

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 18th April, 2008 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	TM James (Chairman)
	Councillor	RH Smith (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	PGH Cutter, DW Greenow, KS Guthrie, B Hunt, PM Morgan and RV Stockton
	Co-opted Members	Mrs J Evans (National Farmers Union), Mr PH Hands (Visit Herefordshire), Mr PM McCaull (HALC) and Mr G. Woodman (Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce)

In attendance: Councillors: PA Andrews, WLS Bowen and PJ Edwards

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors: DJ Benjamin and MAF Hubbard.

38. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

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

No suggestions were received from members of the public.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name	Agenda Item	Interest
Councillor PM Morgan	7	Personal – as Board Member of the Visit Herefordshire Trust
Councillor RH Smith	7	Personal – as Council appointed Board Member, Courtyard Centre for the Arts.
Councillor PGH Cutter	10	Personal – through involvement in organising Christmas Lights at Ross.
Councillor RH Smith	11	Personal – Member of Village Neighbourhood Watch Group
Councillor RV Stockton	Generally	Personal – as former Cabinet Member.

41. MINUTES

On considering the Minutes, a general comment was made that the Committee expressed its reservations concerning the quality of reports submitted for consideration in the Agenda.

42. REVIEW OF TOURISM WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

Councillors PM Morgan and RH Smith declared a personal interest in this item.

The Committee received a report on the Review of Tourism in the County with Specific Reference to Tourist Information Centres. Councillor RH Smith, on behalf of the Tourism Review Group, presented the paper. By reference to the Desired Outcomes, Key Questions and the Scoping Statement, he took the Committee through the report and highlighted in particular the following issues:

- That the review had been undertaken as a result of an Audit Commission report that had highlighted the need for a way of measuring the effectiveness of tourism in the County, and ensuring value for money from its Tourist Information Centres (TICs);
- The review had been undertaken in line with the scoping statement attached as Appendix 1 to the document;
- That value for money from the TIC model was a key consideration. Tourism West Midlands were in the process of developing key performance indicators to measure tourism volume and value throughout the region;
- That the management and delivery of tourism information services should remain under the Council's control;
- That the County should establish at least one exemplar TIC that would be able to stand comparison with the best in the Region, provided that this could be achieved at no extra cost.
- That the TIC structure should be changed to a 'hub and spoke' concept. Such a structure would have no impact on costs, but would offer gains in efficiency and hence value for money.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made;

- Councillor BA Hunt, Ward Member for Bromyard, recording his minority view on the Review Committee that while he would like the facility at Bromyard to be treated the same as the other Market Towns, he accepted the suggestion that the current facility should be upgraded.
- Concern was expressed by a Member about a proposal to move the Ross-on-Wye TIC to the library in Ross-on-Wye. This would move the TIC from one end of the town to the other, which might prove to be to its detriment.
- Mr Hands concurred with a comment from a Member that the cost of exhibiting at the World Travel Market at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham had proved prohibitively expensive. It was for the same reason that Visit Herefordshire had also decided not to attend the Bristol Travel Show. He added that he was delighted to see the proposal that the Kington TIC should remain in its present location.
- That consideration might be given to relocating the Hereford TIC to a retail outlet that did not incur such high costs. The Old House was put forward as a suggested alternative location. The Committee endorsed the suggestion in the report that, should a Tourist Information Point be established within the Edgar Street Grid development, this should be subsidiary to the City Centre TIC.
- Visits undertaken as part of the Review had found that the Shrewsbury TIC had featured Herefordshire in its displays, and that the Ludlow TIC had been similarly knowledgeable about Herefordshire. Mr Hands pointed out that it

was the policy of the TICs that they should cover an area around them to a thirty mile radius. They were likely, therefore, to overlap county boundaries.

- The Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) thanked the Committee for a thorough report and all the hard work that had been put into the review. He said that new figures had been worked up using the Scarborough Model, which meant that the estimates of the total tourism contributed to the economy of the County could be revised from £291 million as outlined in item 4.1 of the report, to £335 million. The Head of Economic and Community Services reported that this model had been chosen as it was much more locally focused than the Cambridge model that had previously been used. The latter gave a greater emphasis to national figures. Referring to Appendix 4 at Agenda page 29, it was noted that the Destination Management Partnership spent approximately £105,000 on promoting the County.
- The Cabinet Member went on to say that the Hereford TIC had an important role to play in the regeneration of the City Centre, and consideration was being given as to where it should be placed. Care would have to be taken to preserve the heritage offer if the Old House were to be used, as this was a well preserved historic building. Responding to comments concerning the display of out of County literature, he agreed that whilst the emphasis should be on Herefordshire, under reciprocal arrangements, other should also be displayed.
- It was agreed that the sentence on page 19, item 8.3 of the report: 'a TIC may be co-located with an "Info in Herefordshire" office but that the two should never be combined' should be altered to read, 'but that the two should not be combined'.

