

**MINUTES of the meeting of General Overview & Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, The Shire Hall, St Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Tuesday 8 March 2016 at 10.00 am**

**Present:** Councillor WLS Bowen (Chairman)  
Councillor CA Gandy (Vice Chairman)

**Councillors:** JM Bartlett, Mr P Burbidge, Mrs A Fisher, J Hardwick, DG Harlow, EL Holton, JF Johnson, AJW Powers, A Seldon, Mr P Sell, NE Shaw, A Warmington and SD Williams

**In attendance: Councillors**

**Officers:**

**66. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Cooper, Harvey, Swinglehurst, Mr Roger Fuller

**67. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor Holton substituted for Councillor Swinglehurst, Councillor Seldon substituted for Councillor Harvey.

**68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**69. MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting were received. It was noted that two meetings of the committee had been held on 19 January 2016.

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of both of the meeting held on 19 January 2016 be approved as a correct record.

**70. SUGGESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The chairman noted that further suggestions had been received from Mr McKay in regard to the self-registering of public rights of way. It was explained that two briefing notes had already been produced on related matters, and that the Chairman had arranged a meeting between Mr McKay and relevant officers to better address Mr McKay's concerns.

**71. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC (Pages 15 - 26)**

The chairman was grateful that there had been a high level of interest in the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership item.

In response to an enquiry by a member of the public, the chairman agreed that supplementary questions provided in writing would be accepted. It was agreed that responses to these questions would be included within the minutes of the meeting.

Supplementary questions and written responses provided as of 25 April 2016 are attached within this agenda.

## **72. SCHOOL EXAMINATION PERFORMANCE (Pages 27 - 56)**

The assistant director commissioning and education introduced the item. It was explained that there was a process of verification with exam results, as such there is a delay in their presentation. Therefore the results from August 2015 were coming to the committee at this stage instead of shortly after their publication.

A more comprehensive data set on examination performance had been meant to be circulated ahead of the committee, however this had not happened. It was agreed that this would be circulated following the committee. Members expressed their disappointment that this had not been circulated earlier but were encouraged to study the data when published.

It was noted that while there had been a significant increase in the number of academies and free schools in Herefordshire, as well as a decline in the number of maintained schools, Herefordshire council still had a considerable role in co-ordinating all schools in the county.

There was discussion of the role of regional school commissioners:

- It was clarified that regional schools commissioners report the secretary of state for education and specifically monitor the performance of academies.
- They have roles in identifying and responding to underperformance and also encourage the conversion of schools to academy status.
- The west midlands regional school commissioner represented a very large geographical area.
- There was a termly meeting between Herefordshire council and the regional schools commissioner. This focussed on specific issues relating to schools including at an individual level. It was explained that this was a very important mechanism in how Herefordshire council responded to the concerns of academies.

A member of the committee questioned the role of the council working with the school academy group, and how this was funded:

- The council has responsibilities in safeguarding and championing outcomes for children regardless of their location or if they were educated in a maintained school or an academy or free school. The main role of the council was in brokerage and facilitating school to school cooperation.
- The council funds some school improvement services through this service.

A member of the committee expressed confusion over the extent to which the council should be accountable and involved in the performance of academies and free schools. Central government policy encouraged the proliferation of academies and had introduced regional school commissioners as a means of monitoring their performance. As such the role of local authorities within this was questioned given their lack of control over schools other than maintained schools.

In response the director of children's wellbeing made a number of points:

- There were likely to be changes in the role of local authorities in this situation following the results of a consultation later in the year.
- The importance of children's attainment regardless of them being educated in academies and free schools, or in maintained school was stressed.
- Education is a local enterprise, as such members should look to improve education within the local area in whatever form it takes.

- While local authorities do not have far reaching powers in regard to academies and free schools' performance, a significant amount of influence can still be used to encourage school improvement.

The head of learning and achievement gave a presentation summarising key trends in performance data.

