

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Wednesday, 20th December, 2006 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
	Councillor	H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, J.G.S. Guthrie, B. Hunt, J.G. Jarvis and D.C. Taylor
	Co-opted Members	Mrs. E. Newman (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils)

In attendance: Councillor R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services) and Councillor R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Resources)

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor M.R. Cunningham, Councillor P.G. Turpin, Councillor A.L. Williams and Mr G. Jones.

36. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J.G. Jarvis declared a personal interest in Item 9: 'Community Services Scrutiny Committee Work Programme'.

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes for the meeting held on 8th November 2006, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no suggestions from members of the public.

40. REVIEW OF THE SUPPORT FOR MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE CENTRES

The Committee considered the findings of the Museum Review Group following the Review of the Support for Museums and Heritage Centres.

The Chairman began by thanking the many witnesses who had met with and hosted the Review Group whilst it had completed its work. He also expressed his thanks to the Review Group's two principal support officers Lara Latcham and Craig Goodall.

Ms. Latcham explained to the Committee that the Review Group had considered

both independent and local authority operated museums in the County. She reminded Members that a list of all known museums in the County and a list of the Review Groups witnesses had been circulated separately before the meeting.

She informed Members that the Review Group had visited Kington Museum; Butchers Row Museum, Ledbury; the Painted Room, Ledbury; the Judges Lodgings, Presteigne; Hereford Museum and Art Gallery and the Friar Street Resource Centre.

She then took the Committee through each of the Review Group's recommendations explaining the rationale behind them.

- (a) It was felt that the service currently known as Heritage Services should change its name to the 'Museum Service'. This was to help avoid confusion with members of the public who often did not realise that Heritage Services included Museums.
- (b) Nationally Museums, Libraries and Archives are grouped together. It was suggested that the three services in Herefordshire Council were grouped together locally in the same Division to enable easier cross-discipline partnership work. In response to a question it was clarified that the three services had never been grouped together locally. Museums had been linked with both Archives and Libraries but not at the same time.
- (c) It was recommended that all Herefordshire Council Museums, and those independent museums with the capacity to do so, completed the Museums Association Accreditation process. This scheme acted as a quality assurance mark for Museums. Becoming accredited would open up potential funding streams and possibilities of item loans.
- (d) As Heritage Services was a non-statutory service (apart from the preservation of artefacts for future generations) it was potentially more vulnerable to Council budget cuts than other services. Therefore to ensure the long-term future of the service it was felt that the possibility of Heritage Services at Herefordshire Council converting to a single entity Trust be investigated. Converting to Trust Status may also open up new revenue streams which a local authority would be ineligible for.
 - (a) If the recommendation to convert to a Trust was accepted then the Council should award a long-term funding deal to the Trust. Therefore they felt it was prudent for Herefordshire Council to plan along the lines of a 25-year deal.
 - (b) The appointment of a Museum Development Officer was proving to be a successful project and was set to used as a model for heritage and museum work in Europe. As the post was externally funded it was hoped that this funding would continue.
 - (c) Local independent museums had been hit by the withdrawal of the Voluntary Sector Grants Scheme. The Review Group had been advised that Community Grant Funding was available to local independent museums.
 - (d) To enable greater levels of planning to take place it was thought that Community Grant Funding for museums should be made available for longer than the current 12 month maximum.
 - (e) The high cost of insurance was described as prohibitive many times during the Review, especially for smaller independent museums who operated on a tight budget. It was thought that possibly savings could be made if independent museums in the County formed an insurance co-operative. It was thought that the Museum Development Officer would be the best person to investigate this possibility.
 - (f) It was thought that a small hiring collection should be established along the lines of the Reading Corporate Loans scheme. This was where local businesses paid a fee of £1,000 a year to support museum work in schools and in return they could loan an artefact from a designated list. This was seen as a way in which

the Museum Service could generate additional income.

