

Economy, Communities and Corporate

Geoff Hughes - Director

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Our Ref: Council - 17 January 2014

Please ask for: Governance Services

Direct Line / Extension: (01432) 260249

E-mail: councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk

09 January 2014

Dear Councillor,

YOU ARE HEREBY SUMMONED to attend the meeting of the Herefordshire Council to be held on **Friday 17 January 2014** at the Council Chamber - Brockington at **10.00 am** at which the business set out in the attached agenda is proposed to be transacted.

Please note that car parking will be available at Brockington for elected Members.

Yours sincerely



**A BROOKES
DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER**

AGENDA

Council

Date: **Friday 17 January 2014**

Time: **10.00 am**

Place: **Council Chamber - Brockington**

Notes: Please note the **time, date** and **venue** of the meeting.

For any further information please contact:

Governance Services

Tel: 01432 260249

Email: councillorservices@herefordshire.gov.uk

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Agenda for the Meeting of the Council

Membership

Chairman

Vice-Chairman

Councillor LO Barnett

Councillor ACR Chappell

Councillor PA Andrews
Councillor CNH Attwood
Councillor PL Bettington
Councillor WLS Bowen
Councillor AN Bridges
Councillor MJK Cooper
Councillor BA Durkin
Councillor DW Greenow
Councillor J Hardwick
Councillor JW Hope MBE
Councillor RC Hunt
Councillor TM James
Councillor AW Johnson
Councillor JLV Kenyon
Councillor JG Lester
Councillor RI Matthews
Councillor PJ McCaull
Councillor JW Millar
Councillor NP Nenadich
Councillor FM Norman
Councillor CA North
Councillor GJ Powell
Councillor R Preece
Councillor SJ Robertson
Councillor A Seldon
Councillor J Stone
Councillor DC Taylor
Councillor PJ Watts

Councillor AM Atkinson
Councillor CM Bartrum
Councillor AJM Blackshaw
Councillor H Bramer
Councillor EMK Chave
Councillor PGH Cutter
Councillor PJ Edwards
Councillor KS Guthrie
Councillor EPJ Harvey
Councillor MAF Hubbard
Councillor JA Hyde
Councillor JG Jarvis
Councillor Brig P Jones CBE
Councillor JF Knipe
Councillor MD Lloyd-Hayes
Councillor RL Mayo
Councillor SM Michael
Councillor PM Morgan
Councillor C Nicholls
Councillor J Norris
Councillor RJ Phillips
Councillor AJW Powers
Councillor PD Price
Councillor P Rone
Councillor P Sinclair-Knipe
Councillor GR Swinford
Councillor GA Vaughan-Powell
Councillor DB Wilcox

AGENDA

		Pages
1.	PRAYERS	
2.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE To receive apologies for absence.	
3.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest by Members in respect of items on the Agenda.	
4.	MINUTES To approve and sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2013.	13 - 30
5.	CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS To receive the Chairman's announcements and petitions from members of the public.	
6.	QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC To receive questions from members of the public.	31 - 34
7.	NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDERS There are two Notices of Motion for consideration by Council. NOTICE OF MOTION ONE Proposed by Councillor BA Durkin and seconded by Councillor J Stone. This Council welcomes the Government's intention to introduce a national funding formula for schools from 2015-16. Herefordshire funding is £244.10 per pupil below the national average despite the additional costs we face in maintaining a network of small schools to support our rural communities. We are anxious to see greater fairness and consistency in the way schools and academies are funded and support the approach taken by the Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing, working with local authority colleagues through the f40 group, in seeking a national funding formula as the way to achieve this. We believe that the funding formula should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have at its core a basic unit of funding per pupil that is based on a clear expectation of what schools are expected to deliver. • Allow a degree of local discretion to cover those local circumstances that a formula covering more than 24,000 schools cannot be expected to embrace. • Include support for rural primary schools through a lump sum and a an allowance for 'sparsity'. We join with the Cabinet Member for Children's Wellbeing in urging the Government to work closely with local authorities, and the f40 group in particular, in developing an appropriate funding model for schools.	

We acknowledge that a redistribution of the budget for schools will need to be implemented over time in order for the change to be manageable for those areas where funding is currently more generous.

NOTICE OF MOTION TWO

Proposed by Councillor PM Morgan and Seconded by Councillor ARC Chappell.

This Council resolves to amend the Constitution, with immediate effect, so that a named vote at Council will only be required if 8 or more members present so request it.

8. LEADER'S REPORT

35 - 48

To receive a report from the Leader on the activities of Cabinet since the meeting of Council in October 2013.

9. APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER, RETURNING OFFICER, ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER, STATUTORY SCRUTINY OFFICER AND PROPER OFFICER FOR REGISTRATION SERVICES

49 - 52

To designate specific posts to discharge the functions of Monitoring Officer, Returning (and Acting Returning) Officer, Electoral Registration Officer, statutory Scrutiny Officer and Proper Officer for Registration Services (including responsibility for the Coroners Service).

10. APPOINTMENTS TO COUNCIL COMMITTEES

53 - 58

In light of changes to the political balance of the Council, to:

- (a) determine the number of seats on each committee;
- (b) approve the allocation of seats to political groups ; and
- (c) receive nominations from those groups.

Please note that the Council is being asked under this item to approve alternative arrangements to strict political proportionality for appointments to Committees and other bodies in accordance with Regulation 20 of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.

11. REVISION TO THE CURRENT COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

59 - 106

To agree amendments to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme as recommended by the Cabinet Member.

(The recommendations below are subject to a Cabinet Member decision to be taken on 13 January; should any changes to the recommendations result, these will be published as a supplement to this Council Agenda.)

12. GENERAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT - HEREFORD AND WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY CONSULTATION RESPONSE

107 - 116

To inform Council of the work undertaken by General Overview and Scrutiny Committee's task and finish group on Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority's Community Risk Action Plan 2014-2020 Consultation and the response submitted to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

13. FORMAL QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS TO THE CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRMEN UNDER STANDING ORDERS

To receive any written questions from Councillors.

The Public's Rights to Information and Attendance at Meetings

YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO: -

- Attend all Council, Cabinet, Committee and Sub-Committee meetings unless the business to be transacted would disclose 'confidential' or 'exempt' information.
- Inspect agenda and public reports at least five clear days before the date of the meeting.
- Inspect minutes of the Council and all Committees and Sub-Committees and written statements of decisions taken by the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members for up to six years following a meeting.
- Inspect background papers used in the preparation of public reports for a period of up to four years from the date of the meeting. (A list of the background papers to a report is given at the end of each report). A background paper is a document on which the officer has relied in writing the report and which otherwise is not available to the public.
- Access to a public Register stating the names, addresses and wards of all Councillors with details of the membership of Cabinet and of all Committees and Sub-Committees.
- Have a reasonable number of copies of agenda and reports (relating to items to be considered in public) made available to the public attending meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Committees and Sub-Committees.
- Have access to a list specifying those powers on which the Council have delegated decision making to their officers identifying the officers concerned by title.
- Copy any of the documents mentioned above to which you have a right of access, subject to a reasonable charge (20p per sheet subject to a maximum of £5.00 per agenda plus a nominal fee of £1.50 for postage).
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- The nearest bus stop to Brockington is located in Vineyard Road near to its junction with Old Eign Hill. The return journey can be made from the same bus stop.

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

BROCKINGTON, 35 HAFOD ROAD, HEREFORD.

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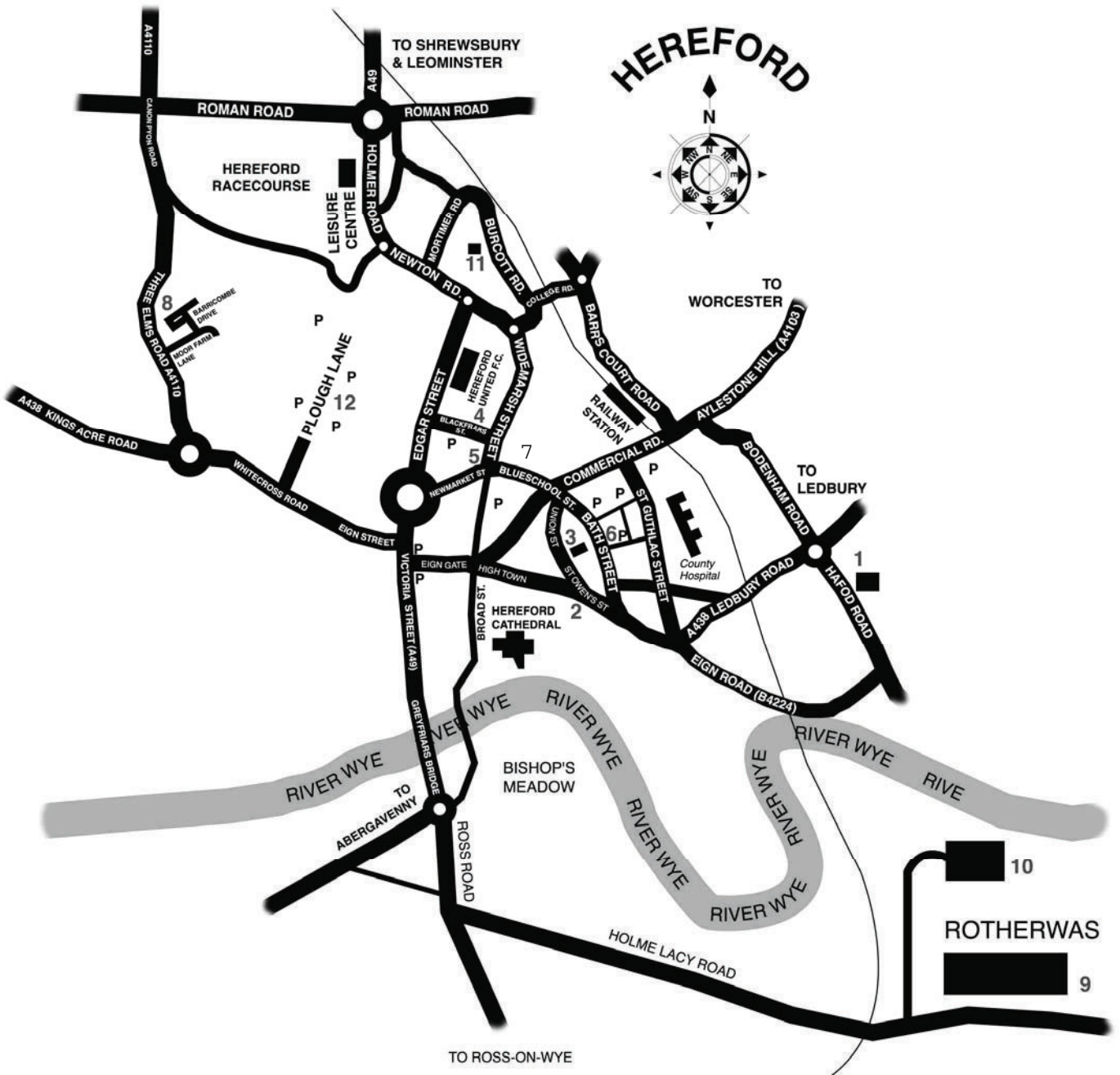
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| 2 | Town Hall | 8 | Trinity House |
| 3 | Shire Hall | 9 | Thorn Office Centre (ICT) |
| 4 | Blackfriars (inc. Legal) | 10 | Amey |
| 5 | Garrick House | 11 | Merchant House |
| 6 | Bath Street | 12 | Plough Lane |

HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of Council held at Council Chamber - Brockington on Friday 18 October 2013 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor LO Barnett (Chairman)
Councillor ACR Chappell (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: PA Andrews, AM Atkinson, CNH Attwood, CM Bartrum, PL Bettington, AJM Blackshaw, WLS Bowen, H Bramer, AN Bridges, EMK Chave, BA Durkin, PJ Edwards, KS Guthrie, J Hardwick, EPJ Harvey, JW Hope MBE, MAF Hubbard, JA Hyde, TM James, JG Jarvis, AW Johnson, Brig P Jones CBE, JLV Kenyon, JF Knipe, JG Lester, MD Lloyd-Hayes, PJ McCaull, SM Michael, JW Millar, NP Nenadich, C Nicholls, FM Norman, RJ Phillips, GJ Powell, AJW Powers, R Preece, PD Price, SJ Robertson, P Rone, A Seldon, P Sinclair-Knipe, J Stone, DC Taylor and DB Wilcox

34. PRAYERS

Councillor the Reverend Prebendary Carl Attwood led the Council in prayers.

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors MJK Cooper, PGH Cutter, DW Greenow, RI Matthews, RL Mayo, PM Morgan, GR Swinford, GA Vaughan-Powell and PJ Watts.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors RJ Phillips and DB Wilcox declared non-pecuniary interests in Agenda item 9, the Youth Justice Plan; the former as a Justice of the Peace and member of the Youth Justice Panel, the latter as a Youth Magistrate. Councillors J Hardwick and Brigadier P Jones CBE declared non-pecuniary interests in Agenda Item 7, Notices of Motion under Standing Orders; the former as his brother was a retained fire-fighter in Fownhope, the latter as the Council representative on the Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority.

37. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Ordinary and the Extraordinary meetings of Council held on 19 July 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

In the Chairman's announcements the Chairman:

- Introduced Sir John Foley and Air Vice Marshal Mike Smart, who provided Council with a presentation on the Honours system in the County on behalf of the Lord Lieutenancy of Herefordshire. Councillors had a key role in putting forward deserving members of the public through their understanding of the people in their wards;
- Following the resignations of Councillor A Hempton-Smith and Councillor RB Hamilton the Chairman thanked the two former members for their contribution as ward councillors, and for the considerable work undertaken by Councillor Hamilton as Cabinet Member,

Environment, Housing and Planning. The Tupsley by election would be held on 7 November, and the Pontrilas by election would be held on 21 November.

- Informed Council that a service to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War Ceasefire was held at St Peter's Church on 4 August and was attended by many Korean veterans, military and councillors;
- Informed Council that the construction of the County's new archive and records centre at Rotherwas had begun;
- Informed Council that this was the 6th year of the Pride of Herefordshire Awards;
- Informed Council that the Herefordshire Diamond County Award would be held again in 2014, and a pre launch will take place towards the end of the year;
- Informed Council that Pembridge had won a Gold award representing the West Midlands in the national "Britain in Bloom" awards;
- Thanked Councillor Nenadich for commencing the fund raising for the Chairman's appeal for St Michael's Hospice by organising a Caribbean Lunch which raised over £4,000.
- Informed Council that a petition had been received from Councillor J Stone on behalf of the Wigmore catchment area, from parents in Brimfield and Little Hereford regarding school transport charges and would be received by Councillor Millar (Cabinet Member – Children's Wellbeing).

39. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

A copy of the Public Questions and written answers is attached to the Minutes at Appendix 1. There were no supplementary questions asked.

40. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDERS

(Councillors J Hardwick and Brig P Jones CBE declared an interest)

Potential Combination of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service/Resource at Hereford Fire Station

In accordance with paragraph 4.16.17 of the Constitution, the Notice of Motion, moved by Councillor MD Lloyd-Hayes and seconded by Councillor WLS Bowen was amended as follows:

'This Authority is concerned by proposals currently under consultation regarding a merger of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service with Warwickshire FRA. Such a combined Authority stretching from the Welsh Borders to Northamptonshire, may result in Herefordshire having even less influence than it does at present – an unwelcome democratic deficit.

This Authority whilst welcoming closer collaboration with any neighbouring Fire and Rescue Authority would require assurance that any merger would not have a deleterious impact on the people we represent.

In addition, this Authority has concerns about a proposed reduction of staff or vehicles at the Hereford Fire Station for the following reasons: Hereford City is the only 24 hour station in the County; as a standalone station it is isolated from any other 24 hour support. Herefordshire covers an area larger than Worcestershire but relies on part time or retained fire fighters.

Worcester Fire Station, however, is supported by Kidderminster, Redditch, Bromsgrove whole time cover with additional back up from Droitwich, Evesham and Malvern.

Herefordshire is further disadvantaged by the current road infrastructure and lack of motorways. Any reduction in personnel could seriously affect the response times to the life threatening road traffic accidents and call outs to flooding incidents in this County: therefore this Authority whilst understanding the financial pressures facing all public bodies at this time would not support a reduction in staff, pumps or equipment at Hereford Fire Station without significant assurance of how service levels will be maintained in the county.

In order to inform the development of the response to this consultation which closes on 10 January, this Council resolves to request that the General Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider the impacts of the proposals to inform the response that Full Council will submit'.