- Performance in ofsted inspections was a success across Herefordshire. A third of students were in schools achieving good or outstanding ratings from ofsted.
- Attainment in primary phases had improved significantly and were now in line with national averages.
- Secondary phases remained above national averages.
- Key stage five performance remained strong.
- A list of ten schools which were performing particularly well, it was noted that these were spread across Herefordshire and not concentrated in one area.
- The number of children not in education, employment or training in Herefordshire were better than national averages.
- Performance in phonics had improved, however were still below the national average.
- Key areas of focus included key stage one provision. While broadly in line with the national average this area was still a focus.
- The number of children eligible for free school meals was an area of particular focus.
- There was not a problem with pupil absences, rates were in line with national averages. However there were specific areas which needed improvement. Notably the number of authorised absences was above the national average.

Cooperation with other organisations was summarised, including national leaders in education, school governors in leadership. It was also summarised that Herefordshire council works closely with ofsted and HMI in leadership improvement to address areas of underperformance. Herefordshire Council was working closely with the regional schools commissioner to spread good practice in schools.

It was noted that there are now three teaching schools in the county.

The chairman thanked officers for their presentation and also queried the referral times for speech and language services in Herefordshire. It was noted that much of the responsibility for this area falls under the clinical commissioning group. In response it was noted that this was an area under the remit of a task and finish group reporting to the health overview and scrutiny committee and that this report may be of interest.

A member of the committee made a number of points:

- requested that comparable figures for previous years performance, and national performance data be provided. The assistant director commissioning and education confirmed that such data was contained in the additional presentation to be circulated.
- Highlighted the need to ensure that responses to high rates of authorised absences did not have an inverse effect on unauthorised absences. The head of learning and achievement stated that the causes of high authorised absences were being investigated and that this would be considered.
- Queried the training for parent governors offered by Herefordshire council which had been referenced in the presentation. In response the importance of training for parent governors was stressed but it was noted that much of the responsibility for this rested with the governing body themselves. Herefordshire council offers a mentoring service for parent governors however there are a number of other organisations who provide other training for parent governors.

A member of the committee commented on the final sentence in item 8 referring to the need for early intervention triggered by financial management. It was argued that financial management does not always correlate with poor performance.

A member of the committee queried the use of financial data as an indicator of declining performance and the level of support available for this. In response a number of points were made:

- Council approaches to identifying needs were based heavily on data. Support provided involved spreading good practice between schools.
- Financial issues were often symptomatic of other issues in performance but were not considered in exclusion.
- A team of advisors would previously have a significant role in improvement; however this was now largely carried out by school leaders themselves,

A member of the committee stated that there was often a delay in the production of data, it was queried if a data based approach limited the council's ability to intervene swiftly.

The director of children's wellbeing explained that in the first instance, school improvement was the duty of the governing body. However, data was not the only mechanism used to monitor performance. Soft intelligence was also used to identify problems in schools.

Where a governing body failed to prevent decline in a schools performance, the local authority does have the ability to intervene more significantly. The length of the process of intervention varied considerably between schools.

In response to a question about the use of specialist teachers and education leaders in school improvement, it was explained that the council maintains a network of specialist leaders able to support schools. It was explained that this support is offered indirectly with the council acting as a broker.

A member of the committee noted that authorised absences was a key issue and that a breakdown of how such absences were occurring would be useful information.

A member of the committee suggested that the greater inclusion of parents in the teaching of phonics would improve performance in this area. The head of learning and achievement recognised that this could be good practice. It was noted that this is practice in some schools in the authority however this is not standard. The Vice-Chair stated that these suggestions could be incorporated into the Health Overview and Scrutiny committee's task and finish group on early years provision.

It was clarified that the data presented was the same as the presented to the monthly performance leaders meetings.

There was discussion of the provision of post 16 education.

- A member of the committee noted that while large individual Hereford sixth form colleges were highly performing institutions, the reduction in sixth form provision in surrounding local authorities, market towns, and the reduction in public transport was adding additional pressures.
- The head of learning and achievement described how post 16 performance information was very positive in terms of attainment measures. However, numbers of students achieving two substantial qualifications was below national average. It was described that there were areas in the authority where students would not achieve two substantial qualifications, even in colleges rated good by ofsted.
- The director of children's wellbeing explained that small scale sixth form colleges are not effective for all students, as supported by national evidence. While these

institutions do achieve good levels of performance they do not enable attainment for all students.

