

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 8th October, 2007 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	TM James (Chairman)
	Councillor	RH Smith (Vice-Chairman)
	Councillors	CM Bartrum, PGH Cutter, DW Greenow, KS Guthrie, MAF Hubbard, PM Morgan and RV Stockton
	Co-opted Members	Mr P Hands (Visit Herefordshire) Mrs. E. Newman ((HALC)) Mr G Woodman (Chamber of Commerce)

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

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

16. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors MAF Hubbard, TM James, and RWV Stockton declared personal interests.

18. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes for the meeting held on 2nd July, 2007, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no suggestions from Members of the Public.

20. PRESENTATION BY CABINET MEMBER - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Councillor AJM Blackshaw (Cabinet Member – Economic Development and Community Services) presented his report, copies of which were circulated at the meeting.

The report set out current issues and priorities for the next 12 month period, major decisions expected to be taken, and areas identified for performance improvement.

The Cabinet Member concluded by noting that with ever increasing pressure on budgets it would be a continuing challenge to maintain performance and strive for improvement.

In the course of discussion the following principal points were made:

- A question was asked about the approach to making budget savings, suggesting that the measures under consideration seemed to involve service reduction rather than focusing on cost reduction. In this context reference was made to the proposal to reduce the opening time for Leominster Tourist Information Centre to six months which it was stated would have a big impact on service but would only generate a small saving. The Cabinet Member said that consideration had to be given to making savings on non-statutory services. It was difficult to make significant savings and the focus was therefore on making small reductions across a number of areas.
- The Head of Economic and Community Services noted that there was an immediate pressure to meet the fact that budgets for 2007/08 had only been increased to account for pay inflation. To balance the budget for 2007/08 savings of £108,000 would need to be secured. The position at Leominster was being reviewed and it was now proposed to delay a decision for a year and look at other options.
- The national thinking regarding the transfer of assets owned by local authorities to local ownership and the possibility of a role for the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils was raised. It was suggested that a protocol could be developed.
- A further question was asked as to whether the Council could inform Community Groups of proposed disposals and liaise with them over ways in which those groups might take local ownership of assets. The Cabinet Member said that discussions were taking place. A Member noted that the maintenance costs of buildings were often beyond the abilities of local bodies to meet.
- The Cabinet Member commented that he was mindful of the desire to maintain a presence in the Market Towns. However, it was important to manage assets effectively. This could involve wider working across the directorate and also across directorates as a whole.
- In response to a question about the proposed development of Ross Library the Cabinet Member confirmed his intention to engage with Local Members.
- It was questioned whether the resource was available to meet the new requirement that decisions on public path order applications be made within 4 months.
- That it was important that the resource implications of the Crime and Disorder Act and the change to the operation of the Community Safety and Drugs Partnership were reflected in the Medium Term Financial Management Strategy.
- That consideration should be given to the potential role Parish Councils might have in relation to the Commons Act 2006.
- The performance indicator on the percentage of footpaths and rights of way easy to use by the public, described as hovering around the lower threshold of 50%, was discussed having regard to tourism implications. The Director of Adult and

Community Services said that although he did not think additional resources could be allocated to address the pressures on maintenance and the backlog in Diversion Orders he did think resources could be targeted on those routes linked to the Council's tourism promotions. In response to further comments about the accessibility of the network he added that the interpretation of the definition of the performance indicator target was being checked to establish whether it was a true reflection of the situation on the ground.

- The Cabinet Member welcomed the suggestion that Parish Councils, and organisations such as the Ramblers Associations and Herefordshire Nature Trust should be invited to assist in identifying priority routes.
- A question was asked about how the new grant programme designed to engage older people in their community could be accessed. The Head of Economic and Community Services reported that information on the scheme had been widely circulated, including to Parish Councils and Age Concern.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his presentation.

21. ACTION PLANS FOR CULTURAL SERVICES INSPECTION, REVIEW OF HEREFORD CITY PARTNERSHIP AND THE 18-35 REVIEW

The Committee was informed of action plans arising from the Audit Commission's Cultural Services Inspection and the scrutiny reviews of the Hereford City Partnership and how Herefordshire could retain 18-35 year olds in the County and attract them to it (the 18-35 review).

The Head of Economic and Community Services presented the report.

Further to the report to the Committee in July 2007 she reported that work to complete the actions in the Cultural Services action plan, a copy of which was appended to the report, was on track.

Following consideration by the Committee in March 2007 the Scrutiny Review of the Hereford City Partnership and the 18-35 Review had been considered by Cabinet on 6th September 2007. Action plans reflecting those recommendations accepted by Cabinet were also appended to the report.

