

REPORT OF THE MEETINGS OF CABINET

HELD ON 9TH AND 23RD SEPTEMBER AND
14TH AND 21ST OCTOBER, 2004

Cabinet Members: R.J. Phillips (Leader of the Council),
G.V. Hyde (Deputy Leader), Mrs. L.O. Barnett, P.J. Edwards,
Mrs. J.P. French, J.C. Mayson, D.W. Rule, MBE, R.V. Stockton,
D.B. Wilcox, R.M. Wilson.

This report covers proceedings of the meetings listed above. A supplementary report on proceedings of the meeting held on 4th November, 2004 will be circulated separately.

1. DECISIONS RESERVED TO COUNCIL UNDER PART 4 OF THE CONSTITUTION

- 1.1 **Council Tax Designation and Capping - Local Government Finance Act 1992 - Council Tax Limitation (England)(Maximum Amounts) Order 2004** - Cabinet has finalised its recommendations for the allocation of budget reductions required to meet the revised budget necessitated by the Government's decision to limit the Council's budget for 2004/05 to £175,320,000.

Cabinet recommends to Council the revised budget as set out at Appendix 1.

- 1.2 **Review of the Constitution** - The Constitution combines all the required governance provisions for a local authority, together with the more traditional standing orders to regulate public meetings and decision making. The County Secretary and Solicitor is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the operation of the Constitution and making recommendations for improvement as necessary. The Constitutional Review Working Group, Strategic Monitoring Committee and Cabinet have considered a number of recommendations for changes to the Constitution. These are set out in detail at Appendix 2. In summary they deal with:

- **Clarification of Head of Planning Services' powers of referral** and publication of the referral procedure.
- **Members' Planning applications** – subject to clarification from the Standards Board for England it is recommended that the Council maintains its local prohibition on Councillors using agents at planning committee meetings.
- **Supplementary Planning Guidance** - it is recommended that approval for Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) be delegated to the Cabinet Member (Environment) in consultation with the Planning Committee.
- **Formal Questions at Council** - addresses practical issues about the asking of questions at full Council.
- **Delegations in Relation to Employee Matters** - it is recommended that a new Standing Order be added to clarify the role of Members in the appointment, dismissal and discipline of staff.

- **Local Area Forums** - It is recommended that revisions be made to the Composition and Terms of Reference and that, in order to reduce the constraint imposed by strict geographical boundaries, reference to LAFs be deleted in Appendix 20 "Membership of Area Based Bodies".
- **The Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP)** - It is recommended that the Council agree to review its current Members' Allowances Scheme during 2006/07 (prior to the next local elections) and that current membership of the IRP be continued for a further three year period for that purpose.
- **Control of Borrowing, Investments or Capital Expenditure** - It is recommended that the definition of the Council's budget be amended to include "Investments".
- **The Policy Framework** - As there is no longer a statutory requirement to produce a Housing Investment Programme it is recommended that it be deleted from the Policy Framework and that the Housing Investment Strategy be added to the terms of reference of the Cabinet Member (Social Care and Strategic Housing).
- **Regulatory Sub-Committee** - It is recommended that the sub-committee comprise three councillors from the Regulatory Committee.
- **Children's Bill and Review of Cabinet and Scrutiny Portfolios generally** - It is recommended that one Cabinet Member be identified to take lead responsibility for Children's Services pending the outcome of an operational review and the enactment of the Children's Bill and that the Strategic Monitoring Committee takes responsibility for monitoring the Cabinet's response to the Children's Bill. The Leader will formally move the appointment of Councillor Don Rule as the lead Cabinet Member for Children's Services at the Council meeting. A number of minor modifications to the existing Cabinet portfolios are also recommended.
- **Health Scrutiny Joint Committees** - It is recommended that provision be made for the formation of health scrutiny joint committees to allow the Council to participate in joint committees with other local authorities when reviewing NHS services across a number of areas.
- **Financial Regulations and Associated Amendments** - The current financial regulations have been in force for a number of years and a revised version of financial regulations detailed at Annex 1 to Appendix 2 reflecting a number of practical issues is recommended for approval.

