

**MINUTES of the meeting of Social & Economic Development Scrutiny Committee held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Thursday, 4th September, 2003 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:** Councillor Chris Chappell (Chairman)  
Councillor John Stone (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: H. Bramer, M.R. Cunningham, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, J.G.S. Guthrie, Mrs. R.F. Lincoln, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes and P. G. Turpin  
Non-voting Co-opted Members: Mrs. E. Newman (HALC) D. Stevens (Chamber of Commerce), Mr P. Thomas (Herefordshire NFU).

**In attendance:** Councillors Mrs. P.A. Andrews, D.J. Fleet and P.E. Harling G. V. Hyde (Cabinet Member – Economic Development Markets and Property), J.C. Mayson (Cabinet Member – Rural Regeneration and Smallholdings), R. V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community and Social Development).  
External Expert Advisors: Mr A. Curless, Mr P. Collins, Mrs D. Gittoes, Mr A. Glover.

**12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor R.B.A. Burke and Councillor A.L. Williams.

**13. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)**

Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie substituted for Councillor R.B.A. Burke and Councillor Mrs M.D. Lloyd-Hayes substituted for Councillor A.L. Williams.

**14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**15. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 19th June, 2003 be approved

**16. CHAIRMANS REPORT ON MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF OUTSIDE BODIES**

The Chairman reported that since the June meeting he and the Vice-Chairman had met informally with a number of business and service provider representatives to ascertain the possibility of establishing a body of external expert advisors. These advisors could be invited to attend specific meetings to advise the Committee from an external service user or provider perspective and to provide insight on particular item. The Chairman reported that sixteen people had agreed to undertake this role and he welcomed four of them: Mr A Curless, Mr P. Collins, Mrs D. Gittoes and Mr A. Glover to the meeting.

The Committee agreed that it would be useful to have a body of external expert advisors from which to seek either information or a wider opinion on specific issues.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted and the suggestion that external expert advisors be called upon on an ad hoc basis to advise the Committee on specific issues be approved.**

**17. PRESENTATION BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MARKETS AND PROPERTY**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor G. V. Hyde, Cabinet Member for Economic Development Markets and Property, to the meeting and invited him to present his aspirations for his programme area.

Councillor Hyde emphasised that he would outline his own current thinking. However, it would be for the Executive as a whole to form a collective view on a number of these issues in due course.

Currently he foresaw no significant change to the general policies contained in documents over the last 12 months.

He wished to see an increase in the marketing and promotion of Herefordshire to attract businesses, particularly those in the more modern higher paid sectors. He recognised that a number of Business Parks in the County were outside the control of the Council. However, he advocated a closer relationship with these parks in the promotion of the County. In this context he had great hopes for the Morton-on-Lugg site with its access to the railway and the A49. He also wished to see greater co-operation and co-ordination between Property Management and Economic Development.

He was anxious to improve the overall road structure throughout the County but saw a real need to improve transport around the City. While other trading estates in the County were not in the control of the Council, he thought access to these also needed improvement. Responding to a question regarding access to the Rotherwas Industrial Estate he acknowledged that there had been an improvement to the bus service for the area and that a 'Green Travel Plan' had been formulated. Improving the movement of freight was a difficult issue, as this would affect the national road network.

He hoped that the impetus would be maintained regarding the 'Edgar Street Grid' development. This was a major opportunity to develop new job opportunities and attract tourists and visitors to the City and County. He expressed disappointment that some opponents to the development did not wish to see a food retail element included. He commented that this was only one element in a multi million pound development for the City, which should also bring important benefits for the County.

He wished to see the Council working closely with the Hereford City Centre Partnership to upgrade and reconstitute the City centre to attract more visitors. He invited anyone to put forward ideas to improve the future economic prosperity of the County.

He was keen on the idea of Lifelong Learning and the development of a Learning Village and would be exploring further, together with the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development), how the Council, in partnership with other agencies i.e. the Learning and Skills Council, could improve the chances of attracting to the County full time jobs with good career progression.