It was proposed to present a progress report on each of the three action plans to the next meeting.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

Cultural Services Inspection

It was asked what progress was being made against recommendation 1b: the development of performance measures concerned with value for money. It was reported that value for money measures were contributing to the review of the Halo Contract Scrutiny Review. Measures for cost per user and cost per resident had been developed for libraries and tourist information centres.

A question was asked about action R1c: measure the effectiveness of tourism. The Head of Economic and Community Services said that an assessment had been made using the Cambridge model. This showed tourism benefited the County to the sum of £291 million. It was requested that a copy of the report be sent to Members undertaking the Scrutiny Review.

18-35 Review

A Member expressed disappointment that the review contained no cutting edge, innovative approaches. As a rural County there was surely an opportunity to be at the forefront of developing green, sustainable initiatives.

It was suggested that promotion of existing businesses was overlooked.

Reference was made to the "Young Chamber" run by the Chamber of Commerce and Business Start Up schemes.

That the mixed development of the former Ledbury Cottage Hospital to include business units should be monitored to see if that model could be successfully applied and supported elsewhere.

The Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) said that the need to engage young people was recognised. There was a challenge both to attract businesses and to ensure that talent was available to employers within the County.

The Director of Adult and Community Services commented that whilst there were low levels of unemployment in the County wage levels were also low. The key was to improve the skills of the workforce. The development of the Edgar Street Grid, Rotherwas and the learning village did present opportunities. The Council was supporting partners such as the College of Technology and encouraging training and vocational activities with the business community.

It was suggested that the statistics on wage levels may not be entirely reliable because of the number of small businesses where a Director might be the main employee and would technically pay themselves a low salary.

The importance of Broadband access to attracting businesses was highlighted.

Hereford City Partnership

The issue of support for the City Centre Manager was discussed. The Director of Adult and Community Services said that support for the Partnership as a whole would need to be considered as part of the budget process.

RESOLVED: that a report on progress against the three action plans be reported to the next meeting.

22. LEDBURY TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

The Committee was informed of the position on the proposed relocation of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in Ledbury.

The Head of Economic and Community Services presented the report. She noted that Ledbury and Area Development Trust (LADT) was finalising its report on future use of the Masters House and this needed to be linked to work by the Council on future use of facilities in the Town. It was intended that a further report would be made to the Committee's next meeting.

Councillor Swinburne as Local Member welcomed the way in which a recent meeting with the LADT had been open to a range of options. She commented on the importance of the TIC's link to local businesses. She emphasised the importance of

explaining the issues relating to the future of the TIC clearly to the public and demonstrating that the level of service to them would not be diminished.

The Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) endorsed the need for communication and emphasised the role of local members in that process.

A Member noted that the role local members could play and their accountability for and ownership of proposals depended on the extent to which they had been consulted on proposals and had contributed to them.

RESOLVED: That a further report be presented to the next meeting.

23. REVENUE BUDGET 2007/08

The Committee considered an update on the projected revenue budget outturn for 2007/08 for Economic and Community Services.

The report showed a projected overspend of £40,000. The Director of Adult and Community Services reported that he expected that the budget would be brought into balance by the year end. He noted that the impact of absorbing inflationary increases in non-pay areas in accordance with the corporate strategy had been significant, amounting to £108,000.

In response to a question he confirmed that the outturn took account of the required Gershon efficiency savings.

RESOLVED: that the projected revenue budget outturn for 2007/08 for Economic and Community Services be noted.

24. ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Committee considered the performance indicators position and other performance information for the Economic and Community Services Division.

It was noted that future reports would report performance on an exception basis.

In the course of discussion the following principal points were made:

- It was requested that where it was indicated that an indicator was only measured annually the date when the measurement would take place should be indicated in the report.
- In relation to the LPSA 2 target for reducing violent crime it was noted that if performance for the remaining three quarters was equal to the target for the first quarter the number of crimes would greatly exceed the target. Similarly the LPSA 2 target for a 15% reduction in overall British Crime Survey recorded crime would be missed because performance indicators on criminal damage and violent crimes contributed to this overall indicator.
- Performance against BVPI 178: percentage of footpaths and rights of way easy to use by the public was also raised, noting that this compared very unfavourably with upper quartile performance. It was suggested in reply that engaging volunteer help might generate some improvement in performance.

The Committee noted the report.

25. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted that taking account of discussions earlier in the meeting reports on Ledbury TIC, and progress reports on various action plans would be added to the programme for the next meeting, together with a report on Rotherwas Futures.

A report on the Edgar Street Grid would be scheduled for April 2008.

It was proposed to bring scoping reports forward for the future reviews of Future Economic Policy and the Community and Safety Drugs Partnership.

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

The meeting ended at 11.43 a.m.

CHAIRMAN