

**HEREFORDSHIRE  
COUNCIL  
SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEES REPORT  
2007-2009**

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## **Foreword**

Scrutiny has a key role in helping to achieve the Council's objectives and improve outcomes, quality of life chances, health and wellbeing. Scrutiny members work to ensure that the voice of residents of Herefordshire is heard, engage with partner organisations and assist with developing Council policy.

The Council as a whole recognises how important it is that scrutiny contributes to improvements in services provided to the people of Herefordshire and to the decision making process within the Council. This report summarises the work of the scrutiny Committees and highlights topics and matters that have had a particular impact on the work of the Council, its partners and the community.

The scrutiny role will continue to develop, especially in the ways in which we scrutinise partnership working and strengthen focus on the most important issues affecting quality of life. We will continue to increase our engagement with the public and focus our work on making sure that Herefordshire's residents are well served by the Council and its partners.

We would like to thank the co-opted members who contribute positively to our scrutiny work and all those who provided information to the Scrutiny Committees and Review Groups which helped us reach our recommendations.

## Introduction

Scrutiny is carried out by Committees and Panels made up of non executive Councillors from the Council's political groups. Scrutiny Committees ensure the accountability and transparency of the Council's decision making process. The following Committees have been established by Herefordshire Council and each provide a review of their activities from May 2007 to April 2009 in this report.

- Strategic Monitoring Committee (which reviews corporate performance and scrutinises corporate matters and co-ordinates the work of all the scrutiny committees).
- Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing
- Children's Services
- Community Services
- Environment
- Health

The key roles of Scrutiny Committees are to:

- Hold the Executive to account for their decisions.
- Help review and develop Council policy and make recommendations to the Cabinet.
- Probe, investigate, test the options and ask the difficult questions before and after decisions are taken.
- Look in more detail at areas of Council functions to ensure that they are meeting local needs and delivering value for money.
- "Call-in" decisions - this is a statutory power which means that a key decision is placed on hold until it has been considered and the relevant Scrutiny Committee and it has made recommendations on the issue.
- Review performance of the Council and highlight areas for improvement.
- Scrutinise local partners and public service providers.

The public are welcome to attend Scrutiny Committees (except when it is necessary on rare occasions for the Committee to discuss an issue in private – for example where there are issues of commercial confidentiality) and are encouraged to suggest items for scrutiny to consider, as explained in more detail on the next page of this report.

Each Scrutiny Committee has a work programme. This sets out what issues it intends to consider. Scrutiny Review Panels (which are time limited) are

formed to carry out reviews on a particular issue or topic. The Committees also respond to particular issues of concern that arise during the year.

### **Public Engagement with Scrutiny**

You can contact Councillors and Officers at any time about any matters and issues you would like a Scrutiny Committee to investigate.

There are two other ways you can directly contribute at Scrutiny Committee meetings.

#### **Suggestions for Scrutiny**

You can suggest issues for the scrutiny function to consider by attending a Scrutiny Committee. Councillors will then research the issue and determine whether the issue will form part of the Committee's work programme.

#### **Questions and Participation at Meetings**

You can submit a question for consideration at a Scrutiny Committee meeting as long as your question is directly related to an agenda item to be considered at that meeting. Your question would need to have been received **no later than two working days before the meeting** so that an answer can be given at the meeting. Questions need to be made in writing and sent to the Scrutiny team officer whose contact details are on the front of each agenda.

Members of the public will also, at the Chairman's discretion, be able to contribute to the discussion at the meeting.

#### **Accessing Information**

Information on the Council's scrutiny function is available on the scrutiny pages of the Council's website [www.herefordshire.gov.uk](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk). This also provides access to all agenda papers and minutes.

## Summary of Activity

### The scrutiny function has:

- Tested the plans for the delivery of Herefordshire Connects, a strategic transformation project designed to improve delivery of services, increase efficiency and generate significant financial savings.
- Commented on the Cabinet's plans to improve the Council's Service Delivery Partnership arrangements with Amey so that there is a better service for less cost.
- Prompted the Cabinet to review the strategy for managing the Council's smallholdings estate and bring the strategy up to date.
- Made strong recommendations on the Council's office accommodation strategy.
- Reviewed the provision of information communication and technology services.
- Reviewed the arrangements for the transition of looked after children from leaving care to adult life.
- Investigated the modernisation of day opportunities for older people.
- Examined the Herefordshire Home Point Housing Allocations Policy.
- Examined the development of the Wyebridge Sports Academy to clarify the value of the proposal and how it will function.
- Challenged a proposal to close Kington Children's Centre Nursery with the outcome that nursery provision in Kington Town has been continued by a new provider.
- Considered public concern about the closure of the LEA swimming pool at St Martin's, Hereford, designed specifically for swimming tuition and made representations reflecting these concerns to Cabinet.
- Reviewed the Council's agreement with Halo Leisure Trust following an Audit Commission inspection of Cultural Services. seeking to address the Inspection's comments and recommendations.
- Reviewed tourism in the County, particularly Tourist Information Centre (TIC) provision and its ability to meet the needs of its customers in view of local and national trends in response to an Audit Commission inspection of Cultural Services.
- Reviewed the Edgar Street Grid development, the largest regeneration scheme in the County, to seek to maximise its value and impact for the

benefit of Hereford City and the wider County.

- Considered pressures on maintaining the Public Rights of Way Network recommending an urgent review of the backlog of Definitive Map Modification Orders with a view to eradicating the backlog within three years.
- Tested plans for the development of the Rotherwas Access Road.
- Emphasised the urgency of dealing with the replacement of Colwall Railway Bridge, mindful of the detrimental effect of its partial closure on the local community.
- Reviewed household waste recycling in the County to investigate improvements against a background of tougher Government targets.
- Completed a review of the Herefordshire Travellers Policy, mindful of the contribution of the traveller population to the economy and distinctiveness as well as the cultural diversity of Herefordshire.
- Considered a range of environmental issues reflecting the Council's leadership for the Herefordshire Partnership's Local Area Agreement target to cut carbon emissions.
- Tested proposals to develop enhanced partnership working between Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire to deliver better services, more effectively, to the citizens of the County.
- Sought to ensure that the service on the ground in Herefordshire is not adversely affected by the reconfiguration of West Midlands Ambulance Service Emergency Operations Centres in the West Midlands and pressed for reinvestment into the County of any resources realised through reorganisation.
- Pressed for the development of radiotherapy provision at Hereford, supported by the National Cancer Strategy which amongst other things recommends that no patient should have to travel more than 45 minutes for cancer treatment.
- Scrutinised performance across the Council and asked Cabinet Members and officers to account for their performance and explain their future plans.

## **STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE**



### **Councillor Phil Edwards Chairman of the Strategic Monitoring Committee**

#### **What the Committee does**

The Committee scrutinises the Council's corporate activity including strategies and policies relating to finance; audit and performance management and corporate support services. It also co-ordinates and oversees the work of the other scrutiny committees and includes as members the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of all the Scrutiny Committees.

The Committee met formally 20 times during the reporting period. In addition Committee Members have attended informal Review Group meetings.

#### **Herefordshire Connects**

Herefordshire Connects is the Council's strategic transformation project designed to improve delivery of services, increase efficiency and make better use of resources. It envisaged it would deliver annual savings of several million pounds a year for the Council.