Councillor MD Lloyd Hayes addressed Council and made the following points:

- That whilst the issues were addressed in the Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority's Community Risk Management Plan, this was a complex document to digest within the allotted 12 week consultation period.
- That forced austerity cuts were taking their toll and the Fire and Rescue Service, an already lean organisation, was being asked to make savings of £4.7m over the next 2 years. These cuts would inevitably have an impact on front line services.
- That the Fire Authority was a statutory body with a core function of responding to fires. Since the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, fire fighters were required to respond to emergencies, road traffic accidents, chemical spills and increasingly to flooding as a result of unpredictable weather. Civil unrest and terrorism threats required specific training for the incident response unit vehicle crews, together with training for the Swift Water Technicians for water based emergency calls.
- There were full time crews in Redditch, Bromsgrove and Kidderminster, allowing the stations to support each other. There were also day crews at Evesham, Droitwich and Malvern. Hereford was relatively isolated, and expected to serve the County with the support of part time or retained fire stations and had to use an inferior road network with over 6,000 potholes.

During the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- A Member pointed out that there was a great deal of concern regarding the concept of merging with another Fire Authority, and suggested that consideration be given to an alliance between Authorities, in the same way that the Police force had achieved.
- That the Fire Authority was an independent organisation and it was not within the purview of this Council to suggest how it should make necessary budget cuts. That the Authority had to achieve budget savings of £4.7m was not disputed but, at this juncture, no decision had yet been taken as to how this should be achieved.
- That fire-fighters in Hereford were called out to car accidents more often than they were to fires, and whilst only one response vehicle might attend an accident, a vehicle attending a fire would only do so with backup. Retained fire-fighters

could find it hard to continue in their roles as most would not be in a position to take more time off work.

- That consideration should be given to the geography of the County as part of the consultation exercise. The rural and outlying areas were not well represented as weight was being given to the populations centres under the Fire Authorities remit.
- That cuts had already been made to the service, which was one of the lowest funded in the country. Residents in rural areas were more vulnerable to longer response times, and Kingspan, which was one of the top 15 employers in the County, could be put at risk should Kingsland station close.
- That the Chief Fire Officer had been invited to address a public meeting in Ross-on-wye.
- That flooding was undoubtedly one of the major issues for the Service, which would be severely stretched should there be a severe outbreak of floods as had happened in 2007.
- That it was not clear to a Member what the value would be of requesting the General Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider the consultation document, as the matter was already being dealt with by the professionals in the field.
- A Member said that the consultation document was seen as off putting. It was unclear that there were three proposals in the document, all of which would need to be implemented in order to ensure that savings were achieved. Stations across the County would be put at threat and there was concern that local communities would be put at additional risk as the proposals did not give consideration to the needs of rural areas.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That in relation to the possible combination of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue service and proposals in the Community Risk Management Plan the General Overview & Scrutiny Committee be requested to consider the impact of the proposals to inform the response that Full Council will submit.

41. LEADER'S REPORT

The Leader of the Council, Councillor AW Johnson, presented his report.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- That the HM Treasury were concerned about the funding model for the Waste Management contract for the scheme with Worcestershire County Council, and it would be reviewed, together with alternative options
- There was no viable option to use the site at Rotherwas, as the Council did not own the site and there was no secured funding in place
- That there was no basis to the rumour that Blue School Street would be reduced to one lane before the new City Link Road was operational;
- In reply to a Member's comment that she had requested that the format of the Leader's report should be reviewed, the Leader said that he was not prepared to give assurances about the length of a report, but there would be fortnightly

meetings with Group Leaders to disseminate information within the Executive Rolling Programme.

- That whilst it was appreciated that there were concerns regarding the proposals for changes to school transport, it had to be realised that the level of cuts that it would be necessary to make would affect all within the County and transport would continue to be provided for pupils to their nearest school..

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

42. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

(Councillors RJ Phillips and DB Wilcox declared an interest)

Council received a report on the Youth Justice Plan which was prepared on an annual basis on behalf of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Worcestershire County Councils. The West Mercia Youth Offending Service were tasked with setting out the basic plan which laid out how youth justice services across West Mercia were structured and identified key actions to address risks to service delivery and improvement.

RESOLVED: That the Youth Justice Plan as prepared be approved.

43. CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER AND SECTION 151 OFFICER DESIGNATION

A report to designate the post of Chief Officer Finance as the Authority's Section 151 Officer was received.

RESOLVED

THAT:

- (a) the person holding the post of Chief Officer Finance be designated as Section 151 Officer for Herefordshire Council; and**
- (b) the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make any consequential amendments to the Constitution as necessary.**

44. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMEN - AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE AND HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Council considered the appointments, where vacancies had arisen, for the roles of Vice Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee and Vice Chairman of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED:

THAT:

- (a) Councillor NP Nenadich be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee; and**
- (b) Councillor WLS Bowen be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

45. MONITORING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

Council received the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report 2012/13.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

46. HEREFORD & WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Councillor Brig. P Jones presented a supplementary Annual Report of the Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority.

RESOLVED: That the report be received.

47. FORMAL QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS TO THE CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRMEN UNDER STANDING ORDERS

A copy of Member questions and written answers, together with the supplementary questions and answers asked at the meeting is attached to the Minutes as Appendix 2.

48. DATES OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED: That the meeting of Council scheduled for 13 December 2013 be cancelled and a meeting held instead at 10.00 am on Friday, 17 January, 2014.

The meeting ended at 12.30 pm

CHAIRMAN

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013**Question from Mr G Perkins, Herefordshire**

Question 1

I would like to raise the question of the amount of money spent on floral decorations, grass cutting and similar activities most of which are purely cosmetic and could be scrapped given the parlous financial situation. In Bromyard we see flower beds being re-planted and verges cut where there is no road safety justification. Driving round Hereford one sees the same. Not least in the city itself. This sort of thing could be devolved to the local Town /Parish Councils - if residents really want this - perhaps to compete in pointless "In Bloom" competitions they can pay through the local precept or volunteer to do it themselves.

Is Herefordshire Council going to cut this non essential activity?

Answer from Councillor PD Price Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 1

There is a long history of volunteering in this county, which Herefordshire can rightly feel proud of, and it is already the case that much of the type of activity referred to by Mr Perkins is supported or supplemented by the Town and Parish Councils, community groups and many public spirited individuals. These activities enhance the quality of our localities both visually and in helping to support wildlife and biodiversity in our more urban areas; as such they do have real value and we recognise that the results achieved do matter to many in our communities.

That said, budgets are under severe pressure and we must focus the resources we have available on the highest priority activities. We have already taken the decision to change the planting in all council planted and maintained flower beds from annual bedding to perennial planting or grass, achieving an annual saving of some £60,000. We continue to work with our Public Realm Service provider, *Balfour Beatty Living Places* and with local councils, to build on the excellent work already carried out within our communities for the self-delivery of a range of key activities that maintain the quality of our local areas, but which Herefordshire Council will no longer have the resources to support.

Question from Mrs E Morawiecka, Breinton

Question 2

Herefordshire Council was awarded significant funding from the Department of Transport for their "Destination Hereford" bid. In the bid to the Government Department, Herefordshire Council made the commitment that:-

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013

“Political engagement will be delivered through weekly briefings to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and briefings to the Council’s Environment Scrutiny Committee”.

A large element of this funding bid was for improvements to Broad Street, Hereford. However, the decision to revise the programme and focus on cycle network development and sustainable transport improvements across Hereford was agreed by the Cabinet Member and discussed directly with the Department for Transport.

I am not aware of any briefings to any Scrutiny Meeting since the "Destination Hereford" bid was successful over 2 years ago. Would the Cabinet member please explain how the funding allocated for the Broad Street works is now being utilised to promote sustainable transport and best value for money for the County's taxpayers?"

Answer from Councillor PD Price Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 2

The Broad Street scheme, as originally conceived within the *Destination Hereford* Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) funding bid was subject to public consultation in the autumn of 2012, during which concerns were raised that a scheme with a significant focus on public realm improvements did not generate sufficient transport benefits. The council, responding to these concerns, reviewed the allocation in consultation with the Department for Transport and agreed to re-allocate funding to enable the improvement of the city’s cycle network comprising a number of smaller schemes which aim to improve sustainable access to the city centre. The council and the Department for Transport share the view that this allocation will assist with the promotion of sustainable transport. A copy of the programme of schemes and a map of scheme locations, which comprises over £2M of LSTF capital funding alongside other funds such as the Cycle Safety Scheme and Local Transport Plan will be provided directly to the questioner, and is available on the *Hereford Active Travel Scheme* pages of the council’s website.

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013**Question from Councillor PJ McCaull**

Question 1

When Cllr Roger Phillips was Leader of the Council and the building of the New Market came before Full Council in the Shire Hall for approval I spoke against the package. Cllr Roger Phillips put the cost of the new market at around £7 million I said I thought it to be nearer £10 million. Actual cost £14.8 million.

He also stated the development would put £18 million in the council's bank plus the development would also provide for the Link Road and other infrastructure. So what has gone wrong, who got all the figures so wrong?

- 1) We are borrowing £34 million for the Link Road which with compulsory purchase and other costs could be £40 million in the end.
- 2) Cllr Phillips put forward a good case and led us to believe the above
- 3) *How could anyone get it so wrong and what has happened to the monies the council were led to believe would be coming from it all in total?*

Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips Cabinet Member Enterprise & Culture

Answer to question 1

Firstly let me be clear that the building of the new livestock market is an enabling element for the redevelopment of the old market site – and the economic benefits which flow from the latter will not be immediately apparent simply from the successful move of the livestock market. However I'm delighted with the positive impact the new livestock market has already had on our agricultural economy; this Wednesday alone saw 12,000 sheep from Herefordshire and neighbouring counties including Cheshire, Glamorgan, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire. The points Cllr McCaull raises around the costs of this were addressed in my answer to his question to Council in November 2011, the £7.1 m being the build cost as identified in the Cabinet report in September 2009.

I must also correct the assertions made in the question. We have not borrowed £34m pounds for the Link Road. We do have provision of £27m within the Medium Term Financial Strategy; we are actively exploring other funding opportunities including through the Marches Local Transport Body and the latest round of government pinch point funding.

Major infrastructure project costs will always vary to some degree through the development of the scheme and a decision on implementation will be based on the costs and funding available when the decision is taken.

Supplementary Question

The Cabinet Member states that the Council has not borrowed £34m so which Cabinet Member made the statement to the Hereford Times newspaper and also stated that it was a very good time to borrow as short term loans were at very low interest especially from other local authorities? All loans have to be repaid.

Response by Leader of the Council

I made the statement to the Hereford Times in response to a letter in the paper. Interest rates are at an historically low rate and now is as good a time as any to borrow.

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013

Question from Councillor MD Lloyd Hayes

Question 2

Many members of the public attended public meetings in June concerned about the future care for their relatives. They were informed in June that assessments would take place promptly, we are now in October and these needs assessments have not taken place.

How can budgets be drawn up when the council is not aware of the costs involved?

Answer from Councillor AW Johnson Cabinet Member Corporate Strategy & Finance

Answer to question 2

In answer to the question, budgets are drawn up on the basis of a wide range of information available at the time; all budgets are of their very nature projections and will include a number of variables and every effort is made through the budgeting process to minimise or take account of those variables, which of course include natural changes in social care service users' needs. We of course know the cost of our current services and the available resource we will have in future years to support people living in the community which inform our budget setting.

I am also delighted to be able to respond to the issue about the timetable for assessments for people who use the council provided day opportunities services.

My colleague, the Cabinet Member Health & Wellbeing, advises that where people request an assessment due to a change in need or because they wish to take a direct payment, they will have an assessment. Where a change in service is proposed assessments will be scheduled if necessary. As we have slowed down the period of transition in order to consult and involve service users, their families and providers, we have not needed to commence a programme of reassessments in quite the same way we originally envisaged. All service users should have an annual review, and we will use this process to complete reassessments by the end of March 31st 2014.

It is important to note that the timing of reviews when service changes are being effected is crucial to ensure they take place as close to the point of transition as possible and mitigate any potential duplication of resource whilst also ensuring that the needs of our service users are met in the most appropriate and cost effective way.

Supplementary Question

The Children and Families Bill focuses on disabilities. Is the Council prepared for the change in legislation and the impact it will have on the social care budget?

Response by Cabinet Member – Health and Wellbeing

A number of briefings have already taken place on the Bill. The Director has stated that the implications are significant.

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013

Question from Councillor DC Taylor

Question 3

Council Tax and business rates 2012-13

Could I be advised how many Court Summons' this council has issued in the above financial year for non payment of Council tax and business rates. What was the total amount collected on behalf of this Council for each of the above? What percentage did we fail to collect?

Answer from Councillor AW Johnson Cabinet Member Corporate Strategy & Finance

Answer to question 3

In 2012/13 there were 6,083 summons issued to 5,465 (6.6%) households in relation to council tax, and 533 in relation to business rates (NNDR).

The amounts collected (which includes the 17% collected on behalf of the Police Authority, Fire & Rescue Authority and local councils), and the percentage not collected for the same year are as follows:

Council tax collected = £93,127k
Council tax % non-collected = 1.4%

NNDR collected = £44,539k
NNDR % non-collected = 0.9%

It is worth noting that Herefordshire's excellent collection rates for that year, as with previous years, was higher than the Unitary, Shire District and England averages.

Question from Councillor AJW Powers

Question 4

The Environment, Housing and Planning portfolio is of vital importance to such urgent strategic matters as the continuing Core Strategy process and the Herefordshire-Worcestershire Waste Disposal Contract negotiation. Given the already full-time portfolio responsibilities of other cabinet members amongst whom these key issues (and others) have been provisionally shared.

When can we expect an appointment to the key Environment, Housing and Planning portfolio vacated following the resignation of the former Cabinet Member Russell B. Hamilton?

Answer from Councillor AW Johnson Leader of the Council

Answer to question 4

Cllr Powers is absolutely correct in pointing out the importance of the Core Strategy and Waste Management Contract (although he is mistaken in thinking that the latter was included in the Environment Housing & Planning portfolio – it was and still is within the Major Contracts portfolio).

I am considering, in the context of the council's priorities, how best to deploy the wide range of skills and experience available to me and will of course inform members of any further Cabinet Portfolio changes at the appropriate time.

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013

Supplementary Question

Is this not the ideal moment for you to dismantle the present Cabinet system – widely regarded by members on this side of the chamber and by members of the public as unfit for purpose – and to put in place a more broadly based, cross-party ‘war cabinet’, a ‘cabinet of all the talents’, such as that recently proposed by your colleague the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing?

Response by Leader of the Council

I am not considering changing the Cabinet system. I will decide how best to meet the demands we face.

Subsequent Written Response by Leader of the Council

I would repeat the answer I provided at Council. I have no intention of dismantling the Cabinet system. I am considering how best to deploy the skills and experience available to me and will inform members of any further changes to Cabinet Portfolios at the appropriate time.

Question from Councillor MAF Hubbard

Question 5

At the Council meeting in November 2012 the council RESOLVED:

- a) That the appropriate Cabinet Member be requested to arrange for a revised retail impact assessment to be undertaken to understand the potential impact of the new development on Hereford's historic retail area;*
- b) That the Leader be requested to arrange cross party talks to develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle issues arising out of the revised retail impact assessment detailed in a) above.*

This was passed by 47 votes to 3.

Would the Cabinet Member & Leader please explain how they have responded to the council's resolution to date?

Answer from Councillor RJ Phillips Cabinet Member Enterprise & Culture

Answer to question 5

The request to arrange a revised Retail Impact Assessment would place an unbudgeted financial pressure on the council at this time. Before taking a decision on the matter I have asked officers to identify what currently funded activity may contribute to a better understanding of retail impacts and trends in the city, to that end we are working with existing retailers on developing a ‘one City’ approach for the City's retail offer.

Supplementary Question

When is the Cabinet Member going to take the action required of him by this Council and will the Leader advise us on how we are to plan for notices of motion that require us to take action in future?

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013**Response by Cabinet Member**

I accept that the procedure followed in dealing with this Notice of Motion was flawed. The Director is rectifying this for the future.

I want a proactive take on a one city approach. It is important that this is a long term approach. The new development will open in April 2014 and I want it to provide jobs for local people. Grants from existing businesses will support a pop up shop for skills and training. Local people can register to work on the new development and in retail generally. Video retail events have been held nationally and in Hereford which have included both the new development and the existing City Centre.

Rather than putting funding into an RIA I want funding and energy put into something more proactive.

Question from Councillor MAF Hubbard

Question 6

The burnt out buildings in central Hereford are still very much in place, with no movement on re-developing the site. At a recent planning for real exercise run by the City Council the scaffolding & burnt out buildings featured as one of the biggest complaints. One of the burnt out buildings is a listed property and the owners have a duty to restore the damage. With the maximum lease being signed in the historic core presently set at about 10 years, with a five year break clause, the restoration of these buildings is becoming more and more unlikely.

How long will the Cabinet Member wait before he is prepared to take enforcement action to rectify this eyesore in our historic city centre?

Answer from Councillor GJ Powell Cabinet Member Health & Wellbeing

Answer to question 6

Officers have been working closely with the site owner, the site owner's agent and architects in order to bring forward the recovery of this very prominent site. Planning permission has already been granted for a full and proper restoration and reconfiguration scheme, which will contribute significantly to the viability and vitality of High Town.

