

REPORT OF THE MEETINGS OF CABINET

HELD ON 19TH MAY, 9TH AND 23RD JUNE AND 14TH JULY, 2005

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 is the first report submitted to Council for the current year and covers proceedings of the meetings listed above.

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

- 1.1 **Youth Justice Plan** – Cabinet has endorsed the Youth Justice Plan which, as part of the Policy Framework, requires approval by Council. The Plan is enclosed as a separate document and is available in the Members' Room, on the Council's website or on request. The Youth Justice Plan is prepared on an annual basis on behalf of Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire County Council. The basic plan preparation is undertaken by the Youth Offending Team. The format is closely prescribed. Once completed, the Youth Justice Plan is submitted to the Youth Justice Board.

Cabinet recommends to Council that the Youth Justice Plan be approved.

- 1.2 **Herefordshire Provisional Local Transport Plan 2006/07-2010/11** – The Council's second Local Transport Plan constitutes the Council's transportation policies and strategy for the five year period 2006/07 to 2010/11. It includes a costed programme of transport improvement schemes for the period which have been developed with the aim of delivering key outcomes including improved accessibility, safer roads, reduced congestion and better air quality. It follows on from the first LTP that covers the period 2000/01 – 2005/06. A Provisional Local Transport Plan must be submitted to Government by 29th July, 2005 and the Council will have the opportunity to make further revisions and submit a finalised Local Transport Plan by 31st March, 2006.

A Summary of the Provisional Local Transport Plan 2006/07 to 2010/11 is enclosed as a separate document and a copy of the final draft of the full plan has been placed in the Members' Room and can also be viewed on the Council's website at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/ltp.

When considering the report Cabinet proposed a number of amendments to the draft plan, including

- Additional text to highlight the need for an the extension of the Roman Road west and improvements to the eastern skew bridge;
- Additional text to further highlight the need for improvements to the Air Quality at the Bargates, Leominster
- Clarification of the importance of providing an outer distributor road

and the need for a second crossing over the River Wye at Hereford;

- Confirmation be included that the Council's Speed Limit Policy aims for village speed limits to be 30 mph.

Cabinet recommends to Council that the Provisional Local Transport Plan 2006/07 to 2010/11, as amended, be approved for submission to Government, and that minor editorial changes to the draft be delegated to officers with any significant changes being subject to the approval of the Director following consultation with the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation).

- 1.3 **General Reserves, Provisions and Balances** – Cabinet has received a report on the Council's current level of Reserves together with a review of the Council's policy regarding the maintenance and application of such Reserves.

Cabinet has noted the level of the Council's reserves, provisions and balances and the purposes for which they are held, and endorsed the following policy.

Cabinet recommends to Council:

- That the current level of minimum prudent reserves be maintained at £3,000,000 and continues to be reviewed annually as part of the budget process. The level of balances will continue to be assessed and influenced by the formal risk management process, which includes the corporate and service risk logs and the nature of council expenditure.
- That general balances be maintained at a level between 1½% and 3% of net revenue budget.
- That, in line with current practice, general balances be utilised in support of one-off, non-recurring items of expenditure rather than for recurring expenditure.
- That, notwithstanding the above, reserves be only utilised in exceptional circumstances, to mitigate increases in Council Tax.
- the application of reserves, amounting to £175,000, to meet exceptional property related expenditure, primarily as a consequence of dilapidation works and other costs associated with rationalising the Council's office accommodation.
- the establishment of a new provision in 2004/05, amounting to £108,000, in respect of the likely repayment of European Social Fund Grant to the Learning and Skills Council in respect of project work for disaffected pupils.

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 **Phase 3 of the Friar Street Museum Resource and Learning Centre** – Following confirmation by the Heritage Lottery Fund of an award which would set aside up to £1,223,000 or 65.62% of the total development costs to Herefordshire Council, the Cabinet Member (Community Services) approved match funding of £640,000, spread over the next three financial years, to be allocated to this project to allow it to proceed. The award was subject to Herefordshire Council confirming its matchfunding position as soon as possible. The decision was not called in and took effect on 3rd June, 2005.