After being told that the predicted savings had reduced, the Committee called for a report which set out the chronological development of the Connects project, the financial position and the interlinkages with the Council's other major IT projects. In parallel with this the Committee also 'called in' a proposal on the purchase of a particular software package for social care. The Committee's view was that to ensure proper, informed decision making, future Cabinet reports should be much clearer, outlining the alternative options which needed to be fully considered.

Cabinet approved the revised report produced at the Committee's request and accepted the Committee's further recommendations on the Connects project. The Council's Joint Management Team, with strategic partner Deloitte, subsequently undertook an options appraisal of the Herefordshire Connects project to make sure that the vision for Herefordshire Connects remained fit for purpose both now and for the future. The Joint Management Team also updated the business case to take account of current and future needs; identified benefits already achieved and ensured that governance arrangements were robust and appropriate. The programme was re-shaped

and prioritised to reflect increased joint working with NHS Herefordshire and the increased risk of key ICT system failure.

The Committee agreed that there was a need to address the growing risk of ICT systems failures promptly, as highlighted in the Deloitte report. It advised Cabinet of the need for reassurance that the Connects project would deliver the objectives in full. Cabinet was requested to ensure measures were put in place to enable effective monitoring of the successful delivery of the project.

### **Service Delivery Partnership With Amey Wye Valley**

The Committee has considered developments in the contract with external providers for delivering a number of important services. These include highway maintenance, grounds maintenance, street cleansing, toilet cleansing, recycling, street lighting, courier services, printing, vehicle maintenance, signage, building maintenance, building cleaning, and event catering as well as the provision of a variety of engineering and technical services.

An initial 10 year contract for the Partnership to deliver these services was awarded in 2003. After Amey PLC took over the contract the Committee invited representatives of the Company's national and local management to make presentations and answer questions on Amey's future plans and their level of commitment to Herefordshire.

The Cabinet, jointly with Amey, then undertook a review to examine ways of improving the partnership arrangements between Amey and the Council. Two key objectives were set: to review alternative forms of delivery with a view to securing annual savings to the Council of a minimum of £1 million; and to improve the current quality and level of service.

Having emphasised the need to improve the quality of service and to ensure Amey was accountable to the Council, the Committee was assured that it was possible both to make savings and improve the quality of service and that the new arrangements would be transparent.

The Committee therefore broadly supported the recommendations being made to Cabinet on the future arrangements. The Committee will scrutinise both the quality and value for money of service delivery under the new arrangements.

### **Strategy For Managing The Council's Smallholdings Estate**

Herefordshire's smallholdings estate (tenant farms) was originally set up as part of a national scheme, designed in part to provide farming opportunities for ex-servicemen returning from the First World War.

The smallholdings estate is around 2,100 hectares (5,200 acres) and has an estimated disposal value (depending on the approach chosen) of between £20-40 million.

The Committee, concerned about the policy documents governing the management of the estate, recommended that the Executive should



undertake an overarching review. The Committee then commented on the provisional findings during the policy review process.

The Committee agreed that the evidence supported the retention of the smallholdings estate. However, it made specific points about the principle of encouraging career progression, and increasing the acreage of the estate if and when appropriate, as well as the need for support and development for tenants tailored to their individual needs to increase the prospects of progression.

Cabinet is due to consider the Committee's recommendations along with comments from the National Farmers Union and the Tenant Farmers Association in the summer of 2009.

### **Office Accommodation Strategy**

The Council wishes to rationalise its property holdings portfolio and, in the process, to improve service delivery and to deliver efficiency savings. The Council has inherited a large number of office buildings, either owned or leased, within Hereford and it is a priority for the Council to streamline the portfolio. The Committee appointed a working group to consider the development of an integrated office accommodation strategy for the Primary Care Trust and the Council.

By its nature much of the work concerned material of a commercially sensitive nature and is not in the public domain. However, the Committee made strong recommendations, on the proposed timescale for the project; on the need for the project to be resourced with a full-time project team; the need for further detailed work to be undertaken; and possible sites for integrated office accommodation.

Cabinet is due to take a decision on the Strategy in May 2009.

### **Performance And Financial Reporting**

In addition to making a number of detailed recommendations to Cabinet on aspects of performance and the Council's financial position the Committee has sought to achieve improvements to the reporting itself.

Improvements in financial reporting have resulted. This was recognised in the Audit Commission's 2008 Use of Resources Judgment.

## **Elections**

The Committee has considered and monitored progress against an action plan designed to improve the service and processes based on lessons learned from the May 2007 elections where a number of difficulties were experienced despite the considerable efforts made by staff. The Committee considered that whilst a large proportion of these difficulties could be attributed to the late introduction of significant legislation governing the elections, it was essential that substantial improvements were made to avoid recurrence of the problems.

The Committee invited the Electoral Commission to attend a meeting to give a presentation on its work and discuss electoral issues. The Commission confirmed that many of the concerns expressed about the May 2007 elections in Herefordshire had been shared regionally and nationally and were due in part to the introduction of new legislation shortly beforehand.

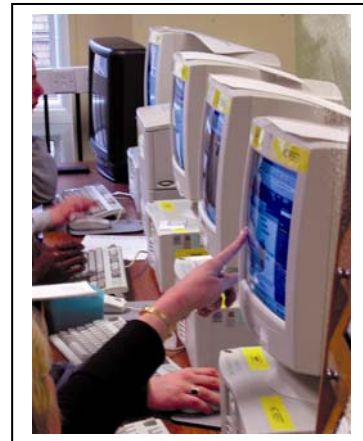
The Committee will consider the need for further scrutiny depending on how future election arrangements work.

## **Scrutiny Review of ICT Services**

The Committee has revisited the review of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) Services it undertook in December 2006. As well as finding out what tasks within the action plan had been completed or remained to be completed, the 2008 review identified a number of areas where the original recommendations needed to be reinforced or strengthened and new recommendations made.

The review made a number of recommendations which were taken on board by the Cabinet, subject to appropriate funding. In summary these included:

- The need for a new sustainable, secure and resilient Data Centre.
- The Council needed to investigate using the Community Network to provide increased broadband provision to the Rotherwas area and to encourage use of the Community Network by the Primary Care Trust
- Development of a single website for all council services.
- Re-design of the Council intranet to make it easier to use, ensuring that information within it was reliable and timely so as to support effective decision-making.
- The need to address the corporate financing and capacity of ICT Services, together with recruitment and retention issues.



- A number of recommendations relating to information security issues in both the Council and schools.
- Service IT requirements taking disaster recovery and business continuity into account at all times.
- The procurement of all ICT services and equipment to be either through or in consultation with ICT Services.
- IT training for all Council personnel and Members.

### **Activity Summary**

The Committee has also considered, commented and where appropriate made recommendations to Cabinet on a number of other issues, including:

- Monitoring the Council's budgets and consideration of integrated performance reports, as well as the draft financial strategy, draft capital programme and draft treasury management strategy. .
- Received presentations by Cabinet Members on past performance and future plans and questioned them.
- The Performance Improvement Framework and Performance Improvement Cycle.
- Consideration of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and Direction of Travel, Local Area Agreement priority setting, and the Comprehensive Area Assessment preparation programme
- Changes to the Constitution
- Monitoring of progress against the action plan developed as the Authority's response to the Audit Commission's audit of its performance management arrangements.
- The Ombudsman Annual Letter and Complaints and Compliments Monitoring.
- Consideration of various strategies including the draft Corporate Plan, Procurement Strategy, Community Strategy Development Plan, Pay and Workforce Development Strategy, and Office Accommodation Strategy
- The Employee Opinion Survey
- Principles to guide the provision of education in Herefordshire in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- Financial control of capital schemes in property services.
- Adopted and updated a Scrutiny Development Plan and commissioned an external healthcheck of the function.
- A review of the Council's use of consultants.

