

**MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Thursday, 17th July, 2008 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:** Councillor TM James (Chairman)  
Councillor PM Morgan (Vice Chairman)

Councillors PGH Cutter, GFM Dawe, BA Durkin, KS Guthrie, MAF Hubbard, B Hunt, RH Smith and RV Stockton

Co-opted Members Mr PM McCaull (HALC)

**In attendance:** Councillors Mr PM McCaull

**50. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Greenow.

**51. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor Cutter substituted for Councillor Greenow.

**52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

| <b>Name</b>            | <b>Item</b> | <b>Interest</b>  |
|------------------------|-------------|--|
| Councillor TM James    | 9           | Personal – City Partnership  |
| Councillor MAF Hubbard | 9           | Personal – City Partnership  |
| Councillor RH Smith    | 6           | Personal – as Council appointed Board Member, Courtyard Centre for the Arts. |
|                        | 12          | Personal – as Council appointed Board Member, West Mercia Police Authority.  |
| Councillor RV Stockton | 11          | Personal – as Council appointed Board Member, the Halo Trust                 |

**53. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes for the meeting held on 18 April 2008, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

No suggestions were received from members of the public.

**55. ANNUAL REPORT ON ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**

The Cabinet Member for Economic and Community Services presented his report.

The Cabinet Member took the Committee through his report, and highlighted the following areas in particular:

- The scope that the portfolio covered;
- The twenty three achievements that were summarised in the report. He said that now that the Rotherwas Relief Road had been completed, it was expected that employment in the area would increase, and that those companies who were already on the Estate would be encourage to stay there. The Completion of the Museum Resource and Learning Centre, which had been opened by HRH Princess Alexander in April, would be a valuable asset for the County.
- The success of the Herefordshire Business Conference, which had shown that the County had more to offer than the strengths of its rural economy. The conference would be held biannually in the future, in order to keep the issues current.
- At the Hereford International Youth Conference that had been held in the County earlier in July, Herefordshire had received praise for its work from Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP.
- The priorities and schemes that lay before the Council. The Edgar Street Grid project would henceforth be referred to as the Extension of the City Boundaries.
- The issues that were before Cabinet for decision, which included the reviews of the Tourist Information Centres and the Management Agreement with Halo that had been undertaken by the Committee's review groups.
- That the Crime and Disorder PI's showed that burglary and reported domestic violence had reduced in the County but conversely, poor performance in the areas of violent crime and criminal damage had led to an overall worsening of the crime and safety picture.
- That although 79% of County residents were satisfied with the local community as a place to live, the 2007 target of 87% had not been met. He added that the economic climate had put people under pressure, and pointed out that it was likely that the construction industry would cut its workforce. Kingspan were already laying staff off.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his report, and in the ensuing discussion, the following principle points were made:

- It was suggested that in the light of the Library satisfaction survey results that the Library, Mobile Library and Home Delivery Services should be re-advertised.
- That access to genealogy websites should be made more available in Libraries.
- That consideration should be given to an alternative name for the Extension of the City Boundaries project, such as 'The Hereford Project'.
- In reply to a question from a Member, the Cabinet Member said that it was intended that there should be a Central Library in the Extension of the City Boundary project. Discussions around the content of the overall site, such as the proposed Herefordshire University, would centre around the location and the content of the library. It was intended that the building should be an iconic structure for the City.
- In reply to a further question, the Cabinet Member said that the County was making every effort to benefit from the 2012 Olympic Games to be held in London. The possibility of involvement in the Paralympic Games would also be explored, and the Principal of the Royal National College for the Blind would be travelling to Beijing in order to lobby the national team to come to Herefordshire.

The Blind Football World Championships would give the County a tremendous boost in 2010, as they would be hosted in Hereford.

- In reply to a question from a Member, the Cabinet Member said that the Rotherwas Relief Road had been a necessary project, and had proved successful. It had secured at least two thousand jobs, and had increased investment in the site which would lead to a rise in employment by around 100%.
- In reply to the Members' question concerning the Extension of the City Boundaries project, he said that there had been seven public consultation meetings held that had involved Hereford City, and that the team were working closely with the Hereford City Partnership. It was important to get the correct product mix on the site, and that it was certainly not intended that it should just be a retail centre. Culture and arts would be included in the project, and would be complemented by the retail offer from the Cattle Market, which would help to increase the footfall to the area. With regard to the Butter Market, there had been a meeting with the tenants, and there was an ongoing dialogue with the Chairman of the Tenants Association. They would be an integral part of the critical path toward the regeneration of the City centre. The Council would research best practice around the country before going forward with the project.
- A Member expressed concern over the decline in the footpath PI, as he believed that these were one of the Counties best selling points. A Member concurred, and said that at a recent meeting of their Local Access Forum, it had been reported that the Herefordshire Walking Festival had been a great success, with at least 1200 participants, over half of which had come from outside the City. Whilst this was good for tourism in the County, concern had been expressed that the current vacancy for a Rights of Way Development Officer post had not been filled. It had been the feeling of the meeting that the Council were not prioritising this area, and that more resources should be invested. It had been stated that the backlog of footpath works would not be cleared before 2029.
- The Strategic Asset Manager reported that there had been a change in management of the Public Rights of Way services, and a suite of new policies was now in place. This was a complex legal area, with a number of statutory consultative processes, but the fast track system that had been introduced meant that the backlog of cases, where there were no planning objections, had been reduced. It was noted that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan had been instigated, and that there was an engagement process with the Parish Councils with a two stage consultative process. There were funds of £50k available up to 2011 to undertake improvement works.

