

STRATEGIC (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

22 March 2011

PRESENT:

Councillors Smedley (Chairman) Hogan (Vice-Chairman), Jackson (Vice-Chairman), Adams, Brookes, Constable, Derrick, Mrs English, Humphreys, Lewin, Norman, Smith, Tittley, and Wilks.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Councillors, Atkins and Bamborough.

(In accordance with Council Procedure No.17 Councillors Greatorex and Wilcox also attended the Meeting)

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the Strategic (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee held on the 26 January 2011 were taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman,

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings held on the 26 January 2011 be approved and signed as a correct record.

PROGRESS IN RELATION TO THE COUNCIL'S IMPROVEMENT AND EFFICIENCY STRATEGY

It was reported that the Council developed its Improvement and Efficiency Strategy as part of the Strategic aim to 'Deliver through Improvement'. Actions in the Strategy brought together many of the activities that were designed to improve the way services were delivered and to maximise the value for money achieved by seeking to ensure activities were as efficient, effective and economic as possible.

The strategy was approved in Spring 2008 and subjected to scrutiny through a Task Group drawn from Members of this Committee.

The work that was initially envisaged was noted as being 90% completed and the remainder of the work represented activities that were now unlikely to happen due to changes in priorities or actions. It was noted that the projects had become part of the Expenditure Review proposals and the savings made had contributed towards the savings which were currently being sought. Given the significant work currently underway to ensure delivery of the Budget Reduction Programme it was proposed that the ongoing improvement work be amalgamated within that delivery plan.

Members noted the content of a schedule of the most recent successes that the Strategy had helped to deliver.

RESOLVED: That the change of approach to scrutinising the delivery of the Improvement and Efficiency Strategy be agreed.

SHARED SERVICES/SYSTEMS SUMMARY REPORT

It was reported that the Committee first considered a report on shared services and systems at its meeting in June 2010 and the Committee had requested that they receive regular updates.

Members noted the progress update of the Shared Services/Systems arrangements that were currently in place in **Appendix A** to the report.

It was noted that there was an growing interest across the County in increasing momentum around building shared services via an initiative known as Staffordshire One Place. This was a programme that was exploring opportunities to integrate services for Building Control, Development Control, Environmental Health and Trading Standards, Revenues and Benefits and Legal services which involved all Staffordshire Districts and Staffordshire County Council.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

ICT TASK GROUP REPORT

It was reported that during the summer of 2009 the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee formed a Task Group to review Members' ICT which developed the concept of the Technology Fund for Elected Members to procure the ICT solution that suited them best.

One year on, this approach had been reviewed and has delivered a number of benefits including an overall saving in cost. The scheme would, therefore, be applied for 2011/12.

Members would be consulted in the coming weeks on their requirements for the forthcoming year and, in line with the agreed process the Independent Remuneration Panel were being consulted on the opening amounts for the Technology Fund as part of their Annual Report which would be considered by Members at Annual Council in May 2011.

Members asked that suitable training be put in place for first time users of ICT.

RESOLVED: (1) The Committee noted the review of the first year of the allowance and supported the continuation of the scheme, and

(2) The Committee supported the promotion to new Members, post the election, of the use of their own ICT, given the additional flexibility existing Members had gained.

EQUALITIES TASK GROUP REPORT

In December 2010 the Members' Equality Task Group was established to consider changes in Equalities legislation and the implications for the District Council.

The Equality Act 2010 replaced the existing anti-discrimination laws with a single Act which included a new Public Sector Equality Duty, replacing the separate duties

relating to race, gender and disability and extending that duty to age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

The Act promoted a simplified and proportionate approach to equality commitments based on individual councils' agreed priorities for their communities and employees and moved away from the previous blanket implementation of legislation irrespective of varying community profiles and priorities.

Compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the general and specific duties was noted as being monitored and enforced by the Equality and Human Rights Commissioner, with the right being given to individuals, groups and equality campaigners to challenge the District Council.

The consultation regarding the specific requirements was currently in progress, however, and therefore the full implications for the Council were still to be determined.

RESOLVED: (1) The Committee supported the following recommendations for the District Council to continue to develop equalities in line with the changing requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and ongoing consultation.and;:

(2) To develop an organisational action plan, based on the Equality and Human Rights Commissions guidelines

(3) To continue to monitor new and changing legislation and adapt plans accordingly to secure compliance with legislation and customer service commitments.

(4) To develop an action plan to launch, promote and support the revised streamlined Equality Impact Assessment process, prioritising financial decisions being considered in response to governments spending review.

(5) To organise a further meeting of the Equalities Task Group upon completion of the development process and to report back to this Committee on the requirements.

WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the Work Programme and Forward Plan.

RESOLVED: That the content of the Forward Plan and Work Programme be noted.

VOTE OF THANKS

It was proposed by Cllr. Wilks, duly seconded and

RESOLVED: That the sincere thanks of the Committee be recorded to Councillors Smedley, as Chairman for his work during the past year.

Cllr Smedley asked that his thanks to the Officers and Members of the Committee be recorded.

CHAIRMAN
(The Meeting closed at 7.35pm)