At the Council meeting held on 30 July, 2004 Councillor Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes proposed that the Council should consider the reinstatement of Programme Panels at the next revision of the Constitution. Councillor Mrs. Lloyd-Hayes attended the Constitutional Review Working Group (CRWG) on 7th September, 2004 and put her case. In doing so she stated that Programme Panels had allowed all Members the opportunity to influence Cabinet Members on a variety of issues. She said she spoke for a number of the newer, less experienced Councillors who were either not aware that they could discuss ward issues directly with Cabinet Members or Scrutiny Chairmen, or were reluctant to do so. The CRWG have reviewed the history of the introduction and operation of Programme Panels whose role was now undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees. There was a reluctance on the part of the CRWG to recommend the reintroduction of Programme Panels as this was seen as adding

more bureaucracy to the decision making process. It was acknowledged that more work needs to be done to keep all Members informed, by offering more briefing seminars and raising awareness of the role of the Scrutiny Committees in holding the Executive to account and contributing to policy development and determining what issues they should consider. A review of scrutiny activity for the year 2003/04 provides an opportunity to review progress to date and scope for improvement.

Cabinet has recommended that the proposal for determining applications for planning permission in relation to the Council's own developments by the Planning Committee be referred back to the Constitutional Review Working Group for further consideration.

Cabinet has also recommended that the Constitutional Review Working Group review ways to encourage more member participation generally at full Council meetings.

Cabinet recommends to Council that the detailed recommendations set out at Appendix 2 and associated documents be approved.

- 1.3 **Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (UDP): Representations to the Revised Deposit Draft** - The UDP Working Group reconvened to consider representations to the Revised Deposit Draft UDP due to be examined at a Public Inquiry in February 2005. The views of local members on representations affecting sites in their wards had been sought as part of the review. The purpose of considering representation at this stage in the statutory process was to establish a formal response so that the Council's position at Inquiry is clear.

In the majority of cases the UDP group recommended that no further changes be sought to the Plan. However, in a limited number of cases it is recommended that the Inspector be asked to recommend a modification to the Plan. These are:

- to allow more up to date flooding information to be included (policy DR7 and proposal maps);
- to include reference to flood risk assessments being required in low/medium risk areas (policy DR7 and in respect of various proposals in the Edgar Street Grid area); and
- to strengthen the reference to a possible extension of the Roman Road improvements to the A438 Brecon Road.

In addition three cases have arisen where it would be prudent to give objectors and others who may be affected a chance to comment, and these are:

- to reduce the area of employment land north of the B4355 at Kington (policy E3);
- to take forward the existing commitment to provide a landscape buffer between residential development and the Model Farm employment proposal at Ross-on-Wye by protecting land on the proposals map for this purpose between the two land uses under policy HBA9; and
- to amend mineral and waste policies (policies M3, W1 and associated reasoned justification, and reasoned justification to policy S9).

Cabinet recommends to Council for approval the changes to the Revised Deposit Draft as recommended by the UDP Group and has authorised the Cabinet Member (Environment) to agree any potential changes to the UDP arising at Inquiry, prior to and subject to their approval by Council if recommended by the Inspector as modifications to the Plan.

2. NOTICES OF MOTION

2.1 No motions to Council were considered by Cabinet during the reporting period.

3. KEY DECISIONS BY INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBERS WHICH WERE NOT INCLUDED IN THE FORWARD PLAN

3.1 **Cabinet Member (Education) - Closure of Hope Under Dinmore Primary School**
- The number of pupils attending St Mary's of Hope CE Primary School, Hope-under-Dinmore has fallen to 12 and the Governors have requested that the school closes from the earliest practical date. In accordance with Section 29 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, the Council can now formally propose to close the school permanently subject to representations and the agreement of the School's Organisation Committee. Formal closure could take place within the current school year. The Cabinet Member (Education) has approved the publication of the necessary public notice proposing permanent closure of the school and has agreed that St Michael's CE Primary School, Bodenham be designated as the alternative school for the catchment area, with free transport provided for all relevant pupils who would be entitled under the Council's home to school transport policy.

4. CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE (Chairman of Cabinet – Councillor R.J. Phillips)

4.1 Report on Decisions Taken

(i) **Proposals for a Single, Coherent Corporate Planning Process** - Cabinet has recognised the need for and agreed proposals for a medium term three year Corporate Plan which sets out what the Council intends to do in achieving the ambitions of the Herefordshire Plan, and how the Council's priorities, targets, actions and resources will achieve this. There is also a need for an Annual Operating Plan for the whole Council which makes clear what it aims to achieve in each year of the Corporate Plan and what it will do, with what resources, to make sure this happens. The Annual Operating Plan will provide the basis for performance monitoring by Cabinet and the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

(ii) **Recovery of Town and Parish Council Election Costs** - Cabinet has reviewed the charges for fees to be levied on parish and town councils at ordinary elections and for casual vacancies following a suggestion from the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) that the Council should absorb the cost of ordinary parish council elections to be held in May 2007 but that the full cost of any casual vacancy elections held should be paid in full by the parish concerned. Cabinet has noted that costs for the previous elections were higher than usual mainly due to the increased turnout resulting from an all-postal ballot. It has suggested that parish and town councils should be making early provision in their annual precepts for election costs.

