

H REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

Members' Induction

- 1 Following the local elections on 7 June 2001, a variety of events have been held, firstly as a way of welcoming new members to the County Council and secondly, to give all members an early opportunity to hear about and discuss some of the key challenges and opportunities that the Council will be faced with during the next few years.
- 2 A particularly important event, as part of the initial induction programme, was the Partnership Working event held on County Council day, 28 June. Some 29 partner organisations participated in this and I am sure that all members who were able to attend were most grateful for, and impressed by, the effort that these organisations had put in to their exhibitions and presentations, from which a great deal was learned. I for one hope that such an event can be repeated, and I understand that this was a view shared by many of the participating organisations.

Developing our E-Strategy 2001-2005

- 3 The e-strategy document containing our approach to delivering services through the use of electronic media was agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 23 April. Work is now well underway to complete our Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) Statement for submission to the DTLR by 31 July 2001 as our initial response to achieving 100% electronic service delivery by 2005.
- 4 Following Cabinet Member decisions, implementation of two major e-projects has started. The first is in the Library service where around three hundred Internet PCs will be installed over the next 12 months to provide free public access. The second is the installation of a broadband telecommunications network that will deliver high-speed data links to council offices throughout the county and will offer the capacity for introducing more joined up working with other councils, the NHS and other public and private organisations.

Market Testing

- 5 Following a Market Test for Building, Surveying and Maintenance and a comparison of costs and benefits, a report recommending that the service was retained in-house was agreed by Cabinet in July 2001. Work has also been completed to analyse the results of the Market Test for Operational Leasing and these will be presented to the Cabinet Member for Resources in July 2001.

Recruitment and Retention

- 6 A range of initiatives have been put in place to tackle some of the recruitment and retention issues within the County Council. These include housing and relocation schemes, mortgage subsidiary, car leasing, student bursaries, market premium supplements, recruitment events, student sponsorships, generic advertising, the employment of staff over 65 and more extensive adoption of flexible working. Whilst some of these have been applied for the last six months eg Market Premium others are in the early stages of application. There have also been a range of service specific actions which have been taken to alleviate some of the recruitment and retention problems. For example a joint trip to Canada with a Teacher Agency resulted in 40 Supply Teachers being recruited. The career grade for Social Workers is currently being amended to ensure that we are competitive with our surrounding local authorities.
- 7 The full impact of these measures will be assessed over the next few months, however it appears that market premium for example, has had a positive impact within *some* areas. A summary monitoring report will be provided on a quarterly basis to Cabinet, commencing at the end of July.

Modernising

- 8 From 28 June 2001, the County Council has been operating formally under the new political arrangements enshrined in the new Constitution. As required under the Local Government Act 2000, the detail of these arrangements has been submitted to the Secretary of State. Accompanying it was a report on the public consultation that was undertaken, and a separate report setting out how the pilot period between November 2000 and June 2001 was evaluated.

- 9 The development of the senior management structures has continued throughout this period. The Chief Officer and Strategic Managers have identified the significant areas of service that will be the building blocks to delivery of the Council's services in the future.
- 10 Informal and formal consultation has taken place with the directly affected employees, recognised trade unions and wider staff groups. A report, including a summary of the feedback from this consultation, was considered by Cabinet on 9 July. Following this a process for matching current post holders to the newly defined posts is taking place during July. Any new or vacant posts will be advertised externally with internal applications welcomed.
- 11 Work is also commencing in supporting employees to adopt the 'new ways of working' i.e. the 'whole council approach' to parallel these structural changes.

Replacement Financial Systems

- 12 As part of our e-strategy, the project to replace core financial systems by April 2003 is progressing. Earlier this month 5 potential suppliers each undertook a full day of presentations / workshops to a group of staff from across the authority. Evaluation of the submissions is now taking place in order to produce a shorter list for more detailed discussions.

Internal Audit

- 13 A report has been received on Internal Audit activity last year. It indicates that the standard of financial administration is generally good across the authority, but that there are some areas for improvement. A copy of the report has been made available to Overview and Scrutiny.

Asset Management Plan

- 14 The Asset Management Plan (AMP) is a fully integrated approach to the management of all our land and property holdings valued in the region of £426m. The AMP provides a framework for managing the property portfolio effectively; from land acquisitions, building and highway design, use and adaptation, construction and maintenance through to disposal or demolition. It follows 'good practice' in land and property management and its purpose is to support improving services to the community through ensuring effective and efficient utilisation of our assets and enhancing financial returns to the Council. This approach is not new to us, as the council has followed it for many years and included Capital Programme prioritisation, project appraisal, condition surveys and property reviews.
- 15 The main operational function of the Corporate AMP is to help decision-making by County Councillors, senior officers, property professionals, partner organisations and others with strategic asset management responsibilities. In order to do this the AMP will be continuously updated with a formal annual revision.
- 16 Aspects of the AMP of particular relevance to the Council include:
 - the use of assets to actively support Corporate Strategy and Council objectives and to contribute to the process of service improvement
 - enhanced efficiency and service delivery from wider service-provider and community related consultation / co-ordination
 - interdepartmental computerised data collection and accessibility.
- 17 The AMP was presented to Cabinet on 9 July for endorsement, with a report describing its content and development by the inter-departmental AMP Group in conjunction with the Capital and Property Strategy team. Once the AMP has been formally adopted it has to be submitted to central government for evaluation by 31 July 2001 to ensure that our Basic Credit Approval incorporates an annually escalating discretionary element for capital expenditure.

Capital Receipts

- 18 During this period, Foot and Mouth delayed rural property sales but following the lifting of access restrictions to the Countryside, property is now being offered for sale. Capital receipts secured so far this financial year are £0.96m plus a further £1.1m legally committed.

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