



meeting **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING**

date **Thursday 7th 2006**

agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PEOPLE & PERFORMANCE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report seeks to update Members on various issues relating to the People and Performance portfolio since my last report to Council.

2. PERSONNEL AND EMPLOYMENT RELATED MATTERS

2.1 Senior Officer Restructuring

Following the appointment of Strategic and Service Directors, it is envisaged that Service Heads will be in place by the end of October/November, with draft structures being developed for the rest of the new departments and finalised over the rest of the financial year. Now that the Strategic and Service Directors have been appointed, Service heads will be mapped onto these new appointments with the existing heads of service reporting to the Service Directors from the beginning of October.

A further Section 188 notice has been issued which relates to the integration of services and trade unions have been consulted on its contents. The document allows for meaningful and close consultation to take place over the ways in which we propose to minimise the redundancies and we will be meeting with unions on a regular basis via special Informal Corporate Joint Forums. The previous Section 188 consultation period (which related to the budget reductions) came to an end on the 19th June. The vacancy protocol is working well and heads of HR and Management teams are managing the flow of vacancies

2.2 Learning and Development

My previous report indicated that, following discussions at Personnel Committee, the County Council recently signed up to the Ashridge Virtual learning resource, which allows employees and members access to a significant learning resource. Information sessions have been held and we are receiving positive feedback.

Key Leadership Skills will be at the heart of the Authority's management development programme and we are working in with an external partner to develop these and a process to measure them is being developed. This should be presented to the Leadership Forum in October.

Finally we are working with the trade unions on developing a Learning Agreement which will see trade union learning representatives working with the County Council on key skills across a range of our employees

2.3 Sickness Absence

Joint work has begun in order to take this issue forward. Following an initial meeting to discuss ways in which we might reduce sickness absence, a Programme Initiation Document and project plan is being drawn up to be implemented jointly with the trade unions. This will be presented via the Informal Joint Forum for agreement. Meetings with the trade unions have been arranged, commencing August.

2.4 Children Workforce strategy

Reporting directly into the Children's Services Executive, a Nottinghamshire Children's Workforce Multi Agency Project Board (NCWMAPB), embracing all key local partners including Primary Care Trusts, Connexions and the voluntary sector was established in March. Corporate HR and the Children's Services Development Manager are actively working with NCWMAPB members to develop an interim Children's Workforce Strategy for 2006/07, based on national guidance.

It is anticipated that the refocused resources available to the council's new Children and Young People's department will provide the capacity to review this interim strategy (once the major structural facing other partners such as PCTs are also complete), with a view to further developing it into a longer term strategy up to 2010, in line with national requirements.

2.5 Health and Safety

Work is starting on developing a partnership bid for funds from the Dept of Health to support the 'choosing health' paper. Lack of dedicated resources is making this work difficult, although, a cross departmental approach is being developed which will see help being drawn from across the County Council. We are particularly focusing upon overall 'wellbeing' which is a preventative approach to employee and community health.

3. BEST VALUE AND PERFORMANCE

3.1 Best Value User Satisfaction Survey

Every three years the Council is required to undertake a survey of County's residents to gather their views about the area in which they live and their satisfaction with the services the Council provides. The County Council has combined with the seven district Councils and the City Council to employ the services of IPSOS MORI to undertake the surveys. Each Council will, however, have their own survey as a part of this process.

The survey will be conducted in September and should provide the Council with a range of information both about satisfaction with particular services and how generally respondents feel about the Council including ease of contact, provision of information and involvement in decision making.

3.2 Direction of Travel Assessment

Each year the Council is evaluated by the Audit Commission and given both a star rating and direction of travel judgement as the outcome of the comprehensive performance assessment. This year the final judgement will not be announced until after the inclusion of the results from the Best Value User Satisfaction Survey which will be February 2007.

However, the assessment of the Direction of Travel is based initially on a self assessment that needs to be submitted in September. A draft submission will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 13th September.

This will be followed by visits from an Audit Commission officer who will look into particular aspects of the Council's work. Last year the Council was judged to be Improving Well, the second highest ranking on a four point scale.

