

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 28 June 2010 at 10.00 am

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

Councillors: PL Bettington, Churchill, GFM Dawe, BA Durkin, KS Guthrie, MAF Hubbard, B Hunt, SJ Robertson, RH Smith and RV Stockton

In attendance: Councillors AJM Blackshaw, WLS Bowen, PJ Edwards, JG Jarvis and AT Oliver

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor DW Greenow and Mr G Woodman.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor RV Stockton substituted for Councillor DW Greenow.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name	Item	Interest
Cllr KS Guthrie	8 – Revenue Budget Monitoring Report	Personal, Council appointee to the Board of Trustees of the Courtyard Centre for the Arts
Cllr B Hunt	10 - Safer Herefordshire Partnership Scrutiny - Update	Personal, Council Representative on the West Mercia Police Authority
Cllr RH Smith	10 - Safer Herefordshire Partnership Scrutiny - Update	Personal, Council Representative on the West Mercia Police Authority
Cllr MAF Hubbard	11 - Independent Review of the Destination Management Partnership 13 - Edgar Street Grid - update.	Personal, Council appointee to Board of Visit Herefordshire Personal, Director, It's Our City Campaign Group.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes for the meeting held on 12 April 2010, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Mr Leon Wolfson asked that the Committee consider reviewing the Edgar Street Grid project in the light of the substantial alteration in the economic climate since the initial review was undertaken, and the apparent lack of funding for the link road, the planning of which had disrupted local business.

He suggested that the Committee look at the plans for the Grid, but this time with input from local businesses.

RESOLVED: That the matter would be considered later in the meeting, under item 13 on the Agenda.

6. PRESENTATION BY THE CABINET MEMBER (ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES)

The Committee received a presentation from the Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) of achievements for the year and challenges for the future.

During his presentation, the Cabinet Member highlighted the following areas:

- That local authorities now had a duty to produce a Local Economic Assessment, which would be completed in August and would inform a new economic development strategy to be produced by December 2010.
- a Tourism Transition Group had been established to support the next stage in the development of tourism in the county, working with the Destination Management Partnership. Work would include the production of a new strategy and refreshed branding.
- The County suffered with areas of little or no broadband coverage or low speeds. An intentions paper had been published which outlined an approach to support broadband and a conference took place in March 2010.
- Whilst Herefordshire had a relatively low unemployment rate, the economic downturn had created an 80-100% increase in claimant rates. New programmes, including Future Jobs Fund, had been helpful in supporting people into work or training.
- That Jesse Norman MP was supporting the University Gateway, the development of Higher Education Funding provision for Herefordshire on the ESG site.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted

7. PACT MEETINGS - UPDATE

The Committee received an updated report on the progress of the PACT meetings.

The Head of Partnership Support reported that Members had raised a number of concerns in relation to PACT meetings, particularly around the level of involvement from West Mercia Police, the venues used, the action sheets and attendance by senior Council Officers.

Recent informal analysis of the January/February PACT meetings indicated that some of the concerns of Members regarding input from senior officers in the Council and its partners had improved. A representative from JMT attended each meeting and there was regular input from Amey, Herefordshire Housing (or other relevant registered social landlord) and the Community Protection Team. In addition, attendance by Parish Councils in a large number of areas was consistent, albeit generally from the surrounding areas of the venue. Community attendance was variable, and dependant on current local issues.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- That attendance by the local ward Member at the meetings was important

- Although the public who did attend the meetings were not, on the whole, concerned about the police, consideration might be given to finding an alternative name for the PACTS.
- It was important that the Council should have a presence at these meetings, and there should be a clear understanding by the partners of Safer Herefordshire as to the ownership of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

that

- a) the report be noted; and;**
- b) the intention to review the future operation and purpose of these meetings as part of an engagement framework for the Herefordshire Partnership should be reported to a meeting in six months time.**

8. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

(Councillor Guthrie declared an interest)

The Committee received a report on the final revenue outturn position for Community Services for 2009/10 and the agreed budget for 2010/11.

The Community Services Accountant reported that the final position for Community Services for 2009/10 was an under spend of £155k. She went on to say that there had been an under spend on Sports Development as a result of staff vacancies, and an under spend on Parks and Countryside of £179k. The expected staff savings had been increased from £40k to £55k.

