

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Tuesday, 6th June, 2006 at 2.00 p.m.

Present:	Councillor	A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
	Councillor	H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	J.G.S. Guthrie, B. Hunt, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, D.C. Taylor, P.G. Turpin and A.L. Williams
	Co-opted Members	G. Jones (Tourism Sector)

In attendance: Councillors G. Jones

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R.B.A. Burke, M.R. Cunningham, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels and from Mrs. E. Newman (HALC) and Ms. C. Jones (Chamber of Commerce).

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Mrs. Lloyd-Hayes substituted for Councillor M.R. Cunningham and G.Woodman substituted for Ms. C. Jones.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name	Item	Nature of Interest
Councillor A.C.R. Chappell	9 'Proposed Review of Hereford City Partnership'	Personal
Councillor J.P. French	6 'Review of the Courtyard Centre for the Arts'	Personal
Councillor Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes	8 'Preparations for the Three Choirs Festival'	Personal
Councillor J. Stone	6 'Review of Courtyard Centre for the Arts'	Personal
Councillor A.L. Williams	9 'Proposed Review of Hereford City Partnership'	Personal

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes for the meeting held on 24th March 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

No suggestions were received on issues for future scrutiny from the members of the public present at the meeting.

6. REVIEW OF THE COURTYARD CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

The Committee considered the findings of the Courtyard Review Group following the review of the Courtyard Centre for the Arts. A copy of the report was sent out separately to the agenda papers.

The Chairman welcomed Martyn Green, Chief Executive at the Courtyard Centre for the Arts, and Margaret Thomas, Chairman of the Courtyard Trust Board to the meeting.

Councillor H. Bramer, Chairman of the Courtyard Review Group, presented the report of the Courtyard Review Group to the Committee. He explained that the Review Group had investigated the status of the recommendations and suggestions made by the first review and had made nineteen further recommendations and suggestions following their investigations.

The principal recommendations of the Review Group are concerned with the Courtyard making a fuller use of the non-arts related resources available to it in order to increase income levels to address its current budget deficit and then increase its arts related work. A summary of the recommendations and suggestions made by the Review Group can be found in Part 10 of the Report.

He informed Members that the Review Group had been greatly impressed by enthusiasm and professionalism of the Courtyard staff and thanked them all for their assistance during the Review. He also noted the high regard in which the work of the Courtyard was held regionally and nationally.

The Chairman thanked Councillor H. Bramer for his report and explained to the Committee that the Courtyard had asked to comment on the report after it had been considered by the Courtyard Trust Board. Therefore the Committee needed to decide whether to wait for this response before considering the recommendations or to consider the recommendations and forward them to Cabinet and allow the Courtyard to present its response to Cabinet. It was agreed that the Courtyard would present its response directly to Cabinet and that the Cabinet Member (Community Services) would inform the Committee of the outcome.

Margaret Thomas, Chairman of the Courtyard Trust Board, thanked the Review Group for their comprehensive report and looked forward to working together with Council to put together a constructive plan for the Courtyard Centre for the Arts.

A Member of the Committee felt that catering at the Courtyard should remain in-house and not be franchised to a commercial operator as recommended in the Review Group's report.

Councillor H. Bramer responded by explaining that when the Review Group completed its desktop benchmarking exercise by comparing the accounts of two comparable arts centres the Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal and the Castle, Wellingborough. These investigations had revealed that the other arts centres trading companies, the arm of the business responsible for catering and other associated features, were turning over amounts which were greater than their level of income gained through admissions. Whereas the Courtyard Trading Company was turning over just over half the value which it raised from admissions. Therefore the Review Group had concluded that there was room for improvement and had felt

that the best way for this improvement to be achieved was through the franchising the operations of the Courtyard Trading Company to a commercial operator. A summary of the accounts comparing the Courtyard to the two bench mark venues can found at Appendix 3 to the report.

Martyn Green, Chief Executive of the Centre for the Arts, thanked the Review Group for completing the benchmarking exercise and explained that the probable reasons why the Brewery Arts Centre's Trading income was significantly higher than the Courtyards. These principally were: the Brewery Arts Centre was a well established centre located in the centre of Kendal which was of course a tourist area. He added that the Brewery Arts Centre found it difficult to attract its trading company customers to attend arts centre events. He also added the Brewery Arts Centre provided more than just catering facilities.

Councillor H. Bramer acknowledged the differences in location between the Courtyard and Brewery Arts Centre and suggested that if the Brewery Arts Centre's Trading Company provided more than just catering for the arts centre then perhaps the Courtyard's Trading Company could also provide additional facilities.

RESOLVED:

THAT: (a) the recommendations and suggestions of the Courtyard Review Group be approved and submitted to the Cabinet Member (Community Services) for consideration;

(b) a copy of the Courtyard's Response to the report of the Courtyard Review Group presented to Cabinet be forwarded to all Members of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee;

and;

(c) the Cabinet Member (Community Services) report back to the Committee at later date on any taken as a result of the Review Group's report;

7. PRESENTATION FROM THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL ON THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME AREA

The Committee received a presentation from Councillor R.J. Phillips, Leader of the Council, on the annual activity in the Economic Development programme area within Herefordshire.

The Leader began his presentation to the Committee by paying tribute to the late Councillor G.V. Hyde who had been the previous Cabinet Member responsible for the economic development programme area.