In response to a question regarding the potential sale of Council properties, he commented that the whole portfolio of properties would be reviewed and that some may have to be sold to facilitate the better management of accommodation for Council staff.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Hyde for his presentation.

**18. PRESENTATION BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR RURAL REGENERATION AND SMALLHOLDINGS**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor J.C. Mayson, Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration and Smallholdings), to the meeting and invited him to present his aspirations for his programme area.

Councillor Mayson commented that the role of Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration) was a new appointment and his precise programme area, particularly its relationship to the other Cabinet programme areas, was still being established. The cross cutting nature meant that much of his role needed to focus on co-ordination and influence.

In relation to Smallholdings Councillor Mayson reported that he was actively looking at issues surrounding this subject and that a report would be produced in due course, though this aspect of his role sat within the remit of another Cabinet Member.

He briefly described the economic background to the County, including data on earnings and house prices, and emphasised the need to maximise external income to the County. The decline in agricultural employment and the change in agricultural practices had had a knock on effect to the rural economy. He considered that the wider picture now needed to be viewed on rural businesses. While the County had a number of large important companies, small firms were making a significant contribution to the local economy.

He commented that external funding for projects was essential, for example via Objective 2 and Rural Regeneration Zone (RRZ). However, nationally, competition for external funding was becoming even more intense and the cost of working up a funding bid more costly and complex. He also commented that while Government thinking seemed to be changing in relation to 'Rural Proofing' funding packages, he hoped that further funding opportunities would be made available.

In response to a question regarding seeking European funding, Councillor Mayson commented that the Council was well placed and experienced in unlocking funding opportunities. However, it needed to be aware of the costs of administering any successful bid, and the unlikelihood that such funding would be available beyond the life of the current Objective 2 programme.

In reply to a comment regarding the need for integrated transport links, Councillor Mayson acknowledged the clear signal given by existing schemes. However, unless one had a car, transport in rural areas was difficult and he currently had reservations about introducing further similar schemes.

Councillor Mayson was asked for his thoughts on the planning system in relation to future developments. He commented that, in some cases, innovative ideas had been constrained by planning rules and guidance. He also briefly commented upon the shortage of affordable rural housing.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Mayson for his presentation, particularly in view of the embryonic nature of the programme area. He also mentioned that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had given the go ahead for the Claston Farm development at Dormington, and he thanked the Head of Community and Economic Development and his team for their valuable contribution to the project.

## **19. PRESENTATION BY THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor R.V. Stockton, Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development), to the meeting and invited him to present his aspirations for his programme area.

Councillor Stockton commented that his programme area was comprised of a large collection of small services. Although each service was under funded, the creative use of budgets enabled the current level of service to be provided.

He briefly outlined issues surrounding the following services:

Libraries – this area was to be discussed in greater depth later on the agenda. However, he

expressed a wish that any new library for Hereford be sited in the proposed 'Edgar Street Grid' development. It was accepted that while 'local heritage collections' had not been significantly added to of late, greater emphasis would in the future be given to this area of the library collection.

Replacement Swimming Pool for North Herefordshire – he outlined the history to this item and commented that following the recent Cabinet decision regarding the provision of a replacement pool, project management arrangements were being established and the County Treasurer had been requested to report. He commented on the very high percentage of people in Leominster who regarded it as a number one priority.

Wesleyan Chapel, Kington – following a site visit by Cabinet, a business plan for the project was awaited. The project, should it proceed, could attract a large amount of external finance and bring the Grade II listed building back into use as a library and info centre. The top floor could be used by private business, which would help offset some of the revenue costs.

Archives and Churchill House – he reiterated the logic of relocating the museum collection from Churchill House to the new Heritage store facility at Friar Street. Churchill House was currently let under a lease to the Art College.

Tourism – he awaited with interest the work of the new Tourism Co-ordination Group. Following the Best Value Review the Group had been formed to address the recommendation that a management group be formed to oversee tourism development in the County.

Parks and Countryside – he acknowledged the budgetary difficulties faced by this service, particularly in relation to the cost of maintaining adopted land/play areas and income in contract prices which were beyond the scope of budgetary uplifts.