She went on to say that there was an overspend on Tourism of £79k which had resulted from a number of factors, including staff costs. Economic Development had overspent as a result of extra expenditure incurred on the Model Farm project in Ross-on-Wye, but this had been mitigated by under spends within Community Regeneration and the Regeneration Directorate as a whole.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- That the Sustainable Communities Directorate had been created as a result of the merging of the Regeneration and Environment Directorates.
- The Assistant Director Highway, Transport & Community Services said in reply to a query that the play facilities delivered through the Play Builders project were funded through the Area Based Grant, and this initiative would be frozen as the Council undertook a strategic view on its spending. He added that the under spend on Parks and Countryside would not have an impact on public rights of way work (PROW) as it was an under spend, not a saving against budgets. There had been no impact on the PROW work, as the team was managed by Amey, and there was a full complement of staff. The matter would be considered in full at the next meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 13 July 2010.
- That as the Central Government had removed funding for free swimming; the initiative would finish at the end of July 2010. The Council's subsidy for free swimming would be used to fund efficiency savings.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

9. SAFER HEREFORDSHIRE PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY - UPDATE

(Councillors Hunt and Smith declared an interest)

The Committee received a report on the scrutiny of the Safer Herefordshire Partnership.

The Chairman of the Safer Herefordshire Scrutiny Review Group reported that there had been two meetings of the Group at which documentation had been reviewed. The Group had looked at NI 39 (Rate and number of alcohol harm related admissions), a Local Area Agreement and World Class Commissioning Target. The Group had been reassured that the Alcohol Harm Reduction Group was working to put into place a strategic plan to address the issue. The Group would look continue to look at how priorities and budgets were set by the Partnership.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (a) A member of the review group attends the Safer Herefordshire Strategy Group meeting when the Strategic Assessment is presented and priority settings are carried out;**
- (b) The Council income streams be rationalised so that funding for the partnership is received from a central source within the council, and that the Director of Resources should be invited to ensure that funding is coherently managed;**
- (c) A more extensive breakdown of integrated offender management should be provided to a future meeting;**
- (d) In order to provide a true costing, the Council expenditure on the budget should include the teams hidden costs, a figure of approximately £94k;**
- (e) A breakdown of Council contributions to the Partnership should be provided to the review group;**
- (f) Elected members should be asked to encourage their Parish Councils to reply to any future information/survey requests pertaining to the Safer Herefordshire Partnership and;**
- (g) All alcohol commissioning should be centralised and the commissioning of services by the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy Group should be targeted through the Joint Commissioning Group.**

10. COMMUNITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE OUTTURN FOR 2009/2010

The Committee received a report on the outturns for the key national performance indicator targets for Community Services within the new Sustainable Communities Directorate.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised:

- That a business satisfaction survey was sent to businesses on a monthly basis, from which the data for NI 182 (Business satisfaction with regulatory authorities) was derived. There was a target of returns of the survey of 72%.
- That a briefing note providing clear definitions of the performance indicators would be circulated by the Director of Sustainable Communities.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11. INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP

(Councillor Hubbard declared an interest)

The Committee received a report that outlined proposals contained in a report undertaken by the Stevens View Partnership, who were appointed to review the operation of Herefordshire's Tourism promotion.

The Assistant Director, Economy and Culture, reported that the review had found that the DMP (Destination Management Partnership) needed to take the next step in its development, and a number of changes had been suggested. These included the establishment of a new DMP with a more strategic role, and a Chief Executive Officer with administration support.

The review had also recommended that the DMP should not be a membership based organisation. The geographic membership groups would be co-ordinated by a Federation that would have representation on the board of the new DMP.

The Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) confirmed that the Review had his support. A final decision would be taken at Cabinet on the structure of the new DMP.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

12. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF VOLUNTEERING IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee received a report on the Scrutiny Review of Volunteering in Herefordshire.

The Vice Chairman thanked all the volunteers who had attended the two days of interviews that had formed the basis of the report. He said that the work of volunteers was of great importance to both the County and the Council, and volunteering should be encouraged as much as possible. A good forum for promoting volunteering was the Hearts of Herefordshire and the PACT meetings.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- (a) the Committee considered the report of the Volunteering Scrutiny Review Group, in particular its recommendations should be submitted to Cabinet.**
- (b) subject to the Review being approved, the Executive's response to the Review including an action plan be reported to the first available meeting of the Committee after the Executive has approved its response; and;**
- (c) a further report on progress in response to the Review be made after six months with consideration then being given to the need for any further reports to be made.**

13. EDGAR STREET GRID - UPDATE

(Councillor Hubbard declared an interest)

The Committee received an updated report on the Edgar Street Grid Project.

The Economic Development Manager reported that the budgets of Advantage West Midlands and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) had been significantly reduced and as a result the Agency had said that it might have to scale back some of the programmes to which it was committed. The HCA had received a budget cut of £230m for the current year, with an additional £610m considered to be at risk.