Cabinet has reaffirmed the Council's policy on charging parish and town councils to recover election costs, and that the full cost of elections be charged except when combined elections take place. In this case only 50% of costs will be recharged. It has agreed that an administration charge be made on all parishes for uncontested elections but that this charge be based on a per-head of elector cost basis (subject to HALC's views), and that HALC be informed of the likely increase in costs that will be incurred at the May 2007 elections and the extra costs if the Government decides that the all-postal ballot method should be used at the local elections in 2007. This information will also include an assessment for uncontested and contested elections and be sent to each parish and town council. In view of the fact that the Electoral Commission seems to be waning in its support for all-postal elections in 2007 Cabinet has also authorised a review of all polling stations in the County.

- (iii) **The Children's Bill** - The Children's Bill provides a new legal framework which provides the basis for structural change across the range of public bodies responsible for the provision of services to children. Changes to the Constitution as a result of the enactment of this Bill are recommended at paragraph 1.2 of this Report and set out in detail at Appendix 2. Cabinet has also agreed to proceed to the appointment of an interim Cabinet Member and interim Director responsible for Children's Services.
- (iv) **Service Improvement Programme** - Cabinet has endorsed the continuation of the Service Improvement Programme which was established some 15 months ago to look outside the normal areas of service efficiencies and drive forward service improvements. To date it has proved slow to maintain the modest progress initially envisaged. The Council's predicted financial position make it important for Cabinet to commit in a far more corporate way to the rigours of a disciplined service by service programme. The Cabinet Member (Human Resources and Corporate Support Services) and the Director of Policy and Community have been authorised as the Lead Member and Lead Director respectively to deliver this programme. They will be able to establish a Project Board of officers on the basis of an initial secondment from existing duties. This should create the capacity necessary to support the savings required in the context of the forthcoming budget round. There may also be limited scope to augment the work of the Project Board with external consultancy work and it has been agreed that part of the Development Fund might be used subject to appropriate recommendation. Cabinet has noted that if the £1 million savings target for this programme cannot be met then inevitably services would be further affected.
- (v) **Review of Management of the Outbreak of Legionnaires Disease in Herefordshire** - Cabinet has endorsed the recommendations of the Health Scrutiny Committee following its review of the management of the outbreak of Legionnaires Disease in Herefordshire. Cabinet has asked that progress in implementing the recommendations contained in this report and also in the report of the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee on this matter be monitored and be the subject of a report back to Cabinet in due course.

4.2 Report on Items of Interest

- (i) **Budget Monitoring 2004/05** - Cabinet has received a report on revenue budget monitoring for Programme Areas in 2004/05. In particular it noted that:
- Policy and Finance General** - carry forwards from 2003/04 would be spent in full during 2004/05 and the ongoing costs of the job evaluation process would be met from reserves.
- Planning** - Income for the year so far is above budget by approximately £150,000 and staff savings due to vacancies have led to an underspend so far of approximately £60,000.
- Social Care** - The risk assessment suggests a projection of £700,000 over commitment (including some carried forward debt). Robust management action is being taken to rectify the position but this will have a significant impact on the capacity to deliver services.
- General Reserves** - The estimated value of general reserves as at 16th August totalled £3,724,000 incorporating the prudent reserve of £3,000,000.
- (ii) **Capital Programme Monitoring 2004/05 to July 2004** - Cabinet has noted the current position of the Capital Programme forecast for 2004/05. The revised forecast for 2004/05 as at 31st July, totalled £32,921,000 a decrease of £2,017,000 from the original budget. The revised budgets include the allocation of Prudential Borrowing (PB) where applicable. The original budget included a total PB available of £5,000,000 and from that £4,741,000 has already been allocated to various capital schemes. Due to the late allocation of funding £145,000 slippage on schemes has been identified and will be used in 2005/06. It is expected that further amounts of the 2004/05 PB allocation will slip into 2005/06 but as PB is unconditional no resources will be lost. Actual spend in the first four months was £5,618,000 or 17% of the revised forecast. Total committed spend represents £8,824,000 or 27% of the revised forecast.
- (iii) **Treasury Management Activities 2003/04** - Cabinet has received a report on the Council's Treasury activities for the period 1st April, 2003 to 31st March, 2004. It has noted in particular that the maximum borrowing limits were not exceeded during the period; the cost of borrowing for transactions was slightly above budget and the investment income was significantly above the budget; the average rate for the debt portfolio fell by 0.9%; the returns on investments exceeded the index benchmark while the net return on externally managed funds did not meet the index benchmark. In addition, debt rescheduling exercises generated substantial interest rate savings, and staff were congratulated on their efforts in this area.
- (iv) **Audit Services Assurance Report 2003/04** - Cabinet has received a report on Audit Services activity during the year 2003/04. This indicated that the Council's overall level of internal control is satisfactory and although Internal Audit has identified issues at service level, these are not material issues that affect the Council's overall level of internal control. Where problems have been identified immediate management action has been undertaken to ensure that control mechanisms are in place. It is likely, however, that within the Audit Commission's Annual Management Letter reference will be made to

