

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at St. Katherine's Hall, Ledbury on Wednesday, 5th October, 2005 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:	Councillor	A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
	Councillor	H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)
	Councillors	M.R. Cunningham, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, J.G.S. Guthrie and D.C. Taylor
	Co-opted Members	C. Harvey (Chamber of Commerce) and Mrs. E. Newman (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils)

In attendance: Councillors B.F. Ashton, J.C. Mayson (Cabinet Member – Rural Regeneration and Strategy, D.W. Rule MBE (Cabinet Member – Children’s Services), R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services) and R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Resources)

The Committee observed a minute’s silence in memory of Councillor G.V. Hyde, former Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member (Economic Development).

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R.B.A. Burke, P.G. Turpin and A.L. Williams and from Co-opted Members Ms. C. Jones (Chamber of Commerce) and G. Jones (Tourism Sector).

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11. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor R. Mills substituted for Councillor R.B.A. Burke and Mr. C. Harvey substituted for Ms. C. Jones.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes for the meeting held on 13th June 2005, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

The Chairman announced that the suggestion to scrutinise the county’s museums received at the last meeting had been accepted and would be scheduled in the

Committee's work programme for next year.

The following suggestions were proposed for scrutiny:

- The delivery of youth activities in Ledbury.
- The operation of the police station in Ledbury.
- Highways and traffic in Ledbury.

The Chairman agreed to discuss the operation of the police station in Ledbury with the Community Safety Officer and pass on the suggestion to scrutinise highways and traffic in Ledbury to the Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee.

15. PRESENTATION BY CABINET MEMBER (COMMUNITY SERVICES)

The Committee received a presentation from Councillor R.V. Stockton, Cabinet Member (Community Services) informing them of the policy issues affecting his programme area and the main future priorities.

A report from the Cabinet Member (Community Services) was included in the agenda papers.

In response to questions the Committee was informed that:

- Negotiations were ongoing with Accord to take over the contract of Herefordshire Jarvis Services (HJS) who were still the Council's principal contractor.
- HJS were still delivering services for the Council.
- All staff at HJS were being kept informed of any developments in the situation.
- Public Rights of Way was set to join the Parks and Countryside Service.

16. PRESENTATION BY CABINET MEMBER (RURAL REGENERATION AND STRATEGY)

The Committee received a presentation from Councillor J.C. Mayson, Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration and Strategy) informing them of the policy issues affecting his programme area and the main future priorities.

A report from the Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration and Strategy) was included in the agenda papers.

In response to questions the Cabinet Member replied:

- The Moneybox Credit Union had branches in Hereford and Leominster. Moneybox was open to all people who live or work in Herefordshire.
- The Business Rate Relief Scheme currently being piloted in Ross on Wye until September 2006 could become a Countywide scheme if deemed successful.
- The Council was legally obliged to provide a replacement livestock market for Hereford.
- Cabinet would undertake a full and open consultation whilst debating the new location for the livestock market.
- He acknowledged that there were some concerns about how farmers from the Golden Valley would access a new livestock market located to the north west of Hereford.
- There was a high emphasis on Best Value when it came to devolving services to Parishes.

17. HEREFORDSHIRE FESTIVALS 2004/2005

Members received an update on the activity since the Festivals Review, which had been approved by the former Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee in November 2003.

Details of current position in respect of Festivals that had taken place in the County from October 2004 were contained in the report.

The Chairman welcomed invitees from the Leominster Festival, Ledbury Poetry Festival and the Three Choirs Festival. The representatives gave an opening address and then responded to questions from the Committee as summarised below.

Mr. Attwood, Chairman of the Leominster Festival, informed the Committee that this year's festival had been a success, with the appearance of the Tashi Lhunpo Monks the highlight and that next year's Festival had already been planned without the aid of a grant from the Council. Funding was instead being gained from local sponsors. Members were informed about the difficulty of recruiting new volunteers to help organise the Festival despite a high profile recruitment campaign.

Mr. Brookes, Chairman of the Ledbury Poetry Festival (LPF), reported to the Committee that the Festival had enjoyed record ticket sales and was the largest poetry festival in the Country. He explained that the LPF was not just a ten-day event in the summer with other events being held throughout the year. He informed Members that the LPF's community programme cost about £20,000 a year to deliver. He believed that it was a great shame that Herefordshire Council could not provide the LPF with a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

Dr. Bennett, Director LPF, called for Herefordshire Council to provide LPF with an SLA as recommended by the Festivals Review Group.

The Chairman commented that the Festivals Review Group had recommended that the LPF be awarded a SLA, however, budget constraints had prevented the implementation of the recommendation at this time.