There are particular contractual and lease issues that need to be overcome before the planning permission can be fully implemented. Nonetheless officers have recently been advised that a contractor has been instructed to remove the temporary roof and the scaffolding from the building, although on-going support will be necessary for the damaged front elevation. The contractors will be carefully wrapping the listed sections of the properties to prevent any further damage. The work will take around 6 weeks and is planned to start at the end of this month.

On-going discussions are taking place regarding the reconstruction of the site. In the event that this does not proceed the council can consider the appropriateness or otherwise of pursuing regulatory action. Clearly any action will need to be considered within the context of the original accidental fire damage and for that action to be absolutely essential in order to safeguard the remaining listed structure. There are no legal powers to insist that a planning permission is implemented.

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013**Supplementary Question**

As a ward issue of vital importance to the city centre will the Cabinet Member support me, as the Ward Member, to pursue a more efficacious resolution to this eyesore?

Cabinet Member Response

I think the best way forward is for me and Councillor Hubbard, as Ward Member, to discuss with officers what action can be taken to resolve the matter as soon as possible.

Question from Councillor EPJ Harvey

Question 7

Back in 2011 the council's consultants were provided with a costed Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which contained the local infrastructure considered necessary to ensure that the Core Strategy was viable. This plan estimated the infrastructure costs at ~£560m and these costs were used to model the Economic Viability Assessment (EVA) produced at that time.

In spring 2013 the same set of consultants were provided with revised IDP costings which estimated the county's infrastructure costs at only ~£255m. The ~£300m 'saving' in infrastructure costs was achieved by removing the cost of the majority of the local infrastructure from the plan (schools, local highways and road alterations, improved path and cycleways, green spaces, play areas, etc.).

Please can the Cabinet Member explain:

- (a) *what the reason was for the decision to remove £300m of local infrastructure costs from the viability modelling for the Core Strategy; modelling which also forms the evidence base being used to inform the setting of the Community Infrastructure Levy rates for all development in Herefordshire from 2015 onwards?*
- (b) *Was this a decision taken: by or on the advice of officers; by or on the advice of the council's consultants throughout the process: Three Dragons; or by or on the advice of cabinet member/s?*

Answer from Councillor PD Price Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 7

- (a) There was no decision to remove 300m of local infrastructure costs. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) is not a static one-off document but a 'live' one. The IDP schedule cannot specify the entire infrastructure to be provided, when it is to be delivered, or how it is to be funded in the county to 2031. Changed requirements may become apparent as new areas of development are designed in more detail and/or ways of delivering services or facilities are reviewed. In addition, the strategies of service providers and the introduction of new technology will have implications for infrastructure requirements and their costs over the plan period. The infrastructure costs will therefore fluctuate over the IDP period.
- (b) There was no decision.

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013

Supplementary Question

How much longer are you going to attempt to use your 'live plan' argument to postpone the clear requirement to make some reasonable assumptions regarding the infrastructure evidence necessary to deliver your plan ready for examination in public? And when are you going to come clean to parishes and market towns regarding the degree to which you intend to jeopardise their local infrastructure in your efforts to raise funds to prop up your pet project?

Cabinet Member Response

I will provide a written response.

Cabinet Member Written Response

The Council will only submit the necessary documents to the Secretary of State at the point it is concluded that a sound plan exists and is ready for examination. This would be the point that the Council would need to be satisfied that the IDP (together with all other evidence) has reached that definitive stage after the appropriate rounds of consultation have taken place. In the event that circumstances need to be updated before the examination these matters would then need to be explained to the Inspector at the examination.

Question from Councillor EPJ Harvey

Question 8

In July this council approved the Core Strategy without requiring the revised infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) to be approved by council or even for the document to be seen by council before being submitted as supporting evidence to the Core Strategy's Examination in Public.

Currently, and at the time of Core Strategy approval, the IDP lists a total infrastructure cost of £255m for what is termed 'Countywide Requirements', of which £155m is forecast to be provided by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – at currently proposed rates ... £115m of which is proposed to pay for the Hereford Relief Road (~75% of the county's CIL for the next 20 years).

Community Infrastructure Levy has been consistently referred to by officers and Cabinet members as a 'funding bridge' and is not intended to deliver all the funding required to pay for the countywide infrastructure.

(a) At current preliminary draft rates, and assuming the affordable housing targets are met, what is the revenue modelled as delivered by CIL according to the advice provided by the council's consultants.

(b) What are the funding sources identified for the outstanding £100m of infrastructure, not being strategised as delivered by CIL, which is required to fill the funding 'chasm' under the CIL 'bridge'?

(c) What assurance has been obtained that this funding will be forthcoming from the sources identified?

(d) By what means has the viability and deliverability of the local infrastructure listed, but not costed, in the IDP been assured?

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013

Answer from Councillor PD Price Cabinet Member Highways & Transportation

Answer to question 8

- (a) This figure has not been calculated as it is dependent on the floorspace of proposed development which will not be known until the point a planning application is submitted.
- (b) Public funding sources are also likely to vary over the life time of the Plan. As part of the annual budget Council approves a Treasury Management Strategy that includes capital financing requirements for the forthcoming year. This covers one year only and is based on agreed schemes.
- (c) & (d) It is important to note that capital expenditure can be financed in a number of ways including government grant, capital receipts and borrowing. Until specific schemes are brought forward for agreement through the capital programme process it is not possible to indicate funding sources. The information contained in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) schedule will therefore be kept under review and updated. On this basis the IDP is called a 'live' document.

Supplementary Question

I ask for your assurance that the local infrastructure costs will be returned to the IDP forthwith and that you at least give us your assurance here; you state now, and for the record, that no parish council will be advised, expected or driven to use their 'parish share' of any CIL monies to pay for the local infrastructure you expect developers to pay for and which you have removed from your viability modelling; and that you confirm that you are genuinely intending to submit a viable and robust plan to examination? Because people are starting to wonder whether you are playing a cynical game aimed at indefinite developer-led development.

Cabinet Member Response

I will provide a written response

Cabinet Member Written Response

There will always be uncertainty in plan making and even more so for a plan which covers a period of 20 years. The Council will need to demonstrate that there are mechanisms which can realistically deliver the plan and that there is a reasonable expectation that these will come forward. The Council will also need to build in processes for monitoring and review of the Plan. Legislation and guidance makes it very clear that the plan making process does not stop with the adoption of the Core Strategy. Members have consistently been advised that the Core Strategy is a key part of the evolving development plan and not a destination in its own right. In recent years the neighbourhood planning agenda has become a key part of this journey.

The Council is in the fortunate place that it is preparing its CIL charging levy at the same time that the government is setting out its application of CIL monies to local councils. This is now captured in the CIL Amendment Regulations 2013. The Council's CIL charging levy will need to reflect these regulations and any subsequent updates.

Regulation 59C is key to this process and indicates that a local council must use CIL receipts passed to it to support the development of the local council's area by funding the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure or for anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an area. Other key elements include:

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013

Regulation 59A

The extent of the payment

Regulation 59D

When the payment is made to the local council

Regulation 59E

The recovery of local council funding for either failure to spend within a specified period or a misapplication of spend.



MEETING:	COUNCIL
MEETING DATE:	17 JANUARY 2014
TITLE OF REPORT:	QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
REPORT BY:	DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER

1. Classification

Open

2. Purpose

To receive any questions from members of the public deposited more than eight clear working days before the meeting of Council.

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 Members of the public may ask a question of a Cabinet Member or Committee or other Chairmen. Written answers will be circulated to Members, the press and public prior to the start of the Council meeting. Questions subject to a Freedom of Information request will be dealt with under that separate process.
- 3.2 Standing Order 4.1.14.4 of the Constitution states that: a question may only be asked if notice has been given by delivering it in writing or by electronic mail to the Monitoring Officer no later than midday eight clear working days before the day of the meeting (ie the Monday of the week preceding the Council meeting where that meeting is on a Friday). Each question must give the name and address of the questioner and must name the person to whom it is to be put.
- 3.3 A questioner who has submitted a written question may also put **one** brief supplementary question without notice to the person (if s/he is present at the meeting) who has replied to his or her original question. A supplementary question must arise directly out of the original request or reply. The Chairman may reject a supplementary question on any of the grounds for rejecting written questions set out in these Council rules or if the question is too lengthy, is in multiple parts or takes the form of a speech. In any event, any person asking a supplementary question will be permitted only **1 minute** to do so.
- 3.4 The Monitoring Officer may reject a question or a supplemental question if it:
- Is not about a matter for which the Council has a responsibility or which affects the County or a part of it;
 - Is illegal, scurrilous, defamatory, frivolous or offensive or otherwise out of order;

Further information on the subject of this Report is available from
Governance Services on Tel (01432) 260249

- Is substantially the same as or similar to a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months or relates to the same subject matter or the answer to the question will be substantially the same as the previous answer;
- Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information;
- Relates to a planning or licensing application;
- Relates to an employment matter that should more properly be dealt with through the Council's Human Resources processes.

3.5 There will be a time limit of a maximum of 30 minutes for public questions and of 30 minutes for Members' questions. There will normally be no extension of time, unless the Chairman decides that there are reasonable grounds to allow such an extension, and questions not dealt with in this time will be dealt with by written response. The Chairman will decide the time allocated to each question.

4. Questions

4.1 Two questions have been received by the deadline and are attached at Appendix 1.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 18 OCTOBER 2013

Question from Mr G Perkins, Herefordshire

Question 1

I would like to raise the question of the amount of money spent on floral decorations, grass cutting and similar activities most of which are purely cosmetic and could be scrapped given the parlous financial situation. In Bromyard we see flower beds being re-planted and verges cut where there is no road safety justification. Driving round Hereford one sees the same. Not least in the city itself. This sort of thing could be devolved to the local Town /Parish Councils - if residents really want this - perhaps to compete in pointless "In Bloom" competitions they can pay through the local precept or volunteer to do it themselves.

Is Herefordshire Council going to cut this non-essential activity?

Question from Mrs E Morawiecka, Breinton

Question 2

Herefordshire Council was awarded significant funding from the Department of Transport for their "Destination Hereford" bid. In the bid to the Government Department, Herefordshire Council made the commitment that:-

"Political engagement will be delivered through weekly briefings to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and briefings to the Council's Environment Scrutiny Committee".

A large element of this funding bid was for improvements to Broad Street, Hereford. However, the decision to revise the programme and focus on cycle network development and sustainable transport improvements across Hereford was agreed by the Cabinet Member and discussed directly with the Department for Transport.

I am not aware of any briefings to any Scrutiny Meeting since the "Destination Hereford" bid was successful over 2 years ago. Would the Cabinet member please explain how the funding allocated for the Broad Street works is now being utilised to promote sustainable transport and best value for money for the County's taxpayers?"



MEETING:	COUNCIL
MEETING DATE:	17 JANUARY 2014
TITLE OF REPORT:	LEADER'S REPORT
REPORT BY:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To receive a report from the Leader on the activities of Cabinet since the meeting of Council in October 2013.

Recommendations

THAT: the report be noted.

Alternative Options

- 1 There are no alternative options; it is a requirement of the council's constitution.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 To ensure members are aware of the activities of Cabinet.

Key Considerations

- 3 A list of the decisions taken by the executive since the last report to Council on 18 October is provided at Appendix A; none were dealt with under the urgency provisions within the constitution.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Cllr AW Johnson, Leader of the Council on Tel (01432) 260494

2014/15 Budget

- 4 During the autumn the Cabinet has continued to formulate its budget proposals, which will be put before Council at its meeting in February. We held a public consultation to improve our understanding of the likely impact of our proposals with the community, businesses and other partners. We continue to engage with specific groups of people, on individual proposals which affect them directly and I am grateful to all those who have and who continue to make their views known to us.
- 5 The views put forward will inform the decisions we must take about how Herefordshire taxpayers money is to be spent to support the most vulnerable in our community, and deliver essential services in the most cost effective way possible both now and in the future. One of those results was a clear rejection of the prospect of raising Council Tax above the proposed 1.9% to help retain some non-statutory services; the budget proposed will therefore include a recommendation to raise Council Tax by 1.9%.
- 6 As a result of savings involving difficult decisions and the work of the Chief Finance Officer the council is in a much better position going into this budget than was the case last year. Additional savings of £33m still must be made over the next three years, but plans are in place to secure them. The items will be dealt with as part of the rolling programme during the coming financial year.

Waste Project.

- 7 I met with the Minister in early December when remaining outstanding issues were discussed in a frank and very helpful manner. The Minister agreed to have his officials meet with our joint Herefordshire/Worcestershire team to resolve final details. Joint and separate meetings of the two councils' Cabinets were held in early December, and agreement with DEFRA was subsequently reached on 20th December.
- 8 Despite claims to the contrary, alternative solutions had been considered and rejected in favour of one which had all necessary conditions in place including control of a site, planning permission, proven technology and finance. It was disappointing that via social media, some councillors continued with the inaccurate claim that the proposed technology was "dirty". The proposed technology complies with the strictest Environment Agency and European Union requirements.

Summit Meeting

- 9 As part of plans to encourage economic growth in Herefordshire it is proposed to hold a meeting of the major organisations and employers in the county early in 2014 to discuss our respective and collective views and contributions to growth over the next 5 years on a rolling basis. The council recognises that its role in this process is that of a facilitator rather than provider of opportunity. This initiative is consistent with the council's corporate plan priority to create and maintain a successful economy for present and future generations. Plans emerging from this initiative will be published in due course.
- 10 Further to the temporary allocation of Cabinet member portfolios reported to Council in October, substantive arrangements have been confirmed. Whilst these have been communicated at the time, for completeness they are attached to this report at Appendix B.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Cllr AW Johnson, Leader of the Council on Tel (01432) 260494

Community Impact

- 11 The community impact of any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Equality and Human Rights

- 12 Cabinet have paid due regard to the public sector equality duty in their decision-making as set out in the relevant decision reports.

Financial Implications

- 13 The financial implications of any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Legal Implications

- 14 The legal implications of any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Risk Management

- 15 The risks associated with any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Consultees

- 16 None.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Executive Decisions
- Appendix B – Cabinet Portfolios

Background Papers

- None identified.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Cllr AW Johnson, Leader of the Council on Tel (01432) 260494

Decision	Date	Taken By
<i>CIL Task & Finish Group</i> – the Executive’s response to the recommendations of the Task & Finish Group was agreed.	1/10/13	Cabinet Member Environment Planning & Housing
<i>Herefordshire School Improvement</i> - the new strategy and framework for school improvement in Herefordshire, developed with leaders of schools, the Diocese of Hereford, and the Archdiocese of Cardiff was approved	10/10/13	Cabinet Member Children’s Wellbeing
<i>The Master’s House, Ledbury</i> – following an update on the progress of the Masters House, St Katherine’s, Ledbury capital project, an increase in the budget for the scheme to cover extra costs identified in association with the timber framing of the building was approved.	16/10/13	Cabinet Member Enterprise & Culture
<i>Budget Monitoring Reports</i> – Cabinet received a monthly report to monitor projected revenue and capital out-turn position for 2012/13 including Treasury Management activities.	25/10/13 21/11/13 19/12/13	Cabinet
<i>Service & Budget Planning</i> - Cabinet considered the outcome of the recent review of the Council’s priorities; and to confirm the budget and corporate planning arrangements for 2014/15 in light of the ongoing significant financial challenge.	25/10/13	Cabinet
<i>Director of Public Health Annual Report</i> – the annual report 21013 was received and the identified priorities and recommendations noted. It was agreed that the recommendations and the proposed approach and actions highlighted in the report, be used to inform service development and commissioning during the next planning cycle and in the medium term.	25/10/13	Cabinet
<i>Adult Social Care Local Account</i> – the Local Account of Adult Social Care and Support 2012-13 was approved for publication.	21/11/13	Cabinet
<i>Performance</i> - performance for the first half of 2013-14 was reviewed and noted.	21/11/13	Cabinet
<i>Children with Disabilities</i> - Council funding of up to £1.3m (£443k per annum) over the next three years was approved for the procurement of services for children and young people with disabilities as part of a £3.3m (£1.1m per annum) pooled budget between Herefordshire Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group.	21/11/13	Cabinet
<i>Executive Rolling Programme</i> – the executive rolling programme listing future decisions was reviewed.	21/11/13	Cabinet

