

Minutes of the meeting of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Tuesday 17 February 2026 at 2.00 pm

Committee members present in person and voting: **Councillors: Frank Cornthwaite (Vice-Chairperson), Dave Davies, Ed O'Driscoll (Chairperson), Rob Owens, Roger Phillips and Diana Toynbee**

Others in attendance:

R Allonby	Service Director Economy and Growth	Herefordshire Council
Councillor B Baker		Herefordshire Council
J Hobbs	Corporate Director Economy and Environment	Herefordshire Council
G Jones	Co-Chair	Herefordshire DBID
N Kinsey	Economic Development Manager	Herefordshire Council
Councillor J Lester	Leader of the Council	Herefordshire Council
D Mansell	Chief Executive	Herefordshire DBID
H Merricks-Murgatroyd	Democratic Services Officer	Herefordshire Council
Councillor E Swinglehurst	Cabinet Member Environment	Herefordshire Council
D Thornton	Democratic Services Support Officer	Herefordshire Council
D Webb	Statutory Scrutiny Officer	Herefordshire Council

81. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bruce Baker.

82. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Cllr Dave Davies was present as the named substitute for Cllr Bruce Baker.

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Roger Phillips noted that the Co-Chair Herefordshire Destination Business Improvement District (DBID) owns properties in his ward.

The Chairperson noted that he is a board member of the Herefordshire DBID as a representative of one of the market towns.

84. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were received.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson.

85. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions had been received from members of the public.

86. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

No questions had been received from councillors.

87. TOURISM IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The committee considered a report on the Tourism in Herefordshire item.

The principal points of the subsequent discussion are summarised below:

1. The Service Director Economy and Growth noted that:
 - a. The economic plan is being reviewed for the county and that will be progressed through Cabinet in the coming weeks.
 - b. Tourism promotes the county as a place to live, work, and study. Some of the key strengths as a county are around natural environment, culture, and a sense of community.
2. In response to a question about the upcoming ballot, the Chief Executive Herefordshire DBID noted that:
 - a. Destination Business Improvement Districts (DBIDs) operate for a five-year term and every five years they must ballot their levy payers to approve their operation for the following five years.
 - b. On the voting slip, members are asked to answer a simple 'yes' or 'no' question. For the Herefordshire DBID to continue, this question must be answered 'yes' in two ways: first, at least 51% of voting members must vote in favour; and second, those 'yes' votes must represent at least 51% of the total combined rateable value.
 - c. If a no vote was received, the work of the Herefordshire DBID would cease.
3. The Service Director Economy and Growth added that the council is also entitled to vote, as it owns assets that fall within the definition of the Herefordshire DBID, including, for example, car parks, museums, and libraries. As a result, the council holds 23 votes and must decide whether to vote in favour, abstain, or vote against. In the previous ballot, held nearly five years ago, the council voted in favour of establishing the Herefordshire DBID.
4. In response to a question about whether tourism is a council-led strategic priority delivered through partnership or is it a DBID-led marketing function with limited public sector integration, the Service Director Economy and Growth noted that:
 - a. Tourism is important to the council but it does not individually support or have an officer for any other sector or industry. Instead, the way in which the council supports economic development generally is around the provision of business support through the growth hub for any industry.
 - b. It has an economic strategy where the council prioritises support for sectoral growth in the key sectors where it has an opportunity to support the growth of the economy through.
 - c. In the past, local authorities tended to have tourism officers and ran some tourism functions themselves. However, this has predominantly changed across the country because of funding situations and because of the DBID model supporting itself.
 - d. The council took a decision about six to seven years ago to provide funding to develop a feasibility study to assess whether the Herefordshire

DBID itself was feasible and whether there were enough businesses to support it and what kind of levy it would need to charge. The council also provided around £100k in investment at the time to support the development of the business plan and initial ballot to create the Herefordshire DBID, so that over the five years it would generate around £500k return on the levy and create a structure for the industry to support itself.

- e. Since then, the council has continued to support with the finances available to it including around £125,000 of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) administered by the council.
 - f. At the moment, the council has no allocation from government to continue with business grant funding. It was added that economic development is a non-statutory activity.
5. In response to questions regarding the criteria the council will use when deciding how to vote in the ballot, whether Cabinet has articulated a tourism policy to guide that decision, and whether a minimum contingency model should be developed in the event that the ballot fails, the leader of the council noted that voting decisions rest with individual members. However, Cabinet is fully supportive of the Herefordshire DBID and highlighted the established track record of its positive impact.
 6. The Chief Executive Herefordshire DBID also explained that significant work is undertaken with businesses prior to reaching the ballot stage. This includes a stage 1 consultation, which is high-level and allows businesses to share initial views and identify key issues affecting them. The Herefordshire DBID is currently reviewing and analysing the feedback from stage 1 and is preparing to move into stage 2 consultation. Stage 2 will be launched at a tourism conference in April and will be supported by seven roadshow events across the county aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the factors impacting businesses. As part of the Stage 2 consultation, consideration will also be given to the rules governing the Herefordshire DBID, including whether any changes to the levy rules may be required.
 7. The Chief Executive Herefordshire DBID added that in relation to benchmarking, the DBID works closely with other organisations such as Visit Worcestershire, Visit Shropshire, and Visit England and attend other regional local visitor economy partnership (LVEP) meetings to make sure that they are feeding off projects that others are running which can be used as evidence to influence the Herefordshire DBID's own work.
 8. It was also noted that the Herefordshire DBID has a few different data sets including a yearly data set with the Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) data which gives economic impact over the whole tourism sector. Another data set is Place Informatics which is footfall data across the county which has been collected for the last two years. Both STEAM and Place Informatics data are fed into funding applications that the Herefordshire DBID uses and is shared with the council. In addition, there are social media and website statistics which helps to give a better understanding about how people are interacting with the brand.
 9. In response to a question on how the council can engage with planning, economic development, and highways to support the tourism sector and tourism businesses, the service director economy and growth explained that all of these areas feed into the destination management plan (DMP). It was noted that the restart of the Local Plan process will consider the council's economic priorities, alongside how a strong visitor offer for the county can be developed. It was also