Given the uncertainty over funding, the ESG Board had decided to suspend negotiations with businesses in the second and third phases of the Link Road project. This pause would not affect those businesses on the Livestock Market Site, nor those in the first phase of the Link Road.

The Chief Executive of ESG Herefordshire Ltd reported that all the businesses on the Link Road had been written to the previous week in order to appraise them of the situation, and they would be continually updated whenever there was additional important news. All businesses had also been rung up to let them know what was happening as soon as the HCA funding had been suspended.

The letter had consisted of four main parts:

- Reassurance that the Government was continuing to support infrastructure projects
- That a clearer picture regarding funding was expected by the end of the current year.
- That it was not clear what the funding position from HCA was
- That the Link Road had been registered with the Treasury for tax increment financing, a way of using future gains in taxes to finance current improvements.

The Chief Executive, ESG Herefordshire Ltd went on to say that a review of the business case for the Higher Education Centre was also underway, and discussions were taking place with Hereford United FC concerning options to redevelop the club's grounds.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were raised:

- A Member raised concerns about the mixed messages that he perceived were being given out. The Birmingham Post had announced the imminent demise of AWM, which did not bode well for the long term funding position of the project. The businesses on the route of the Link Road were under a great deal of pressure as it was obviously difficult to formulate a business plan if it was unclear where the business would be located in 12 months time.
- In reply to a comment, the Sustainable Communities Director said that Herefordshire was in discussion with Shropshire and Telford & Wreakin councils regarding the Local Enterprise Partnerships that were likely to be instigated to replace the Regional Development Agency. The councils wanted to be well placed in the Region in order to maximise funding opportunities.
- A Member said that whilst he supported regeneration in the City, he was concerned about the way it was being undertaken, and requested that a review of the support packages that were being provided to businesses should be considered in the light of the current economic climate.

- A Member replied that he believed that progress on the project to date had been transparent and had been fully endorsed by Council. He suggested that the proposal was too narrow, and that should a review be considered, it ought to include the strategic direction of the project.

RESOLVED:

That:

- a) A Scoping Statement for a short Scrutiny Review of the strategic direction of the Edgar Street Project be considered at the next meeting; and;**
- b) The Committee should receive a briefing paper on assets purchased by Advantage West Midlands pertaining to the Edgar Street Grid Project.**

14. UPDATE ON THE RELOCATION OF THE OPEN RETAIL MARKET FROM THE FORMER CATTLE MARKET SITE TO COMMERCIAL STREET, HEREFORD

(Councillor Hubbard declared an interest)

The Committee received an updated report on the relocation of the Open Retail Market from the Livestock Market Site to High Town.

In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- That the Market had received support from the public, and was in the optimum place in the City.
- That the City Partnership did not feel that there was a successful overarching guiding strategy for the development of markets in the City Centre. There was concern as to whether the Butter market regeneration was sufficient to help raise the profile of High Town and the City.
- That there should be a greater concentration on the quality of stalls in the market, rather than just on the quantity of stallholders.
- That there were still several stalls in the Cattle Market, including two selling meat that would not be able to move to High Town because of the size of their lorries.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

15. ACTION PLAN MONITORING: REVIEW OF THE HEREFORDSHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2005-25

The Committee received a report on the progress of recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of the Herefordshire Economic Development Strategy 2005-25.

The Assistant Director, Economy and Culture, reported that, together with the recommendations from the review, a survey of employers in the County that was underway would help to form the basis of the next iteration of the Economic Development Strategy, which would be completed by the end of the year.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

16. ACTION PLAN MONITORING: REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY & DRUGS PARTNERSHIP

The Committee received a report on the progress of recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of the Community and Safety Drugs Partnership.

The Partnership Manager, Safer Herefordshire reported that the report was an updated Action Plan from that received by the Committee on 29 June 2009. The Community Safety and Drugs Partnership had now been subsumed into the Safer Herefordshire Partnership.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- A Member expressed concern over the Action Plan, and pointed out that the first two recommendations listed were incorrect, as they were not those listed in the Review.
- He asked that a sample of the actions that had been taken under Recommendation 7 (That the new community pride grants for the County include support for small initiatives that aim to design out crime) be provided to the Committee.
- A Member pointed out that there was no progress stated against Recommendation 9.

RESOLVED: That the areas of concern be noted, and a further reported be provided to the Committee at the next meeting.

17. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be approved and reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm

CHAIRMAN