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

4.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **Social Care Budget** - Cabinet has received a report of the review into the overspend in the Social Care Budget which has risen, for the period April 2004 to the end of February 2005, to £1,514,000. Although the overspend was mainly in the area of Learning Disabilities, the review also looked at budgetary control processes in place across all service areas. The review showed that there was no one single factor that had resulted in the untimely reporting of the overspend, rather a combination of factors had been responsible.

Cabinet was concerned to know whether the budget was insufficient for the demands of the service or if it needed better management.

Whilst noting the imminent restructure of the Senior Management Team and reallocation of budgets between the Children's and Adult Social Care budgets, Cabinet has decided to carry forward the maximum amount of overspend permitted within financial regulations (£800,000). Cabinet has agreed to support the action proposed to manage the Social Care budget in 2005/06 and the implications this may have on service delivery, particularly for services for people with learning disabilities.

The budget will continue to be monitored on a monthly basis until the new Senior Management structure is in place, with remedial action being taken before then if the situation deteriorates; and the position for the write-off of the overspend will be reviewed in the context of the above.

- (ii) **Corporate Planning Process** - The Council has put in place a corporate planning process, linked directly to its performance management framework that enables it to be clear about its priorities and how they will be achieved, including the management of risk and the deployment of financial and other resources. Significant progress has been made in 2004-05, but to ensure

that it is fully effective, there is a need to build on the experience of the first round and tailor the 2005-06 round to current and foreseeable circumstances. Cabinet has agreed that the corporate planning process for 2005-06 should be along similar lines to that operated over the past year, subject to some modifications.

- (iii) **Local Area Agreements** - Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are a key element in the Government's long-term strategy for local government. The Government's clear intention is that every authority will conclude an LAA over the next few years. The first stage of the process is to register interest with the Government Office of the West Midlands. A letter of in-principle support has been secured from a number of partners. Cabinet has given consent for interest to be registered with Government Office West Midlands in obtaining a Local Area Agreement and the Council has been selected as one of the early pilot schemes.
- (iv) **Race Equality Scheme 2005-2008** - The Race Relations Amendment Act came into force in April 2001. The subsequent statutory Code of Practice, the Duty to promote Race Equality, was issued by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) to help public authorities meet the general and specific duties under the Act. One of the specific duties required public authorities to assess their policies and functions and publish a Race Equality Scheme and Action Plan (RES) by May 2002 and review it at least every three years. Cabinet has approved the Race Equality Scheme and Action Plan 2005-08; and arrangements for its delivery.
- (v) **Annual Efficiency Report 2004/05** – The Cabinet has approved the Council's Annual Efficiency Report for 2004/05, which needed to be submitted to the ODPM by 15th June, 2005. The forward-looking Annual Efficiency Statement approved in April concentrated largely on cash releasing savings in order to deliver the Corporate Plan. The backward-looking Annual Efficiency Statement has had to take a more balanced approach between cash savings and performance gains, predominantly because there was no formal corporate savings exercise carried out as part of the 2004/05 budget. The expectation at that time was for services to continue ensuring performance improvement but operating within cash limited budgets and to manage resources accordingly.
- (vi) **Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Submission of Self-Assessment** – The Council will be one of the first eight authorities to undergo a revised Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) during the autumn of 2005. The Corporate Performance score will arise out of the Corporate Assessment (CA) and the Joint Area Review (JAR). Whilst the CA focuses on the corporate capacity of the Council, the JAR is an inspection of Children's Services in Herefordshire, whether or not they are delivered by the Council. Additionally because there has been no Ofsted inspection of the Youth Service, this will receive particular attention and needs a separate self-assessment. Self-assessments are the initial requirement in preparation for the CPA. In the case of the JAR, the submission had to be made by 13th June. Cabinet has agreed the self-assessments relating to the JAR and Youth Services as the first stage of preparation for the CPA.

