

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 7 December 2009 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor TM James (Chairman)
Councillor KG Grumbley (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: DJ Benjamin, GFM Dawe, KS Guthrie, RH Smith, RV Stockton, Churchill and Mr PH Hands

Co-opted
Members

In attendance: Councillors AJM Blackshaw, WLS Bowen, PJ Edwards, MD Lloyd-Hayes and AT Oliver.

34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors DW Greenow and B Hunt.

35. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

As Chairman of VisitHerefordshire, Mr P Hands registered a personal interest in Item 8, The Executive's Response to the Scrutiny Review of Tourism and Tourist Information Centres.

37. MINUTES

Councillor GFM Dawe registered his objection to the Minutes as Members comments were not attributed.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2009, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

A member of the public suggested that an update on the Edgar Street Grid Project should be a regular item on the agenda of the Committee, and questioned why it wasn't on the agenda for this meeting.

39. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2009/10

The Committee received the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report for the period for the six month period to September 2009.

The Service Accountant reported that Cultural Services was expected to overspend by £85k in 2009/10. Savings had already been made that had been factored into this projection. These included staff vacancy savings of £25k on employee costs for Sports Development, relating to post vacancies. There were also staff vacancy savings of £15k in Cultural Services.

He went on to say that the libraries budget was expected to overspend by £125k, largely as a result of employee costs and running costs associated with the Broad Street Library. These costs would be partly offset within the Directorate by savings on Parks and Countryside and Public Rights of Way as a result of the recruitment freeze pending the service delivery review. Some recovery had been made on Tourism budgets which had reduced the expected outturn to a £30k overspend. In addition, a review of alternative delivery methods was being undertaken in order to enable the service to be delivered within budget.

- In reply to a question from a Member, the Director of Regeneration said that as a result of staff reorganisation, posts had been made redundant in the Tourism Service. He concurred with the Chairman of Visitherefordshire that the Destination Management Partnership had not overspent its budget, and was on target for the year.
- In reply to a question from a Member concerning the timescale for replacing the Broad Street Library building, the Director of Regeneration said that whilst the Council was considering different locations, there was no firm timescale at this point in time. A report would be brought to the Cabinet Member in the New Year. The Chairman said that it might be appropriate for the Committee to consider the trends in terms of Library usage at some point in 2010.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**40. ENVIRONMENT & CULTURE AND REGENERATION DIRECTORATES:
PERFORMANCE FOR THE SIX-MONTH PERIOD TO OCTOBER 2009**

The Committee received the Environment & Culture and Regeneration Directorates Performance for the six months period to September 2009. The Improvement Manager reported that there had been significant improvement against the indicators, all of which were included in both the Local Area Agreement and the Herefordshire Community Strategy. In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

In reply to a question regarding NI 10 and 11, the visits to galleries and museums and engagement with the Arts, the Improvement Manager said that the figure was in response to a questionnaire that had been sent out, and was not as a result of a visitor count. It was not limited to visits to museums and galleries in the County. He undertook to provide a more detailed breakdown of this indicator at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**41. EXECUTIVE'S RESPONSE TO THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF TOURISM AND
TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES**

(Mr P Hands registered a personal interest)

The Committee considered Cabinet's response to the recommendations made to it in the Scrutiny Review of Tourism with Specific Reference to Tourist Information Centres. The Director of Regeneration apologised to a Member that the response to this Review had taken a while, and said that the economic downturn had meant that the Directorate's position had been reconsidered in the light of public sector funding reductions. A further review of tourism would be undertaken shortly in order to provide a report to the Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) to ensure that the service was fit for purpose. He added that the initial response that had been made to Cabinet on 30 June 2009 and had been revised by the Regeneration Directorate after Cabinet had deferred consideration of the report, and the subsequent Action Plan had been approved at the Cabinet meeting on 26 November 2009.

A Member expressed concern at the quality of the Action Plan attached to the report, and asked why two recommendations had not been accepted, whilst three other responses apparently missed the point of the original recommendations. He went on to draw the Committee's attention to the specific recommendations in the report to which the responses in the Action Plan were not, in his opinion, appropriate:

- Recommendation 1 in the Action Plan linked back to Recommendations 11.4 and 11.5 in the report submitted to the Committee on 18 April 2008. These had been addressed by the production of an Asset Management Plan, which had not been provided to the Committee.
- Recommendation 9 did not provide concrete proposals to the original recommendation.
- He went on to say that he felt that the Action Plan was an inappropriate response to the work undertaken by the Committee.
- In reply to a question from a Member, the Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) said that the planned Tourism Review would look at how the marketing budget for tourism should be spent. There had been a change in how the TICs were used across the County, and it was important that this matter should be addressed. The budget for the consultation exercise was tight, and the outcomes would be used to good effect.
- The Chairman of VisitHerefordshire said that he was glad that tourism was valued in the County. He pointed out that VisitHerefordshire had helped to bring £410m into Herefordshire in the previous year, on a small budget. The service was good value for money, as much of the work was undertaken by volunteers. If their work were to be costed in, the rate of return would be much less appealing.

