

MINUTES of the meeting of Social & Economic Development Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 1, Shirehall, Hereford on Tuesday, 22nd March, 2005 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:	Councillor	A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
	Councillor	J. Stone (Vice-Chairman)
	Councillors	Mrs. P.A. Andrews, H. Bramer, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, J.G.S. Guthrie, P.G. Turpin and A.L. Williams
	Co-opted Members	G. Jones (Tourism Sector) and Mrs. E. Newman (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils)

In attendance: Councillors Mrs J.P. French (Cabinet Member- Human Resources and Corporate Support Services), J.C. Mayson (Cabinet Member – Rural Regeneration and Smallholdings), R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community and Social Development) and R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Highways and Transportation)

47. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor M.R. Cunningham, Councillor B. Hunt, Councillor G.V. Hyde and Mr. A. Curless.

48. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor Mrs. P.A. Andrews substituted for Councillor M.R. Cunningham.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name	Item	Interest
Councillor A.C.R. Chappell	5 – Courtyard Review Update	Personal
	7 – External Funding Update	Personal
Councillor Mrs. J.P. French	5 – Courtyard Review Update	Personal
Councillor R.V. Stockton	5 – Courtyard Review Update	Personal
Mrs. E. Newman	8 – Parish Council Liaison Update	Personal

50. MINUTES

In relation to minute item number 45 – Possible Pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street – it was noted that the minutes published in the agenda papers had been amended to correct two minor grammatical errors.

RESOLVED: That the minutes, as amended, for the meeting held on 31st January 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

51. THE COURTYARD REVIEW - UPDATE

The Committee considered the response of Cabinet and the Courtyard Trust Board to the report of the Courtyard Review Group.

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Margaret Thomas, Chairman of the Courtyard Trust Board and Mr Martyn Green, Chief Executive of The Courtyard to the meeting.

The Director of Policy and Community informed the Committee that Cabinet had considered the report of the Courtyard Review Group on 17th February 2005. She explained that Cabinet had been generally supportive of the Review Group's recommendations although they had been unable to support the Review Group's recommendation to offer The Courtyard an interim one-year funding agreement. Cabinet had reached this view following receipt of a letter from the Arts Council indicating that a one-year agreement would require them to reconsider the level of support it provided to The Courtyard.

Cabinet had supported the Review Group's recommendation that The Courtyard should seek to identify efficiency savings and requested that officers investigate whether it would be possible to provide some funding from the Children's Services Budget.

Cabinet had also requested that the Courtyard Review Group be reconvened at an appropriate time to monitor The Courtyard and provide a further report.

The Chairman invited Mrs Thomas and Mr Green to present The Courtyard's response to the report of the Courtyard Review Group to the Committee. The full response was set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

In presenting the response of the Courtyard Trust Board Mr. Green highlighted the following principal points:

- The Council received 14 days per year free use of The Courtyard.
- Preliminary investigations currently revealed a franchised shop would provide a limited income.
- Screen West Midlands were positive about the Review Group's recommendation for a dedicated cinema space.
- The Courtyard had hosted 18 conferences in the last year.
- A reduction in the number of in-house productions would greatly reduce the level of support received from the Arts Council.

Mr. Green invited Members of the Courtyard Review Group to attend, with members of the Board, a visit to The Castle, Wellingborough in May 2005. This would enable both the Review Group and the Board to obtain operational information and statistics from a comparable arts centre.

Councillor J. Stone, Chairman of the Courtyard Review Group, thanked Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Green for their comments on the Review Group's report and the invitation to visit The Castle, Wellingborough.

In relation to the decision of Cabinet to award The Courtyard a three-year funding arrangement, Councillor Stone accepted the reasoning behind this in light of the letter received from the Arts Council.

The following are the principal points of Councillor Stone's response to the letter received from the Courtyard Board on the report of the Courtyard Review Group:

- He expressed some disappointment with the response of The Courtyard towards future monitoring by the Council. He explained that as The Courtyard was a recipient of a large sum of public money then future scrutiny and monitoring was essential. The Courtyard needed to be accountable to its major grant provider.
- With reference to paragraph 20.6, of the Courtyard's response, Councillor Stone informed the meeting that whilst he would not necessarily expect the Review Group's recommendations to have been implemented by November 2005, the Review Group would at least expect to see what progress had been made towards their implementation or hear the reasons for disregarding them. He noted how successful retail shops often were at tourist locations.
- He accepted that "a middle-scale" arts centre was a more appropriate term to describe The Courtyard rather than "small-scale" as had been used in the Review Group's report.
- He suggested that The Courtyard contact the Council's Highways Department to see what arrangements could be made to improve signage to the Courtyard.
- He acknowledged that the Council's grant now only represented 20% of The Courtyard's annual turnover compared to 50% in its first year of trading.
- He hoped that The Courtyard would continue to investigate the possibility of hosting more one-day conferences.

