

MINUTES of the meeting of Social & Economic Development Scrutiny Committee held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 3rd December, 2004 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
	Councillor	J. Stone (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	J.G.S. Guthrie, P.G. Turpin and A.L. Williams
	Co-opted Members	Mrs. E. Newman ((HALC)), Mrs. B. Heavens (Tourism)

In attendance: Councillor R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community and Social Development)

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors H. Bramer, M.R. Cunningham, and Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels.

28. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Ms. B. Heavens substituted for Mr. G. Jones (Tourism Sector).

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30. MINUTES

In relation to minute number 18 – Sickness Absence – the Director of Policy and Community clarified that in the final paragraph that exit interviews were not carried out comprehensively due to a number of staff not wishing to take part.

RESOLVED: THAT the minutes for the meeting held on 24th September 2004, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31. POLICY AND COMMUNITY DIRECTORATE 2004/05 FIRST SIX MONTHS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee was informed of the performance of the non-corporate functions of the Policy and Community Directorate against their national and local performance indicators for the first six months of 2004/05. The report outlined the key service issues arising during the period and detailed the main areas of activity undertaken by those services during the two months since the last report.

RESOLVED: THAT the Directorate's first six months' 2004/05 performance indicator information be noted.

32. YOUTH SERVICE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee was updated on the performance of the Community Youth Service against the four key performance indicators set out by the DfES.

The Community Youth Service Manager reported that the DfES has set four key performance indicators for all local authority youth services to work to. These targets relate to:

1. numbers of young people the youth service is in contact with;
2. the number of young people participating;
3. the number of young people who then receive a recorded outcome;
4. the number of young people who receive an accredited outcome.

He reported that during the first six months the Youth Service had significantly under achieved against all four of the above targets. However, only five months of statistics had been assessed due to problems with the implementation of a new Management Information System (MIS).

The Community Youth Service Manager reported that the implementation of the nationally recognised MIS had increased the administrative workload for youth workers creating a backlog of delivered services which needed recording.

The Youth Service was also carrying a vacancy rate of 12% for the whole of the year which had contributed to the overall service under performance. However, new recruitment activity was set to address this but as many of the newly recruited staff were trainees they were unlikely to meet the required performance standards during their first six months in post. It was reported that a new career ladder had been put in place to enable the Youth Service to retain staff once they were fully trained.

The Community Youth Service Manager drew the attention of the Committee to the lack of funding the local youth service received against the standard set by the National Youth Agency (NYA). He informed Members that in order to reach the NYA standard Herefordshire needed funding for 35.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) youth workers whereas the current allocation for Herefordshire only provided for 24.5 FTE youth workers. This equated to the youth service being £566,025 under budget.

The Community Youth Service Manager highlighted the potential cuts threatened to the service by the current strategic options exercise and how this would further reduce the Youth Services ability to achieve the targets set for it by the DfES.

The Director of Policy and Community informed the Committee that a Government Green Paper was due in January 2005 concerning the Youth Service, arrangements for Connexions centres and their future development.

RESOLVED: THAT the report be noted.

33. FUTURE USE OF LIBRARIES

The Committee discussed the future use of Libraries in Herefordshire with Members of the Hereford Libraries User Group (HLUG).

Mr. H. Porte, HLUG Chairman, informed the Committee that the membership of HLUG represented a cross section of the local community who monitor, support and help their local libraries. He commented that HLUG would like to see the new Hereford library as a landmark building incorporated into the proposed Edgar Street redevelopment and that HLUG would like to be consulted on the design process of any new library.

However, Mr. Porte was concerned that no timescale was mentioned for the development of a new library in Hereford. He voiced his short/medium term concern over the unsatisfactory situation found in Hereford library and proposed that radical thinking was necessary to improve the present situation.

Mr. J. Hitching, HLUG, expressed his concern regarding the state of libraries in Hereford and nationwide, reminding Members that a Parliamentary Committee was currently investigating this national problem. He conceded that the traditional library needed to be rethought but felt the role of the library was crucial as the intermediately processor.

The Library Policy and Development Manager highlighted the importance of books and the current national strategy for reading. He suggested that books would never be replaced by computers and the Internet as to be able to use a computer and access the Internet you needed to be able to read. Electronic sources of information would merely supplement the traditional book.

The Chairman thanked the members of HLUG for their comments and invited them back to a future meeting of the Committee as and when the strategy for libraries was further developed.

RESOLVED: THAT the comments of Hereford Library User Group be noted.

34. UPDATE FROM THE COURTYARD REVIEW GROUP

Councillor J. Stone, Chairman of the Courtyard Review Group, updated the Committee on the progress made by the Review Group.

The Review Group, along with members of the Committee, undertook a tour of the Courtyard on 15th October. The Review Group followed this with a comprehensive consultation which had been highly successful in generating a high level of responses from interested parties.

The Group had held two interview days, both in private and in public, to speak with the Courtyard management, Courtyard board members, Friends, users and key Council Officers.