Mr Wilding, Chairman of the Three Choirs Festival, Hereford, informed Members that the Three Choirs Festival was one of the oldest music festivals in Europe and had been running for over 300 years. He reported that the Festival was returning to Hereford in 2006 and that the Festival organisers were trying to widen the appeal of the festival. He felt that the Festival was not appreciated locally as much as it might be and therefore next year there was going to be a greater emphasis on the fringe festival to try to encourage families and others who would not normally attend the festival to watch a performance or be involved in a workshop. He conceded that tickets for the festival on the whole were not cheap, however, some cheaper tickets were available. He reported the festival was trying to get young people more involved in the festival and that the fringe was currently trying to make arrangements to work with schools during next year's festival.

Mr Dickinson, Administrator for the Three Choirs Festival, discussed a case study report completed by the Arts Council about the audience which had visited the festival in 2004 when the festival was hosted in Gloucester. A copy of the Arts Council report had been circulated separately to Members. Mr Dickinson stated that although the report was based on audience figures at Gloucester that the findings were relevant to Hereford as the audience for the festival was broadly similar each year. He informed that Committee that 57% of visitors to the festival had stayed

overnight when visiting the festival, 45% of visitors had travelled over 60 miles to attend and the average spend on tickets per person at the festival was £55.32. He explained that the report showed that the type of visitor to the festival was relatively affluent. This meant that the Three Choirs Festival was good for the local economy. However, he felt that Hereford needed to provide more hospitality and local shops could do more to stock goods which would be attractive to the typical festival visitor.

Mr Dickinson called for the scheduled refurbishment of Hereford City centre in 2006 to be delayed until after the conclusion of next year's festival.

The Chairman thanked the invitees for attending the meeting and congratulated them on the success of their respective festivals. He informed them that he appreciated their financial needs and would ensure that these were brought to the Budget Panel's attention in preparing the 2006/07 budget.

18. YOUTH MATTERS - GREEN PAPER

Members were informed of the Youth Matters – Green Paper consultation on the future of Youth Services and the Connexions Service, a copy of which had been circulated separately to Members.

The Community Youth Service Manager informed the Committee that the Green Paper had been published on 18th July 2005 and invited views on how to reform services in line with the Every Child Matters and the Children Act 2004. The Green Paper consultation was set to end on 4th November 2005.

The following were the main points from the ensuing discussion:

- Young people had been consulted as part of the wider consultation via a young persons version of the green paper and specialist questionnaire; young people had even gone so far as to develop their own version of the young persons green paper to make in more accessible. A young peoples action group was expected to respond to the consultation shortly.
- All local information would be combined to make up Herefordshire's local offer of available services.
- A Youth Worker for Bromyard and Ledbury had just been appointed.

The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) stated that the Green Paper was likely to change the public perception of the Youth Service. The Youth Service of the future would be based on outcomes and gaining qualifications as a subsidiary to the education service rather than having a more social purpose.

The Cabinet Member (Children's Services) informed the Committee that Herefordshire was set to nominate a representative to the Youth Parliament.

RESOLVED: That the Youth Matters – Green Paper be noted.

19. LEDBURY LIBRARY AND TOURIST INFORMATION SERVICE

Members were informed of the latest position on the relocation of the present Library and the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) into new premises at the Masters House, St. Katherine's, Ledbury.

Two questions from members of the public had been received before the meeting.

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Ms. A. Blackmore, Ledbury Resident asked:

1. *"Would the Council confirm that in order for the TIC to perform the services efficiently and productively it needs to be sited in a prominent position.*
2. *The current location is in the best position and we would prefer it remain there. If Herefordshire Council are still considering moving the TIC into the Masters House would they confirm it will be prominently located in the entrance area? The other services such as library, council offices etc do NOT require such prominence.*
3. *If this is not the case, would the Council consider retaining the TIC in the ground floor of The Browning Institute building. This could have an entrance in the Homend – the upper floors could be rented out. This building has been left in trust to Ledbury and should contain a prominent operation such as the TIC. What would be the cost of rent for the ground floor space in this building? (It is understood that the rent is required to offset the maintenance of the building).*
4. *The main reason for removing the TIC from its current location the Council has stated is the rental cost. At present the building has occupants in the upper floors which must offset some of the rent. What is the current rent for the TIC?"*

Mr. R. Kretching, Ledbury resident asked:

"We are constantly being told that we live in the 4th wealthiest nation in the world

Why therefore must the TIC in Ledbury be moved to a small area in the Masters House in a car park away from the Homend (a question of money?)

The current position of the TIC is the eye into Ledbury, where many tourists make it their first port of call to find out about the town.

Local artists and businesses use the windows to sell or promote their services.

It should not be a question of money whether to change the position of the TIC.

If you wish tourists to keep coming to Ledbury the TIC must be easily seen and accessible.

Most towns and cities have TIC's which are easily seen.

Older residents who know the town and the Masters House tell me that they believe there is not sufficient space to occupy the library and TIC together with all the other services already there.