RESOLVED

THAT (a) Cabinet's response to the findings of the Scrutiny Review of Tourism with Specific Reference to Tourist Information Centres should be rejected and the Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services), should be invited to reconsider the Scrutiny Review report in a competent and professional manner;

and;

(b) that a report should be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee that included the outcomes from the present review of tourism as well as addressing the concerns that had been expressed by the Committee regarding the Scrutiny Review Action Plan.

42. EXECUTIVE'S RESPONSE TO THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE HEREFORDSHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2005-2025

The Committee noted the response from Cabinet to the Scrutiny Review of the Herefordshire Economic Development Strategy 2005-25.

The Chairman of the Review Group thanked all Members who had been involved in the Review process, and said that he was glad that the recommendations had been accepted by Cabinet.

The Economic Development Manager reported that it was intended to produce a new Economic Development strategy by October 2010. This would allow time to reflect on the emerging priorities of the Local Development Forum (LDF) and findings of the local economic assessment. There would be a further report on the Review in six months time.

Since the review had taken place, a number of the activities had been undertaken that relate to the recommendations in the strategy review. There was, for example, enhanced communication between economic development and planning services – especially in relation to key projects such as Model Farm. An Intentions Paper on the County's approach to addressing the challenges of Broadband delivery had been produced in order to be presented to Cabinet. Initial discussions with the Hereford Heritage Regeneration Group on the transfer of assets had taken place and a draft proposals paper had been produced. In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:

In reply to a concern from a Member regarding the use of the term sustainability, the Economic Development Manager said that the Council sought to achieve a balance between these two priorities. The Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) concurred, and added that sustainability should be seen in both environmental and economic terms.

In reply to a question, the Economic Development Manager said that the Business Booster Grant had been fully allocated for the current financial year. If funding was available in 2010/11, it was intended that additional awards would be made.

A Member asked that, in light of the inclusion of the Wood Fuel Strategy under Recommendation 8, whether the Council should consider putting solar energy panels on its buildings in order to demonstrate support for this technology. The Economic Development Manager replied that the Council was already involved in actively supporting environmental technologies. It participated, with Shropshire and Worcestershire, in an environmental technology network designed to create a critical mass in the region. The Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) added that the Council was awaiting the outcome of a grant application which had been submitted to Advantage West Midlands (AWM) for renewable technologies.

In reply to a question concerning the utilisation of Water Mills to generate electricity in the County, the Economic Development Manager said that AWM had put money into this idea, and 12 mills in the County had expressed an interest, but had found capital costs prohibitive.

It was noted that the Buchanan Trust were installing heat exchange units in the houses on its Estate.

The Economic Development Manager responded to a question on broadband availability in the County by saying that the Council was attempting to provide individual solutions for individual areas within the County. It was clearly recognised that economic growth was dependant on broadband access.

RESOLVED

THAT (a) Cabinet's response to the findings of the Scrutiny Review of the Herefordshire Economic Development Strategy 2005-25 should be noted;

and;

(b) a further report on progress against the action plan should be made

after six months with consideration then being given to the need for any further report be made.

43. SCOPING REPORT FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERING IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee received a proposal to scrutinise the Support for Volunteering in Herefordshire.

The Director of Regeneration reported that this would be a valuable Review to undertake, as it would provide the Committee with an understanding of the volunteering resource that existed in the County, and how this could be most effectively utilised. It was envisaged that this would be held as a one day scrutiny review, with the whole Committee present. In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- A Member said that greater value should be placed on the work of the Third Sector, which offered a very cost effective resource for the County.
- A Member said that she undertook a lot of voluntary work, and felt that there were issues of risk assessment and potential litigation that needed to be overcome in order to help organisations in the Third Sector.
- A Member suggested that it would be valuable to have an officer resource within the Council to act as a liaison to help develop volunteer groups within the County.

RESOLVED: That the Scoping Statement be approved.

44. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be approved and reported to the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

The meeting ended at 11.35 am

CHAIRMAN