The result of the consultation and interview days had left the Group with a number of lines of inquiry which needed to be explored before their final report can be submitted to the Committee. It was anticipated that a special meeting of the Committee would be called early in the new year for the Committee to consider the report and forward it for consideration by the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development).

RESOLVED: THAT the progress of the Courtyard Review Group be noted.

35. MONITORING OF 2004/2005 REVENUE BUDGETS FOR SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME AREAS PERIOD 1-7

The Committee was advised of the actual net revenue expenditure against budget for the Social, Community and Economic Development programme areas to period 7 of the financial year 2004/05.

The monitoring report for period 7 was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. The report showed the revised budget including carried forward over and underspends from 2003/04, actual performance, variances and projected out-turns for the main service areas within Social, Community and Economic Development.

The Principal Accountancy Manager informed Members that the Social Development budget was currently demonstrating an overall underspend of £371,431. This was due to underspends in Parks and Countryside, Leisure and the Youth Service. Expenditure for the Youth Service was set to increase after a successful round of recruitment and resultant uptake in project work.

It was reported that the latest figures suggested an overspend on Library staffing costs. This was due to a number of recent changes to the staffing structure and an increase in opening hours. The position with regard to Libraries was being investigated as there was still opportunity to mitigate any overspend by reducing expenditure on non-employee headings where possible.

The Principal Accountancy Manager anticipated that the outturn position for the Social Development budget would be a net overspend of £25,000.

The budget for Community and Economic Development was currently showing an underspend of £435,059. The balance resulted from a combination of vacancies, a series of projects and studies yet to commence and grants for various schemes such as Community Buildings which are yet to be paid out.

The Principal Accountancy Manager anticipated that if all planned expenditure for projects and studies occurs within the financial year and the current trend in vacancies continue then there would be a likely underspend of £238,000. However, a large proportion of this underspend represented earmarked funds for future shortfalls in external income.

RESOLVED: THAT the position be noted.

36. STAFFING NUMBERS WITHIN THE POLICY AND COMMUNITY DIRECTORATE

The Committee was advised of the staffing numbers within the Policy and Community Directorate as at 1st October 2004.

The Head of Culture, Leisure and Education for Life informed the Committee that the Policy and Community Directorate was made up of staff who report within the remit of Social and Economic Development and of those who report within Policy and Finance.

The total number of employees as at 1st October 2004 was 494. 212 of these posts were part time and 67 posts were vacant. A detailed breakdown of staff in individual departments can be found in the report.

The Head of Culture, Leisure and Education for Life reported that the Policy and Community Directorate was currently undertaking a review of its management arrangements. He informed the Committee that details of the review and a new organisational structure were expected to be available by 1st April 2005.

RESOLVED: THAT the report be noted.

37. HEREFORDSHIRE PLAN AMBITION GROUPS

The Committee considered the recent progress in relation to the Herefordshire Plan Ambitions relevant to the Policy and Community Directorate.

Members expressed concern that there were too many ambition groups and felt that the ambition groups should be properly scrutinised to see what was actually being achieved.

The Head of Community and Economic Development informed Members that the ambition groups were about to be reviewed with the possibility of rationalising the current structure over the next 12 months.

Following a request for information on the membership and structure of the ambition groups, the Head of Community and Economic Development agreed to provide the Committee with an appropriate list.

RESOLVED:

THAT (a) the report be noted;

and

(b) the Head of Community and Economic Development circulate details on the membership, structure and achievements of the Herefordshire Plan Ambition Groups to the Committee.

38. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF TOURISM SERVICES

The Committee received an update on the Best Value Review of Tourism Services.

The Principal Tourism Officer informed Members that the majority of outputs resulting from the Review had now been achieved or were on going. She reported that the Tourism Enterprise Programme was now coming to an end therefore Herefordshire needed to engage in a number of new innovative actions to raise the profile of the County throughout the U.K. and Europe.

To this end the Tourism Co-ordination Group, a sub group of the Business, Economic Development and Tourism Ambition Group (BETAG), was recommending the formation of a Destination Management Partnership in Herefordshire in order to secure future funding.

Noting that many of the actions or targets identified from the review had been achieved the Committee requested that the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) present a report detailing his plans for those targets/actions which were unlikely to be achieved in order to conclude the Review.

RESOLVED:

THAT (a) the report be noted;

and

(b) the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) produce a final report on the Best Value Review of Tourism Services actions/targets which are unlikely to be achieved for the next meeting of the Committee.

**39. ADDITIONAL ITEM - SCRUTINY REVIEW ON THE POSSIBLE
PEDESTRIANISATION OF WIDEMARSH STREET**

The Chairman proposed that a scrutiny review be undertaken into the possible pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street. He suggested that this be undertaken by a small review group, namely, himself and Councillors J. Stone, H. Bramer and A.L. Williams who would hear evidence at a one-off meeting from key stakeholders and interested parties.

RESOLVED: THAT the scrutiny review into the possible pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street outlined above be approved.

The meeting ended at 11.10 a.m.

CHAIRMAN