- highlighted that, as part of the BID's development of its business plan for the next five years, there is a formal consultation process with each of the council's departments that have an impact on tourism.
10. The Service Director Economy and Growth clarified that over the last four to five years, there has been UKSPF funding and Rural Prosperity Funding from government to councils to allocate to support different business sectors. Those funds run out in March 2026 and there is no new allocation of any government funding to support tourism or any other sector into the next financial year.
 11. In response to a question regarding which elements of the Destination Management Plan (DMP) require leadership, the Service Director Economy and Growth explained that the DMP identifies a range of key activities and actions, each with different lead partners. Coordination of these actions is undertaken through the LVEP. The organisation and delivery of the LVEP is overseen by an advisory board comprising representatives from the Herefordshire DBID and the council, through which the council considers the identified actions and how they will be delivered as part of the DMP going forward.
 12. In response to a question about whether the council does have a role in holding the Herefordshire DBID to account on behalf of the levy payers and the wider tourism community, the Service Director Economy and Growth noted that in terms of the governance structure, the arrangement for the LVEP advisory board is the Cabinet Member Economy and Growth who sits on that alongside an officer as an observer who the Service Director Economy and Growth attends along with chief executive and the chair of the Herefordshire DBID board. There is also an observer status on the board itself.
 13. The Service Director Economy and Growth clarified that, in terms of oversight, the Herefordshire DBID operates as a company limited by guarantee and is therefore legally and governance-wise separate from the council. The council has a statutory duty to collect the Herefordshire DBID levy alongside business rates and may withhold collection if it considers that the Herefordshire DBID is not delivering its business plan or is failing to meet its obligations. This is the only direct oversight role the council holds, as the BID's board is independently accountable for delivering in the best interests of the company.
 14. The Chief Executive Herefordshire DBID added that governance is transparent and fits into what the council and other partners would want to see if it was a council body. All accounts are fully audited to ensure that it is fully operational for its members and all accounts, as well as governance papers, are uploaded onto its website. The Herefordshire DBID also went for British BID accreditation which is a national standard for BIDs to ensure that the Herefordshire DBID is fully operational in every element of governance for the company.
 15. In response to a question about accessibility, the Chief Executive Herefordshire DBID confirmed that it is ensured that all campaigns have elements that everyone can access including, for example, the *Visit Herefordshire Outdoor Active* app which allows everyone free access to all of the information it provides.
 16. The Chief Executive Herefordshire DBID confirmed that businesses within the city boundary are not required to pay both BIDs; they pay either the Hereford City BID or, if located outside the city boundary and operating as a tourism business, the Herefordshire DBID. It was added that the Herefordshire DBID works closely with the Hereford City BID and promotes Hereford-related activity through *the Visit Herefordshire* platforms.

17. The Chief Executive Herefordshire DBID added that, in relation to the Destination Management Plan (DMP), the first review is scheduled to take place in May 2026. An action plan underpins the DMP, setting out how each priority will be delivered, and it was noted that this action plan can be shared in May.

Resolved

That:

1. **Herefordshire Council recognises the considerable positive impact the Herefordshire Destination Business Improvement District (DBID) has had on development of the tourism offer and should ensure council departments support the Destination Management Plan through planning, regulatory services, transport, and highways.**
2. **Welcomes the council leader's view that Herefordshire Council will support the DBID ballot and recommends that the council supports the ballot publicly when it takes place, and that Herefordshire Council continues to engage politically during the DBID ballot process.**
3. **Herefordshire Council develops a contingency plan should the DBID ballot not be successful.**
4. **Herefordshire Council lobbies government to support business development, including tourism, outside of metropolitan areas.**

88. WORK PROGRAMME 2025/6 AND 2026/7

The Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented the draft work programme for the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the municipal year 2025/26 and the first eight months of the 2026/27 municipal year.

Resolved

That:

- a) **The committee agree the draft work programme Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee contained in the work programme report attached as appendix 1, which will be subject to monthly review, as the basis of their primary focus for the remainder of the municipal year.**
- b) **The committee note the work programme for the other scrutiny committees and identify any opportunities for collaboration or alignment of work.**

89. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 15th April 2026, 2:00 pm.

The meeting ended at 4.07 pm

Chairperson