

MINUTES of the meeting of General Overview & Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 8 April 2013 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor A Seldon (Chairman)

Councillors: EMK Chave, BA Durkin, JW Hope MBE, RC Hunt, TM James, Brig P Jones CBE, AJW Powers, R Preece, GR Swinford and DB Wilcox

In attendance: Councillors: RB Hamilton (Cabinet Member - Environment, Housing & Planning), JG Jarvis (Leader of the Council), AW Johnson (Cabinet Member - Financial Management), MD Lloyd-Hayes, PM Morgan (Cabinet Member - Health & Wellbeing) NP Nenadich, GJ Powell (Cabinet Member - Education & Infrastructure) and PD Price (Cabinet Member – Corporate Services).

Officers: D Taylor, Deputy Chief Executive; G Hughes, Director for Places & Communities; J Lewis, Assistant Director People, Policy and Partnership; D Latham, Service Manager ICT Strategy and Commissioning; B Proctor, Head of Communications and Engagement; J Edwards, Root & Branch Programme Support; J Jones, Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer; G Dean, Scrutiny Officer; P James, Democratic Services Officer.

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor EPJ Harvey and Mr P Sell.

57. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor JW Powers substituted for Councillor EPJ Harvey (Vice-Chairman).

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

59. MINUTES

In relation to minute No 53 – Freedom of Information and Arms' Length Companies - a Member sought clarification concerning the minute regarding the Council's part in the ownership of Hereford Futures Ltd. The Head of Governance undertook to check the facts and report back.

A Member remarked that further information had been given concerning the Community Infrastructure Levy and suggested that further explanation be included in Minute 53. It was noted that the findings of the Task & Finish review were expected to be reported to the May 2013 Committee and therefore the Committee agreed to await the final report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1. In relation to Minute 52 – Web-Based Technologies (Digital Channels) - the second bullet point on agenda page 12 be amended to read were to have been migrated...**
- 2. Subject to the above amendment the Minutes of the meeting held 4 March 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

3. A report be scheduled for a future meeting clarifying the Council's part in the ownership of Hereford Futures Ltd.

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

Mrs E Morawiecka suggested that arising from the report to the 4 March 2013 meeting concerning Freedom of Information and Arm's Length Companies (see Minutes No 53) the Committee should question various aspects of the ownership of Hereford Futures Ltd. She suggested that elements of the report may have been erroneous or misleading and the Council did own the company and that this had implications for its operation and governance. She had already written to the Council's Monitoring Officer on this matter. The Chairman thanked Mrs Morawiecka for her suggestion and in view of the complexity of her statements suggested that she put her points in writing via the Democratic Services Officer.

61. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions were received from the public on matters specifically on the agenda.

62. DIGITAL STRATEGY 2013/18

The Committee considered a new Digital Strategy 2013/18 encompassing information management, technology, communications and engagement.

The Assistant Director People, Policy and Partnerships highlighted that the Digital Strategy would guide the future development and implementation of technology infrastructure, information management, and tools to support effective communication and engagement focusing on delivering the priorities within the Corporate Plan. It would also support the customer services strategy by providing customers with easier access to information and services at a time of their choosing.

The Digital Strategy 2013/18 was due to be considered by Cabinet on 18 April 2013.

During the course of debate the following principal points were noted:

- The Committee sought clarification on a number of technical terms used in the report following which it was suggested that a glossary of terms be included in the strategy.
- While the aim of the strategy was to be 'digital by default' it was acknowledged that some residents would, for various reasons, be unable to use or access digital technology and ways of how to support them would need to be addressed. The end user was fundamental to the strategy.
- With the increased availability of broadband in the county it will be important to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups e.g the elderly or less well off, were understood. The availability of broadband would help for example social workers to quickly access up to date information on specific cases and provide an efficient interaction with residents.
- In response to comments concerning issuing staff with mobile technology the Committee were informed that lessons were being learned from when councillors had been issued with digital devices. It was important the right devices were provided to staff to ensure maximum benefits were derived and that staff were confident in using it.
- Training in the use and security of tablet devices would be a key component to deriving efficiencies.
- As with many systems in the Council, any digital system would need to have a business continuity plan to ensure that services continued during any disruption

e.g. power outages. In relation to security and the proposed use of cloud solutions the Committee were informed that a number of measures could be taken to increase the levels of security. The Council would also learn from the experiences of other local authorities and take advice from manufacturers.

- Procedures for the disposal or recycling of redundant IT equipment were in place and were kept under review.
- Concerning the security of both data and systems the Committee were informed that this was continually reviewed to ensure that both were as secure as practical in accordance with international standards.
- It was commented that the report offered no 'alternative options'. This was noted and in the current economic climate it would be sensible to keep all options open. Learning from best practice at other councils would be taken into account.
- Responding to questions on the financial implications the Committee were informed that while the strategy itself had no direct costs, any investment proposal to drive the delivery would be reported via normal governance processes. It was acknowledged that in addition to Hoople staff, extra specialist IT staff may be needed. It was suggested that Cabinet needed to assess the full financial implications arising from the strategy, including both the investment required and the potential savings.
- IT related contracts were reviewed and when appropriate renegotiated. The utilisation of IT systems had produced staff savings over the last year.
- It was questioned whether the objectives of the strategy were aligned with the Herefordshire 2020 Review.