Decision	Date	Taken By
<i>Town Centres</i> – the Executive’s response to the actions proposed in the ‘Mary Portas’ motion passed by Council in July 2012 was agreed.	27/11/13	Cabinet Member Corporate Strategy & Finance
<i>Retail Impact</i> - the Executive’s response to the actions proposed in the Retail Impact Study motion passed by Council in July 2012 was agreed.	28/11/13	Cabinet Member Corporate Strategy & Finance
<i>Adult Social Care Next Stage Integration Task & Finish Group</i> - the Executive’s response to the recommendations of the Task & Finish Group was agreed	29/11/13	Cabinet Member Health & Wellbeing
<i>Corporate Property Strategy</i> – a refreshed Corporate Property Strategy, taking account of decisions taken in respect of corporate asset management over the period of the existing strategy, was approved.	6/12/13	Cabinet Member Contracts & Assets
<i>Waste Management</i> – authorisation was given to officers to conclude and execute a variation to the Joint Waste Management Services Contract with Mercia Waste Management to enable the construction of the EFW Plant at Hartlebury.	12/12/13	Cabinet
<i>Printing</i> - new contractual arrangements for the supply of a managed secure printing service with the council contracting direct with AltoDigital for multi-functional devices (combined printer, photocopier and scanning hardware) and a support contract with Hoople Ltd to replace current contractual arrangements for Herefordshire Council’s printer estate was approved.	13/12/13	Cabinet Member Corporate Services
<i>Adult Social Care Day Opportunities</i> - the underpinning principles, specification, process and transition plans to support the procurement and implementation plan for the day opportunities within the Next Stage Integration (NSI) programme were agreed.	19/12/13	Cabinet
<i>Herefordshire Schools and Post 16 Transport Policy</i> - changes to the Council’s home to school transport policy such that it provides the statutory minimum requirement of free transport; and changes to the Council’s school transport policy such that the subsidy for post 16 special educational needs (SEN) students is withdrawn and they pay the same charge as all other students were agreed. <i>NB This decision is subject to call-in – scheduled for consideration by General Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 15/01/14</i>	19/12/13	Cabinet

Decision	Date	Taken By
<i>Council Tax Reduction Scheme</i> - amendments to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme are being considered for recommendation to Council (and the recommendations appear elsewhere on this agenda).	13/01/14	Cabinet Member Corporate Strategy & Finance

CABINET MEMBER PORTFOLIOS – 1 November 2013

LEADER (CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE): COUNCILLOR AW JOHNSON

External Liaison Support: Councillor RJ Phillips

- Corporate policies and strategy
 - Agreeing and leading the process for recommending the budget , Council Tax and NNDR to Council
 - Recommend to Council the policy framework
 - Communications strategy
 - Key partnerships and external relationships
 - Local government issues
 - Financial policy and financial control
 - Council tax benefits
 - Economic development & regeneration
 - External Liaison
 - LEP/LGA/CCN
 - Hereford Futures
 - Enterprise zone
 - European, national and regional matters
 - Policy development, quality assurance, external liaison, localities development, performance improvement and risk assurance relevant to the portfolio
 - Any initiative not specifically allocated to any other portfolio
- Supported by Cllr Phillips

CORPORATE SERVICES: COUNCILLOR PM MORGAN (DEPUTY LEADER)

- Research
- Community engagement & development
- Legal & democratic services
- Emergency planning and business continuity
- Customer services
- Performance management and improvement framework
- Equalities and human rights
- Modern records
- Risk management
- Land charges
- Registration services
- Coroner services
- Bereavement services
- Gypsies and travellers
- Community safety
- Animal Health & Welfare
- Licensing
- Environmental Health
- Trading Standards
- Market and fairs
- ICT Strategy
- Policy development, quality assurance, external liaison, localities development, performance improvement and risk assurance relevant to the portfolio
- Any other specific responsibilities as allocated by the Leader

CONTRACTS & ASSETS: COUNCILLOR H BRAMER

Support Team Member: Councillor P Rone

- Major contract negotiation
- Commissioning (strategic)
- Oversight and Management of contracts
- Oversight and management of Council assets/property
- Waste
- Common land
- Community services
 - Parks and countryside
 - Leisure services
 - Cultural services
 - Libraries
 - Heritage services
 - Archives
 - Public conveniences
 - Public rights of way
- Policy development, quality assurance, external liaison, localities development, performance improvement and risk assurance relevant to the portfolio
- Any other specific responsibilities as allocated by the Leader

HEALTH & WELLBEING: COUNCILLOR GJ POWELL

- To provide leadership and ensure coordination across the range of Local Authority adult social care services, and through engagement with partners
- Services for vulnerable adults
- Adults safeguarding
- Strategic housing, homelessness, housing allocation and condition
- Public Health
- Leadership of Health & Wellbeing Board, and partnership working with the health services
- Lead member for Health and Social Care in accordance with the Health & Social Care Act 2012
- Broadband
- Transport
- Policy development, quality assurance, external liaison, localities development, performance improvement and risk assurance relevant to the portfolio
- Any other specific responsibilities as allocated by the Leader

INFRASTRUCTURE: COUNCILLOR PD PRICE

- Highways (policy and maintenance)
- Streetscene design, policy and delivery
- Traffic Management
- Car parking policy and services
- Core Strategy
- Land drainage, flood alleviation, rivers and waterways
- Planning, conservation and land use strategy
- Environmental promotion, protection & sustainability
- Shared Services
- Policy development, quality assurance, external liaison, localities development, performance improvement and risk assurance relevant to the portfolio
- Any other specific responsibilities as allocated by the Leader

YOUNG PEOPLE & CHILDREN'S WELLBEING: COUNCILLOR JW MILLAR

Support Team Member: Councillor J Hyde

- To provide leadership and ensure coordination across the range of Local Authority children's services, and through engagement with partners, with a particular focus on children and young people's health & wellbeing, safeguarding, education and attainment
- Services for vulnerable young people/children/families
- Children's safeguarding
- Youth offending services
- Lead member for Children's Services in accordance with the Children's Act 2004
- Leadership and support for schools across the authority
- Post 16 education and training
- Corporate parenting
- Policy development, quality assurance, external liaison, localities development, performance improvement and risk assurance relevant to the portfolio
- Any other specific responsibilities as allocated by the Leader



MEETING:	COUNCIL
MEETING DATE:	17 JANUARY 2014
TITLE OF REPORT:	APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER, RETURNING OFFICER, ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER, STATUTORY SCRUTINY OFFICER and PROPER OFFICER FOR REGISTRATION SERVICES
REPORT BY:	CHAIRMAN, EMPLOYMENT PANEL

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To designate specific posts to discharge the functions of Monitoring Officer, Returning (and Acting Returning) Officer, Electoral Registration Officer, statutory Scrutiny Officer and Proper Officer for Registration Services (including responsibility for the Coroners Service).

Recommendations

THAT with immediate effect:

- (a) the Solicitor to the Council be designated Monitoring Officer;**
- (b) the Chief Executive be designated Returning Officer (Acting Returning Officer in respect of European elections) and Electoral Registration Officer;**
- (c) the Director for Economy, Communities & Corporate be designated Scrutiny Officer; and**
- (d) the Solicitor to the Council be designated Proper Officer for Registration Services (including responsibility for the Coroners Service).**

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Annie Brookes, Deputy Monitoring Officer on Tel (01432) 260605

Alternative Options

- 1 Other posts may be designated to fulfil these functions; regard must be had to the skills and experience of post holders.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 To meet statutory requirements.

Key Considerations

- 3 The Head of Governance left the authority on 31 December 2013. In light of the current financial challenge faced by the authority and ongoing internal staff restructures it is not intended to replace this post like for like.
- 4 The post of Head of Governance was designated to fulfil a number of statutory functions, and it is therefore necessary for other posts to be designated to fulfil these. The designation of these functions to posts is reserved to Council; the Employment Panel, at its meeting on 7 January, recommended a number of specific designations as outlined above.

Community Impact

- 5 The functions collectively support the maintenance and enhancement of robust governance across the authority.

Equality and Human Rights

- 6 The council's policies in relation to job evaluation, recruitment and selection pay full regard to the public sector equality duty.

Financial Implications

- 7 All costs are contained within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

- 8 Section 5 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 imposes a duty on the council to designate one of its officers as Monitoring Officer; this may not be the Head of Paid Service or Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer).
- 9 Section 35(1) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 requires the council to appoint an officer of the council to be Returning Officer for elections and Section 8 of the same Act requires the council to appoint an Electoral Registration Officer; they do not need to be the same person, but may be.
- 10 The Local Government Act 2000 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) requires the council to designate one of its officers as Scrutiny Officer; this may not be the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer or the Chief Finance Officer.
- 11 Section 13 of the Registration Service Act 1953 sets out various powers and obligations of the officer appointed as the council's Proper Officer for the Registration Service.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Annie Brookes, Deputy Monitoring Officer on Tel (01432) 260605

Risk Management

- 12 Designation of posts to fulfil these functions mitigates the risk to the authority of failing to comply with statutory requirements and helps to maintain effective and robust governance within the authority.

Consultees

- 13 Relevant officers as named.

Appendices

- None

Background Papers

- None identified.



MEETING:	COUNCIL
MEETING DATE:	17 JANUARY 2014
TITLE OF REPORT	APPOINTMENTS TO COUNCIL COMMITTEES
REPORT BY:	DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER

1. Classification

Open

2. Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

3. Wards Affected

County-wide

4. Purpose

In light of changes to the political balance to the Council, to:

- (a) determine the number of seats on each committee;
- (b) approve the allocation of seats to political groups;
- (c) receive nominations from those groups; and
- (d) if necessary, in the light of those nominations from political groups, consider any appointments to offices of either Chairman or Vice-Chairman of a Committee required as a consequence.

5. Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) **Council determines whether it wishes the size of ordinary committees and the allocation of seats on those committees to political groups either to be increased as shown at Table 1 or decreased as shown at Table 2 in appendix 1;**
- (b) **the wishes of the political groups as to filling their respective allocations of seats as at appendix 2 (to be tabled following the above vote at recommendation a above) be noted;**

- (c) **should the membership of committees at appendix 2 result in any vacancies the appointments of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen be confirmed in accordance with appendix 2; and**
- (d) **the partial suspension of the rules of proportionality, in respect of the Regulatory Sub-Committee, the River Lugg Internal Drainage Board and the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee, remain in place.**

6. Alternative Options

- 6.1 To draw up a different set of committees of a different size and composition with different terms of reference. As the need for change arises from a shift in political balance rather than from any other governance considerations this is not recommended with only 16 months of the term of this council remaining.

7. Reasons for Recommendations

- 7.1 The Council is required to review its political composition and how this is applied to appointments to committees and sub-committees of the Council at each Annual Meeting of Council, or as soon as practicable after a change in political balance.
- 7.2 A change in the Council's political composition has taken place, following the Pontrilas by-election, a decision of a previously ungrouped Member to join a Group, and another Member's decision to alter group affiliation.

8. Key Considerations

- 8.1 The membership of the respective political groups is now as follows:

	Numbers in Group
Conservative	29
Herefordshire Independent	14
It's Our County	12
Liberal Democrat	3
Total	58

- 8.2 The Council is under a duty to ensure membership of those committees covered by the relevant rules reflects the political composition of the Council, as far as practicable, by allocating seats on the committees to the political groups in proportion to their numerical strength on the Council, whilst also maintaining a similar proportional balance of overall seat numbers.

- 8.3 The Council must then accept nominations made by the groups for filling the seats allocated to them.
- 8.4 The change in proportionality has necessitated a change in the number of seats on committees to ensure an even number on each relevant committee. This needs to be achieved either by increasing or by reducing the size of committees where relevant by one seat.
- 8.5 The political composition of Committees depending on whether, where relevant, the size of Committees is increased by one seat or reduced by one seat is shown in the tables at Appendix 1.
- 8.6 Appendix 2, to be tabled following the vote on recommendation (a), drawn up in consultation with the Council's Group Leaders, shows the membership of committees; and any nominations for committee chairman or vice chairman appointments necessary following membership changes.
- 8.7 It is not proposed to vary Council's decision in May 2013 to allocate certain seats on a different basis from that of political proportion. Council took a **nem con vote** (where no Member votes against the proposal) to permit this approach in respect of: the Regulatory Sub-Committee, the River Lugg Internal Drainage Board and the Wye Valley AONB Joint Advisory Committee. This is again being recommended and these bodies have therefore not been included in the proportionality calculation.
- 8.8 It is not proposed to review the appointments to outside bodies. Any changes required as a consequence of resignations of Councillors will be made by the Chief Executive in consultation with Group Leaders, in accordance with the scheme of delegation.

9. Community Impact

- 9.1 There are no implications.

10. Equality and Human Rights

- 10.1 There are no implications.

11. Financial Implications

- 11.1 The adjustment in committee size either way carries an adjustment in member expenses claims which is so insignificant as to not to be quantifiable.

12. Legal Implications

- 12.1 The Council is required to ensure that the allocation of seats to Committees is compliant with relevant rules contained in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Regulations made under that Act. The proposals in this report comply with the requirements.

13. Risk Management

- 13.1 There are no risk management implications.

14. Consultees

14.1 Group Leaders.

15. Appendices

15.1 Appendix 1 – Possible Council Committee Size and allocation of seats
Appendix 2 - Membership of Committees (To be tabled following the vote on recommendation a.)

16. Background Papers

16.1 None identified.

Possible Council Committee Size and allocation of seats**Table 1 - Relevant Committees increased by one seat**

Committee	Seats	Liberal Democrats	Herefordshire Independents	Conservatives	It's Our County
Audit and Governance Committee	10	1	2	5	2
Employment Panel	6	0	2	3	1
General Overview and Scrutiny Committee	14	1	3	7	3
Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee	14	1	3	7	3
Planning Committee	20	1	5	10	4
Regulatory Committee	10	1	2	5	2
Total Seats	74	5	17	37	15

Table 2 - Relevant Committees reduced by one seat

Committee	Seats	Liberal Democrats	Herefordshire Independents	Conservatives	It's Our County
Audit and Governance Committee	10	1	2	5	2
Employment Panel	6	0	2	3	1
General Overview and Scrutiny Committee	12	1	3	6	2
Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee	12	1	3	6	2
Planning Committee	18	1	4	9	4
Regulatory Committee	10	1	2	5	2
Total Seats	68	5	16	34	13



MEETING:	COUNCIL
MEETING DATE:	17 JANUARY 2014
TITLE OF REPORT:	REVISION TO THE CURRENT COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME
REPORT BY:	CABINET MEMBER CORPORATE STRATEGY & FINANCE

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To agree amendments to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme as recommended by the Cabinet Member.

(The recommendations below are subject to a Cabinet Member decision to be taken on 13 January; should any changes to the recommendations result, these will be published as a supplement to this Council Agenda.)

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) The minimum support rate for those working age applicants who currently receive 91.5% council tax support is reduced to 84% from 1st April 2014. Claimants having a maximum liability of 16% of council tax;**
- (b) Agreement is given to further phased reductions, in support in the following two financial years, 76% from 1st April 2015 and 70% from 1st April 2016; and**
- (c) Further changes to the scheme are approved which caps the council tax reduction to a level of Band D for working age claimants.**

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Peter Robinson, Chief Finance Officer on Tel (01432) 383519

Alternative Options

- 1 Continuing with the current scheme. The council would need to identify savings to compensate for the loss of one-off government grant resulting in reductions to council services.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 To compensate for the loss of one-off government grant awarded for ensuring claimants had a maximum liability of 8.5%, and generating additional revenue for the council and its preceptors.

Key Considerations

- 3 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished the existing national Council Tax Benefit scheme with effect from 1st April 2013. Instead, councils were asked to create and administer a new local Council Tax Reduction Scheme which had to be in place by 1st April 2013.
- 4 The council adopted a new Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) on 1st April 2013. The aim of the CTRS scheme is to provide financial assistance to council taxpayers who have low incomes. The scheme works within the broad requirements set by government, to:
 - Ensure all council tax payers pay something, whilst providing full protection for pensioners whose council tax support must remain at the same level as their current council tax benefit;
 - Consider the need of vulnerable people;
 - Encourage people to work rather than discourage them to do so.
- 5 In the first year government provided additional funding for the CTRS based on a minimum support rate of at least 91.5%, for those working age applicants who previously would have received 100% council tax benefit, this ensured claimants had a maximum liability of 8.5%. Herefordshire Council adopted this 8.5% maximum liability and also abolished the second adult rebate.
- 6 The scheme can be revised each year, with approval necessary by 31st January of the preceding year. To minimise the impact for the loss of the one-off funding from government, a revision to the scheme is proposed. This report provides a proposal to revise the current CTRS scheme and deliver additional revenue through council tax collection to mitigate the impact.
- 7 The working age claimants in receipt of CTR consist of; single parents, single people and couples who could be unemployed, have limited capability for work on the grounds of ill health including disability, or are working but on a low income. The profile of working age claimants is:-
 - Current caseload (as at 01.10.13) = 14,351
 - Total pensioners = 7,103 - unaffected by the CTRS scheme
 - Total working age = 7,248

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Peter Robinson, Chief Finance Officer on Tel (01432) 383519

- 5,000 (approximately) are in receipt of CTR at 91.5%, and therefore, have to pay 8.5% of their council tax liability. These claimants have an income which is at a level that entitles them to maximum reduction.
- 2,248 of these claimants have an income which is at a level that means they only qualify for partial reduction.

Note - 53% of the total working age claimants have dependent children.