## **ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND STRATEGIC HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**



**Councillor Polly Andrews  
Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Strategic  
Housing Scrutiny Committee**

### **What the Committee does**

The Committee scrutinises adult social services including Learning Disabilities, Strategic Housing, Supporting People and the emerging Public Health Agenda.

The Committee met formally 9 times during the reporting period and established a number of informal Review Group meetings.

### **Modernising Day Care Opportunities**

This scrutiny review was undertaken following the Council's work on reviewing its charging policy for non-residential care services. The Committee decided that it was equally important to review the services to make sure that they were meeting people's needs. This work complemented a review being undertaken within the Directorate itself.

The review's aim was to make recommendations to Cabinet on remodelling Day Opportunities Services for older people in the County, to move away from traditional provision to a community-focused service and to clarify the extent of the role of social care in delivering this model.

The aspiration for the remodelled service was to improve the Council's performance above its current one-star rating; provide a structure for early intervention, preventative services, and rehabilitation to reduce the number of crisis referrals to health and social care services; act as a signpost to other services; help provide a clear picture of care need related to the above average increase in the older person population; help reduce levels of isolation by providing services in rural locations; and integrate with Learning Disability and Physical Disability day opportunities services.

The Review Group carried out a number of day centre visits across Herefordshire, and talked to current service providers, volunteers, current service recipients and carers.

The Group made a number of recommendations in response to its findings including in summary:

- Health and social care needs are closely linked. Services should therefore be designed to meet both health and social care needs.
- A diverse range of stimulating activities should be on offer to engage with both 'younger' and 'older' older people, which would also attract potential service users and volunteers.
- Because the County's population has a disproportionately high number of older people, and this is predicted to rise more rapidly than elsewhere in the country, the Council needs to invest in quality day care, in order to prepare for a perceived increase in service need.
- All staff who deliver day care services must be trained to a higher level to ensure the quality of service provision.
- Suitable premises must be secured that can accommodate the level of need being supported in that locality.
- In order to provide 'low level' preventative services locally local amenities such as pubs and village halls should be used, and links should be forged between day care services, nurseries and schools and with voluntary organisations,
- Transport must be more securely arranged with more equitable availability.
- Remodelled day care services must be more cost-effective than current services and affordable for all service users, including those on low incomes.

Cabinet approved the recommendations and an action plan in response to them. The Review Group had stated the intention to look at day care services again in twelve months time to see which, if any, of the pilot schemes were working, with a view to supporting the implementation of those that had proved effective.

### **Scrutiny Review of Transition of looked after children from leaving care to adult life**

This Review examined the Council's approach to transition issues from childhood to adult life for looked after children with support needs and to investigate how improvements can be made to this process.

Local authorities are required by law to act as corporate parents to young people who have been in their care. These include responsibilities to provide

for them financially, make sure they have suitable accommodation, support them in building a career and to keep in touch after they have moved into independence.

The Membership of the Review Group included two Co-opted Members; a Headteacher and a representative of the Voluntary Sector. The Review Group met some young people who had been in the looked after system to discuss their experiences. This took place at a time and place to suit the young people and proved to be a particularly informative meeting.

This discussion, supported by material prepared by local young people as part of National Care Leavers Week in 2007, identified five topics where young people felt improvements could be made; these were: statutory review meetings, change of social worker; change of placement; transferring to an Aftercare worker from a social worker; and moving into their own flat. The Group was able to consider recommendations in response to each area of concern.

The review noted that while outcomes for looked after children and young people are generally positive in Herefordshire there remains a gap when compared with other children and young people in the County and there is a risk that this will widen unless continued efforts are made to address the specific needs of looked after children and young people.

The Committee made a number of recommendations including in summary:

- The issue of the lack of affordable housing in the County.
- The need for dedicated health worker in care settings for care leavers.
- That Health Services consider a system to flag up looked after children and care leavers and ensure an effective link to the Council's system.
- That a dedicated budget for miscellaneous expenditure on young people be created.
- That the format and effectiveness of statutory review meetings is revisited.
- Further consideration be given to arrangements for the change of foster placement and change of social worker and arrangements for the move to aftercare to see if policies and practices can be improved.
- That where evidence of discrimination against looked after children is presented to the Council, the Council uses what powers it can to tackle it.

The recommendations were accepted by the Executive and an action plan prepared. The Executive did consider that there was a relative lack of recommendations relating to Adult Services and identified additional themes to take into account in implementing its response. The Committee will review progress in 2009.

### **Scrutiny Review of Housing Allocation**

The allocation of housing in Herefordshire is undertaken by Registered Social

Landlord's (RSLs), who generally allocate accommodation from within their housing stock through a shortlist provided by Herefordshire Home Point. Herefordshire Home Point is a partnership comprising the Council and the seven largest RSLs with housing stock in Herefordshire. The Home Point service does not allocate properties to applicants but prioritises applicants for housing from the waiting list into a shortlist.

The aims of the review were to understand the level of demand and supply for affordable housing in Herefordshire (through the Home Point Housing Waiting List); identify opportunities for Home Point to further support the Council's Homelessness Prevention Agenda; identify opportunities for further development of the Home Point system, including improved access and customer service; ensure equitable access to the system for vulnerable applicants and, in consultation with the Home Point Partnership Board, to identify improvements and make recommendations to Cabinet on Home Point Herefordshire's Housing Allocations Policy.

The Committee made a number of recommendations in response to its findings, including in summary:

- Support for the increase of the minimum overall percentage of affordable housing in new developments.
- Support for increasing the minimum percentage of rental accommodation for new affordable housing.
- Support for the concept of a Housing Contact Centre / One Stop Shop approach to meet the wide ranging housing needs in the county.

The Review also identified a number of issues which it believed should be considered in the course of devising amendments to the allocations policy and/or the operation of Home Point. The Home Point Partnership is to undertake a review of the allocations policy taking account of the Committee's recommendations. The Committee will consider the outcome of this review.

### **Presentations by Registered Social Landlords**

Following concerns expressed about the maintenance of properties and vacant premises processes the Committee invited the three Registered Social Landlords with most properties in the County: Festival Housing Association, Herefordshire Housing, and the Marches Housing Association to make presentations to the Committee. This enabled the Committee to compare and contrast the approaches of the three associations and seek to reinforce best practice.

### **Assessments Of 18 – 64 Year-Olds Future Needs And Services: Mental Health And Physical Disabilities**

The Committee held a special meeting with the Health Scrutiny Committee to consider recommendations for the development of high-performing health and social care services by 2012 to meet the expected future needs of 18-64 year-olds in Herefordshire with mental health problems and/or physical disabilities.

The Council is committed to maximising the independence, well-being and choice of people with mental health problems and those with physical disabilities. However, despite additional investment and service improvements in recent years, in important respects they still lagged behind what is achieved by high-performing authorities serving comparable areas; and the cost of services had continued to escalate.