Leisure Recreation & Sport – he informed the Committee that a report on the first year of operation by Halo, the Herefordshire Leisure Trust, was expected to be presented to the October Scrutiny Committee.

Cultural Services – he commented upon the importance of providing cultural facilities and opportunities both for local residents, particularly young people, and visitors to the County. He acknowledged the important work undertaken by the Tourism Cultural Consortium in attracting and guiding finance into the tourism sector.

Youth Service – he recognised the difficulties experienced in this service, caused, to a large degree, by the service's long-term inability to recruit staff. A review of the service was underway. He commented that the review may indicate that the service needed a change of emphasis to its service provision and the need to build closer partnership working with other agencies.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Stockton for his presentation.

**20. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REVENUE BUDGET OUT-TURN 2002/03 AND BUDGET MONITORING 2003/04, PERIOD 1-4**

The Committee were advised of the revenue budget out-turn 2002/03 and actual net revenue expenditure against budgets for Social and Economic Development service areas to period 4 of the financial year 2003-2004.

The Principal Accountancy Manager presented a report, and an attached appendix, indicating the revised budget, including carried forward over and underspends from 2002-03 with actual performance, variance and projected out-turns for the main service areas within Social and Economic Development. He commented upon a number of areas of concern, which had been highlighted in the report.

On scrutinising the budget monitoring report a question was raised regarding the budgetary process concerning the grounds maintenance overspend. In reply the Principal Accountancy Manager reported that the contracts were subject to higher inflationary increases than accounted for in the Council's budgets. It was further questioned whether consideration had been given to transferring the responsibility for mowing of small open spaces in rural areas to town or parish councils. The Director of Policy and Community reported that this issue was under consideration. However, she felt it would be financially constraining to separate out any further the already small budget.

**RESOLVED: That the report on the Social and Economic Development Revenue Budget out-turn and Budget Monitoring 2003/04 period 1-4 be noted.**

**21. ADULT LEARNING INSPECTION OF HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL'S ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICE**

The Committee received a report on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's inspection of the Council's Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision, and proposed actions of the Lifelong Learning Development Unit (LLDU) to address issues arising from the inspection report.

The Policy and Commissioning Manager reported that Herefordshire Council received funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide learning opportunities in Herefordshire. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspects the quality of education and training received by adult learners and young people in England. The Council's adult learning provision had been inspected for the first time by the ALI in January 2003 and a report of its findings had been published in April 2003. A number of significant strengths were identified. However, there were a number of key weaknesses, which primarily related to the need to improve quality assurance and equal opportunity monitoring processes, the level of resources currently available to properly manage the service, and how this could affect any future expansion of the service to meet need. The ALI considered that the quality of provision was not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it and that a re-inspection would be undertaken, now reported to commence in early 2004. Following the inspection the LLDU had drawn up a Post Inspection Action Plan, integral to which would be the development of an annual Adult Learning Plan (ALP) and the progress of the planned restructuring of the LLDU.

The Director of Policy and Community highlighted that the level of funding received by Herefordshire Council to support adult learning was significantly lower than the national average. This was a result of current grant allocation levels being based on spend in this area by the former Hereford and Worcester County Council. She also remarked that this was in common with many rural authorities. Officers of the Council, together with the Local LSC had engaged with the national LSC to explore opportunities to redress this inequity. However, current indications were that funding allocations would move towards formula funding, based on student numbers, which was unlikely to redress the base funding issues. She sought the support of the Committee for the actions being taken in support of the funding issues.

Mr Curless, Chief Executive, Hereford and Worcester LSC, expressed his dissatisfaction with the current funding levels which placed severe restraints on funding for the various learning areas. While the local LSC would be taking up the issue with the National LSC he would appreciate any further support from the Council.

In the course of debating the report the Committee supported an earlier view that it was important that the County had a good local learning and skills base to help attract new businesses into the area and provide re-training opportunities for of the local work force.

