

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Burton Hotel, Mill Street, Kington, Herefordshire on Friday, 24th March, 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
	Councillor	H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	M.R. Cunningham, J.G.S. Guthrie and P.G. Turpin
	Co-opted Members	G. Jones (Tourism Sector) and Mrs. E. Newman (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils))

In attendance: Councillors R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services) and R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Resources)

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R.B.A. Burke, J.C. Mayson (Cabinet Member – Rural Regeneration and Strategy) D.C. Taylor and A.L. Williams and Ms. C. Jones (Chamber of Commerce).

41. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor J.W. Hope MBE substituted for Councillor R.B.A. Burke and Councillor T.M. James substituted for Councillor A.L. Williams.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mrs. E. Newman declared personal interests in Item 8 'Refurbishment of Kington Library' and Item 10 'Scoping Statement for Proposed Review of Independent Museums and Heritage Centres'.

43. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes for the meeting held on 11th and reconvened on 13th January 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no suggestions received from members of the public.

45. HALO LEISURE SERVICES LTD

The Committee received a presentation from Jon Argent, Chief Executive of HALO Leisure Services Ltd.

Mr Argent began his presentation by reminding the Committee that HALO had been established on 1st April 2002 as a registered charity with 25 year leases on its nine centres throughout the County. At its nine centres HALO employed 380 full and part time staff and recorded 1.5 million visits and a turnover of £6m per annum.

Mr Argent explained that even though HALO was officially a charity it was still operated as a business with surpluses being returned to the community through improved facilities rather than paid as dividends to shareholders.

The Committee was informed that the Council provided HALO with 20% of its annual income, however, as this income was not subject to Retail Price Increases the Council's input to HALO was in fact reducing over time. This was significant as it meant that, in order to meet unavoidable cost increases, HALO was dependent on creating new income streams to increase revenue rather than relying on grants. Mr Argent reported to the Committee that in 2005/06 HALO will again return an operating surplus. This money would be reinvested into the business for future priorities as identified by the Vision Group made up of Councillors, and Council and HALO Officers.

The Committee heard how opinion surveys of HALO Staff had revealed that the vast majority of staff enjoyed their jobs, were motivated, and proud to work for HALO and prepared to recommend the company as an employer to their friends. This fitted the company's original ethos of becoming 'an employer of choice'.

Mr Argent explained that HALOs facilities were externally inspected and revealed that Ross Pool had recently been received a score of 80% in a QUEST Inspection which was equated to being the sixth highest score awarded in the Country. All Halo centres are within the top quartile of the assessment programme nationally.

The Committee heard about HALO's future investment strategy and how it was essential that investment was made to drive revenue. Examples were given of how it was planned that the gyms be extended at HALO centres in Ross, Leominster and Hereford. Mr Argent asserted that this level of investment was required to increase current levels of revenue. In addition to this HALO sought to improve the current facilities that it offered. Schemes such as changing room refurbishment and locker replacement were funded from reserves and in partnership with the Council, however, these schemes were not commercial improvements.

In terms of asset management the Committee was informed that the Council was responsible for all structures and major plant replacements and that HALO was responsible for maintenance, emergency repairs and replacement of fixtures and fittings. To meet its responsibilities HALO had implemented comprehensive maintenance programmes for each of its centres. These programmes were delivered by qualified in-house teams and sub-contractors at a cost of £350,000 in 2005/06. With regard to Halo's responsibilities a 25-year repair and renewal programme had been established in 2003 with costs being budgeted for within each centre's annual budget. Each item of equipment HALO was responsible for was included on an inventory which included a budgeted replacement plan.

Mr Argent informed the Committee that a number of research methods were in place to monitor future client trends. Customers could offer feedback to HALO through mediums such as comment cards, texts, emails and the main HALO website. An opinion meter was also available on rotation through all centres which allowed customers to complete surveys on a stand alone machine at any time without HALO having to employ somebody to undertake the study for them. In addition to this, non-user surveys were carried out in order to ascertain how it would be possible for HALO to grow its customer base.