The Leader reported to the Committee that the Council had an important part to play in the context of the County's economy as the County's largest employer, landowner and regulator. In order to maintain and aid the local economy it was necessary for the Council to work in partnership with other public and private sector organisations. Working in partnership with other organisations was essential to solve the long-standing problems which existed in the County's economy.

Work was currently underway in trying to influence the development of the Regional Spatial Strategy and Regional Economic Strategy. These strategies are set to configure the manner in which funding is distributed in the Region and it was

important that Herefordshire maintained its current levels of grant funding.

With regard to the Rural Agenda, it was highlighted that the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy had seen income for the County fall. When this was combined with the problems of Avian Flu it was clear to see that the industry was facing significant challenges.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for his presentation and opened the meeting to questions from the Committee. The following are the principal points raised in the ensuing discussion:

- The idea was tabled that the poor take up of the Ross New Trader Supporter Grant could be due to the relatively low value of the Grant (£750). The Social and Economic Regeneration Manager commented that the Grant would be marketed more heavily first and its take up still remained poor the value of the Grant would be revisited.
- The Committee heard now Eign Gate, High Town and the Victoria Footbridge were being refurbished. The Eign Gate refurbishment had been nominated for a national award.
- It was asserted that the profitability of some stores had been compromised by the refurbishment works, however, the Committee acknowledged that other factors could be to blame as well.
- It was not possible for additional/non-executive Members to be on the Board of the Edgar Street Grid Venture Company as public sector representation was limited to 20% of the board which allowed for two representatives from the Council.
- A decision on the application for funding for the Rotherwas Access Road was still pending.
- It was asserted that the Job Evaluation process implemented at the Council did not help the economic vitality of the County in terms of increasing wage levels as the process had seen some staff wages fall. The Leader stated that the Council paid the going rate to its Officers and commented that all Local Authorities in the Country would have to complete the same process by April 2007.
- It was hoped the development of the Herefordshire Economic Strategy and Hereford Learning Village would help to address Herefordshire's low skills base.

8. PREPARATIONS FOR THE THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL

Members were updated on the work undertaken to promote the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford in August 2006 and the work undertaken to raise the profile of the Festival.

The Chairman informed the meeting that a representative from the Three Choirs Festival had been invited to the meeting but unfortunately no one had been available to attend the meeting.

The Interim Cultural Services Manager reported that work had taken place with the Three Choirs Festival Committee to promote the Festival. A direct mail campaign had led to 1600 responses which had resulted in increased ticket sales. Tourist Information staff have been helping customers book tickets and hotels for the Festival. However, there had been concern about the lack of hotel beds in Hereford City which had caused negative publicity for the Festival after an article had appeared in the local press. Moves were now underway with the Festival to utilise hotel space in the wider County, particularly in Leominster and the Black and White Villages.

The Festival Organisers were going to provide extra toilets at the Cathedral and work was also underway to provide temporary signing to direct coaches to the venue.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- A window shop dressing competition was to take place during the Festival with prizes to be presented to the winners by the Festival Organisers.
- The Festival rejected the idea of dual ticketing with restaurants in the City as it wanted customers to use its own facilities at the Shirehall. As the festival catering concluded at 8.00pm it was requested that other restaurateurs in the City were made aware of this so they could plan to stay open instead.
- It was stated that Hereford did not make the best of the opportunity the Festival provided. The Festival was one of the oldest Festivals in the world but it was not an international festival.
- The Council provided money to the fringe festival in order to encourage local people and young people to become involved with the wider Festival.
- It was noted that Dominic Harbour from Hereford Cathedral had been appointed to Visit Herefordshire.
- It was noted that coach drivers were complaining of the narrow turn from West Street into Broad Street to access the Cathedral following the pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street. It was thought the Festival would not be affected by this as the majority of its performances took place in the evenings when Widemarsh Street would be open to traffic so it would be necessary for coach drivers to make the difficult turn.
- It was believed that marketing for the Festival could be improved.
- It was suggested that the Fringe Festival should take place every year even when the main Festival was not based in Hereford.

9. PROPOSED REVIEW OF HEREFORD CITY PARTNERSHIP

The Committee considered a scoping statement for a proposed review of the support to Hereford City Partnership (HCP). A copy of the scoping statement was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Chairman referred to a letter which had been received from Hereford City Partnership after the publication of the agenda papers. The letter welcomed the proposed review and asked that no Member of the proposed Review Group be a currently serving or previous member of HCP.

Councillor H. Bramer was appointed Chairman of the Review Group. Councillors J.G.S. Guthrie, D.C. Taylor and P.G. Turpin were also appointed to the Review Group.

The Committee debated whether the additional non-Council members of the Review Group should be independent of the Review Group. After discussion it was decided that the Review Group would choose its outside body members at a future meeting of the Review Group.

The Committee also extended the time period in which the Review was to be completed by two months. Therefore the Review Group would present its final report to the Committee in December 2006.

RESOLVED:

THAT: (a) the Scoping Statement, as amended, for a review of Hereford City

Partnership be approved;

(b) Councillor H. Bramer, Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie, Councillor D.C. Taylor and Councillor P.G. Turpin be appointed to the Review Group;

(c) Councillor H. Bramer be appointed Chairman of the Review Group;

and;

(d) the Representatives of Hereford City Council, the Private Sector and Retail Sector be appointed by the Review Group.

The meeting ended at 3.48 p.m.

CHAIRMAN