- 8 The consultation questionnaire was explained in a letter to all working age claimants confirming how they would be affected and where they could respond. The consultation questionnaire was also published online on Herefordshire Council's website together with the consultation documents, and publicised alongside the council's budget consultation.
- 9 In total 108 questionnaires were returned, 106 from individuals and two from organisations. Of those that answered, 59 confirmed they were in receipt of CTR and a further nine had previously been in receipt
- 10 The table below sets out options on the proposed changes to the CTRS, increasing the maximum liability available to the claimant, delivering savings to Herefordshire Council and its preceptors. This has been modelled on the existing working age benefit caseload.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme proposed changes	£'000 – Increased revenue due to increasing the contribution levels		
	16%	24 %	30%
Full benefit to Herefordshire Council, and its preceptors, including police, fire service and parish councils	471	974	1,351
Saving to Herefordshire Council (HC) (Approximately 83%)	390	808	1,121
Reduced HC benefit including a 25% bad debt provision	292	606	841

NB: Scenarios that explain the financial implications to claimants based on reducing the maximum liability are shown at Appendix 2.

- 11 The full savings will be beneficial to the council and its preceptors, including parish and town councils, West Mercia Police and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service. Approximately 83% of the council tax bill is due to Herefordshire Council.
- 12 The scale of bad debt is relatively small in 2013, but with increasing contributions brings the likelihood of probable bad debt, thus a 25% reduction for bad debt has been assumed.
- 13 The above options are recommended to be implemented over a three year period to limit the full impact in 2014/15. There is a further restriction that could be made to the CTRS that could generate additional income:
- 14 Restrictions to Band D

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Peter Robinson, Chief Finance Officer on Tel (01432) 383519

- Up until April 2004, council tax benefit was restricted to the level of a Band E property. This meant that whilst claimants in higher banded properties could claim help with their council tax, their maximum award could not exceed the level of a Band E property. This was abolished as it was deemed unfair mainly to pensioners who in general terms, were more likely to live in larger properties.
- Whilst the Prescribed Requirements legislation prevents the introduction of a similar restriction that affects pensioners, applying a restriction to a Band D property for working age claimants produces savings as detailed below.

	£'000 – Increased revenue due to restricting to a Band D level		
	16%	24 %	30%
HC and all preceptors	85	78	72
Savings to Herefordshire Council (Estimated at 83%)	70	64	59

Note – the above changes have to be collected, and it should be assumed that there may be a bad debt element to account for.

- 15 Other local authorities are considering adjustments to the current scheme and have commenced consultation.
- 16 Local benchmarking information is set out at Appendix 4.

Community Impact

- 17 The Corporate Plan agreed by Council in November 2012 has two broad priorities; supporting the development of a successful economy and improving quality of life for the people of Herefordshire. The council remains committed to ensuring public services are prioritised to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. However, the proposals in this report will have an impact on some residents, but there continues to be regard to support for the elderly and vulnerable, with access to support such as Discretionary Reduction Funding.
- 18 The decisions in this report links to key elements of the council's Corporate Plan and demonstrate the effective management of resources to help secure a balanced budget.

Equality and Human Rights

- 19 A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was carried out on the initial scheme and has been reviewed in the light of the revised proposals. A welfare reform event has taken place to discuss the impact on welfare reform and the EIA was presented.
- 20 The consultation has concluded and the findings collated into this report. The final EIA is provided at Appendix 3. Access to the Council Tax Discretionary Reduction funding is available to those facing hardship when paying their council tax.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Peter Robinson, Chief Finance Officer on Tel (01432) 383519

- 21 The CTRS provides essential help towards the council tax liability for all claimants on a low income. By continuing to assess entitlement on a mean tested basis, similar to the national approach to means tested benefits, the scheme is equitable albeit that the level of support overall may be reduced to working age claimants based on the proposals set out in the report.
- 22 Access to the Council Tax Discretionary Reduction funding is available to those facing hardship when paying their council tax. The policy sets out that support is available when:
- The taxpayer is facing exceptional and temporary hardship and they do not have access to other funds/assets that could be used to meet their council tax liability;
 - Any reduction made in accordance with this policy is intended as short term assistance rather than a way of reducing council tax liability on a long term basis;
 - The applicant's eligibility to council tax reduction and all other statutory reductions has been determined;
 - There are unusual and unforeseen circumstances which prevent the property from being occupied and this situation cannot be rectified within a reasonable period of time, for example because of flooding;
 - The applicant has taken reasonable steps to resolve their situation prior to making their application;
 - The applicant can demonstrate that their current circumstances are unlikely to improve in the following six months.

Financial Implications

- 23 The changes will generate an additional £362k in 2014/15, increasing to £670k in 2015/16 and £900k in 2016/17. The One off-government grant lost in 14/15 is £259k together with other reductions in the overall level of government grant. The additional potential revenue is summarised overleaf:

Council Tax Reduction Scheme proposed changes – Summary	£'000 – Increased revenue due to increasing the contribution levels		
	16%	24 %	30%
Additional council tax collected through increasing the maximum liability payable	292	606	841
Limiting the claim for council tax reduction to the value of a Band D property	70	64	59
Total	362	670	900

Legal Implications

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Peter Robinson, Chief Finance Officer on Tel (01432) 383519

- 24 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 and Local Government Finance Act 2012 require the Council to implement a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) and this was implemented by the Council for 2013/2014. Any subsequent amendments to the CTRS Scheme have to be approved by Full Council.
- 25 As the revisions are to be made to a localised scheme, the council must take account of views from the consultation in its decision-making and that consultation should conform to the “Gunning principles” as established in the case of R v London Borough of Brent ex parte Gunning (1985):
- a) The consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage.
 - b) The proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response. Those consulted should be aware of the criteria that will be applied when considering proposals and which factors will be considered decisive or of substantial importance.
 - c) Adequate time must be given for consideration and response.
 - d) The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising any proposals.
- 26 The council is required to as far as possible to protect vulnerable groups when implementing its CTRS. The position with regard to pensioners is as stated in paragraph 5. With regard to other groups the relevant legislation makes no explicit provision, although guidance indicates that the council should pay due regard to its public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 and its duty to reduce and mitigate the effects of child poverty under the Child Poverty Act 2010. The contents of the Equality Impact Assessment and paragraphs 17 to 20 are noted.

Risk Management

- 27 The scale of the changes is likely to have a significant impact on workloads and ICT systems, not least because of the short timescales for the annual billing cycle for 2014/15.

Consultees

- 28 Consultation ran from 28th October until 9th December 2013 to seek the views of residents and interested organisations on the proposed changes.
- 29 The consultation questionnaire was published online on Herefordshire Council's website together with the consultation documents and publicised alongside the Council's budget consultation. In addition, approximately 7,000 letters were sent to current applicants who are likely to be affected by any changes to the scheme informing them of the consultation, directing them to the website and giving them a contact number to ring if they would prefer a paper version of the consultation documents to be sent to them.
- 30 A welfare reform event was also held at the Town Hall on 26th November 2013, where stakeholders such as social landlords, voluntary and welfare organisations were invited and informed of the proposed changes and encouraged to contribute to the consultation.
- 31 In total 108 questionnaires were returned, 106 from individuals and two from

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Peter Robinson, Chief Finance Officer on Tel (01432) 383519

organisations. Last year there were 207 responses to the proposed changes.

- 32 A summary of the responses to the two questions are listed below and full detail are provided at Appendix 1.

Question	Agree/ Strongly agree	Disagree/ Strongly disagree	Neither agree or disagree
1. All working age will have to pay more than 8.5% of their council tax charge	18	81	8
2. Capping council tax reduction to smaller properties (Band D)	23	67	16

- 33 76% of those that responded to question, one disagreed to a reduction in the discount and 75% also confirmed that if there was a rise in contribution, 16% should be the level of charge.
- 34 Of those that answered, 59 confirmed they were in receipt of CTR and a further nine had previously been in receipt.
- 35 Noting there are over 7,000 claimants with access to CTR, but less than 2% have provided a response to the consultation, this is attached as Appendix 1.
- 36 The major preceptors (police and fire service) were consulted on revisions to the scheme and were in favour of the proposed changes.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – CTRS consultation report

Appendix 2 – Examples of the impact of the changes to the scheme

Appendix 3 – Equality impact assessment

Appendix 4 – Summary of local benchmarking

Background Papers

30. None

Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation report

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Peter Robinson, Chief Finance Officer on (01432) 383519

Contents

- Introduction
- Results
- Question 1: All working age taxpayers to pay more than 8.5%
- Question 2: Capping council tax support to smaller properties (Band D)
- Groups affected
- Responding as an individual or organisation
- About you
- Do you currently pay council tax to Herefordshire Council
- Are you currently receiving council tax reduction in Herefordshire
- If you do not currently receive council tax reduction have you ever received it
- Are you currently receiving housing benefit in Herefordshire
- Which of these activities best describes what you are doing at present
- What is your age group
- What is your gender
- Do you have parenting responsibilities
- How would you describe your ethnic group
- Appendix A: List of comments in respect of question one
- Appendix A: List of comments in respect of question two
- Appendix A: List of further comments in respect of CTRS
- Appendix A: List of comments in respect of affected groups
- Appendix B - Letters

Introduction

In April 2013, the government changed the system for providing help for those on a low income to pay their council tax. The localised Council Tax Reduction Schemes (CTRS) introduced by each council replaced the previous national council tax benefit system. Whilst the government prescribed rules which ensured pensioners were protected from any local changes, each council had considerable discretion to develop its own scheme for working age applicants. Any scheme also needed to take into account a 10% reduction in funding from central government.

In the first year, the government provided additional funding for the CTRS based on a minimum level of support of at least 91.5% for those claimants previously receiving 100% council tax benefit. This ensured those working age claimants had a maximum liability of 8.5%. Herefordshire Council adopted this 91.5% liability within its CTRS calculation for the financial year April 2013 to March 2014. This additional funding was for the year 2013/14 only, so the council is now considering additional changes to the scheme for the year starting on 1st April 2014.

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme consultation was launched to seek the views of residents and interested organisations on proposed changes Herefordshire Council is considering making to its local scheme, for working age applicants for 2014/15. The consultation questionnaire was published online on Herefordshire Council's website together with the consultation documents. In addition, approximately 7,000 letters were sent to current applicants who are likely to be affected by any changes to the scheme informing them of the consultation, directing them to the website and giving them a contact number to ring if they would prefer a paper version of the consultation documents to be sent to them. A welfare reform event was also held at the Town Hall on 26th November where stakeholders such as social landlords, voluntary and welfare organisations were invited and informed of the proposed changes and encouraged to contribute to the consultation.

The consultation period ran from 28th October to 9th December 2013.

This report details the results of the consultation questionnaire. In the tables in this report, all percentages are calculated as a proportion of the total number of responses to each question unless otherwise stated. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Note that if respondents could select more than one answer to a particular question, the percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Answers to questions requiring a free text answer, are listed in Appendix A. Every effort has been made to anonymise references to named or identifiable persons without losing the meaning of the comments. There were also two letters received in response to the consultation, the contents of which are included in Appendix B.

Results

A total of 108 responses were received by the end of the consultation period, of these 94 were submitted online and 14 were paper questionnaires. (This does not include the two letters that are included in Appendix B).

Question 1:

All working age taxpayers will have to pay more than 8.5% of their council tax charge.

At the moment, those below the income threshold for council tax reduction only have to pay 8.5% of their council tax. The council is proposing that these individuals would have a smaller reduction in the future, so would have to pay a higher percentage of their council tax.

To what extent do you agree or disagree this principle is fair?

	No.	%
Strongly agree	9	8
Agree	9	8
Neither agree nor disagree	8	7
Disagree	10	9
Strongly disagree	71	67
Total respondents	107	
Not answered	1	

The amount charged could be 16%, 24% or 30% of the total council tax.

What percentage of council tax do you believe that someone who qualifies for maximum council tax reduction should be asked to pay?

	No.	%
16% charge	45	75
24% charge	6	10
30% charge	9	15
Total respondents	60	
Not answered	48	

Question 2:

Capping council tax reduction to smaller properties (Band D)

Council tax reduction is currently based on the actual council tax charge for a property. The level of council tax payable is based on the valuation band of a property someone lives in, with the bands running from the lowest value A to the highest value H.

This change will mean that for taxpayers living in properties with a band of E, F, G and H, their reduction will be based on the Band D charge rather than the actual charge of the higher banded property they live in.

To what extent do you agree or disagree this principle is fair?

	No.	%
Strongly agree	9	8
Agree	14	13
Neither agree nor disagree	16	15
Disagree	21	20
Strongly disagree	46	43
Total respondents	106	
Not answered	2	

In addition to these answers there were 152 additional comments relating to these questions and the CTRS scheme in general. Please see Appendix A for the full list.

We want to ensure that any changes made are fair to everyone. To help us do this, please tell us if you think any of the principles above will particularly affect any specific groups of people. For example, due to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

	No.	%
Yes	70	71
No	28	29
Don't know	0	0
Total respondents	98	
Not answered	10	

If yes, please explain which groups and the reasons they might be affected.

There were 70 comments made, please see Appendix A for the full list

Are you responding on behalf of an organisation, or as an individual?

	No.	%
Organisation of group	2	2
Individual	96	98
Total respondents	98	
Not answered	10	

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation or group, please tell us the name of the organisation /group:

There were two organisations who responded to the consultation; Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Walford Parish Council.

About you

Note: This section only applied to respondents who replied in an individual capacity.

Do you currently pay council tax to Herefordshire Council?

	No.	%
Yes	98	95
No	5	5
Total respondents	103	
Not answered	3	

If yes, please tell us which council tax band (A-H) the property you pay council tax on is in? (If unsure leave blank)

	No.	%
Band A	6	11
Band B	11	20
Band C	15	28
Band D	8	15
Band E	10	19
Band F	2	3
Band G	1	2
Band H	1	2
Total respondents	54	
Not answered	52	

Are you currently receiving council tax reduction in Herefordshire?

	No.	%
Yes	59	58
No	43	42
Total respondents	102	
Not answered	4	

If you are not currently receiving council tax reduction in Herefordshire, have you ever received it?

	No.	%
Yes	9	20
No	36	80
Total respondents	43	
Not answered	63	

Are you receiving housing benefit in Herefordshire?

	No.	%
Yes	41	44
No	53	56
Total respondents	94	
Not answered	12	

Which of these activities best describes what you are doing at present?

	No.	%
Employee in full time job (30 hours plus per week)	23	24
Employee in part time job (under 30 hours per week)	11	11
Self-employed full or part time	14	14
On a government supported training programme	0	0
Unemployed and available for work	5	5
Full time education at school, college or university	0	0
Retired whether receiving a pension or not	9	9
Looking after the home or family	13	13
Long term sick / disabled	35	36
Total respondents	110	
Not answered	0	

What is your age group?

	No.	%
Under 18	0	0
18 – 24 years	3	3
25 – 44 years	31	30
45 – 64 years	59	57
65 – 74 years	6	6
75+ years	4	4
Total respondents	103	
Not answered	3	

What is your gender?

	No.	%
Male	44	44
Female	57	56
Total respondents	101	
Not answered	5	

Do you parenting responsibilities?

	No.	%
Yes	40	39
No	63	61
Total respondents	103	
Not answered	3	

How would you describe your ethnic group?

	No.	%
White British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish	94	95
Other White (please specify below)	3	3
Any other ethnic group (please specify below)	2	2
Total respondents	99	
Not answered	7	

Appendix A: List of comments in respect of question one:

None of the above. The existing percentage is already causing hardship and an increase in arrears. People living on means-tested benefits do not have any surplus income with which to pay council tax and will be forced to cut down on food in order to do so.
Why is Herefordshire Council targeting the poorest and most vulnerable people? Why not increase council tax across the board?
It seems that lowest income families are being targeted.
They mainly live in poverty anyway so zero percent.
What about those stuck looking after family members. Oh yes no one in local councils cares about us again.
Those persons on benefits are hard-pushed as it is. There should be total exemption from council tax liability.
None this is a disgrace some people can't help the fact they can't work.
Difficult for those on the lowest income to pay anything.
If on benefits they can't pay.
These figs are a bit arbitrary.
None of these; people haven't got any extra funds to pay if they have previously had a maximum council tax reduction on low income grounds.
No percentage at all should be paid if someone qualifies for max.
None.
No increase.
It should be left at 8.5% another rise would be detrimental to those already choosing between food or heat.
If you are going to introduce this it should be on a sliding scale and people with disability or illness should be exempt.
It's going to be too much to pay, it's unfair.
It is dependent on their reason why they are below the income threshold, i.e. is a student they shouldn't be forced to pay higher rates.
The amount paid should remain the same 8.5%.
A mechanism may be needed for people who genuinely cannot meet the increases but overall I think this pricing is fair.
I will vote against any councillor who has supported this proposal.
I clicked the 16% button by mistake! I think that a gradual reduction of financial support may be appropriate, maybe from 10%, but is it possible to take individual circumstances into account rather than a blanket reduction in support?
I only tick 16 percent as there's no 8.5%.
As a person in receipt of ESA (incapacity) and maximum council tax benefit, I have recently had to start paying a contribution, which I cannot afford - to pay more is impossibility. I have already had council emergency payment to help cover this unexpected amount; how will I pay more from my budget which has NO surplus?
8.5% is fair.
The government is asking the utility companies not to raise their prices! Then why are they raising theirs? I am disabled but they still take more. Not fair at all, I struggle to heat my house but if I don't pay you first I haven't got a house but if I do then I'm cold all the time.
It should NOT increase! My husband is in receipt of DLA and we should qualify for maximum CTR.
They consume the services, so contribute towards them.
I am on ESA and DLA having to find 8.5% from my fixed income is already a struggle and we have to cut down on basic living costs to afford it. 8.5% is already above inflation rates and Herefordshire council is joining the utility companies in thinking the public are cash cows for the stripping off!!!
This is entirely dependant on various individual circumstances.
This "choice" is misleading. 8.5% is the maximum I would agree with. By "choosing" the lowest percentage offered i.e. 16% it will appear that we agree to 16% when we don't!!
People receiving the lower end of benefits are already struggling. If they have to pay more on their council tax, I strongly believe this will leave people without sufficient heating and food.
0%.
Should stay the same.
I selected the lowest option. However, I do not believe that a household on very low income should pay any more at all.
I have a daughter who has special needs and relies totally on state benefits. Having less reduction on her council tax as well as all the recent cuts, is going to make living very difficult.
This is misleading. There should be a 'no change' option.