Cabinet has received a subsequent report on the Corporate Assessment which had to be submitted by 18th July. It has agreed the self assessment, noting the prescribed format and the detailed Key Lines of Enquiry. It has agreed that all sections of the Self Assessment should be awarded a score of 3 (out of 4) except for the section on Ambitions for the Community which it awarded a score of 4 following the outcome of the peer challenge. Cabinet has paid tribute to all staff involved in the process.

- (vii) **Homelessness Budget** - A report on this item is to be found at paragraph 13.1(ii) of this report.
- (viii) **Integrated Annual Outturn 2004/05** – Cabinet has considered the 2004/05 outturn information for Best Value Performance Indicators, the Capital Programme and Revenue Budget and received an update on strategic risks facing the Council. The integration of these key areas into a single report mirrors the structure and approach of the Corporate Plan adopted by Council in March 2005 and is central to achieving an effective performance management system. The report marks a significant change to the approach to corporate performance reporting, bringing together performance indicators, risk management and financial information into a single report to provide a coherent picture of the Council's performance. The report included annual information for 2004/05 for formal Cabinet approval. Progress on performance for 2005/06 will also be reported in an integrated format at 4, 6, 8, and 10 months.

Cabinet has approved the Best Value Performance Indicators for 2004/05 for publication, subject to any necessary detailed textual amendments, and has noted the key areas of variance of performance from agreed targets. It has also noted the final Revenue Outturn and approved the transfers to and from Reserves, together with the Capital Programme Outturn and the current position in relation to key corporate risks.

- (ix) **Statement of Internal Control** – Formal consideration and adoption of the Statement of Internal control by Cabinet is considered to be best practice. The Statement was also considered by the Statutory Accounts Committee as part of the review and approval of the Council's Statement of Accounts. The following elements of the Statement were drawn to Cabinet's attention:
- The improvements made to and continuing development of, the Council's arrangements for effective risk management reporting;
 - Introduction of integrated performance reporting;
 - Continued development of the performance management framework;
 - Improved anti-fraud awareness activity; and
 - Continued timely closure of accounts.

A key feature of the process behind putting the Statement together is that senior managers will be required to sign assurances that all risks within their areas of responsibility have been considered.

Cabinet has approved the Statement of Internal Control for 2004/05, and noted that the Statutory Accounts Committee will recommend to Council the setting up of a new Audit Committee to replace the Statutory Accounts Committee.

- (x) **Procurement Strategy** – A report on this item is to be found at paragraph 11.1(i) of this report.
- (xi) **The Herefordshire Strategic Service Delivery Partnership Annual Report 2005** – Cabinet has received a confidential report on the performance of the Partnership which commenced on 1st September 2003 with the award of initial 10 year contracts to Herefordshire Jarvis Services Ltd (HJS) and Owen Williams Limited (OW). It has noted the progress made to date in implementing the Partnership arrangements and recognised that a number of inherent cultural and performance issues across the Partnership are still to be addressed. It supports the Partnership's long-term commitment to seeking solutions to these issues, through maximising its collaborative advantage and has requested a regular annual report upon the performance of the Partnership.
- (xii) **Herefordshire Jarvis Limited (HJS)** - Cabinet has received a confidential report on a proposal by the majority shareholder (a Jarvis plc group subsidiary) to transfer its shares to a new owner. The Council has been consulted on the proposal in accordance with the Shareholder Agreement.

4.2 **Report on Items of Interest**

- (i) **Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA)** – Cabinet has received a report detailing progress in developing the second Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA2) together with an update on performance against the targets agreed in the first round LPSA (LPSA1).

The projected Performance Reward Grant (PRG) level is 50% of the maximum available (approximately £1.6 million). Cabinet has noted that the PRG will be used to fund the Council's high priority objectives within LPSA2.

