

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday 8 October 2010 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor TM James (Chairman)
Councillor KG Grumbley (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: PL Bettington, GFM Dawe, KS Guthrie, MAF Hubbard, B Hunt, SJ Robertson and RH Smith

Co-opted Mrs G Churchill (HALC)

In attendance: Councillors PJ Edwards and MD Lloyd-Hayes

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors AJM Blackshaw (Cabinet Member - Economic Development and Community Services), WLS Bowen, B Durkin, DW Greenow and JG Jarvis (Cabinet Member - Environment and Strategic Housing).

19. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name	Item	Interest
Cllr B Hunt	10 - Safer Herefordshire Partnership Scrutiny - Update	Personal, Council Representative on the West Mercia Police Authority
Cllr RH Smith	10 - Safer Herefordshire Partnership Scrutiny - Update	Personal, Council Representative on the West Mercia Police Authority
Cllr MAF Hubbard	6 – Update on the Edgar Street Grid Project 7 – Scoping Report for the Scrutiny Review of the Strategic Direction of the Edgar Street Grid Project. 11. Presentation on the Future of Tourism and Tourist Information Centres	Personal, Director, It's Our City Campaign Group Personal, Director, It's Our City Campaign Group Personal, Council appointee to Board of Visit Herefordshire.

21. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes for the meeting held on 28 June 2010, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

Mr Leon Wolverson asked that the Committee consider reviewing the Edgar Street Grid project in the light of the substantial alteration in the economic climate since the initial review

was undertaken, and the apparent lack of funding for the link road, the planning of which had disrupted local business.

He suggested that the Committee look at the plans for the Grid, but this time with input from local businesses.

Resolved: That the request would be dealt with as part of the Review of the Strategic Direction of the Edgar Street Grid, to be undertaken later in the year.

23. UPDATE ON THE EDGAR STREET GRID PROJECT

(Councillor Hubbard declared an interest)

The Committee received an updated report on the Edgar Street Grid Project.

The Economic Development Manager reported that the pressure on Public Sector funding was still considerable and the Government Spending Review on the 20 October should give greater clarification of the national situation.

He went on to say that the ESG project had been identified by the Joint Strategy and Investment Board as an Impact Investment Location (IIL), and as such was considered to be one of the region's twenty most important regeneration projects.

He added that progress was being made on advancing the Retail Quarter development. The businesses located within the current Livestock Market would be contacted, in early October informing them of the need to make contact with the Council, as their landlord, in order to discuss their tenancy. Potential relocation sites would be included with any communication.

The Economic Development Manager went on to say that planning permission and funding for the Flood Alleviation Scheme had been secured in 2009. In order to acquire the necessary land and access ownerships a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process had been initiated in early 2010. The majority of the CPO Inquiry had been held in early August. A decision from the Planning Inspectorate was anticipated by the end of October 2010.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

That the assets listed in the report as having been purchased with Advantage West Midlands (AWM) funds were now owned by the Council, and that the sum of £5.667m provided by AWM had been spent on the acquisition of these properties.

In reply to a question from a Member, the Development Director, Herefordshire Futures Ltd said that, because the units in Station Approach were approaching the end of their economic life, the Council had a duty to undertake a condition survey on them.

In reply to a question, the Assistant Director, Economy and Culture said that it was unclear what level of funding would be available for regeneration project from Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), but that it was unlikely to be at the level that had been initially available from AWM. There was a new Regional Growth Fund of £1.4bn available nationally across two years as a potential source of investment.

A Member asked whether public funds were being used to provide financial incentives to major retailers to come to the City. The Chief Executive, Herefordshire Futures Ltd replied that any deals that were made with retailers were between Stanhope Plc, as the developer, and the company concerned. No public money would be utilised for such negotiations from either the Council or Herefordshire Futures Ltd.

The Chief Executive, Herefordshire Futures Ltd reported that the meeting that had been had been organised by the ESG Business Association in July had been well attended by the businesses on the Livestock Market and Link Road sites. The businesses in Station Approach had been offered a three year lease less one day.