Asking claimants on the lowest level of income to pay council tax is only a saving if you can actually recover the collect the money they are supposed to pay. It is worth noting that those who may have to pay this increased minimum amount are on what the DWP regard as the minimum income its is possible to survive on and because of this up until April 2013 these claimants had their full council tax paid for them via council tax benefit. Forcing then to pay extra when they don't have the money in the first place simply increases the costs of collection and just leaves you with a bad debt entry on the balance sheet which offsets any savings you expect to get. It is also worth noting that many of these claimants will also have been adversely affected by other changes to the welfare system so they disposal income is reduced to pretty much nil anyway.
If you do this, I will no choice other than to use the child benefit money to pay it, it is not meant for this! They will have less food then.
Less than 10%.
Should be based on their benefits.
None of the above.
At face value this appears to ask people on the lowest incomes to pay higher taxes. It would be far fairer to incorporate a different system that includes increased taxes for everyone - this system does not.
10% at most.
The current 8.5% is a struggle for people on the lowest incomes in the county. How are they supposed to be able to afford twice this?
Even 16% for a claimant on JSA; totally having to finance themselves is too high.
Declined to answer.
I do not believe any of the above options are fair and do not believe that it should increase above the current 8.5%. With increases across the board for fuel, food and other living costs, it seems unreasonable to expect people to find additional money when they already have a very tight budget. You will only drive people further into debt/arrears.
Keep the level at this year's level of 8.5%.
4500 children in this county live in poverty; it's these families you will be forcing further into poverty.
Not clear how you would protect the most vulnerable.
No more than they are currently paying especially if they are unable to work due to disability and are in receipt of disability benefits.
I find it very difficult to pay it now.
8.50%.
People on benefits should only pay a small amount as it hard now.
Any increase in liability is a disgrace! Those of us, who live on what the government choose to give us, as full time carers, are not going to receive any increase in our overall income, yet our local council wants us to pay more to fund its mismanagement of the local area.
Less than 16%, not everyone is on income support or JSA.
Taxation revenue is dependent upon the working community. There can be no excuse for driving some into benefits dependency, or subsidising council mismanagement and absurd salary scales.
If it has to go up then more than double is extremely harsh...
Given the first question there should be 0% option. This is a misleading question.
Recent rises in fuel and food costs are already pushing families on low incomes to the limit. This would result in those liable for payments falling into arrears which would involve more expense for the council.
The current level of support was put in place at that level to ensure that recipients would be able to sustain a civilised existence being able to meet a minimum standard. Any reduction will take recipients below this minimum standard and force them to prioritise between basic needs e.g. eating or heating. This reduction on top of the bedroom tax is punitive and unacceptable.
You cannot get blood out of a stone, income is going down but the council is requesting that we pay more.
Any rise in amount payable will disproportionately affect those on such limited incomes and throw budgets into disarray.
Should keep in line with national capping rates.
8.5% as now.
Existing 8.5%.
None of the above. From 8.5% to 16% is an increase 88%. From 8.5% to 24% is an increase of 182%. From 8.5% to 30% is an increase of 252%. Even the smallest proposed increase of 88% would be financially crippling for low income vulnerable disabled people.
These individuals may be unable to afford basics e.g. food and heating if you increase their council tax contribution.
It should remain as increased charges will be unaffordable for many low income households - the council will spend money pursuing people for non-payments.

List of comments in respect of question two:

<p>People should pay higher council tax for higher band properties. If they can afford to live in a big house then they should pay more not have a reduction. This is unfair to people like me who live in a smaller house, go to work and are going to have an increase in council tax payments.</p>
<p>This is attacking our most vulnerable.</p>
<p>Both of these suggestions could lead to people getting further in to debt.</p>
<p>If CTR is capped then there is no point having the banding system at all.</p>
<p>I will vote against any councillor who has supported this proposal.</p>
<p>I'm not sure what the value of a property has to do with the ability of people to pay.</p>
<p>Disabled and large families need to have larger houses, which would take them into higher bands, and they should not be penalised for that need.</p>
<p>If they are in a higher band than the reduction should reflect this.</p>
<p>It's their choice to live in such a banded area, they knew it when they moved there make it fair and make them pay.</p>
<p>If you live in a Band C or above property, you should be able to pay 100% of your council tax bill. If you can not afford that then you should down size.</p>
<p>Many bands are out of date, the size of one's home does not always correlate to the standard of living.</p>
<p>The higher the band the higher you should be prepared to pay.</p>
<p>Giving that savings are needed it doesn't make sense to subsidise benefit claimants to live in properties larger than average families in work could afford.</p>
<p>I have bought this house to give my children enough space. We have been in a difficult situation where we have left the town we were from to escape a difficult family situation as it is. I will not be able to pay this amount.</p>
<p>Again there is an assumption built in with this decision that it is unfair to ask the 'better' off to pay more. Whilst having a higher banding rate in itself does not prove greater wealth, it is a fair assumption. If someone cannot afford to stay in a high banded property, then they can move - a precedent the government have already introduced with the bedroom tax.</p>
<p>I think it would be unreasonable to expect people to have to pay at the highest band if they are in financial hardship.</p>
<p>Difficult for people in times of hardship to move so this change will unfairly penalise them.</p>
<p>If you can afford to live in a large house then pay the council tax, they can afford it cap the lower Bands B and C if you want to make a positive impact on real people's lives.</p>
<p>Again no indication as to how the most vulnerable would be protected, had this been clear I might have agreed with some of the options above.</p>
<p>Everyone who is capable of work should pay according to their property band.</p>
<p>No doubt those properties are people on a lifetime of benefits with too many kids who also have child benefit for them and don't deserve any savings because they should have had fewer children and got jobs.</p>
<p>I currently live in a Band D property so am unaffected by this proposal. BUT anyone in similar circumstances to me, a full time carer looking after disabled family members, but living in a Band E property, stands to see an increase in their liability by a multiplication factor of almost 3! Even at 16% and using your own example, someone could see their liability increase from under £4 per week to over £11 per week, and yet still not receive an increase in their income from central government. Further comments for which there is no space below: Even this questionnaire is a joke! On page 6, you ask if I am in receipt of council tax benefit! It was abolished by the government this financial year! CTR. That's what we get! And you don't even have a line for carers in the section where you ask what people do. 'Looking after family or home' just doesn't say what it is that we do!</p>
<p>If people live in bigger houses they should pay more.</p>
<p>I think people should pay on the basis of the band their property is in.</p>
<p>The banding of properties does not necessarily indicate personal income. Neither do varying bands receive a better or worse service from the council.</p>
<p>With the current economic state of the country, someone's circumstances can change over night, they can't exactly move into a smaller property overnight.</p>
<p>Should reflect banding.</p>
<p>I don't actually understand the full implications & am therefore unable to comment appropriately.</p>
<p>Disagree because people living in Band D properties will actually experience a 100% increase and not a council tax reduction (as this document suggests).</p>
<p>I don't understand how this new proposal was reached.</p>
<p>It seems fair to limit the liability, based on the premise that the means to afford an increase cannot be accurately assessed on property tax bands.</p>
<p>The designated valuation band of the property you live in is not usually related to the resident's ability to pay bills and may cause serious and potentially dangerous impact on people, for instance, if you render them unable to afford basics such as food and heating.</p>

List of any further comments in respect of council tax reduction:

I suspect that there are relatively few people living in properties above band D who are entitled to any rate of council tax reduction, so this measure would save the council very little money, but it would be disastrous for those affected. Effectively they would be forced to move, which in the case of large families would then create homelessness or overcrowding in a smaller property.
I am a carer looking after my disabled son at home as social services have never given him any funding even though he has been assessed as needing this. Therefore I only receive income support and if these changes are put in place then I will struggle to make the payments, but typical council you don't care even though I save you money by looking after my son at home with no support from any of your departments. So if this comes in and the housing association puts the rent up to affect the bedroom tax then it looks like me and my son will have to live in the car as we cant afford these changes and the rising cost of heating and food prices.
People will just get a criminal record because they cannot afford to pay
Are you then expecting people to consider moving if they happen to live in a higher banded property? What if the help they need with their C tax bill is only for a short period? Just because people live in higher banded properties doesn't mean they have more disposable income. If more people start to fall behind with C Tax, it will cost council money in court fees and bailiff fees. Is this then cost affective?
Someone who has a large family or/and is disabled may live in a band E+ property but actually have a low income, I think you need to consider their income not just what band property they are in although I can see why you are proposing this as most people in band e+ can probably afford it and should pay so its a tough one.
This questionnaire is difficult to understand and I think it would put many people off from replying to this consultation. I understand that because of all the government cuts, everyone now has to pay something towards their council tax, but it is unfair to expect the poorest people to pay more than they have before when they have not had any increase in their income.
People with low income should be protected
I understand the principal but as I have said for those that are already having to live in the cold another rise would be detrimental to the individual's health and wellbeing. Having to choose between food or heat.
I am disabled with multiple sclerosis and receive DLA. I am 60 years old and not able to work although I have worked full time for 43 years. I feel your proposals are penalising the vulnerable.
CTR should take into account a person's ability to work, which is more relevant than the band of the property. It should also consider whether there are other people living in the property who can contribute to CT or not.
I would ask that you bear in mind the financial burden placed upon family carers. We receive what can only be classed as a pittance benefit for working 60+ hours per week. People like me save the country billions of pounds every year by taking responsibility for disabled members of our families. In return we live on the bread line. I am already in negative equity each month and rely upon the generosity and understanding of friends and extended family. Without them, I would starve. That is not an exaggeration that is fact. If you go ahead with these changes it will adversely affect me and I simply will not be able to pay. I don't want to get a bed credit rating based on avoidable situations! I respectfully request that you have some kind of contingency available for certain groups of people, such as family carers, so that we can call upon it if necessary. Thank you.
It's going to be harder to survive on benefits if the council tax keeps going up. I believe that the council tax reduction should stay based on the actual tax charge for a property.
Again, designed to hit the poorest people in the country.
I believe this should definitely be implemented as it will only affect a small minority of council tax reduction claimants.
As a person in receipt of ESA (Incapacity) and maximum council tax benefit, I have recently had to start paying a contribution, which I cannot afford - to pay more, is an impossibility. I have already had Council emergency payment to help cover this unexpected amount; how will I pay more from my budget which has NO surplus? Disabled and large families need to have larger houses, which would take them into higher bands, and they should not be penalised for that need. Age and disability are especially affected by such changes. I am long term sick / disabled - but your tick box below DOES NOT WORK.
There is no extra money! After having worked all my life, I have found myself in an unavoidable position and now need help. I do not smoke, drink or take holidays - in fact, it is difficult to manage the bills so how could I find more money?! There are still many people that take advantage of the system and we are the ones, genuine claimants that are being punished - and it definitely feels like punishment!
I am disabled and I live in a 2 bedroom house so that I can have helpers/family to stay, now we have to pay more TAX for that, now we are having to pay more and more because I cannot work and the benefit I'm on isn't a lot, I struggle to "pay my taxes and be cold and hungry" OR "feed clothe and heat my house and have helpers/family here to help" I am not afraid to say who I am.... (name removed) all I have said on the form are true, as far as I am concerned I am sick of living in a place that doesn't care, I was born British and I get treated as if I am sh** on the government's shoe.
I understand times are hard but as a disabled person who cannot currently earn a living, I find I'm being squeezed financially from all sides. DLA is being changed to PIP and, of course the criteria is being raised to ensure less people are entitled to the new benefit. I don't suppose I'll get it, although I get DLA now. I can see my situation becoming so difficult and stressful that I will despair; I'm having to sell my car (I'm not entitled to mobility benefits although I cannot walk any useful distance), live alone so will not be able to get out of the house. Living costs with a disabling illness are higher for me than a non-disabled person who is unemployed (transport costs, delivery charges for shopping, specialised food, medicines, equipment etc) so I believe this new principle will cause great hardship for an already hard pressed section of society.
Maybe council tax benefit could be paid based on valuation band of the property - with those living in the smallest properties (Band A), paying a lower proportion of their council tax than those in Band D, and those above Band D getting only a token reduction - say 10%. That way, those with the worst accommodation receive most help.
Herefordshire Council should not be contemplating supporting people with Band C or above properties, for more than 1 year to enable them to either find a paying job or to sell the property to down size to an affordable property. Band C covers a 4 bedroom town property which affords a roof over one's head. I have in the past sold my house and gone to renting a smaller home when my only job didn't pay enough to keep a big extravagant house in the country.
How can it be fair and just to penalise long term disabled and unable to work by {a} doubling the 8% we currently pay, to possibly pay to 16% and up to 30% and then {B} capping at Band D, when we live in a Band E property which in turn, will force us to move house, change schools, and cause unlimited stress and not being able to find a council house because there are so many out there!! At the moment we are having to rent privately and we are on the council list of a bronze rating, so if we are forced to move, the likelihood of finding us a place is laughable realistically. I understand things need to change but at what cost.
Particularly in rural areas, there are people on low incomes struggling to pay bills but who live in a larger than 'average' property for a variety of reasons. These properties are more expensive to maintain and for this reason are often in a state of poor repair. Large properties do not necessarily equal wealth.

