



Report to

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

6th December, 2006

Report of

Head of Corporate Policy

Title

Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership & Governance) Strategic Plan Update

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee has asked the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) to report back on issues arising from his portfolio and Cabinet Member Strategic Plan.
- 1.2 This report provides some information in advance of Councillor Taylor's attendance for this purpose at your meeting on 22 November 2006.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 You are asked to note the report.

3 Information/Background - International Strategy

- 3.1 Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee had raised concern about the level of staff resources available to support the International Strategy, particularly in relation to work on economic links and wanted to know how the International Strategy is progressing.
- 3.2 The council's current three year International Strategy was adopted in April 2004 and runs until March 2007. The strategy provides the context for the council's international work and responsibility for it falls into the portfolio of the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance). The strategy covers all the council's international work and work with partners and is delivered across the council's Directorates.
- 3.3 The International Strategy supports the council's corporate vision and corporate objectives and focuses on the following priority areas:
 - Peace, reconciliation and supporting democracy
 - Economy, business and trade
 - Culture, education and community links
 - Strategic development and the co-ordination of international activity.

- 3.4 A key element of the current strategy is the development of partnership work on a local, regional, European and international level, to be outward looking and promote Coventry as a city of the world.
- 3.5 The current strategy also identifies the development of the enlargement of the European Union and the changes to European Structural funds and EU regional policy post 2006 as key challenges that the council needs to address.
- 3.6 Although there will be more EU structural funding available for the West Midlands than was envisaged when the current International Strategy was developed, this will be limited. Accessing the next round of EU funding programmes for 2007-2013 will be more challenging for organisations in the West Midlands and in Coventry.
- 3.7 The issue of accessing future EU funding was raised earlier in the year at a meeting of the Cabinet Member (Finance, Procurement & Value for Money). To respond to this issue, and to inform the development of the council's next International Strategy, a consultant, Dr Jon Bloomfield from the Institute of Local Government Studies, University of Birmingham, was appointed to advise the City Council on how to maximise opportunities for EU funding and influence. Dr Bloomfield's report "*Coventry's European Future – A report of how the city's European aspirations can best be achieved*" and its recommendations will be formally considered by the Cabinet Member (Finance, Procurement & Value for Money) at his meeting on 10 January 2007.
- 3.8 The recommendations of the Bloomfield report are also being used to inform the development of the council's future International Strategy. In addition to this research into EU opportunities, a group of officers has been formed from the key service areas of the council to inform the development of the International Strategy. This work includes an examination of the council's current activity, identification of likely future policy/service areas that may need support from international partnership working e.g. climate change; understanding the future aspirations of our key partner organisations such as the two Universities and the Chamber of Commerce and mapping of sub-region and regional interests.
- 3.9 The current International Strategy highlights the importance of developing partnership networks for Coventry – both regionally and independently. This approach is supported by the Bloomfield report. This is currently being developed through two complementary routes – EU city networks and at a West Midlands regional level.

City Networks

- 3.10 If Coventry is to maximise future EU funding opportunities, the council will need to develop transnational initiatives and look to maximise opportunities for funding from streams such as the R&D Frameworks. These are not ring fenced funds accessed through Birmingham like the Structural Funds, but mainstream EU funding accessed through Brussels.
- 3.11 With this aim in mind, as reported to Scrutiny Board 1 last year, Coventry has been accepted as a member of the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities, an EU city network made up of cities from Spain, Portugal, France, Ireland and the UK – the north-west of the EU. The CAAC is keen for Coventry to be a member city - as a UK city with a different economic offer we make a good partner and have many similar regeneration and sustainability aspirations to cities such as Lisbon, Burgos, Rennes and Cork. Although CAAC has a maritime focus for some areas of its policy and funding streams, a number of other member cities are also inland, some being further from the sea than Coventry.

- 3.12 A relatively inexpensive network – costing 5100 euros – the CAAC is influential in Brussels and has good access to the EU Commission. Membership offers us some access to specific transnational funding and more importantly, ready made partnerships to access a wider range of EU funds. It also has provided opportunities to promote the city and showcase good practice. Coventry can be an influential member of the CAAC compared to our position in a larger network such as Eurocities and no other Midlands city is a member of CAAC. The city of Cardiff currently holds the Presidency of CAAC.
- 3.13 The CAAC is currently developing a new range of work streams with a view to working together on developing projects and initiatives that can access European funding from 2007-2013. Coventry has been chosen to lead the Urban Regeneration work stream and is a member of the Economic Development working group. This will be an opportunity to influence the development of initiatives and to maximise the benefits of membership and will also enable the council to assess better the value of the council's investment. As a lead city, Coventry becomes a member of the Executive Bureau. Two officers are attending a meeting of the Bureau and the Economic Development Group on 20 and 21 November 2006 to make two presentations about Coventry's proposals for future projects. Areas of activity currently being considered include: SMEs, employment and skills. Social inclusion; innovation and technology clusters; sustainable development and climate change; better partnership working and involvement of local communities in regeneration projects.
- 3.14 Coventry will host a meeting of the CAAC Urban Regeneration Group in the new year. A full report on the CAAC with recommendations that the council commits to membership for a year will be considered at the meeting of the Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) on 30 November 2006.

Regional Working

- 3.15 In addition to the council attending a number of sub-regional and regional officers' meetings on European and International issues, Councillor Taylor has been elected onto the West Midlands Regional Assembly European and International Affairs Partnership. This is a key regional body and will assist in ensuring that Coventry's interests are represented at a regional level and that funding and other opportunities can be accessed.

Staff Resources

- 3.16 The council currently has dedicated resources for its international work based in the Policy and Performance Team in the Chief Executive's Directorate. This includes two posts, one of which is currently vacant. However, international activity takes place across the council, including officers working to access EU funding, promote the city and encourage international inward investment.
- 3.17 As part of the council's response to the recommendations of the Bloomfield report, officers will be making recommendations to Cabinet about the most effective way of delivering support to international work in the future. This will also be considered by the Chief Executive in her proposals for the restructuring of the council's workforce.

4 Maximising Access to External Funding Sources

- 4.1 The Cabinet Member (Policy, Leadership and Governance) was asked by Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee on 9 August 2006 to investigate the possibility of working up schemes of varying sizes which could be drawn on to access Government and European funding on demand.

- 4.2 The council continues to work on a range of potential investment projects and initiatives – both the council’s own projects and those of partner organisations - as part of on-going planning to regenerate the city. These are not being developed specifically to access funding but because they are projects that will benefit Coventry.
- 4.3 The Bloomfield report will highlight those EU funding streams that are considered to be the best opportunities for Coventry and work will be undertaken on the recommendations of this report. As noted above, this will be considered by the Cabinet Member (Finance, Procurement and Value for Money) at his meeting on 10 January 2007.

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper	Location
None	