Mr L Wolverson added that at the meeting all the businesses had been canvassed concerning the way that they had been treated by the Council. No business present had been able to say that they felt that they had been treated either professionally or fairly by the Council. He pointed out that Phase 3 of the project would not take place until 2015, and suggested that the plight of the businesses should be separated from the road building project. The Council should consider the relocation of the businesses in the first instance, and look to build the road when this initial step had been finalised and all the businesses had been provided with suitable alternative accommodation. The Chief Executive, Herefordshire Futures replied that he understood the position of the businesses, and ESG Futures would submit bids for funding to allow this work to be undertaken as soon as it was clear to whom the bids should be submitted.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted

24. SCOPING REPORT FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF THE EDGAR STREET PROJECT

(Councillor Hubbard declared an interest)

The Committee received a proposal for a scrutiny review of the strategic direction of the Edgar Street Grid Project.

A Member proposed that a number of additional questions should be added to the Scoping Statement, and that the review should be extended to take place over three days. The proposal was seconded and the questions were included in the Scoping Statement.

The Chief Executive, Herefordshire Futures Ltd reported that Stanhope would be submitting a planning application for the old livestock market site and adjoining land before the end of the present year. It was noted that Members who also served on the Planning Committee would have to be careful that any public comments they might make at the review should not prejudice this application.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (a) the amended Scoping Statement should be approved;**
- (b) the Membership of the Review Group was approved; and**
- (c) Councillor TM James should serve as Chairman of the Review Group.**

25. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received a report on the final revenue outturn position for Community Services for 2009/10 and the agreed budget for 2010/11.

The Community Services Accountant reported that the total Community Services Revenue budget for 2010/11 had decreased by £84k to £9,532k. Details were laid out in the report before the Committee.

She went on to say that here was an underspend of £40k in the Parks and Countryside budget as a result of staff vacancies.

The Community Services Accountant reported that Library Services had reported an over spend on budget of £96k in the previous year, which related in the main to employee and building running costs which had now been resolved and the budget was predicted to come in on forecast

She said that the revision to the forecast for the budget for the Capital Programme was as a result of additional funding of £1m for the Livestock Market, Hereford, £1.5m for Grange Court, Leominster and additional monies for Rotherwas Futures.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- That the supplementary spend on the Livestock Market was for additional works on the project, and that £400k of the money was profiled to be brought forward to be spent in the next financial year. The matter would be considered in greater detail by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- In reply to a question from a Member, the Community Services Accountant said that the spend on the Cathedral Close project was phased, and £25k had been spent to date.
- That the Directorate management and support overspend was currently at £16k, but that this situation would be rectified by the end of the financial year. Budgets were profiled over the year, so that there were fluctuations.
- The Assistant Director, Economy and Culture said that the Council was trying to take a holistic approach to the development of the Masters House in Ledbury, and would be presenting options for the use of the site.
- That there were lines in the budget for both HALO and for a Leisure Centre, as the latter referred to the only Leisure Centre under Council control, which was in Wigmore.
- That the £218k listed in the capital programme for Rotherwas Futures would include the conservation of existing historic buildings on the site, as well as the demolition of more recent ones.
- In reply to a question from a Member regarding the use of the new Cattle Market site on the Roman Road as Park and Ride scheme, the Assistant Director, Economy and Culture said that there were restrictive covenants on the land that meant that it could only be used for agricultural purposes.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (a) the report be noted; and;**
- (b) a briefing note on the Master's House in Ledbury would be provided to the Committee before the next meeting**

26. PERFORMANCE OUT-TURN TO THE END OF AUGUST 2010

The Committee received a report on the outturns for the key national performance indicator targets for Community Services within the new Sustainable Communities Directorate.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:

- That NI 9 (Use of public libraries) was currently indicated as a red as an indicator of the expected result. On average the “real” figures show a 3% drop in library visits
- In reply to a question the Assistant Director, Economy and Culture said that Advantage West Midlands was still in operation, and acted to facilitate the channelling of European Union Funding, some of which was utilised by the Council.
- In reply to a further question, the Assistant Director went on to say that the computer hardware in the library services was purchased with external funding, but that £100k had been spent on maintaining these computers. In order to make savings in the Service, this sum had been reduced, and staff had been reconfigured. She added that there would be a Members Seminar on the 29th October which would address the future of the libraries.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (a) the amended Scoping Statement should be approved; and;**
- (b) Outstanding areas of concern should continue to be monitored.**

27. SAFER HEREFORDSHIRE PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY - UPDATE

(Councillors Hunt and Smith declared an interest)

The Committee received a report on the scrutiny of the Safer Herefordshire Partnership.

