

MINUTES of the meeting of Social & Economic Development Scrutiny Committee held at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Thursday, 27th November, 2003 at 10.30 a.m.

Present: Councillor A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
Councillor J. Stone (Vice Chairman)

Non-Voting Members Councillors: Mrs. P.A. Andrews, H. Bramer, M.R. Cunningham, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, J.G.S. Guthrie, Mrs. R.F. Lincoln and P. G. Turpin
Mrs. E. Newman (HALC), Mr. Maddy (NFU), D. Stevens (Chamber of Commerce)

In attendance: Councillors P.E. Harling, Mrs. M.D. Lloyd-Hayes, and R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community and Social Development)

34. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors J.C. Mayson (Cabinet Member – Rural Regeneration & Smallholdings) and A.L. Williams.

35. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Mrs P.A. Andrews substituted for Councillor A.L. Williams. Mr Maddy for Mr P. Thomas (NFU).

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mrs S.P.A. Daniels declared a personal interest in agenda item No 5 – Presentation by HALO – as she was the Council's appointed member on the HALO Ltd management board.

37. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd October, 2003 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

38. PRESENTATION BY HALO (THE LEISURE TRUST)

The Committee received a presentation by Mr J. Argent, Chief Executive of HALO Ltd (the Leisure Trust).

The Director of Policy and Community informed the Committee of the background to the setting up of the Trust.

Mr Argent outlined the rationale and the original objectives for the Trust. He then described progress made since April 2002 which included a review of staff structures and the development of a Human Resources strategy; work on preventative maintenance programmes and work flow asset management; and a review of the pricing strategy. He reported that the Board had now approved a 5 year Strategy

and would continue to work with the Herefordshire Partnership Ambition Groups. The challenges for HALO included managing ageing assets; the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act; increased maintenance costs and competition from new leisure facilities. He reported that following completion of a feasibility study there was a positive opportunity to invest for the medium to long term to get improved, modern, safe facilities. HALO would also continue to develop partnerships with the Council and other partners and attempt to improve the quality of life for residents of the County.

During the course of discussion the following principal points were noted:

- In response to a question regarding the repair and renewal of equipment and the possible closure of facilities eg as had happened at Leominster Pool, Mr Argent responded that the planned approach to maintenance should reduce equipment failures.
- He acknowledged that following the review of the pricing strategy a number of pricing elements had been removed to make the system simpler. However, the strategy would be continually reviewed.
- Existing facilities would be managed and improved. However, while the wider issue of commissioning of new facilities was outside the remit of Halo, the Leisure Services Manager reported that Halo would inform and feed back to the Council on future plans in the leisure area.
- It was noted that while leisure facilities at Kington and Wigmore were not managed by Halo, they were subject to local trust agreements.

The Chairman thanked Mr Argent for his informative presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation and comments be noted.

39. FESTIVALS REVIEW

The Committee were invited to consider a report from the Festival Review Group.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that following a request from the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) the Committee had established a Festival Review Group to look at the Council's policy towards Festivals.

The Group had conducted a review with the objective of giving guidance to the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) to find common solutions to investment requirements of festivals taking place in Herefordshire, restricting the review to festivals which received investment of over £5,000 pa from the Council. The Review Group's report setting out its approach to the task; its findings; conclusions and recommendations had been circulated to members prior to the meeting.

The Chairman outlined the process adopted for undertaking the review, which had included interviews with 11 key witness groups. He took the Committee through the report section by section and highlighted a number of key issues arising from the review.

The Committee acknowledged the effect that enthusiasm and local pride had on a community and how important local arts provision was in the County.

In relation to Recommendation 6, concerning transport infrastructure with reference to the direct rail link from Birmingham Airport to Hereford, it was suggested that the Manchester air/rail link should not be ignored.

The Chairman thanked the witnesses for their contribution to the review and the Councillors and staff for the work involved.

The Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) thanked the Review Group for undertaking the review and for producing a very readable report which he would consider in due course.

RESOLVED: That the key finding and additional recommendations contained in the report be accepted and the report be submitted to the Cabinet Member (Community and Social Development) for consideration.

40. MONITORING OF 2003/2004 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REVENUE BUDGETS PERIOD 1-7

The Committee were advised of the actual net revenue expenditure against budgets for Social and Economic Development service areas to period 7 of the financial year 2003-2004.

The Principal Accountancy Manager reported upon the revised budget, including over and underspends carried forward from 2002-03, with actual expenditure, variances and projected out-turns for the main service areas within Social and Economic Development. The monitoring report for period 7 was attached to the report at appendix 1.

In reply to a question concerning Youth Services funding, The Director of Policy and Community reported that this was a statutory service provided by the Council. Due to the difficulty in recruitment rather than service provision, an underspend was likely in this area. A restructure of the service would be undertaken to modernise the service and take account of government targets. Services would move to the whole time rather than sessional work and there would be a need to benchmark salaries.

RESOLVED: That the position outlined in the report be noted and an update report on the review of the Youth Service be presented to the next meeting.

41. POLICY AND COMMUNITY DIRECTORATE 2003/04 FIRST SIX MONTHS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee were informed of the performance of the non-corporate functions of Policy and Community Directorate against their national and local performance indicators for the first six months of 2003/04, and received details of the main areas of activity undertaken by those services during the two months since the last report. Variances from key local indicators and national best value indicators were detailed, together with an overview of the wider performance of the individual service area, at appendix 1 to the report.

The Director of Policy and Community highlighted that the number of pupils visiting museums and galleries had already exceeded the annual target by 778. She also commented that: the Funding Fair had been well received; a report on the North Herefordshire replacement pool was due to go to Cabinet the same day; the Anne

Frank Exhibition had been a success, particularly in furthering the Race Equality Partnership; Bromyard Library INFO centre would soon be completed and that work on the Leominster Access Road had commenced.

The Committee noted that any plans for improvements at Belmont library would be considered as part of the review of library services.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

42. PAYMENT OF INVOICES WITHIN 30 DAYS

The Committee considered the performance against this performance indicator during the period 1st April 2003 to 31st October, 2003.

The Director of Policy and Community reported that since the Council's dramatic improvement in meeting this target, only the Strategic Monitoring Committee would normally receive reports on this target. However, the Directorate figures for September showed a drop to 89.8%. She reported that this had been due to staff absence during the holiday period in August, which would need to be anticipated in the future. Also that the further roll-out of the Purchase Order Processing system would have a beneficial effect.

In response to a question concerning the cost of compiling these statistics the Director of Policy and Community reported that systems were now in place to capture the relevant data.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

43. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman requested that the next meeting of the Committee be held on Thursday 5th February, not Thursday 29th January as originally planned. He also suggested that, in the interests of taking the meeting to the public, the Committee be held on this occasion in Leominster.

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee be held at 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 5th February, 2004 in the Council Chamber, Leominster.

The meeting ended at 12.25 p.m.

CHAIRMAN