**RESOLVED:**

**That**

- (a) the Committee support the actions of the Executive in seeking to redress the inequality in funding to support adult learning;**

- (b) the report be noted and at a future meeting, the Committee consider the post-inspection Action Plan, Adult Learning Inspectorate report, Adult Learning Plan for March 2003 and proposals for internal restructuring with a view to making recommendations, as appropriate, to the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) and;**
- (c) prior to that meeting, the views of external bodies be sought and, if required, arrangements be made for those bodies to present information to the Committee at its meeting.**

## **22. CONSULTATION ON DRAFT STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR LIBRARIES**

The Committee were invited to note the key recommendations and proposed action plan for the draft Strategic Framework (2004-2010) for the library service and accompanying consultation plan.

The Head of Customer Services and Libraries reported that the proposed action plan was designed to address the most urgent problems quickly (e.g. buildings which will not meet requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), staff training, service standards, marketing, stock management) but also to build firm foundations for the long term (e.g. restructuring and recruitment, co-location, new partnerships). It aimed to ensure that all available resources were targeted towards priorities. The Council had already recognised that historically the library service had received a low level of investment, and had taken steps to address this. Appendix 1 benchmarked the provision and performance in the key areas of access, staffing, stock and budget against the other 10 benchmark authorities (based on latest data available). A proposed Action Plan for the next three years was included in the report as Appendix 2. This indicated how each action would improve services and meet the needs of the target groups identified in the report. A proposed Consultation Plan was outlined in Appendix 3 to the report.

The Libraries Operations Manager commented that to deliver the range of improvements and developments, the library service faced a unique local 'reality' not necessarily shared by other authorities. This in turn required that the long term policies and strategies to address this, and other actions and solutions, must focus on local circumstances if the service was to fulfil its potential. An indication of how the Local Framework for Libraries fitted into the corporate process, together with a 'timeline' of events was issued at the meeting.

The Committee discussed the report and noted in relation to the Mobile Library Service that a budget existed for the replacement of the library vans. However, it was cautioned that while the mobile service was expected to continue, and it was emphasised that this wasn't about cutting the service, its current format may alter to reflect the needs of a more modern service.

### **RESOLVED**

#### **THAT:**

- (a) the priority customer groups and service improvements and the proposed strategies to deliver them identified in the draft Strategic Framework for the library service be noted;**
- (b) the proposed action plan, to begin implementing them as set out in appendix 2 to the report be noted and;**
- (c) the accompanying consultation plan as set out at appendix 3 to the report be accepted.**

**23. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IMPROVEMENT PLANS FOR ECONOMIC INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SERVICES AND TOURISM**

The Committee were advised of progress in implementing the Best Value Improvement Plans for Economic Investment and Development, Local Development Services and Tourism.

The Head of Community and Economic Development presented a progress report on achieving each of the Best Value Review Improvement Plans. Improvements had been set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 of the report, and included agreed actions, target dates for completion and indicated progress made to date. He also drew attention to key actions required by each of the three services over the forthcoming year.

During the course of scrutinising the improvement plans the Committee noted that in relation to Appendix 1 - Planning and Property Services - the development of a three-year service level agreement with the Council's Property Services Department – discussions with Property Services were still progressing. The Director of Policy and Community reported that as a closer relationship existed between the services, with regular meetings taking place, she thought that the requirement for an SLA had now been superseded. She further reported that the wish expressed by the Cabinet Member (Economic Development, Markets and Property), to see an increase in the marketing and promotion of Herefordshire had yet to be fully debated. She also reported that the results of the Property Review had yet to be reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee.

That the Service Level Agreement (SLA) had arisen because the income from the industrial estates funded Economic Development. Now that the budgets had been separated out there was no longer a need for an SLA. However, the close relationship between Economic Development and Property Management needed further debate. The review had also suggested reconsidering whether the vehicle of Economic Development was right. This review was now underway.

**RESOLVED:**

**That**

- (a) the progress made to date in implementing the Best Value Improvement Plans for Local Development, Economic Investment and Development and Tourism be noted and;**
- (b) the key actions to be addressed in the coming twelve months, highlighted in the report, be noted.**

The meeting ended at 12.20 p.m.

**CHAIRMAN**