Resolved that

- 1. The report and the draft Digital Strategy 2013/18 be noted and the following be considered by Cabinet when considering the Strategy for approval:**
- 2. That it is essential that Cabinet assesses the full financial implications, both investment required and potential savings, for the Digital Strategy 2013/18;**
- 3. That the Strategy is written in plain English and a glossary of terms used be included;**
- 4. That Cabinet ensures that the Strategy addresses issues of potential exclusion of certain social groups or lack of access to broadband connection.**
- 5. Emphasis needs to be given to data security to ensure that data storage systems, whether internal servers or external cloud solutions, are as secure as possible.**
- 6. That staff are adequately trained to ensure that software and systems are fully utilised and that staff are confident in their usage.**
- 7. That Cabinet ensures that the Strategy is aligned with the Herefordshire 2020 Review.**

At 11.12am the Committee adjourned and reconvened at 11.22am

63. RISING TO THE CHALLENGE & ROOT AND BRANCH PROGRAMMES

The Committee were informed of the work to date on the Rising to the Challenge and Root and Branch Review Programmes.

A draft of the report to Cabinet dated 18 April 2013 had been circulated to Members and published on the website prior to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member (Financial Management) highlighted that the savings identified through Root & Branch Review Programme had been a key element in setting the 2013/14 budget and therefore was not open to change. Further significant savings would have to be identified for future years. He invited the Committee to consider how it

wanted to engage in the development of the future Council through proposals for the Herefordshire 2020 review. The Council needed to re-engage in a common sense of future purpose.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that the Council still had major issues to address and hoped that all political groups would work together to the benefit of the County.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that: the Rising to the Challenge Programme had been established for the Council and NHS Herefordshire and that this had produced savings and lessons had been learned from that work; Phase 1 of the Root & Branch Review had been signed off by Cabinet and savings had been identified; Phases 2 and 3 had been accelerated with savings agreed by Council in February 2013 as part of the budget process; the proposal now was that the Herefordshire 2020 review would include all remaining work from the review programme. Work was on-going in the high risk area of services to adults and vulnerable people with resources being moved to support delivery in key areas.

During the course of debate the following principal points were noted:

- The Committee considered that the only flexibility in the budget was in the area of discretionary spend and suggested that if any of the identified savings weren't delivered the shortfall would need to be made up from the discretionary areas. Cabinet needed to give careful consideration to how discretionary budgets were used.
- A member questioned some of the financial figures presented in the report e.g. at pages 17 and 42 of the supplement to the agenda and suggested that a true picture could only be deduced by comparison to figures provided in previous reports. The Committee agreed that given the heightened public focus on budgetary matters reports needed to avoid ambiguity.
- The Committee noted that the savings identified on page 42 of the report had now been updated.
- Responding to comments about the need to keep to budget, the Cabinet Member (Financial Management) reported that robust management and monitoring plans were in place to deliver the savings.
- Responding to questions concerning the 'integration of the commissioning of all public transport' (referred to at page 25 of the report) the Cabinet Member (Education & Infrastructure) reported that a meeting with local public transport providers was due to be held the following day to discuss a range of possible budget saving and efficiency measures. This would particularly focus on the further integration of school/college/public bus services. He also reported that the Council could act as facilitator to enable a number of parish councils to commission bus services in their parishes.
- The Rising to the Challenge and Root and Branch programmes had delivered some positive learning about services, customers and managing change, along with significant savings for 2013/14 and beyond and the opportunity to do things differently. The proposals to re-scope and move to Herefordshire 2020, to encompass two key themes of 'future Council' and 'savings', would give the Council greater clarity about what it does and how it was going to afford it.
- It was suggested that clear communication was essential to ensure that the Council's messages and intentions were clearly presented both internally and to the public. The Chairman commented that a Task & Finish review of Communications was also being considered.
- A point was made that it was unsustainable to expect continual savings to be made and expect services to improve.
- The Cabinet Member (Health & Wellbeing) commented that with the changing demographics of the County and demand for services, the area of People's Services carried with it big budgetary risks, however, through greater efficiencies for example it also offered opportunities to contribute savings. Work was already

underway to redesign services, however, she warned that some services would be cut or reduced.

- It was suggested that all Members needed to be fully appraised, and engaged in, shaping the Herefordshire 2020 Review and that an all Member seminar be scheduled as soon as possible.

Resolved That:

- 1. The draft report entitled 'Rising to the Challenge & Root and Branch Programmes' for presentation to Cabinet on 18 April 2013 be noted and it be recommended that Cabinet consider:**
 - a. That an all Member seminar be arranged as soon as possible to ensure that all Members are fully engaged in shaping the Herefordshire 2020 Review.**
 - b. That Council communications be revised and improved across the whole organisation to ensure that information concerning the Root and Branch Review/Herefordshire 2020 Review, both with the public and internally, is clearly understood.**
 - c. That more detail be included in the report concerning the lessons learned from the Rising to the Challenge Programme;**
 - d. That Cabinet give very careful consideration to how it sets any discretionary spend given the scale of further savings that the Council needs to make; and**
- 2. The Committee through its work programme agenda item give further consideration to how it wishes to be more involved in consideration of the Herefordshire 2020 Review and on the scope of a Council wide review of communications.**

64. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

A degree of criticism was expressed concerning the receipt of late reports as this did not provide Members with adequate time to analyse the report and prepare for the meeting.

The Chairman reported that following concerns about the Council's Legal Service he, the Vice-Chairman and Cllr Brig P Jones CBE had met with the Corporate Statutory Services Manager. Following discussions they were satisfied that the Service was now on a more business footing and measures were now in place to monitor budgets and legal cases. The Committee requested that a follow-up meeting be held in 3 months to ensure that progress was being made.

Following the discussion under Minute 63 the Chairman will discuss with officers the feasibility/scoping of a Task & Finish review into Communications.

The Chairman also reported that he and Councillor Swinford would be meeting with the Cultural Services Manager to discuss the feasibility/scoping of a possible Task & Finish review into aspects of Cultural Services.

The meeting ended at 12.29 pm

CHAIRMAN