In looking towards the Courtyard Review Group's further investigations in the autumn of 2005 Councillor Stone highlighted the following areas that he anticipated the Review Group would be investigating. These were:

1. That the lift was functioning properly and that the water ingress had been corrected successfully after their imminent anticipated repair.
2. The results of the Economic Impact Study currently being undertaken by the Arts Council on behalf of The Courtyard.
3. Evidence from The Courtyard on how older people benefited from using the Courtyard.
4. Further information on the possibility of converting the existing studio into a dedicated cinema.
5. The possibility of The Courtyard holding more conferences and incorporating a retail shop.
6. Investigating the response of the Children's Services Directorate to the Review Group's proposal that it make an increased contribution to the Council's grant to The Courtyard.
7. Whether or not the Youth Service could make more use of The Courtyard's facilities.
8. The level of progress made towards achieving efficiency savings within The Courtyard.
9. An update on the new commissioning agreement between the Council and The Courtyard and how it was working.

Councillor Stone emphasised that The Courtyard had no need to be defensive when being monitored by the Council and that financial accountability was the key to further success.

The following are the principal points made during the ensuing discussion:

- Due to the limited circulation of the letter from the Arts Council on its current and possible future funding arrangements with The Courtyard, which had led Cabinet to award a three year funding agreement with The Courtyard, the Director of Policy and Community read relevant extracts from the letter. The extracts gave details on how a one year funding agreement with The Courtyard would have

resulted in the Arts Council reconsidering the current level of funding it provided to The Courtyard with the likely outcome being a reduction in the level of grant funding.

- Concern was expressed at the lack of any specific business plans for franchising out a retail shop, catering and possible building, remodelling or expansion.
- Concern was expressed that the Courtyard Trust Board did not consider it to be a part of their remit to facilitate improved signage to the building.
- A view was expressed that The Courtyard should fully utilise the facilities currently available to them before considering increasing the size of the building.
- Responding to a request for clarification concerning music bands (Review Group's report para 11.9) the Review Group commented that there may be the potential to develop popular music events, such as jazz bands and orchestras, they had not been advocating 'pop bands'.
- The Courtyard could look to diversify the range of groups it sought to attract for conferences.
- Addressing the problems with signage to The Courtyard on the city's roads should be considered a priority.
- The possibility of a Tourist Information Centre being incorporated into The Courtyard should be considered.

Mr. Green commented that The Courtyard currently had a 3-year general business plan in operation which did incorporate the elements the Committee were concerned about. He also informed Members that The Courtyard did host concerts from orchestras but it had proved difficult to make such events breakeven.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Thomas and Mr Green and welcomed the improved situation currently being experienced at The Courtyard. However, he reiterated that it was important that as recipients of a large sum of public money The Courtyard was held to account.

RESOLVED:

That (a) a written response be provided to the Courtyard regarding a number of points made in their response as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;

(b) the response by the Courtyard Trust Board to the report of the Courtyard Review Group be noted;

(c) the response by Cabinet to the report of the Courtyard Review Group be noted;

and

(d) the Review Group be reconvened later in the year to undertake a follow up review.

52. PEDESTRIANISATION - UPDATE

Members received an update on the consultation on the proposed pedestrianisation of Widemarsh Street, Hereford.

The Head of Service (Policy and Community) informed the Committee that the current consultation on the proposed pedestrianisation had been completed and that just under 300 questionnaire responses had been received. Of the questionnaires

received 81% were in favour of a pedestrianisation experiment later in the year.

The Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation) reported that 45% of the consultees had wanted a partial pedestrianised scheme, therefore once the Eign Gate redevelopment was completed Widemarsh Street would be pedestrianised for the trial period from 10.30 a.m. until 4.30 p.m. During the restricted hours a gate would be closed at the northern end of the southern section of Widemarsh Street to prevent traffic entering the pedestrianised zone.

The Committee outlined the following points of concern for consideration by the Cabinet Member (Highways and Transportation):

- That the public may not be so patient if traffic problems occurred as, unlike during the Transco works, the pedestrianisation experiment was not essential.
- Following pedestrianisation, traffic flow could significantly increase through the access only routes of East and West Street.
- That peak hour traffic congestion could be increased as delivery vehicles, that previously arrived throughout the day, would now be required to beat the curfew for pedestrianisation.
- It was considered necessary that the pedestrianised area should be capable of being open to traffic in the event of an accident on the ring road.

In response to a question, the Head of Service (Policy and Community) reported that £45,000 had been allocated to fund the pedestrianisation experiment.

The Chairman proposed that the Committee undertake an investigation into the economic impact of the pedestrianisation experiment after its conclusion in December 2005.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the report be noted;

and

(b) an investigation into the economic impact of the pedestrianisation experiment be scheduled into the Committee's Work Programme.

53. EXTERNAL FUNDING UPDATE

The Committee was updated on a range of External Funding Programmes currently benefiting Herefordshire.

The Head of Service (Policy and Community) reported that in recent years the emphasis on regeneration activity and funding had amplified at a national level, with regeneration being increasingly used as a mechanism to support economic, community and environmental development. This role was led at a regional level by Advantage West Midlands. He explained that the number of funding streams to support regeneration had also increased which meant that greater financial resources were now available. Some of these funding streams covered the whole Country, such as the National Lottery, and some were geographically targeted, such as Objective 2 European funding. He added that nearly all funding streams were time limited and had strict rules about when project activity could be undertaken.