- (g) A formula should be developed to establish the value that heritage provides to the local community in social and economic terms. The Review Group were aware of two formulae currently being developed and suggested that the outcome of each was monitored closely.
- (i) Finally, upon visiting Kington Museum the Review Group were informed that the Museum premises had been struck several times by lorries reversing to a nearby store. As the Kington Museum premises is owned by the Council it was recommended that preventative measures were put in place to prevent serious damage to the building taking place.

The Chairman stated that as a non-statutory service the Review Group had felt that Heritage Services was more vulnerable than other Council services to suffer budgetary restrictions. He felt that if this happened it would be a mistake as Heritage Services provided many valuable services to the people of Herefordshire.

The Head of Economic and Community Services reported that the Council operated and supported number of non-statutory services and Trusts including Parks and Countryside, The Courtyard and Halo. She added that these operations had been expected to share the Council's current budget restrictions and that it would be unfair if Heritage Services, either as a Council Department or as a Trust was exempt from these measures.

In relation to recommendation (e) it was clarified that by a long term funding deal the Review Group were thinking in terms of a 25-year deal for the Heritage Services Trust. The Review Group had heard evidence of a Trust in the UK receiving a funding arrangement of the same length.

The Director of Adult and Community Services stated that Herefordshire Council provided funding to a number of Trusts in the County who would like a similar funding arrangement. He stated that it was unlikely that a Trust would receive anything longer than a three year funding deal from the Council.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) added that Trust funding was as vulnerable to Council budget cuts as any Council service.

Reservations were expressed about the validity of recommendation (k). A Member of the Review Group responded by saying that whilst he shared the same reservations about the development of formulae to ascertain the social and economic value of Heritage he felt that it was still worthwhile to try and develop the data, as none was available at the current time.

In relation to paragraph 134 of the report the Head of Economic and Community Services commented that every Council service had an income generation target. Any money raised was returned to the Service which had earned/received it. If the income generation target for Heritage Services, which was relatively low anyway, was removed in favour of individual venues retaining all of their on site income then the Service's overall expenditure would need to be reduced.

A representative of Kington Museum thanked the Review Group for their report and for visiting the museum as part of the Review.

The Chairman thanked everyone who had met the Review Group during the course of the Review and reminded Members that there were many interesting museums out in the County that many people were not aware of.

RECOMMENDED:

That:

- (a) consideration should be given to reverting to the title 'Museum Services' to identify the service currently known as Heritage Services;
 - (b) as Museums, Libraries and Archives are grouped together nationally, it should be considered that the three services should be grouped in the same Herefordshire Council division to enable easier cross discipline partnership;
 - (c) all Herefordshire Council Museums and those independent Museums with the capacity to do so in the County should be encouraged to complete the Museum Associations Accreditation process;
 - (d) Herefordshire Heritage Services should research and consider the possibility of converting to single entity trust status;
 - (e) if Herefordshire Heritage Services does convert to a single entity trust then any funding agreement with Herefordshire Council should be long-term;
 - (f) it is to be hoped that the Museum Development Officer project will continue through the support of the West Midlands Hub and Museums, Libraries and Archives;
 - (g) independent museums in the County should be reminded that they can apply for Community Grant Funding;
 - (h) it should be made possible for Museums to apply for longer term Community Grant Funding than the one year agreements currently available;
 - (i) the possibility of a partnership insurance scheme for the Herefordshire Museums Forum members should be explored. This could be pursued by the Museum Development Officer on the Forum's behalf;
 - (j) a small hiring collection should be established to loan objects along the lines of the Reading Corporate Loans scheme;
 - (k) a formula should be developed to measure Heritage's impact on both tourism and also to demonstrate its social and economic impact;
 - (l) preventative measures should be taken to protect Kington Museum from being struck by reversing lorries to a nearby store;
 - (m) the Executives 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;
- (n) a further report on progress in response to the Review then be made after six months with consideration then being given to the need for any

further reports to be made.

41. ANNUAL REPORT ON RURAL REGENERATION

The Committee was advised of the annual activity in the Cabinet Member Portfolio for Rural Regeneration and Strategy.