With regard to Herefordshire's demography and its growing elderly population Mr Argent informed Members that HALO would ensure that its programmes were developed to meet the needs of this group and that facilities were accessible to the

widest practicable customer base. HALO was also committed to delivering broad social agendas including health and well-being, social inclusion and community safety. Partnership work with the Council and Primary Care Trust was a feature of HALO's work in delivering appropriate services to the communities it served.

Finally Mr Argent explained that HALO was committed to fulfilling its potential and ensuring that it supported the communities that it was created to provide for.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- Mr Argent was conscious of private developers entering the leisure market and emphasised the good research that was undertaken at HALO with regard to segmenting the broad market place. He anticipated that HALO would lose some customers to the new development at Holmer Park, Hereford but believed that the number of customers who would leave would be limited due the high cost of membership at Holmer Park. New Private Developments were another reason why HALO needed to continue updating facilities in order to retain its core customer base.
- HALO made over £400,000 of tax based savings in the last financial year due to being a not for profit organisation and registered charity.
- Mr Argent acknowledged that there had been some problems at Ross Sports Centre and highlighted the current partnership arrangements being implemented with local clubs and the Council in trying to build constructive relationships to address the current issues.
- If the Council decided that a skate park was one of its priorities then HALO would be happy to discuss managing the facility.
- The newly developed Leominster Swimming Pool was considered to be an extraordinary success. It was a well used facility used by many schools. There were currently over 500 children enrolled on learn to swim programmes.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) commented on the difficulties which had been reported at Ross Sports Centre and assured the Committee that action was being taken to resolve the problems. He commented that even though HALO was a charity it was operated on business like principles. He added that the Vision Group meetings between the Council and HALO were always frank and solution based and he praised HALO for the transparency which it offered the Council in its monitoring of the company.

The Chairman thanked Mr Argent for attending the meeting and stated that he would like the Members of the Committee to visit some of HALO's facilities in the future.

46. COMMUNITY YOUTH SERVICE PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY YOUTH SECTOR

Members were informed of the working relationship between the voluntary and community sector and Herefordshire Council's Community Youth Service (CYS).

The Community Youth Service Manager began his presentation by reminding the Committee that in 1998 an external survey by De Montfort University had described the CYS as inadequate and that the local authority was failing in its duty to secure adequate provision for young people. The recommendations that the review suggested had been implemented. These had included the commencement of new partnership arrangements with the voluntary and community sector through the Youth Consortium.

In October 2005 the CYS had been assessed as part of the Joint Area Review (JAR) of Services for Children and Young People by Ofsted. The JAR report concluded that improvements had been made across all areas with the exception of 'curriculum and resources'. The report commented that: 'there were insufficient staff and resources to provide a consistently high quality and broad curriculum'. Overall the service was rated as 'adequate' and was described as having 'a balance of strengths and weaknesses'.

With regard to the CYS relationship with the voluntary and community sector, the CYS Manager explained to the Committee that the CYS contributed £52,032 per annum to the Herefordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (HCVYS) through a three-year Service Level Agreement (SLA). This three year SLA was up for renewal this year. The money granted to HCVYS was used to support youth work across the County and in return the Council could record the outcomes delivered by HCVYS and its members in its key performance indicator targets. However, the Council could only claim outcomes proportionate to the level of funding it provided.. The Ofsted inspector described CYS partnership arrangements as 'effective' and that they 'support and complemented its work'.

The CYS Manager informed the Committee that directorate responsibility for the CYS was changing. From the 1st April 2006 the CYS would sit within the Children's Services Directorate of the Council rather than Adult and Community Services and therefore scrutiny of the CYS would be undertaken by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The Committee noted the recent appointment of the new Youth Council.
- The Committee referred to the key performance indicator targets included in a later agenda item and noted that none of the five targets were being satisfactorily met. It was asserted that the voluntary sector had contact with as many young people as the CYS but at a cost of approximately £50,000 rather than £1.1m. It was suggested that a fresh approach was required in order to maximise the returns the CYS provided.
- The Committee was informed that the CYS was still carrying an 8% vacancy rate and that even with a full team of staff the CYS would still not meet national guidelines for the ratio of youth workers compared to the number of young people.
- A Member of the Committee suggested that young people were not interested in gaining educational outcomes in their leisure time and this would obviously have an impact on the CYS achievements. This was why the voluntary sector was probably more successful at providing youth facilities as they did not have to adhere so strongly to producing educational outcomes from their activities.
- The CYS Manager informed the Committee that a significant administrative burden was created through having to monitor and compile data for quality and performance indicators.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) acknowledged the problems within the CYS and commented that the service was fighting a difficult battle, particularly as it was carrying staff vacancies. Attempts to address this deficit had not been aided by the Job Evaluation process which had resulted in the wage levels for Herefordshire youth workers being unattractive compared to other local authorities.