<p>Just because someone is of working age does not mean that we can afford to pay additional council tax costs. Through illness and disability many of us are rejected for employment opportunities. The law says we shouldn't be discriminated against, but of course we are. It is far from a level playing field. We're grateful to receive a basic income from the government, but many of us struggle to live on it. Increasing our costs is adding to the anxiety and stress which we are already newly subjected to i.e. the bedroom tax, heating costs, food costs, rent increases etc. If our council tax costs increase then the money has to come from somewhere. With one income there is no opportunity to spread the costs.</p>
<p>This is an argument about how local government is funded, not about what is right or fair. The council wants to reduce its costs because its income is constrained by National Government. But with this, it is targeting the poorest in our communities. These are means-tested benefits. If you have the means you should pay full CT, if reduced circumstances, then a reduced amount, of insufficient means, then NONE. This is another attempt to increase the burden of financial mismanagement onto those least able to cope. You should be ashamed.</p>
<p>This will cause more financial hardship, confusion and mistakes.</p>
<p>I'm not sure that people who live in high-banded homes, are on a low income should benefit from 'banding down'. It would very much depend on whether they have the option to move to a satisfactory, but cheaper home. I do believe very strongly that people on extremely low income should not pay council tax at all. I don't want to see their tax increased. We are beginning to suffer absolute poverty in this country, rural areas such as Herefordshire are badly affected. Fuel poverty, food poverty and homelessness lead to rising incidence of disease and crime, as well as promoting social unrest. I think it's a false economy at best - and insanely cruel at worst - to force ever greater demands on folks who already cannot afford to live decently.</p>
<p>I wish to point out that I am a parent of someone with special needs, who would not be able to carry out this questionnaire. I am sure there are many in the same situation, and will not be able to voice their opinions. Therefore this questionnaire is not going to show a true picture of these unfair rises.</p>
<p>No account is taken of ability to pay. The ending of 100% benefit imposed charges on people whose income is capped at 1% pa increase - benefits- or on low wages, which are also rising at less than inflation. No assessment has been made of ability to pay or if it is paid, at what cost to other essentials such as fuel and food.</p>
<p>It can take years to sell a house in Herefordshire, since we moved here four years ago I have seen houses sit on the market since we moved. So it is not an option to tell me to just sell up! We will just not be able to pay our council tax. Or my children don't eat or go to school! They are already embarrassed that I am on benefit due to all the negative press in the Daily Mail and other rubbish tabloids about people who claim benefit. One of my children refuses to eat lunch at all as his friends are aware he has free school meals, so he won't eat during the day as it is! It is not their fault that we find ourselves in this situation. Plus there is a high level of unemployment in Herefordshire so very difficult to get a job. I am trying to set myself to start a company within the next year, but now it looks as though it will be even more difficult if the reduction is also removed from low incomes earners too! Impossible to plan anything with these situations. We are living in a society of greedy people who feel that they have a right to earn more than others, have people work for them and enjoy loads of tax breaks, and pay less and be subsidised by those in poverty! Sorry but I feel very strongly about this now and it is time to set a good example and those who earn a lot can afford to pay a lot! I would do it and will once I earn a lot!</p>
<p>The premise that everyone should be treated equally is a cornerstone of English culture. Similarly taxation is based on someone's ability to pay. Council tax is an anomaly in that it is based on the value of the property where they live. If they are fortunate to live in an expensive house, then the amount of tax they pay should correspond equally with someone less fortunate who lives in a less expensive house. Please do not rig the system to help the most well off at the expense of the least well off.</p>
<p>With Herefordshire having such a large community of pension age householders it does seem that the working age claimants who may be experiencing some financial difficulties will be hit even harder in trying to get themselves back on their feet and contributing to the local economy. It is a well-known fact that pensioners provide little into the economy compared to what they take out & if Herefordshire Council looks to make up this deficit from the working age population then I foresee that we will see migration out of the area, meaning a continual decline to the local economy.</p>
<p>Many people who are disabled, old, have mental health issues while trying to live independently, find it hard to meet all costs of living. I strongly feel that all council tax are subjected to means test plus those who also live in higher bands, may also struggle to pay due to low incomes so this should be done for all.</p>
<p>The principles of this proposal seem to angle more towards the Council's desire to reduce their expenditure/budget in respect of council tax and increase the amount collected from the public. There seems to be little consideration of the impact of these proposals on top of the already financially strangling Welfare Reforms, seen over the past 12/24 months. With Herefordshire's large pensioner population, a fair number of whom are living in Band E & above properties. It seems that these proposals are effectively aimed at covering the expenditure that has to be set aside to ensure pensioners remain unaffected. It is those of working age who are the future of Herefordshire's economy, its development and potential growth yet to me, the proposal within Q1 seems to tell them that we do not see them as the future, merely a cash cow for the present.</p>
<p>I think that with the recent welfare reform changes it has become very difficult for people who are not in work to continue to live within their means. An expectation to now pay council tax is unreasonable and will, I believe lead to many more people getting into arrears with rent/council tax.</p>
<p>Save land owners and the already rich of this county more money, those who can afford to pay should pay, stop driving poverty stricken families further into debt.</p>
<p>If implemented, and I sure you will ignore voices such as my own and implement whatever rate you choose, these increases in liability are going to place families such as mine under even greater strain than we already are. This administration is engaged in cutting support for both adults and children with disability, with no regard to the consequences. Now you insult those of us who are full time carers by charging us increased amounts of council tax to fund.....Well what are we being asked to fund?! Not proper road improvements, not services for the disabled, not improvements to anything at all! All you are engaged in is a disgraceful regime of spending cuts, whilst at the same time wanting to increase the tax burden on people who are already struggling financially. I am not, however, surprised. Both centrally and locally, the Conservative party does not give a damn for those of us who exist at the bottom of the income ladder. Shame on you!</p>
<p>As noted above, I am self employed but have been very quiet for some time. I do not claim JSA or income support and I have also been hit with the bedroom tax of, 25% of the rent. If a household does not have a regular income how on earth can they be expected to find yet more money, when money is hard to come by?</p>
<p>It is believed that the government intended the cutbacks to curb excess costs of council officers employed both in numbers and top heavy salary scales, not to retain the status quo and pass the onus upon rate payers to subsidise their expenses. Should we expect officers to act as role models, accept lower salaries and pension rights, too many responsibilities have been delegated to contractors whilst council officers appear bomb proof, yet invisible other than their costing.</p>
<p>Most people would prefer a cut in services over a rise in council tax bills for people already on low incomes or in difficult circumstances. A few pounds a week can make an awful lot of difference.</p>
<p>The EIA is inadequate. For instance, it does not provide breakdown of current council tax Reduction scheme caseload by household or a breakdown of working age households by equality groups. There are no figures to support the assessment's findings.</p>
<p>Family circumstances can change suddenly due to illness, accidents or redundancies and it is not possible to move house quickly, indeed it may not be possible to move at all if the family is large or has been</p>

<p>modified to accommodate someone with a disability. The council tax banding of a family home is not indicative of the affluence of the family, especially if they have had a sudden and possibly catastrophic change in circumstances. It is a punitive measure to assess someone's needs on the value of their home.</p>
<p>My personal benefits, through being disabled after an industrial accident are being cut by this government, but as my income drops, my liability for council tax increases, increases in income should be found somewhere else rather than targeting those who can least afford an increase, I am unable to get a replacement prosthesis due to cuts in hospital budget, unfortunately as we have a conservative government we also have a conservative council running on the same morals, lets take from the unemployed, the disabled, and those who cannot afford any increase in outgoings.</p>
<p>I am extremely concerned about the poorest and most vulnerable being yet again targeted by economic factors beyond their control. Income Support/ESA/JSA etc were originally calculated as being sufficient to live on the assumption that no council tax was payable (& I am disappointed, though not surprised that there has never been a legal challenge to the changes of last year). People budgeted on whether they could afford rent etc. with that in mind. Even changes of what, to others, is 'a mere few pounds a week' can have dramatic consequences on people living on so little, so to target them with further increases could easily result in severe hardship and arrears. I urge you in the strongest possible terms to keep any increase to the absolute minimum. Bear in mind, also, that despite the protection for pensioners, the pension age goalposts have also been moved and not always in line with public pronouncements (e.g. 'Women born before 1954 will be unaffected.' Not so - I was born in 1952 and have been affected). Many people are already having to choose between eating and heating, or are reducing both because of increasing prices. Quite frankly, I think that any society that targets the poor, the sick or the unemployed is on a very slippery slope and does not deserve to call itself 'civilised'. These changes are not, and cannot be fair to everyone. I beg you to keep them to the minimum level possible. Thank you.</p>
<p>This survey has been completed on my behalf by my mother who has explained and sought my views at every stage.</p>
<p>I am badly disabled, and will never have the chance to work again. Because of Herefordshire Council's proposed increases I would like you to know that, I and no doubt thousands of other disabled people living in this community live in fear and fear of the future. Unlike the unemployed, most disabled people are unlikely to get the chance of working their way out of poverty. They are trapped and totally reliant on what little money they receive in benefit. The amount of this money is decided by law in the courts by the government and at no time does it include or allow for any compulsory payments force-able taken under threat by Herefordshire Council. Your proposed compulsory increases from 8.5% to 16% or 24% or 30% are increases of 88%, 182% and 252% respectively, will cause extreme and unnecessary financial hardship to the most vulnerable and dependent members of your community. How can you morally justify this? Do you think benefits have gone up by 88%, 182%. 252%? Of course not, that would be absurd and utterly ridiculous and any such proposed increase would rightly be considered madness. The shortfall in revenue could be obtained from other sources, such as increasing parking charges by 88% to 252%, but that would be an absurdly ridiculous increase and unfair to motorist. Or, increase the entry fee for the swimming baths or community centres, but that would be equally absurd and unfair to swimmers and sport people. All these people have choices whether to pay the increase or not, whereas your proposals for the disabled are compulsory and enforced with threats of fines, bailiffs and imprisonment, and you have the gall to say you are concerned about "fairness". Is Herefordshire Council seriously going to prosecute poor disabled people who cannot pay? Is it not enough that you are already taking away money that has been awarded and dedicated for care and, what's to stop you from doing the same again next year and the year after until the disabled on benefit are paying 100% council tax, "more fear again"! But you don't care, if you did you would not have proposed such an incredibly large increase. Your proposed increases are disgraceful. Shame on you! How low will you go. I think Herefordshire Council's proposed increases are morally abhorrent and unjust, and I will seek legal advice as to whether Herefordshire Council's proposed actions and subsequent seizure of part of a disabled persons benefit is lawful and I shall arrange a meeting with my MP at the earliest opportunity to discuss this matter. Please, re-consider your proposed increases and the effect ANY increase would have on disabled members of this community, and please take into consideration the differences between disabled peoples' benefit and unemployment benefit as the differences, like disability, are extreme and vast.</p>
<p>For those in financial circumstances which necessitate a reduction in their tax liability, it seems correct to limit liability to a reasonable upper level, such as 'bracket D' may provide. Council tax bands do not reflect the capacity to pay, as they only equate to an asset which may carry a mortgage or debt, which itself may never be realised. Also many properties still have disproportionately assigned tax brackets that have never been adjusted since the days of 'second gear valuations'. As a means of adjustment based on the tax band, it is right to limit the effect at the more expensive end of the system. However, it is also contentious to assume that a properties size or value (and hence the council tax system itself) will determine the relative cost to a council's services. As benefits for tax reduction are based on income, this should, ideally form part of the mode for calculating adjustments of the same.</p>
<p>The percentage is fair according to the band of house. To arbitrarily change the higher banding property owners to suit Band D is nonsense.</p>
<p>This is a ridiculous way to increase council tax bills and uses a method which relies on a premise which has no basis in fact. That is, that people in more affluent housing have more disposable income! What nonsense of a premise! This could easily lead to deaths in vulnerable groups through hunger and the effects of cold on groups such as the elderly.</p>
<p>Reductions in benefits, low wages, unemployment all result in households being unable to sustain themselves, increasing debt, child poverty etc. Hereford Council should not slavishly follow present government's strategies that hit the poor and vulnerable, more than they do higher income groups. Herefordshire should aim to protect the poor, disabled and vulnerable.</p>

List of any further comments in respect groups that might be affected:

This will disproportionately affect disabled people and single parents (most of whom are women), as they are most likely to be living in poverty and therefore will be more likely to be affected.
The poorest and most vulnerable members of society. Trust a Tory bully to lash out at the weakest.
Age and disability, these people can't work and are more vulnerable.
The people who stay at home to care for their disabled or elderly relatives, are people who will suffer mainly as all they get is their income support to pay for all these costs, and if this happens how many will give up and leave the Council to pay for there care; costing you even more than your price rise.
Those of us who are unable to work due to mental health difficulties are finding their health is adversely affected by the stress that the extra monies they have to find each week is already causing. I firmly believe that this group will become high suicide risks as a result. I will kill myself if I have to find more money, as I am starving to death slowly even now.
People who have an illness and cant get any more income.
How about all of the above if they are earning low wages or reliant on benefits? How about people in general? Is the council only concerned with not being seen to be discriminatory?
Disabled as they may live in a band E because they need all the adaptations, close to amenities or need to live in a bungalows etc. with a higher council tax banding, then what they would live in if they were not disabled.
People with a disability who are of working age may not be able to work if their disability is profound. They would previously have been exempt from council tax payment. But now they are expected to contribute when their DLA has not increased in line with the amount they are expected to pay.
Disabled people will be more effected as they have less chance of a living wage, or income maximising when faced with financial crisis.
Young people and people that are below the breadline.
Single parent families, the unemployed and self employed on a low income.
People on a low income, due to illness or disability cannot afford another increase.
Severely disabled.
True disability limits what you can do in so many ways, including employment. I feel this group should be unaffected by these changes.
People with disabilities, long-term illnesses and those with young children (especially single parents) cannot be considered as eligible for work - they have other needs and commitments. The proposals would definitely affect these groups.
This could affect already financially stretched people with disabilities.
Disability - it's hard enough surviving on the benefits we get at the moment, without more of it being taking away.
Those on benefit are struggling to pay extra bed tax as it is and this will only make things worse. Maybe the news and newspapers need to be let known what you intend on doing?
Age and disability are especially affected by such changes.
Disability - if you are ill or disabled worrying about how to pay the bills leads to extra illness and even depression. Widows and widowers struggle as they have already lost an income.
Give to the rich and take from the poor, Why not ship all the "POOR" people off somewhere and leave the rich here?
Disabled people who have to rely on benefits which are already due to decrease in the near future.
Those with a disability like my husband who are unable to work (and I am in receipt of carers allowance and therefore income support), will be made to move as we will not be able to afford to live in our present home if our CTR forces us to pay even more money.
The proposals will affect people on Disability Living Allowance and Employment Support Allowance, if like me, through an accident while going to work, I have ended up being disabled and having to endure several operations before I can contemplate trying to get back to work. Prior to my current claim, I have only ever claimed for 3 weeks in 36 years of my working life.
All people are affected due to higher fees from their income and less services because of the squeeze. Monies will just get eaten up for other things not public services.
As explained above, the disabled who are unable to work for whatever reason will suffer.
What about working age disability claimants who are unable to work due to long term illness and are retired because of this? This rule is nonsensical and ageist. I am of working age but because I had to give up my job, which I loved, due to a serious chronic disease, I am now penalised. Yet if I was older, I would not be affected. How is this fair or make any sense?
The disabled and single occupants - please see above notes.
Age and disabled.
All groups, families and individuals on low incomes. CT is a means-tested benefit. Previously the council had determined that some in our communities did not have sufficient means to pay any CT. Have their incomes suddenly significantly improved? No! So you will move them into debt/further debt. Stop punishing the poorest for the gross mismanagement of sycophantic politicians.
Possibly disabled people depending on disability, may not understand changes or be able to call into Council to query.
The disabled are already suffering from cuts, out of all proportion to their numbers. The elderly and young families will suffer more than others, if their income is already compromised; single parents may find it impossible to keep their children safe & healthy.
We are 60 years old and in receipt of DLA and carers allowance, we struggle to pay all the daily bills, if the council tax payable and the bedroom tax rises anymore, we do not have any more cut backs to make as our benefits are now capped at 1%.
Disabled or those with special needs who don't and cannot obtain a paid job.

To all, if their income is insufficient.
Age apart, because the regulations prevent changes to pensioner regulations, these proposals clobber all low income working age people equally.
Pregnant people and those on maternity are very vulnerable and need to be cared for and nurtured, so that they can nurture the future citizens of our county. Old people on basic state pensions do not receive enough to live off in this country. People who are unable to work due to looking after their children will be affected. People who are disabled have been ostracised by the tabloids and now the benefits system. Single parents are being made to be responsible for absent parents, this is just not fair, especially in cases of domestic violence. Children in particular are being affected as the state will threaten their adult carers with fines or imprisonment for non-payment. This does not help the council or our community. The council will be left with a huge administrative and legal bill chasing up all those who cannot pay. The council needs to raise money, not spend more money chasing the non-payers who cannot afford to pay it. I am bringing up my children responsibly and teaching them how to behave well, that has a value to society rather than leave them to bring themselves up whilst I struggle to find work to pay unfair bills. Fuel bills have risen grossly, our boiler blew up in March we have no heating now and there are no government bodies available to help with that. Our roof is leaking in one area and I cannot afford to fix it and do not know how to fix it myself. I paid a roofer and he botched it and will not return to fix it. We are all sleeping in my bedroom to keep warm already, and we are only just starting winter and the energy companies are threatening to increase the bills again! We will have to wait till next summer till we don't have the pressure of heating.
Single parents, who are struggling to feed, clothe and provide power and heat for their families.
My son is severely learning disabled will never be able to work in order to get himself off benefits and has limited funds available, he is purely dependant on DLA/SDA and I think due to his circumstances there should be no liability to pay council tax.
Younger people,
As explained above, this policy will not be fair to everyone. You are asking the most well off to pay less, at the expense of the least well off.
The elderly should be exempted.
It is affecting people by their age obviously. Reasons for this explained above.
Very low income families and those with a disabled member on benefits are already severely stretched financially, choosing between heating and eating. This could well be the straw that breaks the camels back.
Age related claimants of workable age. In areas of higher unemployment or lack of career prospects makes it difficult to get suitable employment. JSA claimants over 50 tend to find greater challenges when securing suitable employment.
Single parents and other vulnerable adults e.g. those with health problems.
Once again the disabled are being hit by charges they can't afford as many are unable to work, the hardship is greater for them – why hinder the most vulnerable again?
Disability: cuts to benefits will reduce their money, which in turn will not help their budget.
All.
My husband and I are both disabled.
Disabled people would work if they could actually get a job. I couldn't care less about the rest, Its their own fault.
Anybody who lives on benefit alone. Some of us have no choice. I have 2 sons with learning disabilities who need full time care and support. Neither I nor my wife has the option of going out to work, so we can only live on what central government gives us, and that is certainly falling in real terms, at least whilst having to shell out more and more of our limited income to pay for the support that they receive because of the cuts this council has made, and to support this councils' desire to spend, spend, spend!
It could affect anyone living in a property larger than they need, which could affect older people whose partner is no longer with them for whatever reason.
Disabled people will probably be the worst affected.
There is a risk, by increasing CT for the elderly living in high band properties, that some elderly people, especially those living alone, will find increases difficult to apply. However, there is wider principle for increases for high band properties which often have more than one income, and anomalies thrown up by these increases should be dealt with by amendment to central government legislation, highlighted by unitary authorities.
Again see comment above. Although no detailed figures have been made available, it is generally the case that the female led households are higher proportion of CT Reduction scheme beneficiaries, so therefore, will be most seriously affected.
Disability
This will particularly affect people with disabilities who may be of working age but are unable to work.
As written above, this is going to affect those who are disabled and are having their benefits cut by central government.
Largely covered above.
People like me, with substantial physical disabilities of working age and already living in Band D on fixed income, this now needing to cover all other escalating costs. The percentage choice is too much, those with a disability may need more space.
You say "fair to everyone". How can it be fair to take such a large increase from the most venerable members of your community, people who are already in financial hardship and despair? How can this be fair, or "fair to everyone", how does it benefit "everyone" to see the most vulnerable members of their community suffer further financial hardship, how can that be in the community interest and if it is, then what does that say about your community and what kind of community are you trying to create? You have a duty of care to every member of this community, but surely your duty of care must be greater to those who are the most vulnerable and needy. In forcing the disabled to pay this compulsory increase, you are discriminating against the most vulnerable group of people in this community. How can that be fair?
Only as per the above argument, though there may be a case to be made for those groups in extenuating circumstances who could be more adversely affected, such as the disabled or pregnancy, in much the

same way that pensioners are omitted.
Property rich versus property poor.
These will affect vulnerable people such as adults who need protection as they may find changes difficult to understand. Also they may affect the elderly for many and complicated reasons, for instance, they can be very proud and may pay bills to the detriment of their ability to purchase basics such as food and heat, and consequently cause increase in cold related deaths.
Low income families, single parents, long-term sick/disabled. the increase in numbers of people in red poverty, including children demonstrates inability to meet current expenditure- the present charges are already too high for many.