The following are the principal points from the ensuing discussion:

- Concern was expressed at the number of empty shops in Ross on Wye and the Cabinet Member was asked what he was doing to improve the situation.

The Cabinet Member shared the concern that the Member expressed and stated that whilst there were some schemes in place to help traders in Ross-on-Wye there were still some empty premises in the town centre.

The Market Towns Officer informed the Committee that there had been 16 applications for shop front grants from traders in Ross-on-Wye which had resulted in the Council approaching Advantage West Midlands for additional funds for the scheme. He also highlighted that Business Rate relief was available to new traders for three months.

A Member of the Committee felt that schemes such as these were insignificant. He felt that Ross-on-Wye was in serious need of complete economic regeneration. He stated that out of town shops were detrimental to the town centre and that planning policies should be amended to prevent further developments.

It was suggested that tourists visiting the Ross on Wye and Monmouth areas were more likely to visit Monmouth than Ross on Wye. He thought that the Committee should consider investigating tourism in the County.

It was noted that there were many empty shops, particularly in Widemarsh Street, Hereford. This was again seen as a serious concern.

The Director of Adult and Community Services added that an Economic Development Strategy for the County would be published soon. He suggested that shops could widen their portfolios by branching out into web sales.

The Head of Economic and Community Services stated that investment was taking place in Hereford. She explained that Marks and Spencer were set to complete a major refurbishment of its Hereford store in the future. It was also noted that Asda was set to increase its opening hours.

- It was noted that Bromyard Town Council was developing a Parish Plan and had recently formed a steering group to facilitate the process.
- The Chairman called for the development of a night-time economy in Hereford City Centre. He felt that the Council could provide grants to City Centre cafes to remain open into the late evening.
- It was noted that the livestock market would probably be the subject of a separate meeting and any questions on the issue could be addressed there.
- In response to a series of questions the Cabinet Member explained that some

small parts of the Council's smallholdings estate had been sold.

He also explained that many of the properties within the Council's ownership would require a lot of maintenance expenditure.

He gave an example of a property which contained a listed wall that would have cost £70,000 to repair. However, it had been possible to sell the property and the £70,000 bill was avoided. He explained that it was his intention to continue with this policy.

In response to a plea not to sell off the Council smallholdings estate as it was a valuable asset the Cabinet Member informed the Committee that whilst the entire estate was worth over £30m it had a relatively low rental income at £400,000 per annum. The majority of this rental income was spent on repairs, then officer costs with a small sum uncommitted. He felt that as the estate did not contribute significant amounts of money then parts of it should be sold when the opportunity arose to fund other projects.

He explained that around half of the estate's tenants had lifetime leases. The majority of these were owned by farmers and the average age of a tenant was 59.

RESOLVED: That, the report be noted.

42. PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Committee was informed of the available performance indicators position and provided with information about current performance management work within the Economic and Community Services Division of the Adult and Community Services Directorate.

The Performance Improvement Manager began by explaining that all the indicators in the performance report were not under their target figures but improvements on the previous year. With regard to Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 178, 'The percentage of total length of footpaths and public rights of way which were easy to use by members of the public', the target of 48% had been exceeded so a successful status icon should have been printed in the report. In addition to this BVPI 127a 'Number of violent crimes in Herefordshire' performance in Quarter 2 was 7.5 and not 4 as listed in the agenda papers. A copy of the performance report was appended to the report.

The Committee continued to discuss BVPI 178 regarding footpaths in more detail. In response to a question the Performance Improvement Manager explained that in order to measure success towards the target a small percentage of the County's footpaths were inspected at specific intervals each year.

A Member of the Committee said that, whilst he understood the inspection regime, he felt that more needed to be done to ensure that the County's footpaths remained open. Inspecting a small percentage of the County's footpaths each year did not ensure that all footpaths were accessible to users. The County had many footpaths which were an important feature in its attraction to tourists.