The Committee believed that the recommendations to improve both Mental Health and Physical Disabilities services were sound but, amongst other things, expressed concerns about the extent of the assumptions underpinning the report and the financial projections which resulted. It was important that the investment required to deliver the improved pattern of service was kept under review as the recommendations were implemented. Work to implement the recommendations continues.

### **Activity Summary**

The Committee has also considered and commented on the following issues making recommendations where appropriate:

- Charging policy for non-residential care services
- Monitoring of the revenue and capital budgets and consideration of performance.
- Received presentations by relevant cabinet members on past performance and future plans and questioned them.
- Scrutiny reviews of support to carers and arrangements for transfer from hospital to home.
- The tendering exercise for learning disability accommodation and support services.
- The Shaw Healthcare Contract, with particular reference to the older people's home at Leadon Bank, Ledbury.
- The implementation of a new integrated social care record system.
- The Commission for Social Care Inspection's annual assessments and performance rating.
- Responsibilities to ensure that vulnerable adults are safeguarded from harm or risk of harm.
- A report on the partnership agreement to provide accommodation and support for adults with a learning disability.
- The implementation of personalised care packages.
- The operation of the rent deposit scheme

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**



**Councillor Sally Robertson**  
**Chairman of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

### **What the Committee does**

The Committee scrutinises the education and social care of Children.

The Committee met formally 10 times during the reporting period and established a number of informal Review Group meetings.

### **Review of Provision of School Places**

The Committee commented on and broadly supported draft principles to guide the future provision of school places in Herefordshire. However, the detailed proposals announced in January 2008 involved a number of amalgamations and closures. This prompted widespread concern in the County.

The Proposals were withdrawn for reassessment. The Committee took the opportunity to question the process that had been followed in undertaking the review of school places and the drafting of the work and requested that when further proposals were made these were scrutinised prior to being released for public consultation. They also requested that all Members of the Council should be kept informed throughout the review process.

Council gave an undertaking that no High School closures or major re-organisations would be considered during the life of the present administration and it was reaffirmed that the Council would continue to apply the existing Small Schools Policy for primary schools and that no closures would happen outside that policy.

### **Wyebridge Academy**

To sustain the success of Wyebridge Sports College and to secure a strong High School in the South Wye area for the long-term, it was decided that the current school buildings needed to be replaced. In the absence of any other

funding the Government's Academy programme was viewed as a way to achieve this objective.

The Committee called-in Cabinet's decision to support the scheme in principle. They sought clarification on a range of issues including the added value of the proposal, the financial implications, the type of education to be provided, arrangements for admission and the justification for having three secondary church schools.

A number of people were invited to attend the meeting to assist the Committee in debating these issues including the Assistant Project Manager for the Academy; the Chairman of the Stakeholder Group of the Academy Project Steering Group; the Head of Wyebriidge Sports College; the Principal of Hereford 6th Form College; Acting Team Rector of South Wye; and the Chair of Redhill Community Association.

Having satisfied itself as to the concerns that had been raised the Committee agreed to support Cabinet's decision to support the scheme in principle.

However, subsequently, in response to a number of concerns the Committee appointed a Working Group to give further consideration to the project. Following Cabinet's approval of the draft Outline Business Case for the creation of the Academy the Committee invited representatives of Partnership for Schools; the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the consultant for the project and the Principal (Designate) Wyebriidge Academy to assist it in answering further questions about the project.

The Committee was satisfied with the Scheme's progress, agreeing that the Working Group would continue to meet as necessary to consider any further issues of concern.

### **Kington Children's Centre Nursery**

The Committee was consulted on a well advanced proposal to close Kington Children's Centre Nursery due to low attendance and the cost of provision. The political sensitivity of the proposal was acknowledged, given that the Centre was the only full daycare nursery provision in Kington town. A nominated representative for concerned parents was invited to put forward the parents' point of view. The Committee recommended that the Cabinet Member (Children's Services) reconsider the proposed closure of the Nursery if a viable alternative option could be found. This contributed to a positive outcome with nursery provision in Kington town continuing with a new provider.

### **Swimming Provision In Hereford City And Surrounding Area**

The Committee was invited to consider the alternatives for making provision for school swimming in Hereford City, following the temporary closure of St Martin's pool, Hereford.

That pool had been designed specifically for school swimming tuition, providing a valuable service to at least 40% of Primary Schools in the County since 1975. It had a good record in enabling children to reach the National Curriculum swimming standard. Some schools valued the pool as a safe environment in which children could learn to swim.

The pool was closed on a temporary basis following the failure of a heat exchange unit. Schools who had been using this pool were offered the use of Hereford Leisure Pool instead. This is a public facility managed by Halo Leisure Trust.

The Committee was asked to consider two options:

- To make improvements in the St Martin's Pool at an initial capital cost of approximately £72,500 with, in the longer term, an estimated £282,000 required together with ongoing revenue costs. (Once improved, transfer to a community organisation was a further option.)
- To close St Martin's Pool and invest in the Leisure Pool.

The Chief Executive of HALO Leisure Trust Ltd; three representatives of Headteachers of schools using the St Martin's (LEA) Pool and the Swimming Instructor at the LEA Pool attended to assist the Committee.

The Committee agreed that in view of the value to the local school population the facility should continue and recommended that the Cabinet Member should consider undertaking the works required to re-open the pool provided that enough schools committed to a 3 year period of charge. The Committee also considered that a review of the longer term financing of the pool was needed.

Cabinet decided that the LEA swimming pool should not be reopened. Alternative provision was offered at Hereford Leisure Pool.

The Committee called in the decision and recommended to Cabinet that: the Council make the necessary investment to enable the pool to reopen as soon as possible; and a thorough feasibility/business case for the next 2 years be prepared in the context of the whole of Herefordshire swimming provision.

In addition to questioning officers and the relevant Cabinet Member, the Committee also heard from representatives from Halo Leisure, Dolphin Swimming Club, Triathlon Club, City of Hereford Swimming Club, Headteacher Credenhill Primary School, Chair of Herefordshire Schools Forum, and two local Swimming medal winners at the 2008 Paralympics.

The final outcome is that, despite the Committee's misgivings, Cabinet has decided that the LEA pool remain closed. HALO has been asked to continue to work closely with schools to deliver safe, cost effective, quality assured swimming provision that will enable and support achievement of curriculum

targets; and the Council, in partnership with HALO is to develop a long term strategy to support the development of swimming provision across the County.

### **Activity Summary**

The Committee's activity has included considering and commenting on the following issues making recommendations where appropriate:

- The annual review of the Children and Young People's plan 2006/07 and the Self-assessment of Children's Services for the Annual Performance Assessment 2007, followed by consideration of the Assessment itself.
- The outcome of the 2008 OFSTED Area Performance Assessment.
- The Directorate Plan.
- Capital and Revenue Budget expenditure monitoring reports.
- Performance against key indicators.
- Response to Review of Behaviour and Discipline Management in Herefordshire Schools.
- Performance of the Youth Service and national changes in youth work.
- Arrangements for School Meal Provision.
- Extended Services in and around Schools in Herefordshire.
- Early Years Provision in Herefordshire.
- Provision of Additional Funding to mainstream schools for Special Educational Needs.
- Progress on addressing needs of children affected by domestic abuse.
- The action plan to improve the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in the County.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**



**Councillor Terry James**  
**Chairman of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee**

### **What the Committee does**

The Committee scrutinises libraries, cultural services including heritage and tourism, leisure services, parks and countryside; community safety; economic development and youth services.