RESOLVED

- THAT**
- (a) the findings of the Tourism Review Group be submitted to Cabinet;**
 - (b) that subject to the Review being approved, the Executive's 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;**
- (c) a further report on progress with respect to the Review should be made after six months with consideration then being given to the need for any further reports to be made.**

43. MONITORING OF 2007-08 COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION REVENUE BUDGET TO PERIOD 12

The Economic and Community Services Accountant presented the report on the monitoring of 2007-08 Community Services Division Revenue Budget to Period 12:

- Economic Development would transfer £79,266 in order to repay prudential borrowing for the RRZ Enterprise centre within the capital programme. The whole amount would be repaid in the current year, to avoid any risk to budget in future years;
- There was a forecast variance outturn of an overspend in Community Leisure and Halo of £208,665. This was as result of the settlement of the job evaluation amount which saw an amount of £67k net due for 2006-07 and an additional £140k over the available budget due for 2007-08;

- The current overspend in Parks and Countryside resulted from issues arising over the Hereford City Council contributions (£137,815) towards parks and open spaces that was still being attributed as an income. This was currently not reflected in the forecast variance outturn and would be funded through central budgets for 2007-08;
- IT Service Level Agreement charges would be charged to the services during period 13 and it was forecasted that the estimated outturn for Libraries would show an overspend of £73,921. This related primarily to charges estimated at £68k from the IT Service in relation to the maintenance cost of PC's used for public Internet access in the Libraries. This was not allocated within the budget when the fee was increased;

In reply to a question, the Head of Economic and Community Services said that the expected outstanding funds from the City Council which had resulted in an overspend on the Countryside and Public Rights of Way budget was a result of a decision of the City Council to redirect its support for the capital fund for parks and countryside which are proving very successful. This obviously had an impact on Herefordshire Council's expected income for the revenue budget as the works still needed to be commissioned. The agreement that had been in place between the two Authorities had come to a natural end and had not been breached by neither party.

A councillor remarked that the nature of Libraries was changing with regard to their IT provision. In light of the overspend in that area, it would be appropriate to show the costs of that provision as a separate heading.

RESOLVED: That the position on the revenue budget set out in the monitoring report be noted.

44. ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Committee considered the report on Economic and Community Services Performance Monitoring. The following areas of key consideration with regard to the Performance Indicators were highlighted by the Head of Economic and Community Services:

- Disappointingly the target for the reduction in violent crime in Herefordshire, which stood at 2,553, was likely to be exceeded, with a projected out turn of 2,979. However a down turn in the figures was indicated in the third quarter. A number of schemes were in place to further reduce the crime rate.
- The target percentage of users satisfied with libraries had not been met. It had been shown that Ledbury and Hereford libraries were the poorest performing; there were plans to improve the site in both locations. She added that in order to improve the out-turn for the target for the number of library visits per 1,000 population a "passport" scheme had been implemented since January in order to increase usage by children and adults.
- Whilst the indicator for the percentage of residents engaged in volunteering work was below target, this was being addressed by an ongoing publicity campaign and investment in training opportunities for volunteer coordinators in the Voluntary Sector. The result did reflect a national trend.
- The indicator for the percentage of footpaths and rights of way that were easy to use by the public was no longer a national performance indicator. However, it was likely that local indicators would be introduced.

The Vice-Chairman pointed out that the overall direction of travel of the indicators

was not positive. The Head of Economic and Community Services replied that she shared his concern that the indicators were not as positive as they could be, but added that PI's were just one measure of how well a service was performing.

In the course of the discussion, the following principal points were noted:

- That the County's libraries provided an excellent service, but that there was an issue as to how the service could reach out to the young in the County. A new approach would have to be sought.
- In conjunction with local parish councils, consideration could be given to prioritising the County's most popular footpaths.
- That the current library indicators did not include mobile libraries, but that the new national indicator would.
- The Committee noted a comment that West Mercia Constabulary might be prevailed upon to extend the hours they policed the City. A Member also pointed out that support by the Community Service Officers was not available after 10 pm.
- The Committee noted a comment that whilst local crime statistics might not be high, there was a feeling of vulnerability in the villages, especially amongst the elderly. The Director of Adult and Community Services stated that a strategic plan for community safety had been produced. The point was also made that the problem had arisen as much as a result of negative reports in the national media as in the local press. In the short term, there had been an increase in a visible police presence, as well as proactive provision of positive stories about Council initiatives to the local media. The Social and Economic Regeneration Manager added that the new three year plan was now on the website.

The Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) stated that the local crime statistics were low, and that Herefordshire was a very safe place to work and live. Work was being undertaken in regenerating the city centre, and care should be taken that the Council should be positive in its portrayal of the County to instil confidence in future business and economic growth. Whilst outside the Terms of Reference of the Committee, the Chairman referred to the adverse publicity that the Council had received over taxi licensing. The Cabinet Member replied that he had had a rewarding dialogue with the drivers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted

45. ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHRISTMAS LIGHTS IN HEREFORDSHIRE

Councillor PGH Cutter declared a personal interest in this item

The Committee were advised of the Arrangements for Christmas Lights and associated events in Herefordshire. The Head of Economic and Community Services reported that the decision to withdraw £3,000 of funding to the five market towns had not been taken lightly. Considering other pressures on the Council's overall expenditure, it was not in a position to sustain this funding. Arrangements for Hereford were different, as £10,650 was provided from the Environment Directorate towards the fixtures, fittings and operation of the lights, the rest of the cost was met by Hereford City Council and its partners.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were made:

- The decision to withdraw funding from 2008, could create public relations damage that would far outweigh the advantages of any savings;

- That the lights in the market towns were undoubtedly a tourist attraction for the area, and were of great benefit to the retail sector within the towns. Attempts to pass costs on to the retailers had proved to be unsuccessful;
- The Committee noted that a significant proportion of the budget was spent on erecting the lights. Recent stringent changes in Health & Safety regulations had significantly increased costs. It was suggested that the public should be made aware of the various safety and budget implications of providing Christmas Lights.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted

46. BROADBAND ISSUES IN HEREFORDSHIRE

The Committee received an update on Broadband issues in Herefordshire.

The Senior Economic Regeneration Officer highlighted a number of issues in his presentation:

- Advantage West Midlands (AWM) funded the upgrading of the outstanding exchanges in Herefordshire in 2006 as it had the power to assist in the provision of a sustainable long-term service where there was perceived to be a clear market failure;
- There were still problems with broadband in rural areas despite the enabling of exchanges. These were associated with line-sharing devices used by BT to allow more lines into small rural exchanges. As a result, many residents and businesses within the County were still not able to get a satisfactory broadband service;
- The Community Access Point project had provided good broadband access in a number of rural communities, but did not deliver directly into homes and businesses;
- The Rotherwas industrial estate was affected both by distance from the exchange, and by cabling issues, and companies were, on the whole, able to receive only a very limited service. A wireless service arranged by AWM was not marketed on to new companies coming onto the site, and the contract had been terminated on 31 March 2008 as the provider had not realised sufficient returns;
- BT had proved repeatedly unwilling to improve the infrastructure to Rotherwas, as the financial returns were not sufficiently attractive. A good broadband service was key to the success of the Rotherwas Futures objectives. An option was being explored whereby some of the Council's infrastructure might be used to provide sufficient data bandwidth into the estate;
- It was suggested that consideration might be given to a survey of the County to find out what issues residents had with their broadband service.

Mr Woodman reported that the Chamber of Commerce had been consulting with businesses on this matter. The preferred option would be to use BT as a provider, and the Chamber of Commerce would support and work with the Council to provide evidence. He believed that it might be appropriate for the Council to put pressure on BT and OFCOM on this matter.

The Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services) stated that the County would stand still without an efficient broadband network, which was vital to its economic regeneration. A high level meeting would be arranged with BT to discuss the matter further.

Following a debate the Committee emphasised the need for Cabinet to establish what levels of broadband were provided throughout the County and to urgently pursue its provision to the Rotherwas Estate and the County as a whole.

RESOLVED:

That

- (a) **Cabinet be urged to urgently address the issue of broadband provision to the Rotherwas Estate and the County, and acknowledge that this is of a high priority to the County;**
- (b) **That Cabinet consider initiating a survey to establish the actual current level of provision in the County.**

47. SCOPING STATEMENT FOR A REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OF THE HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND DRUGS PARTNERSHIP

Councillor RH Smith declared a personal interest in this item

The Committee considered the Scoping Statement for the Review of Community Engagement in the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership.

RESOLVED:

That:

- (a) **the scoping statement for a Review of Community Engagement in the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership appended to the report be agreed;**
- (b) **Councillors: PGH Cutter, DW Greenow, KS Guthrie and RH Smith be appointed to the Review Group;**
and;
- (c) **Councillor RH Smith be appointed as Chairman of the Review Group.**

48. EXCEPTION REPORT ON ACTION PLANS FOR CULTURAL SERVICES INSPECTION; REVIEW OF HEREFORD CITY PARTNERSHIP; THE 18-35 REVIEW AND MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE CENTRES REVIEW.

The Committee considered the Exception Report on Action Plans for Cultural Services Inspection, Review of Hereford City Partnership; The 18-35 Review and Museums and Heritage Centres.

The exception report listed progress against those actions which remained outstanding.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and in the future update reports on Action Plans following a Scrutiny Review be by exception report.

49. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme.

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

The meeting ended at 12.15 p.m.

CHAIRMAN