

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 2nd July, 2007 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	TM James (Chairman)
	Councillor	RH Smith (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	CM Bartrum, DJ Benjamin, DW Greenow, KS Guthrie, MAF Hubbard, B Hunt, TW Hunt and PM Morgan
	Co-opted Members	Mr G. Woodman (Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce), Ms B Heavens (Tourism)

In attendance: Councillors: PA Andrews, AJM Blackshaw (Cabinet Member – Economic and Community Services) and PJ Edwards.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor P Cutter and Ms C Jones (Chamber of Commerce).

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor T. Hunt substituted for Councillor P Cutter, Mr G Woodman substituted for Ms C Jones, Ms B Heavens substituted for the Tourism Sector.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor CM Bartrum	14, Proposed Review of Tourism.	Personal
Councillor DW Greenow	12, Work Programme.	Personal
Councillor KS Guthrie	13, Proposed Review of Agreement with Halo Leisure Trust.	Personal
B. Heavens	14, Proposed Review of Tourism.	Personal
Councillor MAF Hubbard	9, Economic and Community Services Performance Monitoring. 11 Proposed Review of Tourism.	Personal Personal
G. Woodman	14, Proposed Review of Tourism	Personal

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th March 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

No suggestions were received from members of the public.

6. CO-OPTED MEMBERSHIP

The Committee reviewed its co-opted membership.

Members felt that it would be beneficial to continue with the appointment of co-opted members from the Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire Association of Local Councils, Herefordshire National Farmers Union and the Tourism Sector to the Committee.

With regard to the list of Committee Advisors, as listed at Appendix 1 to the report, Members felt that it would be better to stop the practice of holding a standing list of advisors in favour of inviting relevant people to meetings as and when they were required. It was noted that the Committee Advisors had not often been called upon to assist the Committee with its work. It was also noted that many of the people listed as advisors had moved on.

RESOVLED:

That:

- (a) the practice of appointing co-opted members from the Chamber of Commerce, Herefordshire Association of Local Councils, Herefordshire National Farmers Union and the Tourism Sector be continued;**
 - (b) the term of office of the nominee should be at the relevant organisations discretion, subject to the nomination being reconfirmed after the four-yearly elections to Herefordshire Council;**
- and;**
- (c) the practice of holding a list of advisors be discontinued in favour of inviting relevant advisors to meetings on a needs basis.**

7. CULTURAL SERVICES COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT REPORT

The Committee were informed of the outcome of the Cultural Services Inspection by the Audit Commission.

The Head of Economic and Community Services reported that the outcome of the inspection was that Cultural Services in Herefordshire provided 'a fair service that has promising prospects for improvement'. The last time the service was inspected the Audit Commissions rating had been 'a fair service with uncertain prospects' though that inspection focused solely on library services.

Cultural Services had been rated at the top end of the 'fair' grading but because certain standards were being missed it was not possible for a 'good' rating to be awarded.

The key areas which prevented a good rating being achieved were:

- Not meeting all public library standards, including distance to a library for all residents, spending on book stock and opening hours.
- Not displaying service standards at all facilities.

- Non-compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) at Ledbury Library.
- Lack of benchmarking the cost of services.

Appendix 1 to the report contained a summary of recommendations and proposed improvements. The Cabinet Member (Economic and Community Services) informed the meeting that he expected to receive an action plan on the proposals during the summer. The Chairman requested that the action plan be presented to the Committee.

In response to a question the Head of Economic and Community Services confirmed that a lot of the recommendations were around processes. The Audit Commission were keen for the Council to be able to evidence its performance and achievements.

A Member noted that there were a number of problems based around libraries and asked what precisely these problems were. The Director of Adult and Community Services reported that some key core standards were being missed. The key standards being missed were as follows:

1. Ledbury Library was not compliant with the DDA. Plans were being developed to rectify this.
2. The rural nature of the County meant that it was impossible for each resident to live within 2 miles of a library as desired by library standards.
3. Not enough money spent replenishing and adding to the book stock. This was something that could easily be addressed but had to be considered with other competing priorities.

The Head of Economic and Community Services confirmed that it was unacceptable for Ledbury Library to not comply with the DDA and that this had to change. Improvements were also required at Hereford Library.

The Cabinet Member reported that the development of a new Library on the Edgar Street Grid (ESG) site should solve all the problems currently experienced at Hereford Library. In relation to tourism he reported that tourism spending and the cost of Tourist Information Centres (TIC's) was being investigated.