- A member of the committee raised concerns that travel times to urban sixth form colleges from rural areas with limited public transport provision would impact performance. The head of learning and achievement stated that issues of this nature had not been identified.
- It was clarified that school outcomes and improvement needs, as well as year on year improvements were key considerations in the schools capital investment strategy.
- A member of the committee stressed the importance of members considering the relationship between the schools capital investment strategy and performance.

The vice-chair noted that there was a national trend in under performance by vulnerable students in rural areas compared to urban, in large part due to greater levels of funding being available in urban areas, however Herefordshire's performance remained high. The assistant director commissioning and education noted that this was a long standing issue which is well noted.

The Vice-Chair asked that a greater amount of geographical information be made available with future performance data.

A member of the committee queried if the unclear role of governing bodies was symptomatic of resourcing for governor training in both academies and maintained schools. It was also queried if this was causing issues in concerns around performance being identified early.

The director of children's wellbeing identified that there was a very real issue with resourcing in local authority improvement functions. It was reiterated that the council cannot intervene directly into academies. This is an issue included in new legislation which was currently going through parliament. It was noted that the department for education currently worked on policy that school improvement works best at a regional and national, rather than local level.

A member of the committee noted that the centre for public scrutiny was producing a paper addressing inconsistencies across local authority responsibilities in education which would be for benefit of the committee. It was suggested that there was a need to clearly understand resourcing for schools improvement.

A member of the committee explained that it was likely that the education support grant would be reduced in the near future. As a result, members should be mindful of the statutory responsibilities in the area. While many activities in school improvement and in maintaining performance were laudable; were funding to be changed, best and fair use of taxpayers money should be considered carefully.

There was discussion of the potential for increasing numbers of English as an Additional Language students in Herefordshire due to incoming asylum seekers. The key points were made:

- The number of Syrian refugees coming into Herefordshire was expected to have a negligible impact on the provision of EAL teaching in Herefordshire with current numbers of EAL students being over 1000 while the number of unaccompanied child refugees was expected to be very small.
- Unaccompanied children were expected to make up the main proportion of refugees coming to Herefordshire. As they would count as children in care, consideration would be given to their needs in school placements as with all children in care.

- Current EAL provision was at a good standard with a number of examples of good practice.
- Concerns were raised that an influx of refugees might be focussed in urban areas and it was stressed that dispersion into rural areas should also be considered. It was noted that due to the relationship between European migration and the agricultural industry in Herefordshire, many rural areas already supported EAL provision.
- Herefordshire has a different situation in terms of EAL provision compared to many other local authorities. Many EAL students in Herefordshire are first generation migrants where as many other local authorities deal with larger number of third or fourth generation students requiring EAL provision.
- Many other local authorities had disbanded their EAL provision in response to budget restraints. It was noted that much of the responsibility for EAL provision rests with schools and not the local authority.

A member of the committee expressed a number of concerns in the governance of academies, notably in reference to the training and tracking of academy governors. In response it was noted that central government was not allowing schools to convert into single academy trust and instead encouraging multi academy trusts. Due to their scale, multi academy trusts have a greater resources for leadership and experience.

A member of the committee queried what proportion of national leaders in education represented academies and maintained schools. The head of learning and achievement confirmed that there was a roughly even distribution.

A member of the committee noted that it was an unfortunate but a reality in the context of local government funding.

A member of the committee noted issues in the use of leadership led improvements in schools and the lack of resources available for the council. It was noted that this could increase the attractiveness of academy status for schools, which may be contrary to the views of the community. In response the director of children's wellbeing noted that Herefordshire does not currently host any national academy trusts but does have multi academy trusts which have developed within Herefordshire. It was noted that governing bodies differ in opinion over the benefits negatives of academy status.

The director of children's wellbeing expressed concern that regional schools commissioners had regional targets for the creation of academies which could affect trends in the conversion of maintained schools.