The Committee met formally 9 times during the reporting period and engaged in a number of informal Review Group meetings.

### **Broadband Provision in Herefordshire**

There are many residents and businesses in the County who cannot get a satisfactory Broadband service. Although the Community Access Point project has provided good broadband access in a number of rural communities, this does not deliver directly into homes and businesses.

The Committee has urged Cabinet to address the issue of broadband provision to the Rotherwas Industrial Estate, the largest Council owned industrial estate in the County, and to the wider County without delay and requested that this be acknowledged as a high priority. It also recommended initiating a survey to establish the actual current level of broadband provision in the County.

The extent of broadband coverage in Herefordshire has been researched. A range of practical solutions are being investigated with BT and other service providers. A report giving clarity as to the existing situation and detailing some of the proposed solutions is to be taken to Cabinet later in 2009.

### **Review of the Council's Agreement with HALO Leisure Trust**

HALO Leisure Trust is a not for profit organisation created by the Council in 2002. It is responsible for sport and leisure facility management in the County. The sites include; Hereford Leisure Pool, Hereford Leisure Centre, Ledbury Leisure Centre, Ledbury Swimming Pool, Ross Swimming Pool, Ross Sports Centre, Bromyard Centre, Leominster Leisure Centre (and Swimming Pool) and Bridge Street Sports Centre, Leominster.

The Committee commissioned a review because the Audit Commission inspection of Cultural Services had suggested that the Council's agreement with HALO needed to be more robust. The review was intended to address the Inspection's comments and recommendations with a focus on establishing a new agreement with performance indicators, transfer of risk, and long term planning.

The Review Group undertook a number of site visits to facilities managed by HALO, interviewed the Chief Executive Officer of HALO, received presentations from officers and a presentation from the Commissioning Manager (Leisure Services), Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council who advised the Review Group of Sandwell's experience of setting up its comparable Leisure Trust.



The review recognised that HALO had managed to secure very significant increases in both income and usage at all of its managed centres. However, it was also noted that the physical capacity to continue this growth was being exhausted. Any dramatic improvements would only be secured by increasing capacity in terms of acquiring new facilities or partnering with third parties with mutual objectives e.g. schools and the PCT.

In respect of the specific technical expertise and competence within HALO, it was suggested that consideration should be given to further partnership ventures with the Council's Property Department to secure mutual gains.

Given Herefordshire's unique relationship with its Primary Care Trust, it was suggested that the opportunities for joint working be further explored. It was thought such an initiative could help to broaden the client base of the Leisure Trust and hence its long term viability.

The Committee is due to consider Cabinet's response in 2009.

### **Review of Tourism in Herefordshire**

The Audit Commission during its inspection of Cultural Services highlighted a need to measure the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements in relation to tourism including Tourist Information Centre (TIC) provision. A key part of the scrutiny review undertaken in response was an analysis of the TIC model used in the County and its ability to meet the needs of its customers.

The Review Group conducted a series of interviews with key local and regional tourism representatives, tourism providers in the County, representatives of the Destination Management Partnership (DMP) and relevant Council officers and circulated a questionnaire to approximately 1,500 tourism providers in the County.

The Group also visited local and neighbouring TICs with visits made to Bromyard, Kington and Leominster offices; Ludlow TIC and the award winning Shrewsbury TIC in Shropshire.

In 2005, tourism in Herefordshire contributed £291m to the County's economy and the Group was informed that TICs remain the primary means of delivering tourist information and were therefore vital in maximising economic benefits of tourism.



The Review Group found a general decline in the number of visitors to TIC premises, a marked increase in the use of websites and e-mails, and a demand for increasingly comprehensive, detailed and authoritative information. The Group recommended that the County's current TIC structure should be revised to respond more promptly and effectively to these new demands to offer significant gains in efficiency and hence Value for Money.

The Committee is to consider the Executive's actions in this area in 2009.

### **Review of Edgar Street Grid Project**

ESG Herefordshire Ltd was established by Herefordshire Council and Advantage West Midlands (AWM) to lead the regeneration of a 100-acre site to the North of Hereford City Centre. The mixed use development of the site involves the creation of new retail and leisure provision, over 1,000 new homes and a mix of public and private sector developments. This is to be supported by new infrastructure such as flood alleviation, new road infrastructure, car parking and a transport hub.

The 34th largest regeneration scheme in the UK, much of the financing is coming from the private sector with £20m from AWM as a contribution towards the project, and Herefordshire Council contributes the value of its property holdings and revenue funding of £352,950 per year as well as officer time to support the scheme.

Emerging detailed analysis showed that the new development is expected to attract an additional £65-£70million of annual spend from the wider Hereford catchment with 1,500 new jobs as well as 600 on construction work.

The Committee undertook a review, the aims of which were to recommend maximising the value and impact of the ESG scheme for the benefit of Hereford City and the wider County; to understand the views, aspirations and concerns of partners and stakeholders; and to recommend key considerations in the implementation of the ESG scheme, especially in relation to creating a whole city approach.

An informal, one day evidence gathering meeting was held in public (with a question and answer session at the end) at the Courtyard Centre for the Arts, within the Edgar Street Grid. Relevant interviewees were invited to attend facilitating an exploration of the key issues concerning the scheme.

Interviewees included the Chief Executive of ESG Ltd, the Cabinet Member (Economic Development and Community Services), Advantage West Midlands, the ESG Business Association; the Town Clerk of Hereford City Council; a representative of Hereford Civic Society, representatives of Hereford City Partnership and an officer from the Council's Planning Services section.

Cabinet was requested:

- To consider referring to the ESG Scheme in future as the “expanded City Centre” to reflect the “one city” approach in creating benefit for and linkages between the whole of the city centre area.
- To support full consultation by investigating and using other innovative methods of consultation as appropriate.
- That the planned Town Centre Impact Study be independently verified or conducted;
- That a partnership approach led by the City Partnership was taken to address any downturn in use of the City Centre during construction work;
- Consideration given to creating better linkage to the Courtyard Centre for the Arts for the venue to be part of the wider leisure offer presented as part of the expanded city development;

The Committee also requested further reports on the Hereford City Centre Regeneration Strategy, support to businesses to relocate from the ESG site and the current position and options available to enable the development of the Football Ground.

All of the recommendations were accepted by the Cabinet Member.

An action plan will be reported regularly to Community Services Scrutiny Committee. The action plan contains a joint response from Herefordshire Council, ESG Herefordshire Ltd, and the Hereford City Partnership which reflects the combined approach adopted to implement the ambitions of the City Centre Regeneration Strategy.

### **Public Rights Of Way**

Herefordshire is crossed by a network of 2,100 miles (3358 km) of Public Rights of Way. The footpath network makes an important contribution to tourism in the County.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to maintain the Definitive Map that records the location of rights of way. The Committee viewed with concern a

decline in performance against the performance indicator measuring the percentage of footpaths and rights of way easy to use by the public.