The tourism representative added that Visit Britain was conducting a national consultation on the changing needs of visitors. She added that once the report was complete it would be presented to Visit Herefordshire.

In response to a query it was explained that childcare provision at the Counties leisure centres was considered to be inconsistent by the Audit Commission because it was not available in all of the centres all of the time. The Head of Economic and Community Services acknowledged the need to meet the demand but explained that it was not economical to have childcare provision on permanent standby.

RESOLVED:

That: (a) the Action Plan being prepared based on the outcomes of the Audit Commission inspection of Cultural Services be presented to the Committee;

and;

(b) the report be noted.

8. REVIEW OF THE SUPPORT FOR MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE CENTRES - CABINET'S RESPONSE

The Committee considered Cabinet's response to the recommendations made to it following the Committee's Review of Museums and Heritage.

The Head of Economic and Community Services took the Committee through the recommendations made by the Review Group and Cabinet's response to each one. The recommendations and responses can be found at Appendix 1 to the report.

In response to a question the Head of Economic and Community Services clarified that, in paragraph 19 of the appendix, guidelines issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport would be used to measure the impact of tourism. This would enable national benchmarking to take place in the future.

The tourism representative reported that she was pleased that Cabinet had decided to retain the title 'Heritage Services' as heritage was an internationally recognised word within the tourism industry and to visitors.

The Head of Economic and Community Services clarified that the Museum Development Officer (MDO) was in place to support the independent museum sector including gaining accreditation. The MDO was regionally funded at no cost to the Council. Museums in the County could also utilise the services of a Collections Officer.

It was noted that the majority of museums that had converted to Trust status held a collection of national or international importance.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

9. ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Committee were informed of the performance indicators position and other performance management information for the Economic and Community Services Division within the Adult and Community Services Directorate.

The Improvement Manager informed Members that many of the statistics were collected quarterly so there was some information awaiting collation. However it was possible to compare last years performance against targets set.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

Concern was expressed that 70% of residents surveyed thought that speeding traffic was a problem. A Member suggested that perhaps this indicated that residents were in favour of 20mph speed limits being enforced in certain areas.

The Committee noted that a persons perception of a problem could often be different from the reality. Members were informed that the questions asked to measure perception in this area were prescribed by the Home Office so there had been no scope to adjust the manner of questioning to remove negative connotations.

The Director of Adult and Community Services agreed with a suggestion by a Member that it was important that the Council communicated positive messages to the community to try and help improve the public views on issues which were perceived to be problems but in reality were not.

The Head of Economic and Community Services informed Members that the Community and Safety Drugs Partnership had its own media officer who could be used to communicate the type of messages the Committee had been discussing. Following a question Members were informed that the Partnership delivered the majority of its education work through schools.

It was commented that graffiti in the County was on the increase and that this should just be accepted as a fact of life by residents and the Council.

Targets HCS 65a (% of adults who use: Sports and Leisure facilities at least once a month) and 65e (% of adults who use: Parks, open play areas and other recreational facilities at least once a month) were three year targets, so were not adjusted annually.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

10. SERVICE PLAN FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Committee were advised of the work of the Economic and Community Service reflected in the work service plan for the division. A copy of the Service Plan had been despatched separately to Members and was available to members of the public on request.

The Head of Economic and Community Services advised Members that the Service Plan contained comprehensive details on all activities that took place in the Economic and Community Services Division. The plan was split into two parts. The first part dealt with the services and priorities that were the focus of the Division. The second was a detailed action plan on how and when those services and priorities would be delivered. This followed the corporate guidance.

The Service Plan was updated quarterly to monitor progress.

A Member commented that the Plan was difficult to understand, contained a lot of bullet points and lacked referencing.

In response to a question the Head of Economic and Community Services informed the Committee that there were a number of challenges facing the Parks and Countryside Service. These challenges included the introduction of new legislation and issues with resources. Tourist Information Centres faced similar challenges. Both topics were issues that the Committee could consider assisting with.

The Committee noted that on page 41 of the Service Plan the risk rating was ranked out of twelve and not eight.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11. HEREFORDSHIRE SATISFACTION SURVEY

The Committee were advised of the range of data provided by the Herefordshire Satisfaction Survey.

The Senior Research Officer gave a presentation on the Herefordshire Satisfaction Survey, what it was and what information it provided.