arrangements for IT Security, Performance Management and the monitoring of the Herefordshire Jarvis contract, all of which are being addressed as matters of high priority. No fundamental systems were found to be unsatisfactory. Management continues to respond positively to recommendations and has agreed to take action on 96.7% of the recommendations made. A further report on areas of concern will be submitted to Cabinet prior to receipt of the Council's Annual Management Letter.

(v) **Postal Voting Update** - Cabinet has received a report on the recent recommendations of the Select Committee report on postal voting issues. It has noted that a later report from the Electoral Commission is less supportive of all postal voting.

(vi) **Local Public Service Agreement Update -**

Current LPSA - Performance Update - Cabinet has received a report on the latest information against the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) targets which shows that two targets, increasing electoral participation and implementing E Government, have already been met or have been partly met. Targets which are highly likely to be met include: avoiding harm for older people, reduction in deaths and injuries through accidental fire, reducing vehicle crime and road accidents and increasing participation in local decision-making. Other targets, including those relating to domestic burglaries and resettlement support for homeless households, are unlikely to be met. It was noted that domestic burglaries now include thefts from vehicles.

PSA - 2nd Generation - The second LPSA, will, like the current agreement, last for three years and commences on 1st April, 2005. Officers are still waiting for the detailed feedback from government department on the submission outlining the Council's approach to LPSA 2. Previous Cabinet reports have referred to the possibility of a more radical approach to LPSA 2 based on fewer and longer term targets. It is now becoming increasingly unlikely that these ideas can be developed. Cabinet has noted that a Pump Priming Grant of over £900,000 will be paid to the Council at the onset of the new agreement. Together with the roll-forward of the Performance Reward Grant from the current LPSA, a significant level of one-off funding will be available for securing major performance gains over the next three years.

(vii) **Budget 2005/06 and beyond** - Cabinet has received a report setting out the implications for the budget for 2005/06 and beyond arising out of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2004. It has noted that details of the impact of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) will not be available until the Provisional Settlement announcement, which is expected towards the end of November. The assessment of the impact locally, therefore, can only be based on the headline details currently available at a national level. The major elements which have been highlighted are:

- a continuing under-estimation of the additional cost pressures inherent in providing services in a rural setting with RSG funding;
- significant transfers for areas previously funded by Specific Grant at no cost to the Council tax payer. The position is best illustrated in the area of Social Care where expenditure amounting to some £2,500,000 in

2005/06 will be transferred, yet the Comprehensive Spending Review 2004 shows a lower increase in FSS, compared with CSR 2002 figures, of 1.4% (ie equivalent to some £500,000 in Herefordshire);

- o continued use of out of date census data. In some cases 1991 data is still being used, most notably in Social Care, to the detriment of the Council and amounting in broad terms to some £2,000,000
- o continued under-funding of Waste Management
- o real terms reduction in highways funding with an increase of only 2.5% in 2005/06 and a cash freeze in the following two years; and
- o discontinuance of £1,200,000 additional grant received last year and equivalent to 2% on council tax.