The Council stands to earn up to a maximum of £4.4 million for LPSA2, equating to £366,000 per target. The Council remains confident that a final sign off can soon be reached on LPSA2 despite the delays in reaching agreement on outcomes and performance measurement. The next report to Cabinet will contain recommendations and options for funding and on what the money will be used for.
- (ii) **Community Forums** – Cabinet has received a report on the June 2005 round of Community Forum Meetings. It has welcomed the report and noted the concerns and views of the public on the matters discussed but expressed concern at the poor attendance at some of the Forums.
- (iii) **Strategic Monitoring Committee** – Cabinet has received and noted the report of the Strategic Monitoring Committee which is the subject of separate report to Council.
- (iv) **Herefordshire Jarvis Services** – Cabinet has received a confidential report on the financial results of Herefordshire Jarvis Services (HJS) for the period to 31st March, 2005.

5. CHILDREN'S SERVICES
(Cabinet Member: Councillor D.W. Rule, MBE)

5.1 Report on Decisions Taken

(i) **Consultation on New School Funding Arrangements** - The Council has received a consultation paper from the DfES on new school funding arrangements. The proposals include three broad changes to the current school funding system to be introduced from April 2006: a change to the way central government provides funding for schools to local authorities; three year budgets for schools aligned to the academic year, to support effective long-term planning; and streamlining the current standards-related grants from DfES to schools. The consultation paper was sent to all schools. Cabinet has noted the technical response prepared by officers. It has agreed that a further letter based upon the Local Government Association leaflet "don't fence us in!", aimed at ensuring that ring-fencing does not undermine the choice and quality of local services for children, parents and the whole community, should be sent on behalf of the Council.

(ii) **Change for Children in Herefordshire** – Cabinet has received a progress report on the Change for Children agenda in Herefordshire. It has noted a number of actions and events including:

- a Children's and Young People's Partnership Board has been set up and is ready to set out on a programme of work to achieve a Children's and Young People's Plan for Herefordshire by April 2006;
- the first children's centre in Herefordshire has opened;
- extended Schools development continues;
- the Children's Safeguarding Board is being developed.

An assessment of performance on key indicators and a review of improvement plans are being undertaken as part of the self-assessment for the Joint Area Review.

Challenges still to be faced include the provision of six new Children's Centre between April 2006 and March 2008; the forthcoming Joint Area Review; and consultation/involvement of Children and Young People.

Cabinet has agreed the proposed neighbourhoods for South Wye, Golden Valley and Leominster, and preference for Golden Valley to reflect the rural agenda for Herefordshire; and asked for a further report on the strategy for Children's Centres and sustaining the extended school programme.

(iii) **Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Submission of Self-Assessment** - A report on this item is to be found at paragraph 4.1(vi) of this report.

(iv) **Amalgamation of Hunderton Junior and Infants Schools** – Cabinet has received a report on the outcome of the consultations on the statutory notice to close the existing Junior and Infant Hunderton Schools on 31st August 2006, and make other arrangements for Primary School provision from 1st September, 2006. It has decided that an amalgamated school in new buildings will improve significantly the quality of teaching and learning at this school and benefit considerably the area it serves. Cabinet has, therefore,

approved the closure of the two existing schools and agreed that a Three Form of Entry Primary School covering the 3-11 age range be opened on 1st September, 2006. It has also agreed that priority be given in the Children's Services (Education) Capital Budget to replace the existing buildings with new accommodation at a total cost of £6,004,500.

- (v) **Review of Denominational Transport** – Cabinet has received a report on the outcome of the consultations on the future of denominational transport, and advice on policy options.

There had been a six week county-wide consultation ending on 5 June 2005 and 776 responses had been received. The Cabinet Member thanked everyone who had contributed to the review and confirmed that Cabinet had listened to all the points made during the consultation period and carefully read the responses to the proposal.