The Council carried out a satisfaction survey annually. Last year 4,000 questionnaires were sent out of which over 2,000 were returned. 1100 returns were required for accuracy. The questionnaire focused on four themes, namely:

1. Quality of life
2. Services
3. Communications
4. People

Once the questionnaire results were received and analysed, focus groups with local residents, through Herefordshire Voice, were held to establish the reasons behind significant trends in the questionnaire responses.

Reports were also produced containing the findings of the survey and national comparisons.

Members were informed of the results on a range of best value performance indicators and the way that different types of information could be combined to inform the work of the Council and the way it delivered its services.

The Head of Policy and Performance informed Members that they could use Herefordshire Voice to inform their work. Due to the cost and time required to set up a Herefordshire Voice meeting it was recommended that it was only used for long term projects.

The Chairman stated that the three big issues for residents were generally: crime, health and congestion. The Senior Research Officer confirmed that these were regularly important issues.

The Committee were informed that responses to each question could be broken down to identify issues that were relevant to individual wards using postcodes but that the match was not perfect. A Member recalled the Ward profiles that all members had received upon their election to the Council.

In response to a question the Senior Research Officer reported that the findings of the Survey were circulated amongst the Council and its Partners.

A Member asked what Herefordshire Voice was and how it was formulated. The Committee were informed that 1200 people had been randomly asked to join Herefordshire Voice which should ideally be a representative sample of the local population. However, the group was currently over represented by older people but steps were being taken to address this. Questionnaires were sent out 2/3 times a year to the members of Herefordshire Voice to inform the work of the Council.

It was acknowledged as being difficult to recruit younger people into Herefordshire Voice. Adverts were placed in local cinema magazines and at local colleges. It was not possible to offer incentives to young people to complete questionnaires for the statutory surveys. Members felt that if incentives were available then this might encourage young people to participate in Herefordshire Voice and other Council surveys.

The Head of Economic and Community Services informed Members that a teenage lifestyles survey was undertaken annually and a youth service survey every other year.

Members felt that a summary of the research undertaken by the Council would be useful as it would enable them to be informed of what data was available to inform

their work. The Head of Policy and Performance confirmed that this could be provided.

RESOLVED:

That: (a) a summary report of completed research and survey reports be made available for all Members;

and;

(b) the report be noted as a source to inform future scrutiny work and assist in choosing topics for scrutiny that were of importance to the public.

12. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

It was clarified that the proposed Review of the Community and Safety Drugs Partnership scheduled to commence in April 2008 was to focus on the Partnership's community engagement.

The possibility of examining the work of the Hereford Regeneration Group was raised but not added to the work programme.

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

13. PROPOSED REVIEW OF AGREEMENT WITH HALO LEISURE TRUST

The Committee considered a scoping statement for a proposed review of the agreement with Halo Leisure Trust.

The Head of Economic and Community Services informed the Committee that this review had arose out of the Audit Commission inspection of Cultural Services which had suggested that the Council's agreement with Halo needed to be more robust. All the issues identified by the inspectors had been included in the Review Groups scoping statement.

RESOLVED:

That: (a) the scoping statement for a review of the agreement with Halo Leisure trust be agreed;

(b) Councillors CM Bartrum, DJ Benjamin, PGH Cutter, DW Greenow, KS Guthrie and TM James be appointed to the Review Group;

and;

(c) Councillor TM James be appointed as Chairman of the Review Group.

14. PROPOSED REVIEW OF TOURISM

The Committee considered a scoping statement for a proposed review of tourism in Herefordshire.

The Head of Economic and Community Services reported that tourism in the County and particularly Tourist Information Centre (TIC) provision had been criticised by the Audit Commission during the recent Cultural Services inspection. A key part of the proposed Review was the TIC model used in the County and its ability to meet the needs of its customers in view of local and national trends.

It was desirable that if the Review was agreed that it started imminently so its conclusions could potentially influence next years budget.

A Member requested that the structure and decision-making processes of Visit Herefordshire were investigated as part of the Review. It was noted that this aspect was within the scope of the review as drafted.

RESOLVED:

That: (a) the scoping statement for a review of tourism be agreed;

(b) Councillors B Hunt, TM James, PM Morgan, RH Smith and MAF Hubbard (subject to clarification of his personal interest) be appointed to the Review Group;

and;

(c) Councillor TM James be appointed as Chairman of the Review Group.

The meeting ended at 12.26 p.m.

CHAIRMAN