**Resolved:**

**That: (a) the Committee should receive a report on the situation regarding Public Rights of Way Orders and footpaths at its next meeting;**

**and;**

**(b) that a Members Seminar on Public Rights of Way and Footpath legislation should be arranged.**

**56. COMMUNITY/CULTURAL SERVICES REVENUE OUTTURN 2007/08**

The Committee noted the Community/Cultural Services Revenue outturn 2007/08. The Chairman expressed concern over the fact that the regarding process that had taken place with Halo in 2004 would appear to be penalising this Service. A fund had been set up by the Council when the process had been undertaken, and it appeared that this money had run out. The situation should have been monitored,

and action taken with regard to the reserves. The Cabinet Member concurred, and said that the fund allocation had been defined by Human Resources at £250k. The fact that Halo staff would progress up the pay scales appeared not to have been taken into consideration, and the mismatch in funds should not be a burden solely for this Directorate. It was noted that Officers had looked at the transfer before the evaluation process had been undertaken, but delays in the process had meant that this problem had arisen. Internal discussions were required within the Council in order to rectify the situation. The Committee noted various comments as to why this budget head should not be penalised as a result of the outsourcing of the contract.

In reply to concerns expressed over the £40k reported overspend for the 'Flavours of Herefordshire' Food Festival, the Cabinet Member said that the Festival had begun two years ago, and had received five thousand visitors in its first year. This figure had risen to eight thousand in the previous year. The Festival was seen as a colourful shop window for local produce, but it had to be financially sustainable. He believed that holding it at the Hereford Race Course Site had been appropriate, as over 60% of visitors were from Hereford City. A report on the Festival would be brought back to the next meeting.

Following concern over the lack of detail in Appendix 1 and 2 of the report, it was recommended that, in future, greater high level profiled detail should be provided to allow the Committee to draw conclusions from the data provided.

**RESOLVED:**

- That:**
- a) the report be noted**
  - b) a report on the 'Flavours of Herefordshire' Festival be brought to the next meeting.**
- and;**
- c) detailed profiled budgets for 2007-08 and full year profiled budget for 2008-09 be brought to the next meeting.**

**57. ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

The Committee noted the report on the performance indicator position and other performance management information for the Economic and Community Services Division within the Regeneration Directorate and Cultural Services functions within the Environment and Culture Directorate. The following areas of consideration were highlighted by the Improvement Manager:

- That the end of year out-turn information showed that of the forty three performance indicators reported, eighteen had reached target or exceeded the target set. Nineteen of the indicators showed a positive Direction of Travel. Of the indicators that had not reached target, six still showed an improvement year on year. The indicators that did not have a positive improvement year on year included six that out-turned at a level equal to 2006-07.
- That within Cultural Services, half of the indicators had reached target. Highlights included the satisfaction with parks and the countryside, which had reached target and had remained significantly better than the national comparators: out-turning at 69% compared with the national position of 54%.

The Committee considered appendix 1 of the report, and the following areas were highlighted in the discussion:

- That the figures that expressed the percentage of users who were satisfied with Library services in the County were collected using a tested methodology and

they were, of necessity, local, as national figures for these PI's would not be appropriate.

- That whilst the Mobile Library service had not been included in this year's figures, it would be included in the PI's in the coming year.
- A Member congratulated the Countryside Services, which was now working in a more targeted way with Hereford City Council than had previously been the case.
- In reply to Member's concerns over the high level of fear of anti-social behaviour that was reflected in the figures, the Head of Economic and Community Services said that there were task groups looking at this issue. The perception of crime, rather than crime itself was the major issue. The Police were working to instil confidence in residents, and it was important that the message that Herefordshire was a safe county to live in should be clearly made.
- Frustration was felt by Members of the Committee over the lack of clarity of the method of reporting the PI's. This was combined with concern that only eighteen of the PI's had attained their targets.

**RESOLVED:**

- That: a) the report be noted and areas of concern should continue to be monitored;**
- and;**
- b) additional detail should be provided with the Performance Indicator data in order to allow greater clarity for the Committee;**

**58. CLOSE DOWN REPORT ON ACTION PLANS FOR CULTURAL SERVICES INSPECTION; REVIEW OF HEREFORD CITY PARTNERSHIP; THE 18-35 YR OLDS REVIEW AND THE REVIEW OF MUSEUMS AND HERITAGE CENTRES**

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

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted, with no further reports on the actions plans to be submitted to the Committee.**

**59. BROADBAND ISSUES IN HEREFORDSHIRE**

The Committee received a report on Broadband Issues in Herefordshire.