The impact of the above issues combine to produce the toughest local government finance settlement that the Council has seen in its relatively short existence. The Government has indicated that it expects Council tax increases for 2005/06 to be in low single figures. The gap between the potential increase in council tax at a "standstill" budget incorporating the changes to revenue support grant and a council tax rise of 5.5% produces a funding gap of £4,000,000. Assuming limited investment in key priorities of £1,000,000, the gap increases to £5,000,000.

The Council is taking steps to realise savings of £2,000,000 through efficiency targets in procurement and service improvements, with another £3,000,000 to be found from service budgets. It is embarking on a major programme of public consultation which will help inform the final budget decisions.

- (ix) **Local Area Forums (LAFs)** - Cabinet has received a report on the latest round of Local Area Forums. It has noted that a Local Area Forum Co-ordinator has been appointed and she will be working with the Leader and the Chairmen of the Local Area Forums to improve attendance at meetings and enhance the effectiveness of the LAFs. Cabinet has noted that Ward Members are also to play a vital role in championing the LAF meetings with the community and Parish Councils.
- (x) **Strategic Monitoring Committee** - Cabinet has received and noted the report of the Strategic Monitoring Committee which is the subject of separate report to Council.

5. AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT (Cabinet Member - Councillor D.B. Wilcox)

5.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) - Revised Score Card** - Cabinet has noted the arrangements for the publication of the revised CPA scorecard and is of the opinion that, if the Council qualifies for a proportionate Corporate Assessment that the opportunity should not be taken up. This is because it is felt that a proportionate re-assessment would make insufficient contribution to the Council's improvement planning to justify the inevitable disruption of further inspection. Rather it would be more beneficial to concentrate on consolidating those improvements in time for the revised CPA to be introduced for 2005 and beyond.

5.2 Report on Items of Interest

- (i) **Corporate Health Performance** - Cabinet has received an update on the Council's corporate performance in relation to the Council's National and Local Best Value Performance Indicators from 1st April, 2004 to 31st July, 2004. There are three areas, all relating to Housing Benefit Services, which are performing above target and seven areas where improvement is still needed.

6. COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
(Cabinet Member - Councillor R.V. Stockton)

6.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) There were no decisions by Cabinet relating to this programme area during the reporting period.

7. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, MARKETS AND PROPERTY
(Cabinet Member and Deputy Leader - Councillor G.V. Hyde)

7.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) There were no decisions by Cabinet relating to this programme area during the reporting period.

8. EDUCATION
(Cabinet Member: Councillor D.W. Rule, MBE)

8.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **The Government's Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners** - Cabinet has received a report on the DfES Five Year Strategy for schools and local authorities. The Strategy has wide-ranging implications for Herefordshire Schools. It brings together a number of Government policies and is a significant statement of the government's medium and longer term intentions from Early Years to 14-19 Education and Training and also covers control of local authority spending on education and school budgets.

Cabinet has agreed that School Governors and Head Teachers should receive a briefing setting out the implications of the strategy for schools within Herefordshire.

9. ENVIRONMENT
(Cabinet Member: Councillor P.J. Edwards)

9.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **The Herefordshire Code of Practice for the Temporary Agricultural Use of Polytunnels** - Following a review by the Environment Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet has agreed to adopt a revised Code of Practice for the control of use of polytunnels in Herefordshire. The main changes include: an increase in the distance of a polytunnel from a dwelling from 30m to 50m; use of more modern plastic materials which would lessen the visual impact of the polytunnels in the County; a two-year limit on siting of polytunnels in a particular location and a prohibition on returning to the same site within two years. Growers will also be requested to store unused polythene away from public view with all waste to be removed and recycled. The Code of Practice

will be reviewed every two years or earlier if the legal position dictates, and there will be an annual update position report to Cabinet and Environment Scrutiny Committee.

- (ii) **Service Level Agreement with the West Midlands Regional Assembly for the delivery of Regional Planning Functions** - The Regional Planning Partnership has agreed that strategic planning authorities should be invited to support the delivery of the Regional Assembly's role as Regional Planning Body (RPB). Two categories of support for the RPB are identified.

The first comprises work which will be funded by the RPB. This refers to the Council's anticipated role within a new procedure which has been developed to ensure that local authority Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and regionally significant planning applications are in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy. The Regional Planning Partnership has adopted this 'conformity protocol' and recommended its adoption by planning authorities in the region. Under the protocol, the unitary authorities of Herefordshire, Telford and Wrekin and Stoke will adopt a process of mutual scrutiny. Herefordshire will act as an advisor to the RPB for Telford and Wrekin DPDs/regionally significant planning applications. For this work the RPB proposes an allocation to the Council of £2,000. The costs will need to be monitored and there is provision within the agreement for review in subsequent years.