These considerations included:

- The important historic role played by the church in providing schools in Herefordshire. This is a partnership which has been valued and will continue to be valued. There are 25 aided schools in the county and also 20 voluntary controlled schools and the Church of England Schools also have a catchment area.
- The investment the Council has made in those schools since 1998 and the sums raised by the governors of aided schools.
- The commitment to maintain the balance between places in aided schools and in voluntary controlled and community schools as embedded in the School Organisational Plan.
- The need to adopt a discretionary transport policy that was not discriminatory.
- The review was not instigated for financial reasons but this did not preclude financial matters being considered.
- Any change to the policy could only become effective from September 2006, as parents had already expressed their preferences for school places for September 2005 on the basis of information given to them in the autumn of 2004.
- The need to complete the review to inform parents in September 2005 to allow them to express preferences for the following year.
- The policy of other councils.
- Environmental implications and the need to encourage more use of public and group transport.
- The need to seek to achieve fairness in relation to secular families who did not want their children to attend Church schools.
- The need to seek to achieve fairness in relation to parents who

choose to send their children to non-catchment schools for reasons other than denominational belief.

- The legal position.

After carefully considering all the options Cabinet agreed that:

- the Council adopts a policy which provides transport for pupils occupying genuine denominational places on the basis that parents contribute;
- the new policy should be effective from September, 2006;
- pupils currently benefiting from free transport will retain that benefit for the duration of their attendance at their current school, i.e. if pupils currently benefiting from free transport then change their school for whatever reason, that entitlement is to cease;
- the Director of Children's Services be authorised, in consultation with the Cabinet Member (Children's Services), to introduce a process to ensure fair and effective implementation of the new policy especially in relation to low income families; and
- the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) and the Director to report back to a future meeting of Cabinet to provide an update on progress.

The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee has called in the decision to consider the criteria for low income families. It met on 13th July, 2005 and discussed a number of concerns:

- the policy needs to be easily understood by parents;
- the policy needs to be easy to administer
- the use of existing eligibility criteria for State Benefits (ie the use of Council Tax and Housing Benefits and Free School Meals entitlements) as opposed to setting up a local system of entitlement assessment;
- the time factors for the introduction of the policy and the need to involve the voluntary aided schools to ensure a smooth transition;
- the proposed level of parental contribution (£100) and whether this should reflect the lower levels set by some other rural councils;
- the proposal to keep the parental contribution under the Vacant Seats Policy and the Denominational Policy in line; and
- the need for a 'sliding scale' of charges, depending on the family circumstances, and supported the suggested three banded system (full rate, free and 50%).
- It also proposed that further discussion be held with the Church Authorities over the implementation of the policy and that the policy should be reviewed after one year of operation.

Having considered the concerns of the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet has endorsed its original decision and authorised the Director of Children's Services to introduce a policy on contributions for denominational transport as set out above and to take account of the needs of larger and/or low income families. This would entail:

Contributions would be required towards the cost of the first two children attending school from any one family at the same address, towards denominational transport with any subsequent children having a denominational place entitled to free transport;

Contributions being set at three levels reflecting the income level and family situation. The levels would be:

- (a) Full Rate – related to the payments made under the vacant seat policy;
- (b) Free transport for those entitled to free school meals, free prescriptions (on income related criteria) and full housing or Council Tax benefit;
- (c) A 50% contribution from those not entitled under (b), but who would be entitled to some Housing and/or Council Tax benefit. The level of this is to be the subject of further work between Children's Services and Resources and Benefits.

This advice will be incorporated into the Information to Parents handbook. The new policy will be introduced in September 2006 and reviewed in January 2007.

6. COMMUNITY SERVICES (Cabinet Member - Councillor R.V. Stockton)

6.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **Destination Herefordshire** – Cabinet has considered a proposal to establish a Destination Management Partnership (DMP) for Herefordshire in line with the West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy 2004.

The West Midlands Visitor Economy Strategy has recommended that each destination in the West Midlands should be represented by a Destination Management Partnership, a private/public sector organisation to be a single body delivering tourism in the destination.