The Committee was assured that although there are considerable pressures facing the rights of way service innovative solutions have been identified to help manage the workload. The engagement of local communities in the management of the rights of way network is one key development area. As part of this process a network of parish volunteers has been created who act as the Council's eyes and ears.



However, there is a backlog of Definitive Map Modification Orders. The Committee has recommended that the Service undertake an urgent review of the backlog of with a view to eradicating it within three years.

### **Relocation of Hereford City Retail Market**

The Committee called-in Cabinet's decision to move Hereford's traditional open retail market from its current site adjacent to the cattle market, which forms part of the Edgar Street Grid redevelopment, into Commercial Street in the central High Town. Concerns included the interpretation of the results of the consultation exercise; the absence of a quality stalls and stall allocation policies and the impact on existing retailers in High Town.

The Committee questioned the relevant Cabinet Member, and officers, and considered additional responses received from a number of local businesses and made a number of recommendations.

In response to the Committee's recommendations Cabinet has agreed that the relocation will be for an initial one year trial; the strategy for new stalls including their location, will be revisited and adjusted where necessary (in consultation with Hereford City Partnership); a software package, Experion (measuring footfall), will be procured to assess the potential impact of the relocation of the Open Retail Market on the Butter Market; a detailed review of stall allocation will be carried out in conjunction with Hereford City Partnership; and a retail impact study will be conducted as soon as practicable.



### **Activity Summary**

In addition to the matters discussed above the Committee's activity has included considering and commenting on the following issues making

recommendations where appropriate:

- Consideration of performance indicators for the services within the Committee's remit; and the outcome of the Cultural Services Inspection by the Audit Commission.
- Consideration of the Revenue Budget for the services within the Committee's remit.
- An update on the Rotherwas Futures project a joint development of the Rotherwas Industrial Estate by the Council and Advantage West Midlands.
- The action plan for the Courtyard Centre for the Arts.
- Arrangements for Christmas lights in Herefordshire
- The Herefordshire Satisfaction Survey. noting that this was a source to inform future scrutiny work and assist in choosing topics for scrutiny that are of importance to the public.
- An update on the proposed relocation of the Tourist Information Centre in Ledbury.
- Consideration of Cabinet's response to the Review of the Support of Museums and Heritage Centres.
- Commissioning a review of Herefordshire's Economic Development Strategy.
- Monitoring the action plans for the Cultural Services Inspection by the Audit Commission, and the scrutiny reviews of Hereford City Partnership and how Herefordshire could retain 18-35 year olds in the County and attract them to it (the 18-35 review).
- The City Centre Regeneration Strategy.
- The Flavours of Herefordshire Food Festival.
- PACT (Partners and Communities Together) meetings.
- The Charter for Herefordshire Councils

## ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



**Councillor Bob Matthews**  
**Chairman of the Environment Scrutiny Committee**

### What the Committee does

The Committee scrutinises matters such as environmental promotion and protection issues and waste management as well as highways and transportation issues.

The Committee met formally 13 times during the reporting period and engaged in a number of informal Review Group meetings.

### ROTHERWAS ACCESS ROAD

The Rotherwas Access Road Scheme was developed to provide improved access to the Rotherwas Industrial Estate, the principal industrial area of Hereford. During construction of the road archaeological remains known as the Rotherwas Ribbon, a bronze age feature, were discovered crossed by the route of the Access Road. The preservation of the feature generated considerable debate and press and public interest.

The Committee “called-in” Cabinet’s decision to proceed with the road scheme, made following consideration of advice from English Heritage. This was because some thought that insufficient consideration had been given to the available options and there was also criticism of the process that had been followed.

This was a contentious issue with strong views held. The call-in process was tested and did not meet with everyone’s satisfaction. Whilst the Committee endorsed Cabinet’s decision it did record that there might have been instances when information flow within the Council had fallen short of expectations. Cabinet agreed to the Committee’s recommendation to continue to seek funding for further research into the ribbon including a tourism scoping report when appropriate.



## **COLWALL RAILWAY BRIDGE**

Cabinet's decision to approve the funding of a temporary bailey bridge over the sub-standard bridge over the railway carrying the road into Colwall was called-in. At the time of the call-in the bridge was closed to all traffic, subsequently being re-opened to light traffic on a single lane basis. Public concern was very high with businesses in the village unable to receive deliveries from large heavy goods vehicles as the alternative routes were unsuitable.

Particular concern centred on the failure of Network Rail to maintain the bridge and the financial contribution of Network Rail, the owners of the bridge. The Committee, mindful of the county-wide implications urged Cabinet to seek urgent clarification as to the legal responsibilities on both the Council and owners of non Council owned bridges over which a highway runs and that representations be made to the Health and Safety Executive on Network Rail's failure to adequately maintain the bridge. The Committee emphasised the urgency of dealing with the matter in view of the detrimental effect on the local community.

Network Rail has since agreed to bring forward the replacement of the bridge in their maintenance programme. Work is due to be completed in June 2009.

## **Review of Household Waste Recycling in Herefordshire**

The Committee completed a scrutiny review of household waste recycling in Herefordshire. The review examined the current methods and performance of household waste recycling in the County, to investigate any possible improvements to the system and subsequently advise the Cabinet Member on future policy in this area. The Review Group worked against a background of impending tougher Government targets and the re-letting of the Council's current household waste collection contract.

The evidence presented to the Review Group at that time suggested a switch to wheelie bins and alternate weekly collection was inevitable. Whilst wheelie bins are to be introduced for recycling the Executive has decided to retain weekly collections for the black bag residual household waste. The Group highlighted that as waste collection is the most visible service the Council provides change must be smoothly managed and made a number of recommendations to this effect.



Amongst other recommendations the Committee proposed that Cabinet reviewed the Household Waste site opening hours with a view to extending the availability of the facility; gave greater publicity to the facility to recycle household batteries at the Council's

Household Waste sites; that recycling symbology, as appropriate to Herefordshire, is promulgated in Herefordshire Matters; and that the public is informed of the current and projected cost of waste collection to emphasise the need to reduce waste volumes and control Council Tax increases.

The Executive agreed to take the Review's recommendations into account as part of the review of the waste contract as a whole.

### **Review Of Travellers Policy**

The Committee also completed a review of the Herefordshire Travellers policy.

The contribution of the traveller population to the economy and its distinctiveness as well as the cultural diversity of Herefordshire has been very great. Herefordshire has a range of services for Travellers which is considered to be as extensive and experienced as anywhere in the country. The travellers policy needed to focus on accommodating a distinctive minority, with respect for its varied traditions and wishes and promoting good community relations. The findings of a sub-regional report showed that Herefordshire will generate a considerable need for dwelling plots for travellers over the next 10 years.

The Review Group examined the policy and agreed that in future there will be increased pressures to identify and provide more Traveller sites in Herefordshire. It recommended that a protocol with the West Mercia Constabulary needed to be agreed clarifying responsibilities and duties in the event of unauthorised encampments. It was also considered that there was a role for elected members in the ongoing development of policy for this particularly sensitive minority.

The Executive adopted the Travellers policy as recommended by the review group.

### **Environmental Issues**

The Council now leads on the Herefordshire Partnership Local Area Agreement target to cut county carbon emissions by 4.9% over 3 years. There is increasing public interest in the council's management of its own emissions and its performance against its target of a 20% reduction by 2020 (an average of 1.25% per year).