The meeting adjourned at 11.15 a.m. and reconvened at 11.20 a.m.

RESOLVED:

That:

(a) the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be informed of the concerns indicated above by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee regarding the Community Youth Service;

and;

(b) the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor the future performance of the Community Youth Service.

47. REFURBISHMENT OF KINGTON LIBRARY

Members were updated on the progress being made in the refurbishment of Kington Library.

Two questions were received from members of the public.

Miss Edwards, Kington Tourist Group asked:

"A burning question which concerns a number of bodies and individual people in and around Kington, is the provision Herefordshire Council intends to make to enable Kington Tourist Group to continue its work following the move of the Council's Info. Department to the Library and the imminent proposed sale of the building at 2 Mill Street.

We read that Tourism is vital to the economy of the County and Kington T.I.C. has a role to play in helping to build that economy. What is Herefordshire Council planning to do to ensure this vital service survives to serve Kington, one of the County's market towns, and the hinterland?"

Mrs Bradbury asked.

"In Kington, Sure Start and the Doctor's Practice both need new buildings, both also get finance from the Primary Care Trust and Herefordshire Council can they not be encouraged to share and have space for other organisations? For example Age Concern, Citizens Advice Bureau, Credit Union etc all serving the public, plus Kington Tourist Group shortly to be made homeless by Herefordshire Council?"

The Wesleyan Chapel is crying out to be restored and brought back into public use. We find the lack of joined up thinking and planning very frustrating and disappointing.

NB You are meeting in the Burton because we have no Community Hall available during the day!"

The Interim Head of Economic and Community Services informed the meeting that Kington Tourist Group was independent of the Council Tourist Information Centres (TICs) whilst Kington Tourist Group had a close working relationship with the Council the Group had its own policies and procedures.

Currently the Library was being redeveloped in the Town to which the Council's Info shop was relocating. The Info shop was currently located in the same building as Kington TIC, however, once the Info shop had relocated the Council was intending to sell the building which it had occupied. Kington T.I.C. had been offered the opportunity to relocate to the newly refurbished Kington Library. Thereby providing a

similar situation to the one that currently existed at the Bromyard Centre were the leisure centre, library and TIC all operated from one building. Kington Tourist Group had been offered a similar arrangement and raised concerns over the space offered to them.

The Committee was informed that Kington Tourist Group were currently in talks with potential partners with regard to purchasing the building they currently occupied. The Council's offer of space within the refurbished Kington Library was also still available.

A Member expressed his concern that to relocate the TIC to the library was a mistake. In its current location the TIC was located near the main car park in Kington which was used by most visitors. The library was not near this or any other car park so the likelihood was that if the TIC relocated to the library that there would be a downturn in the number of people using the TIC. The lack of parking would also make the relocated TIC difficult to access for disabled users as there was only one disabled parking bay near the library. He felt that the current arrangements for the TIC should be maintained as the current provision was staffed by volunteers at no cost to the Council.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) and the Director of Adult and Community Services reassured the meeting that talks were still continuing between the Council and Kington Tourist Group as to possible options for future location.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) and the Director of Adult and Community Services reassured the meeting that talks were still continuing between the Council and Kington Tourist Group and no decision had yet been made on this issue.

A Member of the Committee stressed the importance of addressing the issue before the start of the tourist season in 2007. She too emphasised that the proximity of the TIC to the car park encouraged visitors to use the TIC and this helped to generate business for attractions across the County.

At the invitation of the Chairman Miss Edwards responded and informed the Committee that she felt that to it was unsuitable to relocate the TIC into the library as it would not be a good place for tourists to visit. She felt that Kington should have a TIC as it served the town and local villages as well as the wider County and Wales. She highlighted the fact that the TIC was staffed entirely by volunteers and that the office had recently completed a refurbishment.