The second category comprises work which will not be funded by RPB, referring to cases where authorities continue to deliver functions that they have previously performed at a sub-regional level. For Herefordshire this entails continuing participation in regional and sub-regional planning through existing working structures and timetables. A partial review of the Spatial Strategy is to commence next year, and the provision of monitoring data continues on an annual basis. Along with Shropshire County Council, this Council also advised the Assembly on the inter-relationship of the West Midlands region with Wales, particularly where formal consultations arise. The Head of Planning Services has been identified as the Council's named representative for these purposes.

Cabinet has agreed that the Service Level Agreement be entered into and the Conformity Protocol be adopted.

- (iii) **Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004: Local Development Scheme** - The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduces a new system of development planning. This provides for local planning authorities to set out their land use planning policies in a series of 'local development documents'. Together with other supporting documents, these will make up the Local Development Framework. As part of the new system Cabinet has approved a Local Development Scheme (LDS) which is a public statement of the Council's programme over three years, for the production of local development documents. The scheme reflects the fact that the new system will be subject to a transitional period of several years as plans in preparation are completed. In due course the Local Development Framework will replace the UDP.

10. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION
Cabinet Member - Councillor R.M. Wilson)

10.1 **Report on Decisions Taken**

- (i) There were no decisions by Cabinet relating to this programme area during the reporting period.

11. **HUMAN RESOURCES AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES** (Cabinet Member - Councillor Mrs. J.P. French)

11.1 **Report on Decisions Taken**

- (i) There were no decisions by Cabinet relating to this programme area during the reporting period.

12. **RURAL REGENERATION AND SMALLHOLDINGS** (Cabinet Member - Councillor J.C. Mayson)

12.1 **Report on Decisions Taken**

- (i) There were no decisions by Cabinet relating to this programme area during the reporting period.

13. **SOCIAL CARE AND STRATEGIC HOUSING** (Cabinet Member Councillor Mrs. L.O. Barnett)

13.1 **Report on Decisions Taken**

- (i) **Home Point Herefordshire Allocations Policy** - Although the Council no longer has any housing stock, it needs to be able to make nominations to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in order to discharge its homelessness duty. Where an authority makes allocation of its own stock or nominates applicants to RSLs it must have a scheme for registering applicants for housing and specifying how preference between applicants will be determined. The Home Point partnership is the means adopted by the Council and a number of RSLs to determine the priority of applicants through a jointly operated choice based lettings scheme. Cabinet has agreed the adoption of the policies set out in a revised allocations scheme and that the Home Point team initiates an action plan to implement the new policy.

13.2 **Report on Items of Interest**

- (i) **The Commission for Social Care Inspection Performance Review Report** - Cabinet has received the Commission of Social Care Inspection's (CSCI) overall performance report on social care in Herefordshire for 2003-2004. The report highlights the Older People's Service Inspection but does not refer to the Fostering Regulations Inspection report which was not available at the time. However, the Fostering Regulation report demonstrates Herefordshire is achieving good standards and has a service fit for purpose.

Herefordshire is seen as one of the best in the West Midlands Region in its ability to produce assessments on children within the Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) timescales and the percentage of looked after children placed for adoption in the year to 31st March, 2004. There was some concern about equipment services and review has since been carried out which shows that the indicator performance was much higher than that reported. CSCI has been advised of the improved reporting of performance.

The Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing has agreed to a further review of the equipment service including exploring third party delivery of this service.

Certain aspects of the report relating to looked after children will be referred to the Corporate Parent Working Group.

Cabinet has requested that future reports include actual numbers alongside percentage statistics.

- (ii) **Audit Commission Housing Self-Assessment** - Cabinet has received the outcome of the regular performance assessment for the service block for housing. It has noted that the assessment has been confirmed at "four" against the key themes contained within the report. This reaffirms the excellent rating for housing and the Council.

The report also identifies areas for improvement which present challenges in the period ahead. These are: completing the housing strategy; the pressure of the provision for homelessness; producing improved customer information; completing the best value review of private sector housing and conducting a private sector stock condition survey.

Cabinet has congratulated all staff involved in achieving and maintaining the high level of the service.

COUNCILLOR R.J. PHILLIPS
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL