

H REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

Developing our E-Strategy 2001-2005

- 1 An e-strategy has been developed that will help transform the way current services are delivered through the use of electronic media. Following wide consultation with the Members and Officers the E-strategy document will be presented to Cabinet on 23 April 2001.

"Better Connected 2001?"

- 2 A report produced by the Society of Information Technology Management recognised Buckinghamshire County Council as one of the top ten County Council web sites and in the top 18% of all authorities. We were identified as being a good site with useful content, more advanced on-line self-service features, comprehensive service information, making widespread use of e-mail, on-line feedback and discussion forums.

Contract Price Reductions

- 3 Prices on contracts for goods and services which were re-tendered have been reduced by an average of 3.23% (or £300,000). This exceeds the target for 2000/01 of 1% reduction in prices.

Market Tests

- 4 Following discussions with and an evaluation of companies which expressed an interest in tendering for Building Surveying and Maintenance a shortlist of four has been invited to tender. Tender documents were drawn up taking account of the views of prospective tenderers and have been sent to the shortlisted companies with a return date of the 14 May 2001. Potential benefits of the tenders and the in-house service will be compared to determine if the service should be out-sourced. The market test will be completed by end of September 2001. Other market tests under way include Highways Consultancy and Operational Leasing.

Organisation Health Survey

- 5 The results of the second annual organisation health survey were considered during the quarter. Headlines include : 98% of staff reporting they have a good working relationship with their fellow workers and 92% feeling that the work they do is useful whilst 83% felt there were not adequate opportunities for promotion and 66% believing that communication between Departments is not good. Information from the survey is being used to develop corporate, portfolio and divisional plans.

Modernising

- 6 Considerable work has been undertaken on consultation, evaluation of the pilot and development of the constitution and management structures with a view to finalising the submission to the Secretary of State following Council's decision in June.
- 7 Much remains to be done to develop new management structures throughout the Council, realign budgets and embed the new Cabinet, Select Committee and Officer processes.

Recruitment and Retention

- 8 Following the allocation of £500K towards alleviating recruitment and retention problems, initiatives are being developed in areas such as market premium supplements, assistance with relocation expenses, mortgage subsidy, bursaries for students and student sponsorship.

Green Paper on Local Government Finance

- 9 The Council submitted views on the green paper. The main points were opposition to any moves to a plan-based system for allocating Revenue Support Grant, support for more flexibility on capital financing and concerns over the proposals for local supplementary business rates.

Finalising 20001/2 Revenue and Capital Budgets

- 10 Considerable work was involved in finalising the Council's budgets for next year. Apart from supporting the work done on this across the Council, the portfolio's own budget was limited to the same cash as last year representing savings of just over £800k in real terms against spending pressures.

Replacement Financial and HR ICT Systems

- 11 Project teams have been formed and the tender process is under way for these key replacement systems which are budgeted for implementation this year for HR and April 2003 for financial systems.

Property Issues

- 12 A regular bulletin has been developed for all Members covering all major building work and projects as well as surplus properties. Capital receipts of £11.2 million for the year exceeded the target figure by over £1 million. Realising capital receipts is vital to the Council's continuing capital programme.

Disability Discrimination Act – Accessibility to Council Buildings

- 13 In consultation with partners and users including private sector charitable institutions, a process for auditing our 600 buildings has been agreed over recent months. Accessibility Awareness Training is now underway for those involved. Following valuable pilot work in this area by the Library Service, building audits are now proceeding using the Accessibility Questionnaire that we have jointly developed with our partners and refined through the training day discussions. From the building audits the work needed will be quantified and reports brought to the Council later in the year seeking approval for the resources required to implement the accessibility improvements.

Medium Term Financial Framework

- 14 Further work is planned before the summer to develop the medium term financial framework and provide the financial context for service planning over the next three years.

Induction of New Members

- 15 Following the election of the new Council, an extensive induction process is planned for new Members. This has already started with improved information for candidates.

Best Value Review of Support Services

- 16 Following the conclusions of the interim report on the Review of Corporate Support Services, an extended review will now be taking place with an emphasis on understanding the support the future Council will require, the impact of ICT on the support activities' business processes and determining the criteria for extending external involvement in the delivery of support services.

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