The chairman queried the number of children eligible for free school meals. The assistant director, commissioning and education stated that this was a long standing issue in Herefordshire. It was identified that work was being done at a regional level and that Herefordshire council was working with HMI in this area. It was also noted that a closing the gap project had been launched in this area.

There was discussion of the need for the committee to present recommendations in relation to the outcomes of a consultation on the changing role of, and resources available for local authorities in the governance and improvement of schools.

#### **Recommends that:**

- a) The committee makes recommendations to cabinet on how they might improve the efficiency of the school improvement framework and strategy, especially in relation to governance in light of likely reduced resourcing in future.**

- b) Council responsibilities for education are clarified and sufficiently resourced. Additionally, that the monitoring of governing bodies in meeting performance standards also be sufficiently resourced. Should the Director at any time find that resources are not sufficient, this must be reported to Cabinet and the General Overview and Scrutiny Committee at once.**
- c) A briefing note be produced in regard to authorised absences to inform future recommendations of the committee.**
- d) The committee consider the findings of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee's early years provision task and finish group in relation to referral rates for speech and language development.**
- e) The committee's suggestions in regard to the teaching of phonics be brought to the attention of the early years task and finish group reporting the health and social care overview and scrutiny committee.**

### **73. MARCHES LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (Pages 57 - 64)**

The chairman introduced Graham Wynn OBE, Chairman of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, and Gill Hamer, Director of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The chairman and Director of the Marches LEP summarised a number of key points about the organisation:

- The Marches LEP had been one of the first Local Enterprise Partnerships created and that there were now more throughout the country. LEPs had been intended in part to replace the Regional Development Agencies in providing infrastructure, housing and sustainable development.
- The Marches LEP represented a large geographical area and 30,000 businesses of varying size. It was explained that 85% of these businesses had ten employees or fewer.
- The Marches LEP was one of six members of the West Midlands LEPs. The Chairman of the Marches LEP also represented the West Midlands LEP at a national level.

The Director of the Marches LEP summarised a number of areas of LEP activity:

- In 2013 the Marches LEP had developed a strategic economic plan (SEP) including a comprehensive analysis of the Herefordshire economy. This had identified numerous areas of focus including the growth of defence and security industries in Herefordshire.
- a skills plan had been developed in cooperation with Herefordshire Council. This was in the process of being updated. Initial data gathered for the review of these documents suggested that the gap between the Marches and national performance indicators was growing to some extent. As a result the review of these documents was likely to be targeted to appropriately apply for continued funding. A key area of the skills plan under review was post 16 skills.
- The SEP had been used as the basis for funding applications. Funding which had been secured through the SEP was largely being used to generate housing.
- The Marches LEP had secured funding for growth and infrastructure packages for the three main urban areas in the Marches.
- A number of Marches LEP projects were summarised. Notably a large scale investment into skills and training packages, particularly targeting the food and

drinks industries. A tender for a similar package for high tech industries was also in process.

- Work was being done at a regional level in the provision of post 16 education. Notably institutions were being encouraged to cooperate more closely and operate economies of scale.
- Investments were being made in the improvement of broadband provision in Herefordshire.
- Work was being done in the provision of skills training for people not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Herefordshire.
- It was explained that the Marches LEP was in the final stages of agreeing the HCA land deal in Telford which was a significant area of LEP activity. Funding provided for this scheme would partly return to the LEP for housing.
- The Growth Hub had been introduced recently with a physical site in Herefordshire and also an online presence provided resources for small businesses.

It was noted that Herefordshire was represented by a number of private business figures from Herefordshire as well as the leader of Herefordshire council. The governance arrangements of the Marches LEP were summarised noting the accountability and assurance framework as well as the Marches Joint committee.

The chairman thanked the representatives of the Marches LEP and invited members of the committee to ask questions.

The chairman noted that the Marches LEP was currently accountable to the Scrutiny Committees of the three local authorities participating. It was queried if it would be more efficient were there to be a single centralised scrutiny committee for this purpose. In response it was explained that at the formation of the LEP there had been opposition to the creation of a combined scrutiny committee. However this was now being considered as part of a review of LEP governance arrangements.