The Committee has considered a range of environmental issues including the Council's environmental performance, corporate environmental management systems, environment strategy and carbon management performance, and reducing the energy consumed and carbon dioxide generated through street lighting and the Council's biodiversity strategy.

The Environmental Strategy report for 2007/08 showed strong performance overall against targets, particularly in the areas of waste management, air pollution control, biodiversity, supporting environmental management within the Council and local businesses, provision of planning services, and EcoSchools. Areas where objectives were not met include the number of reported cycle trips and use of buses by the public and dealing with abandoned vehicles.

The Committee will continue to focus on environmental performance in 2009/10.

### **Scrutiny Review of Planning Services**

The Committee reviewed the Planning Service having been invited to do so by the Cabinet Member. While the Planning Service had enjoyed wide ranging success in recent years the challenge was to respond locally to the national planning reform agenda. At the heart of this was the move from land use to a spatial planning system as the Council rolls out the Local Development Framework and delivers the new Growth Points agenda.

The agreed terms of reference for the scrutiny review included how best the Planning function could deliver the growth required up to 2026 (in particular new dwellings); how the Local Development Framework could best be integrated with the Growth Points agenda; how the Planning Service could contribute to the regeneration of the County in general and to the provision of infrastructure in particular; whether the Planning Service had the capacity and the financial resources to deliver the wider agenda; how best planning policies could be implemented through the development management function; the effectiveness of relationships between officers, members and parish / town councils; what work needs to be done to develop processes that support and enable good communications and relationships to be established and maintained; and what service delivery arrangements would assist in the ongoing modernisation of the service.

The Review made a number of recommendations including, in summary:

- The need for greater Member involvement in various aspects of planning together with improved training and development opportunities for Members.
- That a consultation plan be developed showing how and when the public of Herefordshire will be involved in the choices facing the County in relation to housing growth.
- There should be greater opportunities for all Members to discuss the emerging Local Development Framework (LDF) at its formative stages; and the future purpose and contribution of parish planning to the LDF process needs to be discussed and agreed with Town and Parish councils so that they too can understand the choices ahead and the differences

between them. It was also recommended that the Council develop a training programme that it can offer to Town and Parish Councils.

- Consideration should be given to establishing an all-authority infrastructure group to ensure that all future infrastructure requirements throughout the County are identified and quantified in a structured way.
- Preparation and roll-out of a comprehensive programme to explain development management to members, developers, agents, town and parish councils and the public.
- A number of management related matters including, for example, performance targets and resourcing.

Cabinet is due to respond to the recommendations by June 2009. The Audit Commission also undertook a review of certain aspects of Planning Services which may complement the findings of the scrutiny review. It has requested that the Executive's response to the scrutiny review also include any recommendations and action plan resulting from the Commission's review.

### **Scrutiny Review Of On-Street Parking**

The scrutiny review examined the way in which the Council manages on-street parking and how this fits with the aspirations of the Herefordshire Local Transport Plan 2006/7-2010/11 (LTP) of developing "a sustainable and integrated transport system".

The Local Transport Plan (LTP), states consideration will be given to the introduction of on-street charges in central Hereford to contribute to managing demand and provide funding to support Park and Ride or other sustainable transport improvements. The Council had implemented a programme of Residents Parking Schemes in residential areas close to the centre of



Hereford, and in appropriate locations in the Market Towns, to deter commuter and shopper parking and to help residents park.

In summary the terms of reference included: reviewing parking policies; considering whether and how charges for on-street parking could facilitate the

ongoing support of a park-and-ride system in Hereford City and/or other sustainable travel improvements in line with the LTP aspirations; examining the residents parking schemes; how new enabling technologies could support a shift in parking behaviours and reviewing the current provision for on-street cycle parking.

The Review made a number of recommendations including, in summary:

- the commissioning of detailed research into the use of car parks within Hereford City and development of a parking strategy in the Hereford Area Plan.

- The introduction of a new residents' parking scheme accompanied by promotional material explaining why the changes are necessary and emphasising that residents do not have a "right" to park outside their house.
- The introduction of on-street parking charges should not proceed at this current time. Future introduction of on-street parking charges should be detailed in the parking strategy to encourage a shift to more sustainable modes of transport.
- That should community-led plans be developed for individual streets within the city centre, then consideration should be given to funding these up front and then recouping the costs by the introduction of charges within the streets that have benefitted.
- That all future income from parking of any sort be ring-fenced to provide a regular investment budget for strategic environmental improvements that promote sustainable travel options within the geographical location that the income is earned.
- Charges as an on-street parking control should only be introduced when viable sustainable alternative options for city boundary parking are already in place.
- A targeted campaign of school travel plan implementation and monitoring be carried out within areas considered to be experiencing high levels of congestion, notably Hereford City.
- The development and implementation of a mobile phone cashless payment system for all of the county's car parks should be investigated.
- The current moratorium on new cycle parking facilities in High Town, Hereford, be lifted and further sites for additional parking be investigated and introduced.

The Committee decided that Hereford City Council should be invited to comment on the report prior to its submission to Cabinet. Cabinet will then have two months to respond to the report.

### **Activity Summary**

In addition to the above, the Committee's activity has included considering and commenting on the following issues making recommendations where appropriate:

- Monitoring of the revenue and capital budgets and consideration of performance.
- Developments in safety on trunk roads within Herefordshire.
- Polytunnel developments in Herefordshire
- The Transport Asset Management plan designed to improve long term planning or investment in the transport network.
- The Council's Service Delivery partnership with Amey.

- Arrangements for the permit scheme for commercial vehicles and trailers using household waste sites.
- Waste collection and waste disposal arrangements
- Co-ordination of transport services including those provided by the voluntary sector
- The approach to setting local speed limits.
- Street cleaning

## **HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**



**Councillor Kay Swinburne**  
**Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Committee**

### **What the Committee does**

The Committee has the power to review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services affecting the area and to make reports and recommendations on these matters. It is charged with focusing on health improvement bringing together the responsibility of the Council to promote social, environmental and economic well-being and the power to scrutinise local services provided and commissioned by the National Health Service.

The Committee met formally 12 times during the reporting period. In addition Committee Members have engaged in a number of informal Review Group meetings.

### **Herefordshire Public Services**

The Committee held a special meeting to consider proposals to develop enhanced partnership working between Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire (NSHH).

The Committee questioned the Council's Chief Executive and Director of Resources and the Deputy Chairman of NSHH Board and the Trust's Interim Chief Executive.

The Committee welcomed the principle of establishing a "public service trust" in Herefordshire and endorsed the steps being taken towards further integration and to deliver more effectively better services to the citizens of the County. It made a number of recommendations to improve the proposals highlighting amongst other things the proposed timetable for transition and the financial model.

The Committee's views were taken into account by Cabinet in considering how to progress the proposal. The Council and Primary Care Trust have subsequently pursued integration with the establishment of a joint management team whilst remaining separate organisations from a governance and financial perspective.

## **Reconfiguration of West Midlands Ambulance Service's Emergency Operations Centres in the West Midlands**

The Committee was formally consulted on the reconfiguration of Emergency Operations Centres in the West Midlands. The proposal entailed the closure of the call-centre at Bransford, Worcestershire which served both Herefordshire and Worcestershire and the establishment of two large centres at Tollgate, Stafford and Brierley Hill, Dudley serving the Region as a whole with a third Centre at Leamington Spa.