This is the first stage in the process with the private sector currently being consulted on the proposal to set up one autonomous body to deliver tourism in the County by April 2006. There is still work to be undertaken on the financial cost of operating the DMP and this work will be done during the preparation of the Action Plan. In particular, commitment and involvement of other directorates will need to be secured and any additional resourcing implications quantified.

Cabinet has supported, in principle, the establishment of a Destination Management Partnership for Herefordshire by April 2006. It has also agreed that the shadow partnerships (currently the Tourism Co-ordination Group) be requested to develop an operation Action Plan for the DMP by September 2005. This plan will include the requirements for: funding; staffing; the delivery mechanism; the membership and timetable for delivery. The funding for the DMP will be raised from the existing Council Tourism budget, membership from the private sector, sponsorship from companies and

funding from public sector bodies. The service areas responsible for planning; environment; trading standards; street cleansing; transport and licensing will be invited to participate in the development of the DMP and to be involved in the Partnership thereafter.

7. CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES (Cabinet Member - Councillor Mrs. J.P. French)

7.1 Report on Decisions Taken

(i) **Pay and Workforce Development Strategy 2005-08** – The Council has put in place a corporate planning process linked directly to its performance management framework that enables it to be clear about its priorities and how they will be achieved. An important element to achieving these priorities is the implementation of the Pay and Workforce Development Strategy, which sets out the Human Resources themes and actions to be addressed. The Strategy aims to ensure that the Council:

- has the right people in the right places, with the right skills, to deliver the agenda and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan – improved services with greater efficiency and better customer focus;
- is well-placed to respond to environmental and societal changes, and emerging technology;
- meets its statutory obligations as an employer, and where possible exceeds those to demonstrate best and leading edge practice as the largest local employer;
- becomes an employer of choice amongst those seeking employment and career opportunities.

The Strategy replaces the former Strategy for Developing and Improving Human Resources 2002/05 which set the human resources agenda for the past three years. 79% of planned actions were completed, with 10% no longer relevant and 11% to be carried forward as part of the new Strategy. Cabinet has approved the Council's Pay and Workforce Development Strategy 2005/08, together with the Operating Plan for 2005/06.

(ii) **Integrated Annual Outturn 2004/05** - A report on this item is to be found at paragraph 4.1(viii) of this report.

(iii) **Performance Management Framework** –The Council first adopted a Performance Management Framework in May 2003. Since then and following the appointment of a Head of Performance Management later that year there have been significant developments and improvements made to elements of the framework. These have been brought together into one document, the revised Performance Management Framework, which Cabinet has now approved.

- (iv) **Health and Safety Annual Report** – Cabinet has received a report on a series of actions the Council has put in place to improve the health, safety and well-being of its workforce. These actions have been effective in identifying sickness absence issues to be addressed and reducing the employee turnover.
- (v) **Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Return** – The IEG Return is an essential part of the national monitoring process for assessing electronic local service delivery capability against central government's 2005 target and supports the delivery of priority outcomes for local e-government. It is an important feedback mechanism for assessing progress towards realising the benefits from the investment in e-government and the use of IEG funding in individual local authorities. The Council is on target for a 95% completion rate by March 2006. The Cabinet Member emphasised that the onus is on all staff in all directorates across the Council to assist in the process of IEG Delivery. Cabinet has noted that efficiency savings of £500,000 are expected in the coming year. In approving the Implementing Electronic Government Return 2005 Mid Term (IEG4.5) Cabinet has complimented the staff involved for their work and for their use of plain English throughout the document.
- (vi) **Joint Team with the Pension Service** – A report on this item is to be found at paragraph 13.1(v) of this report.
- (vii) **Members' ICT Policy** – the Cabinet Member has received a report setting out a draft ICT Policy to support members in their Work. This has been designed to complement the Protocol on the Use of Resources being recommended by the Standards Committee elsewhere on this Agenda. A copy of the Policy has been sent as a separate document. All Members have been consulted on the Policy and given an opportunity to raise any concerns.

8. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

(Cabinet Member and Deputy Leader - Councillor G.V. Hyde)

8.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **Property Strategy** - A Property Strategy has been drawn up which has identified the need for a review of the Council's property and land assets.

Cabinet has received a confidential report on the matter and has agreed that the Property Strategy be adopted for the future management of the Council's property and that Property Working Groups be established.
- (ii) **Office Accommodation** – Cabinet has received and agreed a confidential report setting out the business case for an Office Accommodation Strategy to address the operational and business issues of dispersed office accommodation.

The decision was called in by the Strategic Monitoring Committee because of concerns about the business case; amount of detail; need for independently costed (alternative) proposals; and traffic implications. The Committee met on 9th and 15th June, 2005 to consider the matter further.

After due consideration of the issues the Committee requested that Cabinet did not commit itself to the development of the preferred site as a permanent solution to the Council's office accommodation needs without further consideration; that it satisfied itself that the comparison between the options was valid from a strategic as well as a financial aspect; and that it continues to examine alternative options.

Having carefully considered these points, Cabinet has re-confirmed its original decision and agreed the recommendations of the Strategic Monitoring Committee and will proceed with that support.

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

9.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **Environment Strategy and Revised Environmental Policy** – Cabinet has approved the Corporate Environment Strategy which provides partners and managers across the Council with an overview of major environmental commitments that have been made by the Council. These are linked through the agreed ambitions of the Herefordshire Plan and the Corporate Plan 2005/06 which states that one of the Council's top priorities is "to protect the environment, including recycling much more waste and significantly reducing carbon emissions". The Strategy is backed by an integrated action plan that aligns the aims and objectives described in the Strategy with the time targets adopted for each action.

Cabinet has also approved a revision of the Council's Environmental Policy to take account of:

- The certification to ISO 14001 of numerous Council services and functions since the policy was passed in 2002;
 - The change from the initial focus on the Council's direct environmental impacts out to include public facing services such as Waste Management and Transportation;
 - Revisions to the ISO 14001 standard in 2004.
- (ii) **Grafton Travellers' Site** – Cabinet has considered a report setting out options for the future of the Grafton Travellers' Site in Hereford.

The Council's current Travellers' Policy is to refurbish or replace sites through exploring the sale of land to facilitate the refurbishment or redevelopment of Travellers' sites in Herefordshire. The Grafton site was identified as a site that could possibly be disposed of, allowing the Capital receipt to be used to provide a new site. At the time the Policy was drawn up no grants for site refurbishment were available and the entire refurbishment would have needed to be undertaken using the Council's own resources. The Grafton site has been closed since 2001 following a series of serious vandalism incidents.

In 2003/04 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) made grants for refurbishment available. Despite searching for replacement sites for Grafton it became clear that finding a suitable replacement site would be difficult, therefore a grant application for refurbishing the Grafton Site was made as an alternative option. Although the grant application was initially unsuccessful the ODPM eventually announced in December 2004 that Herefordshire had been successful in its bid for a grant, which amounted to 75% of the £400,000 necessary to refurbish the Grafton Site. Capital support will be needed to meet the Council's contribution.

The Council currently has three other grant applications outstanding with the ODPM: for two new Transit sites and to refurbish and improve the existing Watery Lane Travellers' site.

After careful consideration of alternative sites Cabinet has agreed that the ODPM grant be used for its original intention and that the Travellers Site at Grafton be reduced from 20 pitches to 10 pitches, refurbished, and the remainder of the site sold.

10. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION **Cabinet Member - Councillor D.B. Wilcox)**

10.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **Herefordshire Provisional Local Transport Plan 2006/07-2010/11** - A report on this item is to be found at paragraph 1.2 of this report.
- (ii) **Dishley Street Car Park, Leominster** – Cabinet has considered a confidential report and authorised the Director of Environment, in consultation with the County Secretary and Solicitor, to dispose of an area of Dishley Street Car Park, Leominster for the construction of a new dentistry practice scheme, subject to the agreement of acceptable lease terms and conditions and the provision of additional replacement public car parking spaces at Etnam Street.