The vice chair queried the prioritisation of resources by the Marches LEP. In response the director of the Marches LEP explained that the accountability and assurance framework outlined the process for prioritisation in how value for money of schemes were appraised and how the impacts of a project was considered. Once projects had been considered following close investigation the Marches board would decide if a project represented good value.

The vice chair noted that Herefordshire had done well in funding from the LEP compared to other members. It was queried how delivery of projects was ensured. In response it was explained that a performance, risk and monitoring committee had been formed which included three board members. The committee received detailed reports on a quarterly basis on individual projects.

The vice chair queried the extent of cooperation between the Marches LEP and surrounding LEPs, notably with the greater Birmingham area. In response it was reiterated that the chair of the Marches LEP also represented the six LEPs in the West Midlands area at the national level, and that these six LEPs met bimonthly. There were 11 LEPs within the Birmingham 'powerhouse' area. The Chair of the Marches LEP was a member of the board on the West Midlands Connect project which was the first major project of this grouping. It was noted that this project represented a substantial geographic area. Within this context it was the role of Marches LEP board members to promote investment within the Marches within the context.

The vice chair queried how medium sized and small businesses were engaged with the LEP and how their understanding of its activity and potential resources were developed. In response it was noted that the Marches LEP represented three separate business



boards who would in turn be represented at the Marches LEP. Additionally, the federation of self-employed and small businesses, as well as the chamber of commerce were engaged with. Growth hubs had been established to provide advice and support to businesses. A range of additional engagement activity was summarised.

It was queried if there was cooperation with Wales in LEP activity. It was noted that this was difficult due to central government policy. However there was cooperation with the Welsh equivalent of LEPs. Within Wales LEP type activity had not been in place for as long as in England. It was noted that with areas of the Marches being hubs for eastern Welsh areas, there were common challenges and interests in cooperation.

A member of the committee noted that there was a lack of understanding of the Marches LEP across Herefordshire, particularly in rural areas. It was noted that Bromyard had been identified as an area with over-dependence on a single industry within the report. It was described that businesses in the area were highly dependent on surrounding road infrastructure and queried what investment would be provided to pre-existing road networks.

In response it was noted that issues in the current network of trunk roads in Herefordshire was a concern. Additionally it was explained that there was investment going into new road infrastructure in nearby Welsh areas and so it would be prudent that this be continued with the road network in the Marches.

The director of the Marches LEP reiterated the importance of diversity in business across the west Midlands area and the need to support this.

A member of the committee noted that most of the projects presented by the Marches LEP were centred in large urban areas despite the rural nature of much of the Marches and Herefordshire area. It was queried to what extent were rural areas, market towns and small businesses being considered by the Marches LEP. In response the chairman of the Marches LEP explained that market towns were an important part of the Marches' strategy. In particular, ensuring market towns had sustainable futures was significant. The creation of housing enabling the provision of education was a considerable focus.

The director of the Marches LEP explained that the majority of the first wave of funding from the Marches LEP had been focussed on strategic projects in urban areas. However, it was intended that were a second phase of growth funding to be secured then this would be deployed with a greater focus on rural areas.

Representatives of the Marches LEP noted that providing funding and support for small businesses was a challenge. Much of the funding which had been secured by the LEP for small businesses was for the development of growth hubs. However additional funding was trying to be secured through European Union funding. The chairman welcomed what was being done but expressed disappointment that activity was limited in this area.

A member of the committee noted the lack of awareness on the work of the Marches LEP among members. The activity of the LEP in market towns with speed networking events which had been a success. It was commented that the growth hub had to be based somewhere, while it was unfortunate that this was in Hereford and not in one of the market towns this made geographical sense with Hereford being central to the county. The growth hub had a web presence, phone presence and conducted work in the market towns which was positive.

A member of the committee stressed that members should advertise the work of the LEP to their constituents to allow them to benefit more from the services provided. The chairman suggested that this could be the basis of a recommendation by the committee.

A member of the committee queried the publication of annual reports. While the LEP had been created in 2010, the first annual report was published in 2015.