The Senior Economic Regeneration Manager reported that, at a recent meeting with BT's Regional Manager, the company had outlined the reasons why there were so many problems with Broadband in rural areas. When the UK telephone network had been set up, the expectation was that only 50-60% of homes would want a telephone. Currently there was an average of 1.3 phone lines per home, and as a consequence the exchanges were finding it hard to cope. BT was required to provide a telephone link to every home that wanted one, but was not required to provide broadband. BT had agreed that there were a lot of areas in the County that couldn't receive broadband, and these were being upgraded on a financial appraisal basis. It cost BT £210k to upgrade a hamlet of ten homes to Broadband. A survey of residents and businesses was being considered for the September issue of *Herefordshire Matters*. This should establish who had experienced problems and what they were, and help the Council take forward the issue with BT.

The Senior Economic Regeneration Manager went on to say that, as had been reported at the last meeting, the Rotherwas Industrial Estate was affected by distance and cable quality issues and the broadband service there was limited to 512Kb bandwidth for most firms. As a result businesses have had to “bond” lines or take leased lines, to give them the capacity that they required. This issue had been discussed with BT, most recently in May, but it was unlikely that BT would take steps to improve the matter. The Chamber of Commerce was undertaking a survey of businesses in Rotherwas so that a future sustainable service could be costed out.

In the ensuing discussion, the following principle points were made:

- That provision of broadband to the Rotherwas Estate should be regarded as a matter of urgency, not least because jobs, and the investment in the Rotherwas Relief Road, would be at risk unless companies on the Estate had this facility;
- That it was possible to get satellite broadband connections for companies at Rotherwas, but that this was an expensive option which made firms less competitive. It could be possible to use the Council’s infrastructure to provide sufficient data bandwidth into the Estate, and discussions were continuing, with a wireless service being the most likely solution for distribution. Under existing legislation, the council could provide a broadband service, but would not be allowed to run it.
- A Member suggested that, although Advantage West Midlands were not in a position to fund broadband provision directly, they were able to fund community enterprise structures. These might be used as a vehicle to run the broadband infrastructure.
- A Member pointed out that in rural areas there was a great deal of scepticism that the Council was actively involved in forwarding the cause of broadband provision.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee expressed dismay at the lack of Broadband provision to the Rotherwas Estate.**

**60. TO REPORT THE FINDINGS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE AGREEMENT WITH HALO LEISURE TRUST**

The Committee received the Scrutiny Review of the Management Agreement with Halo Leisure Trust. The Chairman said that it had been a useful process for the Members of the group, as it had given them an increased awareness of the services that were available throughout the County. The Strategic Asset Manager added that the Review had been of the Management Agreement, and not of Halo’s performance in managing the sites.

In the ensuing discussion, the following principle points were made:

- That the Management Agreement was separate from the individual leases for each site occupied. The nature of the agreement meant that there was built in flexibility that allowed the Council to add or subtract sites from the portfolio.
- A member supported the comments made in paragraph 7.2 of the report, and the view that the setting up of Halo was as a long term strategic commitment for the Council and, as a result, a more strategic approach to service planning would need to be established.
- A member highlighted paragraph 9.1(b) of the report, and said that he was concerned over the proposal for the transfer of risk as he had found that the export of risk was rarely satisfactory, and usually cost more in contractual terms.

**RESOLVED:**

- That:**
- (a) the findings of the Scrutiny 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 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.**

**61. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE HEREFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY & DRUGS PARTNERSHIP**

The Committee approved the appointment of Councillor PM Morgan as Chairman of the Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement in the Herefordshire Community Safety & Drugs Partnership. Councillor Morgan had been appointed in place of Councillor RH Smith who, as the recently appointed Council's representative on the West Mercia Police Authority Board, did not feel that it was appropriate that he should continue to Chair the Review.

**62. SCOPING STATEMENT FOR A SCRUTINY REVIEW OF HEREFORDSHIRE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the Scoping Statement for the Review of Herefordshire's Economic Development Strategy.

**RESOLVED:**

- That:**
- (a) the scoping statement for a Review of Herefordshire's Economic Development Strategy appended to the report be agreed;**
  - (b) Councillors: PGH Cutter, B Durkin, MAF Hubbard, and TM James be appointed to the Review Group;**
- and;**
- (c) Councillor RV Stockton be appointed as Chairman of the Review Group.**

**63. WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered its work programme.

The work programme at Appendix 1 was noted. Further to Minute No. 57 a Members Seminar on Public Rights of Way should be added to the programme for the October meeting.

**RESOLVED: That subject to the above amendments, the work programme be approved and reported to the Strategic Monitoring Committee.**