11. RESOURCES **(Cabinet Member - Councillor R.M. Wilson)**

11.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **Procurement Strategy** – It is a requirement of the National Procurement Strategy for Local Government that Councils adopt a procurement strategy. This Council is unusual in having outsourced a significant amount of its activities, or in other ways developed strong working partnerships, and in part-owning West Mercia Supplies, a purchasing organisation. The Council's significant procurement activity takes place by either of these means. The Council's revised Procurement Strategy, which the Cabinet has now approved, will continue with this pragmatic and successful approach.

**12. RURAL REGENERATION AND STRATEGY
(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 ADULTS AND HEALTH
(Cabinet Member Councillor Mrs. L.O. Barnett)**

13.1 Report on Decisions Taken

- (i) **Social Care Budget** - A report on this item is to be found at paragraph 4.1(i) of this report.
- (ii) **Homelessness Budget** - Cabinet has received a report on the budget provision for homelessness, which shows the budget is under extreme pressure in terms of meeting statutory provision and will overspend unless additional resources are allocated. This is due to the increasing numbers of people requiring support and the costs associated with the use of temporary accommodation.

Cabinet has agreed that funds can be vired to the homelessness budget 2005/06 from other budgets within the Council which are not scheduled to spend as initially planned when the budgets were set.

The position will be kept under review and reported within existing performance reporting arrangements and revisited as part of the budget process for 2006/07. In the unlikely event that underspendings occur, then these would be returned to corporate funds.

- (iii) **Home Improvement Agency Service** – Cabinet has received a confidential report confirming that the current service provider, Anchor Staying Put, has given notice of withdrawal of the service from September 2005. The existing service has been reviewed, and a detailed option appraisal and re-specification of the service to meet current and future needs in Herefordshire, undertaken. As a result of this review Cabinet has agreed that the Home Improvement Service be operated as an in-house service.
- (iv) **Homelessness and Housing Advice** – Cabinet has received a confidential report confirming the decision by Herefordshire Housing Ltd to withdraw from the Housing Agency Agreement in respect of Homelessness and Housing Advice Agency Services. Having reviewed all options Cabinet has agreed that the Homelessness and Housing Advice Agency Services be operated as an in-house service. It has also recommended that Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee consider a review of the current state of homelessness within the County.

- (v) **Joint Team with the Pension Service** – Cabinet has approved the setting up of a Joint Team, an integrated partnership between the Department of Work and Pensions and the Council, potentially incorporating the Welfare Rights, Housing Benefit and Fairer Charging Teams. The Joint Team will support the local community to access benefits and entitlements including Pension Credits, carry out assessments on an individual's ability to contribute to the cost of social care and provide information and advice to meet the needs of older people and their carers.

- (vi) **Green Paper on Adult Social Care: "Independence, Well-being and Choice"** – The Green Paper is the Government's consultation paper setting out its proposals for the future direction of social care for all adults of all age groups in England. It is, itself, the outcome of consultation of a range of stakeholders inside and outside Government, including service users. The Government's new vision for adult social care is based on the principle that everyone in society has a positive contribution to make and that they should have a right to control their own lives. Cabinet has approved a response welcoming and supporting the vision. It has also identified issues for greater emphasis and others for further exploration and development. It was particularly concerned that the initiative is properly resourced.

- (vii) **Homelessness Improvement Plan** – Cabinet has considered a confidential report and approved a Homelessness Improvement Plan which sets out a range of objectives and actions for the purpose of tackling the current homelessness problem in Herefordshire. It has also approved the provision of Invest to Save resources of £100,000 to tackle homelessness and agreed that the Bed and Breakfast budget be used for preventative activities where investment will save money and avoid the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

**COUNCILLOR R.J. PHILLIPS
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**