- The director of the Marches LEP explained that while the LEP had existed since 2010, considerable activity had only really started in 2015 where the LEP had begun to implement projects it had received government funding for.
- Prior to the reports the LEP's web presence and newsletters had been examples of publishing the LEPs work in the public domain. This was an area which the LEP had been asked to strengthen and was being improved upon.
- The chairman of the LEP reiterated that Shropshire County Council was the accountable body for the LEPs funding and accounts and related documentation would be held by them.

A member of the committee queried how many businesses which had been brought into the Hereford enterprise zone had been based in Herefordshire previously. The member also asked for clarification of the wording of what was meant by jobs which had been 'created directly' by the HEZ. Additionally it was queried if there had been any foreign direct investment as the result of the enterprise zone. In response, the director ECC clarified that the HEZ was itself managed by its own board. The majority of businesses within the HEZ were local expansions. One company had come from outside from a neighbouring local authority. There had been a recent piece of FDI from Turkey and the board was working actively to bring in more FDI.

The chairman praised the number of companies in the HEZ which were expansions of Herefordshire businesses.

A member of the committee argued that there were systemic problems with the LEP in terms of governance and accountability:

- It was described that the LEP represented an organisation which was not a legal entity which was responsible for tens of millions of pounds of public money, staffed by a board predominantly comprising of individuals from the private sector. It was argued that this was an underlying issue with all other governance issues identified with the LEP.
- The representation for and local knowledge of Herefordshire within the LEP was held by the leader of the Council as a member of the board and also by officers of the council.
- Concern was raised that the report identified that the leader's annual report to council was the mechanism through which members would be formally updated on the work of the LEP and notifying members in advance over projects which would be coming forward. It was argued that member's and members of the public lack of awareness in the LEPs activity was due to the failure to properly communicate these matters.

A member of the committee queried 2016/2017 projects identified in the report. The south wye transport package quoted a new housing development. It was argued that the Lower Bullingham housing development identified within the council's core strategy was already served by the A49 linkages pre-existing and clarification was sought.

- Director, Economy Corporate and Communities clarified that the Lower Bullingham site was the one identified within the report. While there was a physical linkage between the site and corresponding road networks, as was stated in the core strategy the construction of the housing site was reliant upon the construction of a full bypass. As a result the construction of the next leg of the bypass which was the southern link road was essential to this.

A member of the committee noted that the LEP not being a legal entity may cause some concern among the public. It was asked if the LEP was still obliged to respond to freedom of information and similar requests within its status:

- The director of the Marches LEP clarified that in reality, were a member of the public to request information on Marches LEP projects via a freedom of information request or similar mechanism this would be channelled through the relevant council in coordination with the LEP. While the LEP was not legally subject to freedom of information requests the Marches LEP did provide background information and support investigations such as FOI requests and would cooperate in the formation of responses.
- In response the member of the committee stressed that this represented an anomaly in the accountability of a body responsible for large sums of public money.

A member of the committee asked for clarification of the exact hierarchy between the marches joint committee and the Marches LEP board. The joint committee had been identified as being a mechanism to sign off board decisions, however it was queried what powers the joint committee had to block recommendations.

- The director of the marches LEP clarified that the Marches Board made recommendations which it was then the responsibility of the Marches Joint Committee to approve. However were the joint committee not satisfied with recommendations as presented it was the responsibility of the leaders of the three participating councils to decide whether to approve recommendations or to return them for further consideration by the board. It was explained that this had not happened at that time, however, key decision making had only in reality begun in 2015 with key projects and initiatives going forward.
- The chairman of the LEP clarified why the LEP was not a legal entity. The marches LEP was unique given its representation by the business sector, many other LEPs had emerged out of pre-existing bodies however the Marches LEP had not. At the time of its formation there had been a number of structures for LEPs available, when advice on best practice had been sought from government it had not been recommended to form a legal entity as it had been preferred to have funding accountable by being managed by a local authority. It was described that an external organisation had analysed the Marches LEP's governance arrangements and identified that the Marches LEP had made improvements in its governance arrangements.
- In response the chairman sought clarification that Shropshire council was the accountable body for much of the Marches funding, this was confirmed by the director of the Marches LEP who also clarified that for individual projects Herefordshire and Telford Councils were also accountable.