The Chairman of the Safer Herefordshire Scrutiny Review Group reported that the last two meetings of the Group had considered national indicators associated with both Anti Social Behaviour and drug treatment. He commended the recommendations of the Group to the Committee.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- That there was a lack of confidence in the Group concerning the number of drug addicts in the County, as the figures produced by the University of Glasgow were national calculations, and had a 20% margin of error.
- That the most effective people to talk to provide information and to spark debate within schools were ex-users, rather than teachers.
- That a few users were sent out of County for rehabilitation, but that this was not the most effective way of treating people. Greater emphasis was being put on the community based wrap around approach to rehabilitation through support and education. Most users wanted to do community detox in this way, using DASH (Drugs Advisory Service Herefordshire).

RESOLVED:

That:

- (a) The recommendations from the Review Group adopted by the Committee, and referred to the Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing), for consideration.**

- (b) That the two Council Members of the West Mercia Police Authority could be utilised more effectively by the Council;
- (c) That the Review Group supported the concept of the wrap around agenda, and that the closer working relationship with Strategic Housing Services within the Sustainable Communities Directorate, would provide additional support; and
- (d) That the Review Group recognised that, whilst there was a high involvement of GP surgeries in drug treatment support, every effort should be made to ensure that all GP practises in the County were part of the programme.

28. PRESENTATION ON THE FUTURE OF TOURISM AND TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

(Councillor Hubbard declared an interest)

The Committee received an overview presentation on the future of Tourism and Tourist Information Centres (TICs) in the County

The Assistant Director, Economy and Culture reported that as a result of changing tourism trends, financial pressures and the reviews that had been undertaken, it had been decided to review of current Destination Management Partnership (DMP) and the delivery of TICs service. Herefordshire was not the only Local Authority that was reconsidering its tourism service; changes were also being made in other areas.

She went on to say that less than 5% of tourists to the County used Tourist Information Centres (TIC). It had been decided therefore to provide a central hub for the service in Ross-on-Wye, and TICs would be integrated with Info shops elsewhere in the County. The majority of services currently provided by the TIC's would continue in the integrated facilities. Changes would be made to the DMP structure, with the introduction of a new Board and a new Chairman. The DMP would have links with the Marches Enterprise Partnership and with a Federation of local members.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- That the net cost of the changes was £219k, but that the plans would save £200k. £19k would be required to support the TIC function. Not all staff would be transferred to the DMP. Support would be sought from the private sector, especially around the issue of branding.
- The services of Tourist Information Centre in Leominster would be merged with the Info Shop in the town. There would be no alteration to the services presently available.
- That the situation with the Hereford TIC differed from the rest of the County, as the TIC offer could be spread across different venues, with potential to work with partner organisation to provide services.
- That the net cost of the changes was £219k, but that the plans would save £200k. £19k would be required to support the TIC function. Not all staff would be transferred to the DM. Support would be sought from the private sector, especially around the issue of branding.
- That the Tourist Information Centre in Leominster would not be closed down, but would be merged with the Info Shop in the town. The same service would be available as was presently available.

- That the situation with the Hereford TIC differed from the rest of the County, as the TIC offer could be spread across different venues. Staff would have to be redeployed.
- A Member expressed concern at the loss of the volunteer skills base that would result from the closing of TICs, and the inevitable reduction of quality of service that would result from this decision.

RESOLVED:

That

- (a) **The presentation be noted and;**
- (b) **The Committee expressed concern regarding the potential loss of skills as a result of the closure of TICs in the County, and urged the Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) to take urgent note of this in any redeployment of staff.**

29. SCOPING REPORT FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF FESTIVALS IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee received a proposal to scrutinise Festivals in Herefordshire.

Resolved: That, in the light of the importance of the Edgar Street Grid Review, this Review should be deferred until after the Elections in May 2011.

30. COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be approved and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 11.50

CHAIRMAN