The Committee supported in principle the reconfiguration of Emergency Operations Centres as proposed by the Trust, encouraged by the investment in compatible IT systems across the proposed 3 Centres, and recognised the strategic rationale for the proposal. However, the Committee indicated its full support was dependent on assurance that the service on the ground in Herefordshire would not be adversely affected and that data for the County will be collated separately and monitored; that there would be no urban drift of services and that this is monitored and evidenced; and that in order to ensure that residents of Herefordshire continued to receive a high calibre service suitable training is provided to control room staff so that they had a good knowledge of the areas they served, including an understanding of the issues facing a rural area such as Herefordshire; increased cross-border communication with neighbouring ambulance services to further improve effective service delivery; and reinvestment into the County of any resources realised through reorganisation.

The Committee also suggested that providing direct funding for equipment for Community First Responders (CFR) would be a good place to start to seek to improve the provision of service to rural areas and has continued to urge that direct funding is provided for CFRs.

The Committee's separate review of the Ambulance Service, outlined in the next section of this report, has made further comment on this point.

It was reported to the Trust Board in January 2009 that with the transfer of provision being moved to Brierley Hill, there had been a decline in response performance within the Herefordshire & Worcestershire Locality. The Ambulance Service Review has recommended that regular progress reports be supplied for the Committee's scrutiny especially regarding resource drift away from the County and response performance.

### **Review of West Midlands Ambulance Service in Herefordshire**

The Committee undertook this review in September 2008 in response to public concerns about the level of service provided by the West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) in Herefordshire and particularly in the Ledbury and Ross-on-Wye Areas where the target for responding to Category A calls within 8 minutes was consistently not being met.

The Committee undertook a number of visits and interviewed a range of witnesses as well as considering other information and data.

Whilst the review found that the Herefordshire ambulance service is of high quality, it also concluded there were grounds for the public concerns that had been expressed. The review made a number of recommendations aiming at securing an improved service including:



- Resource needs should be regularly assessed with at least one additional ambulance required to be allocated to Herefordshire, which should be based in Ledbury.
- That effective means are implemented to ensure all arrivals by ambulance at Hereford Hospital are accommodated safely that all other measures are taken to reduce inappropriate use of emergency services and to release beds safely.
- That enough funding and other resources be found for Community First Responders (CFRs), who are volunteers and currently have to raise funding for themselves,
- The deployment of CFRs should be more effective.
- That data collection and dissemination, particularly of outcome-based indicators, be improved.
- That regular detailed progress reports following the Emergency Operation Centre reconfiguration be supplied for scrutiny especially regarding resource drift and response performance.

The Committee noted that the Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) as commissioners of the ambulance service had proposed their own independent review of the service in December 2008. Factors prompting this review included a decline in performance commencing in September 2008 with a significant decline in December 2008. In addition the view was that in the rural areas WMAS regularly underperformed, even following allocation of extra financial resources by individual PCTs to try and improve performance in their local areas.

Assurance was sought and received that this later review, due to report to the regional commissioners in May 2009, would take account of the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee was informed that WMAS was also undertaking its own review of provision in the County.

The Committee has been assured that the scrutiny review findings and recommendations are being given serious consideration. On conclusion of the two separate reviews of the ambulance service led by WMAS and the PCTs respectively findings will be reported to the Committee, together with a progress report on the scrutiny review.

### **Gp (General Practitioner) Led Walk-In Health Centre**

As part of the National Health Service Next Stage Review being led by Lord Darzi, each Primary Care Trust (PCT) in England was tasked with developing a GP-led health centre which would be open from 8am until 8pm, seven days a week, which would provide booked appointments and walk-in services to registered and non-registered patients. The Committee was advised that the re-tendering of the Out Of Hours service in the County during the same time as the proposed new service development offered an opportunity for an innovative local solution with a single provider for the health centre and the out of hours service.

The Committee sought and received assurance that any new development would not be to the detriment of the existing primary care service and would lead to an improved service.

The Committee has observed that the provision of a walk-in centre contrasts favourably with provision in the Market Towns and rural areas where opening hours and the range of services offered by GP practices varies. It has commissioned a scrutiny review of the services offered by GP practices within the County.

### **Radiotherapy Service Options Proposed By The Three Counties Cancer Network**

The Committee has strongly advocated the case for the provision of a radiotherapy service at Hereford Hospital.

The Three Counties Cancer Network (3CCN) (comprising Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire) in considering the expansion of radiotherapy services had identified three options. These were expansion at the Gloucestershire Oncology Centre in Cheltenham; developing services at Hereford County Hospital; or developing services at Worcestershire Royal Hospital.

The Committee emphasised in particular in its response that the development of the Hereford option was supported by the National Cancer Strategy which amongst other things recommended that no patient should have to travel more than 45 minutes for cancer treatment. Very few places in Herefordshire and Powys, where many of Hereford County Hospital patients come from, are within 45 minutes travelling distance of Cheltenham. Development of a treatment facility at Worcester was supported as the next subsequent phase of development after that recommended at Hereford.

The Committee was unhappy at the length of time that the enhanced provision had been under consideration and delay in reaching a decision, particularly

given the weight of public expectation. The Committee was pleased with the announcement in July 2008 of the intention to provide services at both Hereford and Worcester.

### **Activity Summary**

In addition to the matters described above the Committee's activity has included considering and commenting on the following issues making recommendations where appropriate:

- Regular presentations to the Committee by or on behalf of the Chief Executive of Herefordshire NHS Hospitals Acute Trust, NHS Herefordshire and West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust.
- Integrated falls prevention and management strategy.
- Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust Foundation Trust status.
- Changes to mental health services.
- The development of the Local Involvement Network.
- The memorandum of understanding between the Council and the Health Protection Agency dealing with protocols for tackling infectious diseases.
- The Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2007.
- NHS Herefordshire's Local Delivery Plan.
- Commentaries on health bodies in Herefordshire as part of the Healthcare Commission's annual health check process.
- The strategic review of provider services.
- Provision of services for children with special needs.
- Stroke services.
- Sexual health.
- Commissioning a review of GP services.
- Intermediate Care Services.
- Audiology Services.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Scrutiny function will be addressing a number of issues in the year ahead. During 2008/09 an external healthcheck of the scrutiny function was carried out. Work will continue to respond to the findings of this and update the Scrutiny Development Plan.

A key element of this response is the annual work programme to ensure it focuses on both strategic internal-facing issues which are key to the Council's delivery of its corporate objectives and external-facing issues reflecting the concerns of residents and communities of Herefordshire. The overriding aim is to focus on the most important issues affecting people's life chances and quality of life. Alongside this the Committees will retain the flexibility to consider issues as they may arise in a timely manner.

There will also be a number of procedural measures to take in response to legislative change. These include embedding the Councillor Call for Action process, responding to the requirements for the scrutiny of crime and disorder matters; implementing arrangements to fulfil the scrutiny role in relation to petitions; and ensuring arrangements for the scrutiny of partners are robust.

This adds up to another challenging year ahead. A programme of ongoing training and development is being developed to continue to support and improve skills to equip the Committees to meet these challenges effectively.

## **Further information**

If you require any further information about the Scrutiny Committees or any of the current reviews, please contact Democratic Services by e-mail, phone or post:

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