

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 26 July 2016 at 10.00 am

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

Councillors: JM Bartlett, MJK Cooper, J Hardwick, JF Johnson, MT McEville, AJW Powers, NE Shaw, EJ Swinglehurst, LC Tawn, A Warmington and SD Williams

In attendance: Councillors DG Harlow, cabinet member - economy and corporate services, PM Morgan, deputy leader/cabinet member - health and wellbeing, and PD Price, cabinet member – infrastructure.

Officers: A Floyd – communications manager, R Gabb – programme director housing and growth, M Samuels director for adults and wellbeing, A Scott – assistant director safeguarding and early help, N Silver – assistant director communities, N Webster – economic development manager.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors CA Gandy, EPJ Harvey, and EL Holton. Apologies were also received from the statutory co-optees: Mr Burbidge, Mrs Fisher and Mr Sell.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor M McEville substituted for Councillor CA Gandy and Councillor LC Tawn for Councillor EPJ Harvey.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 May 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. SUGGESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

It was reported that two suggestions for scrutiny had been received, both relating to highways maintenance.

6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions had been received.

7. ECONOMIC MASTER PLAN

The committee was invited to comment on the proposed framework for engaging with communities on the development of an economic masterplan to secure improvement in the development of, and engagement with, the plan.

The cabinet member – economy and corporate services introduced the report commenting that the plan was being presented at a very early stage to enable the committee to engage fully with it. He considered it important that the plan was not seen as party political and believed that the plan's 7 themes should be acceptable to all councillors. It was intended to ask GOSC to be involved in putting forward project suggestions on an ongoing basis.

In summary the plan was intended to pull together the many strands of activity that make Herefordshire great and shout about them on a bigger stage to make the county stand out and so exert a greater influence on regional and national bodies in pursuit of the county's interests.

The economic development manager delivered a presentation, a copy of which had been included with the agenda papers.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

- Communication was of key importance to generate engagement.
- Guidance for Councillors as to what was expected of them and how best they could help community groups bring forward and develop proposals would be helpful.

The economic development manager commented that engagement events to date had generated some ideas but these had been quite small scale. The aim through the Plan was to identify more strategic projects. It might be the case that once documentation was produced including criteria for projects people would see the scale of opportunity and respond accordingly.

- Mindful of the pressure on public finances the plan was intended to draw in resources from both investors and local communities. The Council could not be aware of all the ideas in local communities and the aim was to capture those ideas through engagement.
- It was suggested that the retired population in the County might be viewed as a resource and consideration given to how to draw on their experience and encourage their involvement in projects.
- Consideration might usefully be given to ways of pooling ideas for economic development through less structured approaches such as a think tank.
- An inventory of strengths would be helpful. Once those were clearly understood it would seem sensible to identify ideas for economic development that would consolidate those strengths.
- It was noted that use of locations for film and tv productions could generate a great deal of tourism interest if promoted effectively. A number of examples were given in this sphere and others, for example producers of quality products in the County, where it was considered opportunities to promote the County had not been capitalised upon and where there was far greater opportunity to do so. It was suggested that there was the potential for far greater promotion for Herefordshire.
- A doubt was expressed more generally as to whether the County was making the most of the potential of tourism. It was suggested that insufficient account was also being taken of the visitor attraction the work of the many artists in the County represented.

- Clarity should be sought as to how the planning framework accommodates farm diversity proposals, for example in relation to semi-permanent structures such as log cabins and whether that framework is appropriate.
- The cabinet member – economy and corporate services suggested the committee might wish to nominate a member of the committee to contribute to the regular meetings he had with the chief executive and the director of economy, communities and corporate. Some Members indicated that they wanted to accept this invitation. A suggestion was made that whoever contributed should not be a member of the administration.
- The intention to seek to promote projects in the market towns as well as the City was welcomed. Clarification was sought as to how local ward members were expected to contribute. The cabinet member acknowledged that a mechanism for engagement with the Town Councils and others needed to be developed
- It was suggested that it would be helpful to revisit the Economic Development Strategy 2011-16 to establish whether there were any lessons that could be learned from the success or otherwise in delivering that plan that could inform the new plan. The economic development manager suggested that the further report proposed to be submitted to the committee in September 2016 could include highlights of lessons learned in relation to the implementation of the 2011-16 plan and how these might inform the development of the new masterplan.
- One view expressed was that it was important to the Council's financial position to promote economic development that would generate increased business rate income for the Council and that should be the focus of the plan.
- Another view was that there were a number of ways of achieving economic growth and the plan needed to explore all options including those which represented a unique selling point such as tourism, heritage and encouraging the many artists and craftsmen in the County.
- It was suggested that an alternative to the word masterplan should be found as this implied a role for the Council that could be off-putting to some and did not reflect the Council's role as a facilitator rather than a dominant force.
- If the committee was to review the plan as part of its work programme, as was being recommended, it was important that the plan included measurable outcomes.
- The Council should be wary of seeking to imitate initiatives of other authorities, including neighbouring rural ones, and should instead be more visionary seeking a distinctive path for the County where it would be one step ahead of others.
- It was observed that Group Leaders had not had sight of the masterplan and it was requested that there should be greater Member involvement, possibly by a small group, in taking the work forward, noting also the regard that needed to be had to ensuring local ward members were aware of proposed projects and consideration given to their role.