4. TRADING SERVICES

4.1 New Construction Partnering Framework

Design Services has now concluded an extensive selection process and appointed three construction partners in a Framework to deliver the County Council's capital building projects (with individual value above £350k) until July 2010. It is estimated that total spend during that period will be in the region of £120 million for buildings including schools, libraries and offices. Cabinet approved invitation of tenders in September 2005 recognising that it enables Nottinghamshire to embrace the principles of Rethinking Construction. The new Framework will complement the existing framework with Robert Woodhead Ltd for smaller works.

The Framework is open to any authority in the East Midlands, and Nottingham City Council and Leicestershire County Council have been active in supporting the procurement process. The process has involved significant input from Design Services team members, clients, and Legal Services. The Framework commenced on 24 July and workshops were held on the following two days to determine operating procedures and begin to build the team. Four projects have already been allocated to the Framework with a total value of around £12 million.

The successful contractors are:

- Interserve, a national contractor with a regional office in Leicester
- Marriott Construction, part of the Kier Group and based in Nottingham
- G F Tomlinson Ltd, a regional contractor based in Derby

5. ENERGY & SUSTAINABILITY

5.1 Sustainable Energy: Beacon Funding

Members will recall that the Council was one of only seven Local Authorities in England and Wales to be awarded Beacon status for Sustainable Energy for 2005/06. To continue the support provided to other local authorities in addressing the issues of climate change and sustainable energy the seven beacon councils have been awarded Beacon Peer Support funding of £186,000 from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Nottinghamshire County Council, as lead beacon, will administer this support programme which will include:

- A benchmark for sustainable energy against which local authorities can measure their current practice
- A toolkit providing a range of self assessment activities and options for improving performance
- An awareness raising strategy and series of roadshows
- Seven pilot mentoring projects

I am looking forward to being involved in providing peer support to the other Councils. I can also advise that I will be reporting to Cabinet later this year on a proposed Carbon Management Plan to reduce the Council's own carbon dioxide emissions.

5.2 Local Authorities Energy Partnership

The County Council was instrumental in establishing the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Local Authorities Energy Partnership (LAEP) some 10 years ago and since this time it has secured almost

£4 million of external funding to deliver sustainable energy initiatives for the benefit of people in the two Counties.

The most recent success is a grant of £379,000 from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Climate Change Communication Fund for a programme of initiatives to change attitudes towards climate change. The programme is part of a national campaign taking place over the next 18 months and will raise awareness about the causes and impact of climate change, and provide people with clear and straightforward information about what they can do to tackle it in their area.

Earlier this year the Partnership was also awarded £85,000 from the Regional Centre of Excellence to develop and improve sustainable procurement practice within the Region. The project aims to support projects from across the region that are targeted at generating efficiency gains/savings through collaborative working between local authorities that are linked to the Efficiency Review and National Procurement Strategy.

The LAEP was the first regional partnership of its kind to be established and is cited as a national example of best practice. As joint Chair of the Partnership I am delighted that we will be holding our 10th Anniversary Conference at County Hall in December where it all started in 1996.

5.3 Energy Supply Contracts

With the volatility in World and UK prices (for example wholesale gas prices have risen by almost 300% in the last 3 years), energy purchasing has become more specialised and recently I agreed to new procedures to further improve our energy purchasing arrangements.

The first test of the new procedure was held last month when we renewed our contract for the supply of electricity for street lighting. Under the new e-procurement arrangements we have been able to improve the number of tenders received and the competitiveness of their bids. We have also been able to purchase electricity at wholesale rather than retail prices resulting in substantial savings for the Council.

Last year our electricity contract renewal for street lighting rose by 65% to £2.3 million and in the early part of this year we had been anticipating further large increases. Just before the e-tender electricity prices had begun to stabilise but even so we were expecting at least a 10-15% increase. I am pleased to report that we received very competitive bids and with the benefits of wholesale rather than retail prices the cost of our electricity, which is a fixed price for the next 2 years, will be less than a 1% increase on previous costs.

As a Beacon Authority for Sustainable Energy we have been at the forefront in delivering best practice and this approach to energy procurement is now recommended by the Office of Government and Commerce following the Gershon efficiency review.

Cllr John Stocks
Cabinet Member for Resources