It was noted that whilst the target for footpaths had been met the target set was not particularly high in the first place. According to the performance report only 49% of the footpaths inspected were considered easy to use by members of the public. A Member of the Committee deduced that this meant that the remaining 51% of the

footpaths inspected were considered not easy to use when they were inspected. As this figure only represented a small percentage of the County's footpaths the Committee expressed concern at the potential number of footpaths which may not be easy to use throughout the County if the figure from the inspected footpaths was representative of all footpaths in Herefordshire.

Other Members commented that individual farmers and parish councils had responsibilities to keep footpaths in their jurisdiction open.

The Director of Adult and Community Services informed the Committee that there were significant resource issues which impacted upon the level of footpath maintenance that could take place. He also accepted that to a certain extent the Council was reliant on the work of parish councils in ensuring that footpaths in the County were easy to use by members of the public. He stated that he would circulate a briefing note outside of the meeting concerning the issues raised and the responsibilities of parish councils and footpaths.

The Head of Economic and Community Services explained that there were good relationships in place with many of the County's parish councils who were able to apply for grants to enable them to help maintain their footpaths. The same situation was not true with private landowners who often gave enforcement officers a difficult time and had to be threatened with legal action to ensure they met their statutory obligations.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) added that footpaths were a very difficult issue to deal with. He commented that any legal issues often took years to resolve and the budgets for maintenance were always overspent..

In relation to Local PI LPSAA2G, 'Average (median) weekly earnings in Herefordshire compared with the average in the West Midlands', it was noted that the average earnings in Herefordshire for 2005/06 was significantly lower than the West Midlands average.

The Director of Adult and Community Services explained that whilst there was low unemployment in Herefordshire the quality of jobs available was not particularly high. This meant that wages were lower. It was part of the Council's Economic Strategy to encourage companies requiring higher skilled and consequently higher paid workers to the County. At the same time schemes were in place to retrain people to increase Herefordshire's skills base.

It was noted that the target regarding the number of respondents who found it easy to access a Post Office was set at 85% and not 58% as set out in the report.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) added that he was pleased to report that BVPIs 170a/b/c, with regard to Museum usages, were all set to be achieved. In the past these targets had been difficult to achieve. It was explained that the target which counted number of visits to a museum per 1000 of the population counted out of County visitors.

RESOLVED:

That: (a) the Director of Adult and Community Services circulated an information report regarding footpaths in the County including the responsibilities of Parish Councils;

and;

(b) the report be noted

43. COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme for the remainder of 2006/07.

It was suggested that the Committee recommend to its successors, following the May elections, that they consider completing a Review of Tourism in the County. The Review should be on two fronts. Firstly, to consider how Tourism is managed in the County. Secondly, on what can be done to attract more visitors to the County.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) asked the Committee to consider delaying any planned Review of Tourism until the new Destination Management Partnership had become more established. He felt that to review tourism whilst the DMP was still finding its feet could be potentially damaging.

The Chairman added that the Divisional Commander of West Mercia Police was to be invited to the next meeting of the Committee as part of its Community Safety remit.

In response to a question on progress with the recommendations of the Courtyard Review Group the Committee was informed that the Courtyard had still not submitted its response to the Review to Cabinet. The response had been delayed pending the outcome of a consultant's report commissioned by the Courtyard. It was expected that this report would be completed by March which would allow the Committee to be updated on the situation at its next meeting.

Members expressed concern about the length of time it was taking the Courtyard to respond to the Review Group's report and the cost of consultancy work that had been commissioned.

Following earlier concerns expressed about the County's economic position it was suggested that the Committee consider the Council's Economic Strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the following issues raised by the Committee be approved and reported to the Strategic Monitoring Committee:

(a) Review of Tourism;

(b) Community Safety and West Mercia Police;

(c) Response from the Courtyard Centre for the Arts to the Courtyard Review Group;

and;

(d) Herefordshire Economic Strategy.

The meeting ended at 11.40 a.m.

CHAIRMAN