The Cabinet Member (Resources) indicated that the Property Services Manager was in talks with Kington Town Council about the possibility of them purchasing the office currently housing Kington Tourist Group.

A Member suggested that the value of the site where the TIC was currently located was not too expensive. He also felt that Kington Town Council should not have to buy the building from Herefordshire Council as the building was already owned by the taxpayer.

In response to Mrs Bradbury's question, the Interim Head of Economic and Community Services informed the meeting that Herefordshire Council did seek to adopt a co-ordinated approach to its projects as illustrated by the integration of the library and Info shops. The library was being refurbished in order to make it compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act, and space within the new building would be available for use by the local community.

48. COMMUNITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Committee was informed of the available performance indicators position and provided with information about current performance monitoring work within the Community Services division of the Adult and Community Services Directorate.

The Performance Improvement Manager reported that with the advent of the new Annual Operating Plan the performance indicators currently used were going to be reviewed.

He explained that all areas within the Community Services division, with the exception of the the CYS, were either performing better than last year or meeting or exceeding their targets. He took the Committee through the report highlighting the success stories and any issues, challenges and concerns as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- The target in relation to the reduction of alcohol related crime and disorder, within the Social and Economic Regeneration Section of Appendix 1 to the report, was referred to as a success story. The Committee noted that whilst it was likely that the performance outturn was going to be improved compared to last year's outturn it was still likely that, unless there was a significant reduction in incidents in the final quarter, the outturn figure would exceed its target.
- The Committee questioned whether the indicator relating to Freedom of Information requests within the Parks and Countryside Section of Appendix 1 to the report did not contain any details of Environmental Information Requests or requests made under the Data Protection Act. The Performance Improvement Manager confirmed that the indicator did not contain this information and that he would include it at the next meeting.
- The data in relation to the performance indicator on staff absence within the Parks and Countryside section of Appendix 1 appeared to be incorrect. The Performance Improvement Manager agreed to supply the correct data by e-mail to all Members of the Committee after the meeting.
- The Committee noted that HALO's annual staff survey was carried out by Herefordshire Council.

The Chairman noted the requests made by a number of Members of the Committee for further details on issues contained within the performance monitoring report and appendix and requested that more detailed performance monitoring information be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That:

(a) the report on Community Services Performance be noted;

(b) identified areas of concern continue to be monitored;

(c) correct details with regard to staff absence within the Parks and Countryside section be provided to the Committee by e-mail;

and;

- (d) further detail be included with regard to performance management data in subsequent reports.

49. SCOPING STATEMENT FOR PROPOSED REVIEW OF INDEPENDENT MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE CENTRES

The Committee considered a scoping statement for a proposed review of the support for independent museums and heritage centres in the County.

The Chairman informed the Committee that following a suggestion received from a member of the Committee at its meeting in June 2005 a scoping statement had been drafted for a proposed review of support for independent museums and heritage centres in the County. He commented that there were many items of historical importance in the Council's ownership that could be displayed and suggested that an audit of these artefacts should be a part of the review.

The Interim Head of Economic and Community Services clarified that as well as reviewing the funding for independent museums and heritage centres the review would investigate the Council's own heritage provision.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) stated that the Museum in Hereford would be expanded when the present library moved to a new site.

A Member of the Committee explained that he thought the way heritage facilities were provided could be changed and that new ways of engaging young people should be sought, particularly so that young people could interact with artefacts rather than be prohibited by the glass display case culture that currently existed.

The Committee decided to appoint five Members to the Review Group: four Councillors and one Co-opted Member.

Three Councillors expressed an interest in serving on the Review Group. It was suggested that a letter be sent to those Members not present seeking a volunteer to take the fourth Councillor place on the Review Group.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (a) the Scoping Statement, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, for a review of the support for independent museums and heritage centres be agreed;
 - (b) Councillor H. Bramer, Councillor A.C.R. Chappell, Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie and Mrs. E. Newman be appointed to serve on the Review Group;
 - (c) Councillor A.C.R. Chappell be appointed as Chairman of the Review Group
- and
- (d) those Councillor members of the Committee not present at the meeting should be invited to express an interest in serving on the Review Group.

