

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE

Meeting Held on 5th July, 2004

Membership:

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

HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY

1. The Committee received an update on progress against the Council's Human Resources Strategy for the year ending 31st March, 2004.
2. It raised issues relating to the completion of Staff Review and Development discussions and measures to deal with Equal Opportunities issues and has been assured that appropriate action is being taken or is under consideration. It has also requested an analysis of the findings from exit interviews. Progress in reducing sickness absence has been welcomed.

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

3. The Committee has received a monitoring report on the Council's Improvement Plan. It has noted that the majority of actions have been completed although further work is needed on internal communications.
4. The provision of Broadband within the County forms part of the Plan. The Committee sought clarification on the latest position and was advised that a briefing note would be sent to all Members.

PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT

5. The Committee was informed of the progress on negotiations with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister over the second Local Public Service Agreement which the Council is to negotiate with the Government later in the year.
6. It has noted the complexity of the process and the intention to seek to ensure Member involvement. It has suggested that at some point more analysis is needed of the economic effects of older people entering the County and whether this is necessarily detrimental.

HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AND PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS REPORT

7. The Committee has received a progress report on the implementation of the Herefordshire Plan. It has expressed the view that there is a need to demonstrate that the work being carried out is delivering practical benefits. A fundamental review of the Plan is underway with the aim of having a final Plan in place by 31st March, 2005. The Committee had already decided to conduct an analysis of the Council's input into the Plan and this will feed into the review process, with further reports to be made to the Committee.

PERFORMANCE REPORTING – NATIONAL AND LOCAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

8. The Council's performance against Best Value Performance Indicators for 2003-2004, and the intention to integrate targets more closely with the Corporate Plan and focus more selectively on the key strategic ones has been noted. The Committee identified a number of areas where there was the potential for the way in which the performance information was presented to be misinterpreted. It has welcomed the fact that further consideration is being given to how best to present performance information and some of the targets themselves to ensure that the clearest and most accurate picture of performance is given.

RESULTS OF 2003/2004 BVPI SATISFACTION SURVEY

9. The Committee was advised of the Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) Satisfaction Survey results for 2003/2004.
10. The survey of 3,200 residents was undertaken during September to November 2003 by postal questionnaire. The residents were selected randomly from a list of 5,000 addresses supplied to the Council by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which had also prescribed the format of the survey. The surveys are required to be conducted every three years. The Committee has recognised the potential benefits of the proposal that the Council conducts an annual survey.

COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS MONITORING 2003/2004

11. The Committee was informed of complaints and compliments recorded for 2003/2004 including complaints determined by the Local Government Ombudsman and the Complaints Panel. It has noted an increase in both compliments and complaints. It was advised that this indicates that action to make it easier for people to comment on the Council's services has worked.
12. In relation to Ombudsman complaints it remains the case that there have been no findings of maladministration against the Council since its formation in 1998. This is worthy of note given the thousands of transactions the Council undertakes.

FINAL REVENUE OUTTURN 2003/2004

13. The Committee was informed of the final revenue outturn position for 2003/2004. It has noted that the underspending of £3.5 million carried into 2004/2005 was significantly higher than expected. This was partly because anticipated spending had been delayed and partly because an over-cautious approach had been taken in forecasting the end of year position, highlighting potential overspendings while assuming carry forwards would be spent in year.
14. The Committee has cautioned that it is important to recognise that a proportion of the underspend is already committed, for example some £1 million in the case of the Education Directorate. It has also noted the intention to analyse the carried forward underspendings to clarify the extent to which expenditure is required for, and committed to, ongoing work or whether the demand on the relevant budget is no longer present. This will assist the Council in assessing what flexibility it has to reallocate its resources.

STRATEGIC AUDIT PLAN 2004/2005

15. The Committee has noted the Strategic Audit Plan. It has received assurances that revisions to the Plan to realign it to available resources are manageable and appropriate.

ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE INDIVIDUAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

16. 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), the first four of which are identified as key roles in report on "The Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister". Issues considered by the Strategic Monitoring Committee as described above are listed for completeness.

Education

17. The Education Scrutiny Committee met on 22 June 2004 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	Pupil Referral Service – Progress Report Special Educational Needs Services
Policy Development and Review	Policy on 14-19 education Standard School Year Proposal for 2005/2006 Health and Safety of Pupils during Educational Visits Review of Discretionary Policies Applicable to Home to School Transport Education of Excluded Pupils Outcome of Parental Applications for Year 6 Pupil Transfers to High Schools September 2004
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Monitoring of Capital Schemes Revenue Outturn 2003/04 and Budget 2004/05 Best Value Performance Indicators 2003-2004
Other	

18. The Environment Scrutiny Committee met on 18 and 23 June 2004 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	Implementation of Improvement Plans
Policy Development and Review	Review of the Voluntary Code of Practice for the Use of Polytunnels in Herefordshire
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	GEM Performance 2003/2004 Waste Management Capital Programme 2004/2005 Revenue budget 2004/05 and Outturn 2003/4 Performance Indicators Herefordshire Plan Ambitions
Other	-

19. The Health Scrutiny Committee met on 23 and 28 June, 2004 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Access and Waiting Communication and Morale Review of Management of Legionnaires Disease Outbreak
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	
Other	Arrangements for Provision of Cancer Services

20. The Committee is also to meet on 29th July, 2004 to consider the annual report of the Director of Public Health.

21. The Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Committee met on 17th June, 2004 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	-
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Scoping Work – Home Care and Supported Housing
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	National Inspection Arrangements and Local Performance Performance Monitoring Budget Monitoring
Other	

22. The Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee met on 11 June 2004 and considered the following issues:

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	Festivals Review – Progress Report South Wye SRB Forward Strategy
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Adult Learning Inspectorate Re-inspection Performance Monitoring Herefordshire Plan Ambition Groups
Other	

23. The business conducted by the Strategic Monitoring Committee at its meeting on 5th July, 2004 is summarised below.

Theme	Reports
Holding the Executive to Account	-
Best Value Reviews	
Policy Development and Review	
External Scrutiny	
Improvement (Performance Management and Review)	Final Revenue Outturn 2003/2004-07-02 Human Resources Strategy Herefordshire Council Improvement Plan – Monitoring Public Service Agreement – Update Herefordshire Plan and Partnership Progress Report National and Local Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) BVPI Satisfaction Survey Results Complaints and Compliments Monitoring Strategic Audit Plan
Other	

**T.M. JAMES
CHAIRMAN
STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE**

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Agenda Papers of the Meeting of the Strategic Monitoring Committee held on 5th July, 2004.