It was asked in response to public question 8, while the answer stated that LEP accounts would be available on Shropshire County Council's website, a member of the committee had not been able to locate these and Shropshire County Council had not been able to provide these upon the member's request.

- The director of the Marches LEP explained that it would be investigated as to why account information had not been available or could not be located on Shropshire Council's website as they had been in communication with the relevant information in the production of responses to questions from members of the public.
- The member of the committee expressed the importance of these documents being clearly available as they were within the public interest.

- The chairman suggested that the member propose a recommendation on these matters.

A member of the committee queried why contracts for the south wye transport package had been signed recently despite an assertion in previous Marches Board minutes that this would need to be done earlier. In response the Director, Economy, Communities and Corporate clarified that the dates referred to in the minutes concerned were no longer relevant. There had been uncertainty over the confirmation of funding due to elections in 2015. Confirmation of funding had been received subsequently enabling contracts to be signed.

A member of the committee discussed the importance of small and medium size businesses and noted the success of LEP events in market towns. The need to focus on market towns going forward was stressed. The cabinet member economy and corporate services emphasised the need for plans to be business led.

The difficulties in engaging with small businesses were stressed, however through the LEPs activity and the growth hub more small businesses were now being engaged with than had been previously. Other than reinforcing this engagement activity it was difficult to suggest other actions that could be taken. The next phase of funding would also allow for a greater level of engagement with small businesses and market towns, additionally work with the business board and enterprise zone would allow these groups to identify their own priorities.

The chairman of the Marches LEP stressed that at all opportunities the LEP tried to engage the business board given their representation. Research was being done to try and better help engagement with the business community. However working with small businesses was difficult. The time of small business owners is very limited and engaging with these groups would remain a challenge. However, the LEP will continue to pursue cooperation with these groups as they are vital to growth in the county.

In response to a query by a member it was clarified that the Leominster enterprise zone is not a special enterprise zone despite the suggestion from the park's name. As such it does not receive the with the privileges enterprise zone status this allows as is the case with the Hereford enterprise zone.

A member of the committee noted that due to the wording of the committees agenda they could not adequately word a recommendation in relation to some governance issues which had been raised by the committee. It was noted that as Herefordshire Council was the body responsible for the governance of the Marches LEP recommendations on relation to the need for the LEP to function in an open and transparent fashion, and for Herefordshire Council to communicate this in a concurrent fashion were not within the remit of this meeting of the general overview and scrutiny committee.

**Resolved that:**

- a) The committee commend and encourage further the engagement of small businesses within the activity of the Marches LEP.**
- b) The work of the Marches LEP in cooperation with neighbouring and other Local Enterprise Partnerships, in particular the equivalent bodies across national borders be encouraged.**
- c) That the Marches LEP ensure that the delivery of accounts and reporting is made more clear and the availability of such documentation to the public is ensured.**

- d) **That the committee recommend to the board of the Marches LEP that a summary of accounts be published in conjunction with the annual report on the activity of the Marches LEP.**

**74. WORK PROGRAMME**

The chairman noted that the Community Infrastructure Levy Task and Finish Group was due to report back to the committee at the next meeting. The importance of the community infrastructure levy for Herefordshire's development was stressed.

The chairman explained that a work programming and training session for members was being arranged for the coming months as well as questioning skills training. The chairman welcomed the opportunity for members of the committee to have a greater role in the work programming of the committee.

The chairman discussed work which had been done investigating gypsy and travellers sites provision within the county. The chairman stressed the legal and moral duty Herefordshire council had in this area.

It was discussed that the inclusion of the forward plan had been raised at the previous committee. The chairman stressed that this would be included with the upcoming work programming session.

A member of the committee noted a number of grammatical errors within the work programme document within the agenda.  
The committee approved the work programme.

**RESOLVED: That the draft work programme be noted**

**75. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 10 May 2016 at 10.00 am.

The meeting ended at 1.15 pm

**CHAIRMAN**