Your comments to us the residents of Ledbury would be greatly appreciated."

The Acting Cultural Services Manager reported to the Committee that the current location of the library in Ledbury was contrary to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) due to a stepped entrance, narrow doorways and a further staircase within the building without a lift.

She explained that, subject to listed building consent, the library was set to relocate in part to the Masters House in December 2005 or January 2006. However, this was only a temporary move as a Heritage Lottery bid (HLF) was being submitted to facilitate the complete relocation of the library. If the HLF bid failed investigations would be made into funding the relocation through the Council's capital programme.

Regarding the TIC, the Acting Cultural Services Manager explained that the current

lease on the building in which the TIC was located was set to expire in two years time. She explained that the relocation of the TIC to the Masters House would provide an improved service in an historic setting which could become one of Ledbury's foremost tourist attractions in its own right. The TIC would have its own separate entrance, on the doctor's surgery side of the building, and signage from the town centre would be provided. The TIC may also be able to extend its opening hours, as the centralisation of services in the Masters House would allow greater flexibility with staff.

If the TIC were to relocate to the Browning Institute it was not possible to ascertain the costs of relocating as the building was not owned by the Council. It would also not be possible to have window displays if the TIC relocated to the Browning Institute, unlike at the Masters House where the window displays would continue.

Mr. P. Oar, Ledbury resident highlighted the example of Yeovil TIC which had relocated away from a town centre location, and was reporting major reductions in the number of visitors it received as no one knew where to find it.

The Cabinet Member (Community Services) explained to the Committee that he believed that the Masters House would become one of the best tourist attractions in Ledbury. If the TIC relocated to the Masters House it would still be accessible from the high street and the new location would be well signposted. Although local artists might benefit from being able to display their work in the window of the current TIC this was not a principal function of a TIC and not a facility that the Council was obliged to provide.

In closing the item the Chairman stated that the Committee would investigate progress on the issue again in the future and that the issue of signage to the TIC would be passed onto the Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That the plans for the relocation of both the Library and the Tourist Information Centre in Ledbury be noted.

20. COMMUNITY SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee received a report on the available performance indicator positions and were provided with information about the current performance management work within the Community Services Directorate

The Director of Adult and Community Services explained to the Committee that a factual error had occurred on page 11 of the performance report in relation to Heritage Services. The report stated that visitor figures to Hereford Museum and Art Gallery were down from last year. In fact visitor figures for July and August 2005 were higher than those recorded in the respective months in 2004.

The Acting Cultural Services Manager informed Members that visitor figures for museums and visitor figures in general regionally and nationally were inconsistent. The museum in Kington was reporting higher visitor numbers than last year, as were museums in Powys and Worcestershire. The Council had conducted its own survey into visitor trends regionally and nationally through Visit Britain and had discovered that many other areas were suffering from lower numbers of overnight stays. It was possible that the recent terrorist attacks in London had contributed to the reduction in the number of visitors to London who then venture out into the rest of the Country.

The Performance Improvement Manger informed the Committee that in future performance reports were likely to be more concise and have a greater focus on

exception reporting.

He added that, in order to gain figures regarding the number of people who use open spaces at least once a month, a representative Best Value survey was carried out every three years.

RESOLVED: THAT the report be noted.

21. SCOPING STATEMENT FOR FOLLO UP REVIEW OF THE COURTYARD CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

The Committee discussed the scoping statement for the proposed follow up review of the Courtyard Centre for the Arts, as requested by Cabinet following the report of the Courtyard Review Group which had been approved by the former Social and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee in January 2005.

The Vice-Chairman explained that Cabinet had accepted a number of the Review Group's previous recommendations. The new review would be monitoring the progress that the Courtyard had made, as outlined in the key questions on the new scoping statement which was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The Chairman explained to the Committee that a new Member and Chairman of the Review Group needed to be appointed as the previous Chairman of the Review Group, Councillor J. Stone, had been appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council.

RESOLVED:

THAT (a) Councillor M.R. Cunningham be appointed as a Member of the Courtyard Review Group;

(b) Councillor H. Bramer be appointed Chairman of the Courtyard Review Group;

and;

(c) the scoping statement for the follow up review of the Courtyard Centre for the Arts, as appended to the report, be approved.

In closing the meeting the Chairman accepted a question from Tony Bradford, Ledbury resident, who was concerned about the proposed closure of Ledbury Jobcentre+ and the prospect of disadvantaged Jobcentre+ customers having to undertake a 30 mile round trip to Hereford to participate in compulsory interviews in order to claim benefits.

The Chairman informed Mr. Bradford that the Council could not prevent the closure of Ledbury Jobcentre+ but offered to follow up the issue separately and write back to him in due course.

The meeting ended at 7.59 p.m.

CHAIRMAN