The economic development manager commented in response that the next stage of the plan's preparation would include arrangements for engagement with Members and with others.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the cabinet member–economy and corporate services be invited to consider the following recommendations:

- Consideration be given to ways of pooling ideas for economic development through less structured approaches such as a think tank.
 - An inventory should be made of the County's strengths and opportunities for synergy be then identified.
 - Clarity should be sought as to how the planning framework accommodates farm diversity proposals, for example in relation to semi-permanent structures such as log cabins and whether that framework is appropriate.
 - The invitation to a GOSC member to participate in meetings with chief executive, director and cabinet member on the development of the Masterplan be accepted.
 - The further report proposed to be submitted to the committee in September 2016 should include highlights of lessons learned in relation to the implementation of the 2011-16 economic development plan and how these might inform the development of the new Masterplan.
 - There should be cross-party engagement and engagement with all Members in developing the Plan.
 - An alternative word to masterplan should be found to describe the plan.
 - The plan should take account of the value of the arts and tourism to the County's economy.
 - Consideration should be given to how best to maximise the promotional opportunities for Herefordshire. and
- (b) consideration of the draft economic masterplan be added to the committee's work programme for September 2016 together with an annual review of the effectiveness of the plan thereafter.

(The meeting adjourned between 11.50am and 12noon)

8. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY 2016-19

The committee was asked to consider the communication strategy with associated communication protocols for the period 2016-2019 and whether to make any recommendations to inform cabinet's consideration of the strategy.

The cabinet member – economy and corporate services introduced the report. He commented on the importance of ensuring that the council's priorities and values were clearly communicated and understood. He observed that if the council was to move all offline transactions onto a website platform it could save up to £7m per year in transaction costs.

The Communications Manager gave a presentation, a copy of which had been circulated with the agenda papers. In discussion the following principal points were made:

- The Communications Manager acknowledged that not all residents had internet access and would wish to use that method of communication. She also confirmed that the accessibility of the website would be tested to ensure that it complied with relevant standards. Focus groups and user testing would be taking place.
- The use of a chat facility was to be encouraged taking into account how an operator's time can most effectively be used. The Communications Manager

commented that there were plans for a chat facility to be introduced after the initial phase of website development.

- Clarification should be provided as to how it is intended to implement the “spend within our means” approach outlined in section 3 of the strategy at appendix 1 to the report at p41 of the agenda papers: “making tough but necessary choices which will include ceasing to provide some services and working with communities to help them run services important to them”;
- The opportunity for the community to interact on-line quickly and easily should be fully explored;
- It was requested that clarification be provided on what was meant when the documentation referred to “the Council” as the term was currently sometimes applied to Members as a whole sometimes to officers and at other times to the administration or the executive. It was important that it was clear on whose behalf communications were being issued.
- Some dissatisfaction was expressed about the working protocols for elected members. It was suggested that these were unduly restrictive and implied the exercise of a centralised control over all communications. The assistant director communities replied that the various representational roles of members were recognised and the protocol was not intended to inhibit members in fulfilling those roles. Members proposed that the communication protocols should be subject to further consideration and a further report on them made to the Committee;
- The wording of paragraph 5.13 of appendix 2 to the report relating to the access of the press to premises be reviewed and clarified.

RESOLVED:

- That**
- (a) the communication protocols be subject to further clarification and consideration and a further report on them made to the Committee; and**
 - (b) that, subject to a above, the following recommendations be made to inform cabinet’s consideration of the strategy communication strategy with associated communication protocols for the period 2016-2019:**
 - **the use of a chat facility on the website should be pursued taking into account how an operator’s time can most effectively be used;**
 - **the opportunity for the community to interact on-line quickly and easily should be fully explored;**
 - **clarification be provided as to how it is intended to implement the “spend within our means” approach outlined in section 3 of the strategy at appendix 1 to the report at p41 of the agenda papers: “making tough but necessary choices which will include ceasing to provide some services and working with communities to help them run services important to them”;**
 - **the wording of paragraph 5.13 of appendix 2 to the report relating to the access of the press to premises be reviewed and clarified.**

9. DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME AND TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

The committee considered its work programme.

The chairman highlighted that Appendix 1 to the report set out the topics that had been identified as priorities at the work programme workshop in May and proposed a way of addressing each one. He invited the committee to endorse the proposed approach.

He also drew attention to paragraph 13 of the report which identified two additional subjects that the Committee was invited to consider adding to the work programme: the draft highways maintenance plan and a spotlight review of phosphates issues.

In relation to phosphates issues he added that since the publication of the agenda it had transpired that the Nutrient Management Plan Board had previously agreed to hold a joint seminar for Herefordshire/Powys councillors. All the relevant organisations had agreed to participate and provide presentations. The aim was for the seminar to be held in September. To avoid duplication it was proposed to await the outcome of this event before deciding if any scrutiny work was necessary.

Several members commented on the importance of considering phosphates issues promptly. It was also questioned whether a spotlight review would be sufficient. The chairman acknowledged these concerns and confirmed that it was intended that the approach to scrutiny of the issue would be discussed following the seminar.

He also drew attention to Appendix 3, prepared at members' request to show progress in response to recommendations the committee had made.

In relation to the proposed task and finish group on customer services/libraries it was reported that a report was due for cabinet in September. This did not allow time for a full task and finish group. It was proposed that further consideration be given to how best to take this matter forward.

Finally the chairman reported that it was also proposed to add a budget and policy framework item: Statement of community involvement consultation, to the agenda for 5 September.

RESOLVED: That the actions proposed in appendix 1 to the report be endorsed and the work programme at appendix 2 to the report, as amended, be approved.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting was 5 September 2016.

The meeting ended at 1.06 pm

CHAIRMAN