

**MINUTES of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 8 February 2010 at 9.30 am**

**Present:** Councillor PJ Edwards (Chairman)  
Councillor WLS Bowen (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: PA Andrews, AE Gray, KG Grumbley, TM James, RI Matthews, AT Oliver and PJ Watts

**In attendance:** Councillor RJ Phillips (Leader of the Council).

**9. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors ME Cooper and PM Morgan.

**10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor AE Gray declared a personal interest in agenda item 5: Sustainable Community Strategy (Refresh) as a provider of care.

**11. MINUTES**

It was reported that the last word of paragraph 2 of Minute no 6 on page 4 of the Minutes should read "January", not February and had been amended.

**RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting as amended be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

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

There were no suggestions from Members of the Public.

**13. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY (REFRESH)**

*(Councillor AE Gray declared a personal interest.)*

The Committee considered whether to make any comments to Cabinet on the refresh of Herefordshire's Sustainable Community Strategy covering the period 2010-2013.

The Head of Partnership Support presented the report. She drew attention to the six priority themes for the County; guiding principles for Partnership working developed during the refresh; and the intention that the Strategy should highlight the key issues and challenges facing the County.

The Leader of the Council commented on the importance of all partners working together to deliver the agreed priorities in the context of financial constraints. He considered that compared with many areas partners were co-operating well but there were some cultural issues to address. For example, where public bodies were answerable to Government

departments this could distort priorities. There was a need to ensure that their actions were aligned to the needs of the County.

In discussion the following principal points were made:

- That it was important that Partners were accountable for delivering the Strategy, reflecting the way in which Councillors were accountable to the electorate. The role of the scrutiny committees in holding partners to account was noted.

The Head of Partnership Support stated that she recognised the importance of accountability to the community and efforts were being made to enhance that accountability. She expressed an interest in examining how the Partnership could work with the scrutiny committees as part of this process.

- Members observed that the document required further editing and made a number of detailed comments, highlighting a number of typographical and grammatical changes identifying some areas where there appeared to be inconsistency and where the text needed to be updated, and requesting that the statistical evidence base be checked and terms used in the document more clearly explained.
- It was suggested that the section on Stronger Communities should be strengthened. It needed to highlight the need to address the problem faced by parts of the community where the population was ageing, there was no affordable housing, and no house building, meaning it was difficult for young people to live in those communities, which in turn was leading to a decline in local services. The Local Development Framework did not address this concern and the Strategy needed to link to that. Noting that affordable housing could sometimes be interpreted as meaning small houses, Members suggested that sensible mixed developments were needed. The importance of local people being given priority when allocating affordable housing was also stressed.
- Members emphasised the critical role housing played in health, education, safety and family life and the importance of the Strategy fully reflecting this point.
- The section on Children and Young People needed to reflect the pressures on the viability of schools and most importantly emphasise the need to continue to strive to maintain and improve educational standards.
- It was noted that the draft document appeared to provide for considerable design work and colour photographs. It was suggested consideration be given to producing a simplified document that would keep production costs down, perhaps, for example, confining use of colour to the front cover only.
- The community use of school facilities was discussed. It was suggested that the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee might want to consider this issue.

**RESOLVED: That, noting that the document needed further editing and that the Committee had made a number of detailed comments in this regard, Cabinet be recommended to consider the following principal observations on the Sustainable Community Strategy Refresh:**

- **The need for the Strategy to emphasise the importance of service delivery and of Partners being responsive to issues of local concern and accountable for their actions.**
- **The need for the Strategy to reflect the need to address the problem faced by parts of the community where the population was ageing, there was no**

**affordable housing, and no house building, meaning it was difficult for young people to live in those communities**

- **The need for the Strategy to reflect more strongly the critical importance of affordable housing for local people recognising the vital role housing played in health, education, safety and family life.**
- **The need for the Strategy to emphasise the importance of continuing to strive to maintain and improve educational standards.**
- **That a simplified document should be prepared to reduce production costs, confining use of colour, for example, to the front cover.**

#### **14. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered its work programme including a request from the Executive to review the impact of the severe winter weather as part of that programme.

The Leader commented on the benefits he thought could be derived from a review of the response to the severe weather by the various partners in the County.

It was agreed that the review be undertaken as a “one day” review by the Committee as a whole.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- That**
- (a) a review of the impact of the severe winter weather be included within the work programme; and**
  - (b) the work programme as amended be approved as a basis for further development.**

The meeting ended at 11.00 am

**CHAIRMAN**