An update of the main funding streams available and how they currently applied to Herefordshire was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration and Smallholdings) commented that bids were expensive in terms of the amount of officer time required to make an application but were hugely valuable if the bid was successful. He cited an example of a recent bid for Objective 2 funding which had cost £25,000 to submit but had brought in £1.4m to the County. He further told how funding schemes were set to be simplified in an attempt to reduce the time and effort local authorities spent making bids.

The Chairman commented that in the last 5 years approximately £40m had come into the County through external funding.

In response to a question regarding the externally funded workspace development at Rotherwas Industrial Estate, Hereford, the Head of Service (Policy and Community) informed the Committee that two of the six workplaces had been successfully let.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

54. PARISH COUNCIL LIASON UPDATE

Members were provided with an update on Herefordshire Council's Parish Council liaison activity.

The Head of Service (Policy and Community) introduced the Committee to Mr Shane Smith, Community Regeneration Support and Grants Assistant, who provides the Council's Parish Council Liaison Service. He informed Members that Mr Smith was one of only a handful of liaison officers throughout the Country.

The role of Community Regeneration Support and Grants Assistant was four fold:

1. To act as first point of contact for members of the public wishing to contact their local Town or Parish Council and to liase between the local Councils and Herefordshire Council.
2. To monitor the Service Level Agreement between the Council and Herefordshire Association of Local Councils (HALC).
3. Facilitating Parish Councils in the drafting, despatching, development and implementation of Parish Plans.
4. Providing officer support to those parishes designated as Quality Parishes.

HALC welcomed the appointment which had been a great help to local Councils. The HALC representative reported that some Parishes were set to make Quality Parish accreditation applications which, if successful, would then require Herefordshire Council, in negotiation with the Parish, to devolve certain services to the Parish.

In response to questions it was explained that in order for a Parish Council to be accredited with Quality status the Parish needed to have, amongst other things, a qualified clerk.

The Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration and Smallholdings) supported the idea of strengthening the power of Parish Councils. He was aware that many Parish Councils felt that their views were often not noted, especially with regard to planning applications. He further informed the Committee that any Parish Plan not yet started would not be implemented as the Countryside Agency had decided to end funding for such projects. Those Parish Plans which had been implemented would now be supported by the voluntary sector and through the Council by the provision of officer

support.

RESOLVED:

That (a) the report be noted;

and

(b) a further report on Parish Council Liaison be considered in 12 months time.

55. POLICY AND COMMUNITY DIRECTORATE 2004/05 FIRST TEN MONTHS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Committee was informed about the performance of the non-corporate functions of the Policy and Community Directorate against national and local performance indicators for the first ten months of 2004/05.

In response to a question on the apparent lack of Youth Service activity in Hereford City, it was noted that a report on the Youth Service would be made to the Committee's next meeting. In the interim a briefing note would be sent to Members on the varied activities that the Youth Service was currently delivering to Hereford City.

Concern was expressed over the significant lack of achievement with regard to BV170 (b) number of school pupils visiting museums and galleries in organised school groups. Members requested that formal arrangements concerning the "Museum on the Move" bus be improved for future years.

RESOLVED:

THAT (a) the report be noted;

and

(b) Members be updated on the activities being delivered by the Youth Service before the next meeting.

56. ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING - RESULT OF REINSPECTION

Members were advised on the outcome of the reinspection of the Council's Adult and Community Learning (ACL) provision.

Herefordshire Council's ACL provision had been reinspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) in early December 2004. Its previous inspection in January 2003 had identified significant weakness in the ACL's leadership and management.

The Head of Service (Policy and Community) reported that the ALI report had been published on 4th February 2005 and the Council's ACL provision had been graded 'good' in five out of the six areas inspected and 'satisfactory' in the sixth. Quality Assurance had been the area identified as 'satisfactory' on the basis that, whilst the appropriate processes were in place it was not possible, within the short timescale since their implementation to assess the full impact on the quality of learning.

The Head of Service (Policy and Community) informed the Committee that the

inspection results demonstrated that the service had made significant progress since its first inspection and placed Herefordshire's ACL provision within the top 28% of Councils inspected by the ALI. A detailed breakdown and explanation of the areas inspected and details of future action to be taken were detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

57. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2005/06

The Committee considered its new work programme for the period until March 2006.

The following issues were discussed in relation to the Committee's work programme:

- An update on the proposed Edgar Street Grid development to be heard at the next meeting of the Committee.
- The Chairman proposed that a Scrutiny Review be undertaken into the County's provision for 18-30 year olds focusing on the need to do more to attract or retain this age group in the County.
- The report for the Youth Service scheduled for the June meeting should include reference to the work of the Youth Involvement Worker.
- Following a suggestion that the Committee should discuss providing candidates for the Youth Parliament it was noted that the Council was reviewing this position.

It was noted that the next two meetings of the Committee were likely to take place in the evening, in the Market Towns.

RESOLVED: That the proposed work programme be approved subject to the inclusion of the above suggested issues and recommended to the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

The meeting ended at 11.55 a.m.

CHAIRMAN