation to NI 59 (initial assessments for children's social care carried out within seven working days of referral), the CPRM reported that this area had received the closest attention by Children's Services and was rigorously and regularly scrutinised by OFSTED, which had commented favourably on the arrangements in its latest annual assessment.
- Members reiterated concern as to whether enough was being done to improve future performance in respect of the measures of educational achievement, particularly as regards the proportion of pupils achieving 5 good GCSE passes, including English and Maths, set out at page 26 of the agenda. It was noted that the Strategic Monitoring Committee had referred the issue to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee in December 2009 and it was requested that the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee's response be reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- In response to a suggestion that it could be difficult for members of the public to understand from the report the difference between direction of travel, which was assessed against performance at the same point of the previous year, and changes since the previous quarter's report, the CPRM drew attention to the key to the judgements in the report in Appendix 1. He said he would consider how best to make the reports clearer in this respect.
- It was suggested that the judgement that performance in relation to reducing carbon emissions was on track presented a more favourable assessment than that which would be reported to the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 22 March. The CPRM said that, pending the reporting of data on levels of carbon emissions, the judgement in the integrated corporate performance report was based on performance against the action plan intended to secure reductions. The new performance management system, which would operate from April, was designed to provide a more accurate means of tracking progress, including highlighting where information or commentary had not been updated.
- In response to a concern that a number of the targets were measuring processes and the development of policies rather than the achievement of what mattered to the public, the CPRM said that most targets in the corporate plan were – and would continue to be – in terms of improvements that would benefit people and communities.
- It was observed that the commentary on performance against the target for the number of vacant posts as a proportion of the approved establishment indicated that work was ongoing to confirm the establishment. The CPRM acknowledged the

importance of establishing this baseline and said that he was aware efforts were being made to bring the necessary validating work to a conclusion.

- It was noted that the Customer Insight Unit had been established and would begin producing analyses and reports from April 2010.

RESOLVED

That (a) the report and points raised by the Committee be noted;

(b) the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee's consideration of performance against a range of education attainment targets should be reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

21. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2009/10

The Committee considered December's budget monitoring information, an indication of estimated outturn for both revenue and capital to 31 March 2010 and treasury management activities in the first nine months of 2009/10.

The Head of Financial Services presented the report.

She highlighted that the projected overspend on the revenue budget at the end of December 2009 had been £847k. It was currently envisaged that the implementation of recovery plans and maximisation of grant income would deliver a balanced budget at the year end. However, a lot of work remained to be done to achieve this position.

She noted the position on earmarked reserves shown on page 67 of the agenda papers had changed following use of the winter maintenance reserve and the social care contingency and now stood at £14.6 million.

In relation to the Treasury Management Statement she highlighted ongoing work to reschedule debt.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- Paragraph 17 of the report stated that invoices from Mencap totalling £150k, relating to domiciliary care for 2008/09, had unexpectedly been received in December 2009. Paragraph 25 referred to a one-off cost of £110k relating to unexpected invoices for the Homecare block contract for domiciliary care. Clarification was sought.

The Head of Financial Services commented that there had been an error in communication between service areas and an issue in relation to contract negotiation. It was not considered to be a systemic failure and work was underway to mitigate the risk of such a situation occurring again.

- The Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee commented that she did not agree with the statement in the report that the measures in the recovery plan for the Integrated Commissioning Directorate were realistically achievable.
- A Member drew attention to the reference in the report to an absence of budget provision for personal budgets for nursing and residential care packages in 2009/10 and asked what provision had been made for 2010/11. The Head of Financial services said that the gap remained to be addressed in finalising the service budgets.

- Clarification was requested on the overspend of £375k on the managing agent contract with Amey Wye Valley; the background to and administration of the Leader Vital grant; and capital expenditure on City Centre enhancements and details of the works
- The institution of a more robust panel procedure for reviewing the level of void placements in residential homes and day care facilities was discussed. It was requested that a report be made to the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee on the operation of the Panel and its effectiveness in reducing voids. The Head of Financial Services noted that the current level of voids was 12%. It would be reasonable to expect a figure of 5-6%.
- It was asked whether the forecast capital expenditure for 2009/10 would be realised, given the level of actual expenditure incurred. The Head of Financial Services said that it was usual for a larger spend to occur towards the end of the year, and a number of contracts would have stage payments calculated and made just before the end of the financial year.
- Concern was registered about the pressure on Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant and the reported backlog of approximately £1m.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) the report and its approach to delivering a balanced outturn position at the year end be noted;**
 - (b) briefing notes be circulated to Members of the Committee on the overspend on the managing agent contract with Amey Wye Valley; the background to and administration of the Leader Vital grant; capital expenditure on City Centre enhancements and details of the works;**
 - (c) a report be made to the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee on the operation of the Panel reviewing the level of void placements in residential homes and day care facilities and its effectiveness in reducing voids.**

22. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

It was noted that a further update on ICT Services needed to be added.

RESOLVED: That the work programme as amended be approved as a basis for further development.

23. DEPARTURE OF DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND CORPORATE POLICY AND RESEARCH MANAGER

The Chairman thanked Steve Martin, Corporate Policy and Research Manager, who was leaving the Council, for his contribution to shaping the work of the Committee and the Council.

Mr Martin replied that he had enjoyed his time at the Council and had welcomed the constructive challenge the Committee had provided.

The Chairman also thanked Annie Faulder, interim Deputy Chief Executive, who was also leaving the Council, for her work in introducing the new performance management framework and developing the Council's partnership arrangements.

Annie Faulder replied that she too had enjoyed her time in Herefordshire.

The Committee endorsed the Chairman's remarks.

The meeting ended at 11.55 am

CHAIRMAN