Letter 1

Comments on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation

I am concerned that the people deciding this will, in the main, have no idea what the impact of paying £2.72 per week for council tax will have on our poorest residents. (I include myself in the former category).

I agree with the principle that everyone should be expected to pay something to contribute towards local services – the question is, how much.

There is little information about the numbers of people affected (7,238 claimants are mentioned as receiving average support of £15.24 per week, elsewhere 7,090 claimants are mentioned as receiving an average support of £18.06 per week – are these individuals or households, and what percentage of the total number of individuals or households is that?). There is no information about rates of collection from these people since April 2013. I consider this makes it difficult to make a judgement on this matter. It is also unclear whether these figures take into account the potential rises in council tax of 1.9% or 5% currently being consulted on in the budget consultation.

The prevalence and necessity of food banks in the County suggests that a large increase in contributions to Council Tax for some in society may be too much of a burden. The context of rising household fuel prices cannot be ignored.

16% is rather a large difference from 8.5% (and I'm surprised 24% and 30% could even be considered – but perhaps collection rates suggest there is some capacity?) Why isn't 10% or 12% being considered (presumably there is some reason for those figures being chosen)?

Yet again, I am at a loss to understand why central government sees fit to exempt all pensioners, regardless of income.

Council Tax is an outdated system, and a blunt tool for financing local services. Reform is overdue. The principle should not be one of making the poorest pay more while the richest pay comparatively less.

I would like to know what outreach to those people who will be affected there has been, and what response there has been, perhaps via CAB and other groups supporting people in these circumstances. I repeat, many of us have no idea how little money some people manage their households on.

Also, there is little clarity of which public services will still be available from the local council to the general public, and there should be clear communication about what people are paying for.

Letter 2

Changes to Council Tax Reduction scheme

A personal contribution to the consultation

This is in response to a letter from Herefordshire Council regarding the above, and not wishing to reply by an impersonal questionnaire.

I strongly disagree with the proposal put forward as:

- It targets the poorest residents who are in the least position to pay
- The hardest hit are those like me, who are unable to work through disability/illness and totally rely on financial support
- It discriminates against residents who happen to live in properties of Band E or above. Claimants of CTR who live in these properties do not have more income than those in the lowest Band properties
- The proposed increases are huge – from 7.5% to 21.5% not to mention a proposed general increase of Council Tax by around 5% - this is shocking and upsetting

My example of living in Band E property – the proposal means a potentially staggering 5 fold increase from £150 to £790 – how can the Council justify this and tell me how do I pay this?

You say you will protect the most vulnerable – where are your proposals to do this and what are they?

I agree in principle to every resident of Herefordshire contributing to council tax but it needs to take into account the ability to pay and so be fair. The system should not generate anxiety, worry and fear in people who are already in financial poverty through no fault of their own. Please reconsider and propose an increase in line with inflation.

Council Tax Reduction

This appendix details how proposed changes to council tax reduction would affect those receiving this support. The table lists their weekly award of council tax reduction award for the relevant property band that applies.

The green column represents their award under the old council tax benefit system (pre April 2013). The amber represents the 2013/14 position under council tax reduction, while the pink columns represent their new awards that would be received under the various additional liability reductions. The amounts in brackets represent the new award should a Band D restriction also be applied.

1) A couple with or without children on Income Support or income based Jobseekers Allowance

Band	2012/2013 CTB/week £	2013/2014 CTR/week 91.50%	future projections		
			84%	76%	70%
A	19.54	17.87	16.41	14.85	13.67
B	22.69	20.76	19.06	17.24	15.88
C	25.94	23.73	21.78	19.71	18.15
D	29.18	26.69	24.51	22.71	20.42
E	35.66	32.62	29.95 (24.51)	27.11 (22.71)	24.96 (20.42)
F	42.15	38.56	35.41 (24.51)	32.03 (22.71)	29.51 (20.42)
G	48.64	44.51	40.85 (24.51)	36.96 (22.71)	34.04 (20.42)

2) A single claimant or lone parent on Income Support or income based Jobseekers Allowance

Band	2012/2013 CTB/week	2013/2014 CTR/week 91.50%	future projections		
			84%	76%	70%
A	14.58	13.3407	12.25	11.08	10.21
B	17.02	15.5733	14.30	12.94	11.91
C	19.46	17.8059	16.35	14.79	13.62
D	21.88	20.0202	18.38	16.63	15.32
E	26.72	24.4488	22.44 (18.38)	20.31 (16.63)	18.71 (15.32)
F	31.61	28.92315	26.55 (18.38)	24.02 (16.63)	22.12 (15.32)
G	36.48	33.3792	30.64 (18.38)	27.72 (16.63)	25.53 (15.32)

* it should be noted that of our working age caseload, 91% live in properties of Band C or below.

Equality Impact Assessment Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)

Service Area	Revenues and Benefits Service
Policy/Service being assessed	Council Tax Reduction Scheme
Is this is a new or existing policy/service?	Existing Policy
If existing policy/service please state date of last assessment	29 August 2012
EIA Review team – list of members	Council Tax Reduction Project Group
Date of this assessment	20.12.13
Signature of completing officer (to be signed after the EIA has been completed)	Anne Phillips
Name and signature of Head of Service (to be signed after the EIA has been completed)	Peter Robinson

Policy - CTRS	Relevance/Risk to Equalities																							
State the Function/Policy /Service/Strategy being assessed:	Gender			Race			Disability			Sexual Orientation			Religion/Belief			Age			Socio-economic			Priority status For EIA		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CTRS – Reduce the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay 30% of the council tax charge.			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓	✓				✓		✓		
CTRS – Reduce the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 16% of the council tax charge (with a Band D limit)			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓	✓				✓		✓		
CTRS – Reduce the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 24% of the council tax charge (with a Band D limit)			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓	✓				✓		✓		
CTRS – Reduce the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 30% of the council tax charge(with a Band D limit)			✓			✓			✓			✓			✓	✓				✓		✓		

Stage 1 – Scoping and Defining

(1) What are the aims and objectives of policy/service?

The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) has been in place since 1st April 2013 and replaced the National Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme. CTRS is a locally determined system of council tax support. The aim of the CTRS scheme is to provide financial assistance to council taxpayers who have low incomes.

Persons who are of state pension age (persons who have reached the qualifying age of State Pension Credit) are protected under the scheme in that the calculation of the reduction they are to receive has been set by Central Government.

For working age applicants however, the reduction they receive is to be determined by the local authority.

This Equality Impact Assessment looks at the potential for **not only** protecting pensioners (as required under the legislation) **but also** retaining a large amount of the protections already present for working age within the existing CTRS scheme carried forward from the CTB scheme.

Where a **working age claimant** applies or continues to receive council tax reduction, it is proposed that the reduction will be calculated on the same rules as the current CTRS scheme except for the following;

- Reduce the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 16%, 24% or 30% of the council tax charge.
- Reduce the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 16%, 24% or 30% of the council tax charge (with a Band D Limit)

These changes will apply from 1st April 2014.

Central Government has not been prescriptive in how an authority should protect vulnerable groups, but points to the council's existing responsibilities including the Child Poverty Act 2010, the Disabled Person Act 1986 and the

	<p>Housing Act 1996, as well as the public sector equality duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>The current level of assistance (<i>7,090 claimants and average amount per week of £18.06 per claimant</i>) is provided for pension age claimants, details for working age claimants is given at the end of this assessment.</p>
<p>(2) How does the policy/service fit with the council's wider objectives?</p>	<p>All persons within the council's area who have a low income may apply for support and assistance with their council tax.</p> <p>By making an application, providing evidence of their income and household circumstances, their potential entitlement for support will be calculated in line with Central Government prescribed requirements for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.</p> <p>The maintenance of a full reduction scheme, with few changes from the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme fits with the corporate objectives in that it meets, as far as possible, equality and sustainability.</p> <p>The reduction scheme assists the local economy and also ensures, as far as possible within the constraints on a reduced budget, that persons on a low income will be able to meet their council tax liability.</p> <p>Pension age claimants will not see a reduction in their support however, working age cases will see a reduction in the support they currently receive.</p>
<p>(3) What are the expected outcomes of the policy/service? Who is intended to benefit from the policy/service and in what way?</p>	<p>The desired outcomes are as follows;</p> <p>Pension Age Claimants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That all pensioners receive the level of support required by

regulations set by Central Government (Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Prescribed Requirements) Regulations 2012);

- That all pensioner claimants or existing working age claimants who rise to pension age are able to receive council tax reduction in line with the regulations; and
- That all pensioner claimants continue to receive the correct level of council tax reduction at all times.

Working Age Claimants

- That all working age claimants are still able to receive council tax reduction but the level of reduction payable will **reduce**; and
- That all working age claimants continue to receive the correct level of council tax reduction at all times.

<p>(4) Does this policy/service have the potential to directly or indirectly discriminate against any particular group?</p> <p>Please identify all groups that are affected and briefly explain why</p>	<p>RACE</p> <p>NO</p> <p>The support scheme does not take race into account when calculating the level of support</p>	<p>AGE</p> <p>YES</p> <p>The support scheme takes into account age when calculating the level of support available.</p> <p>Pensioners will not see any reduction in the support paid (as they are protected under regulations set by central government).</p> <p>Working age claimants will be affected or lesser degree due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 16%, 24% or 30% of the council tax charge. or • Reduction of the maximum level of council tax reduction so that taxpayers have to pay at least 16%, 24% or 30% of the council tax charge (with a Band D limit) 	<p>GENDER</p> <p>NO</p> <p>The support scheme does not take gender into account when calculating the level of support</p>
	<p>RELIGION/BELIEF</p> <p>NO</p> <p>The support scheme does not take religion or belief into account when calculating the level of support</p>	<p>DISABILITY</p> <p>NO</p> <p>The support scheme continues to have in-built protections for disability in the form of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the award of additional premiums for disablement; • disregarding higher levels of income where a claimant is in remunerative work and is disabled; and • there is no requirement to have non dependant deductions where a claimant is disabled 	<p>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</p> <p>NO</p> <p>The support scheme does not take sexual orientation into account when calculating the level of support</p>

<p>(5) Are there any obvious barriers to accessing the service?</p>	<p>No – customers will continue to access the reduction scheme in an identical fashion to the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The approach of the council has been to provide a range options for claiming and customers are encouraged to make a claim at any time.</p>
<p>(6) How does the policy/service contribute to promotion of equality?</p>	<p>The Council Tax Reduction Scheme provides essential help towards the council tax liability for all claimants on a low income. By continuing to assess entitlement on a mean tested basis, similar to the national approach to means tested benefits, the scheme is equitable albeit that the level of support overall may be reduced to working age claimants.</p>
<p>(7) Does the policy/service have the potential to promote good relations between groups?</p>	<p>Due to the nature of the cuts required in the level of council tax reduction, all working age claimants will see a reduction to their current entitlement, however the way that the council is introducing the changes by maintaining the means test, allows the most vulnerable to receive a relatively higher level of support</p>

<u>Stage 2 - Information Gathering</u>	
<p>(1) What type and range of evidence or information have you used to help you make a judgement about the policy or service?</p>	<p>Extensive modelling from existing data. The modelling has been based on changes to the existing Council Tax Benefit Scheme administered by the council.</p> <p>Modelling information has included number of working age claimants and amount of council tax benefit paid (<i>7238 claimants and average amount per week of £15.24 per claimant</i>), claim numbers and benefit paid across council tax bands, range of income types and household make-up.</p>
<p>(2) What consultation/ information has been used?</p> <p>What new consultation, if any, do you need to undertake?</p>	<p>A full consultation with the public is being undertaken as required by the legislation (Local Government Finance Act 2012). Whilst pension age claimants are protected, the authority will still, as part of the consultation process, look to pension age claimants and pensioners generally to respond to the consultation itself.</p> <p>In respect of working age claimants, it is essential to consult with the group, as being of working age; they will be directly affected by any changes decided by the council.</p> <p>The consultation process is comprehensive and encourages a full response to the changes to the current reduction scheme, (notwithstanding the fact that the authority is obliged to implement the scheme determined by Central Government for pension age claimants).</p> <p>Interest groups will also be directly consulted as part of the process.</p> <p>Public consultation is to take place during the period 28th October until 9th December 2013.</p>

<u>Stage 3 – Making a Judgement</u>	
<p>(1) From your data and consultations is there any adverse or negative impact identified for any particular group?</p> <p>Is there any evidence of needs not being met?</p> <p>e.g. language or physical access barriers; lack of appropriate resources or facilities</p>	<p>To be completed after consultation is complete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAB - identified single parents particularly women – reliance on benefits due to difficulty finding employment • Herefordshire Headway – persons with head injuries sometimes unable to face changes and impact on their income and go into denial resulting in debt problems • RSL's – working age are already being impacted on other welfare reforms namely the spare room subsidy which reduces housing benefit entitlement • Example Remarks from consultation as at 20th December 2013:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Existing % of CTAX payments causing hardship. ○ Herefordshire are targeting the poorest and most vulnerable
<p>(2) If there is an adverse impact, can this be justified?</p>	<p>To be completed after consultation is complete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic impact – for working age subject to reductions in housing benefit due to the spare room subsidy and benefit cap
<p>(3) What actions are going to be taken to reduce or eliminate negative or adverse impact?</p>	<p>To be completed after consultation is complete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discretionary Housing payments available for housing benefit customers who are impacting from other welfare reform issues • The Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy is being revised and publicised • The reductions in minimum support are being phased in over a three year period, 1st April 2014 – support reduced from 91.5% to 84%, April 2015 76%, April 2016 70%.

(4) Is there any positive impact?

Does it promote equality of opportunity between different groups and actively address discrimination?

To be completed after consultation is complete

- **Yes – all working age customers will be treated the same**
- **Legislation separates the working age from the pension age. Pension age not affected by changes.**

<p><u>Stage 4 – Action Planning, Review & Monitoring</u></p>	
<p>If No Further Action is required then go to – Review & Monitoring</p> <p>(1) Action Planning – Specify any changes or improvements which can be made to the service or policy to mitigate or eradicate negative or adverse impact on specific groups, including resource implications.</p>	<p>Following consultation, the changes proposed are to be reviewed. The scheme will be reviewed annually, thereafter.</p> <p>The council has established a full project plan to ensure that changes are introduced correctly, accurately and on time.</p>
<p>(2) Review and Monitoring</p> <p>State how and when you will monitor policy and EIA Action Plan</p>	<p>Full monitoring of scheme implementation will be undertaken on a monthly basis in line with the accepted project plan.</p> <p>The Revenues and Benefits Service will undertake monthly and quarterly collection of data.</p> <p>The council will review the policy annually. It is expected that due to changes in legislation and funding, that the level of council tax support available will change annually.</p>

An Equality Impact Assessment on this policy was undertaken on 20th December 2013.

Local Benchmarking

Other local authorities are considering further adjustments to the current scheme and consultation has taken place. In 2013/14, Shropshire agreed the:

- Abolition of second adult rebate (like Herefordshire)
- Removal of child benefit disregards
- Removal of earnings disregards
- Reduction of capital limit to £10k.

The three district councils that make up the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service mirrored the old council tax benefit regulations when devising their CTRS for 2013/14. However, for 2014/15 they have consulted on the following proposals:

- Limiting the maximum liability CTR can be based on (Wychavon are consulting for 20% maximum liability)
- Removing the disregard for child benefit
- Reducing the capital limit.

The picture is similar in Gloucestershire with the districts retaining the same CTR rules as were in place for council tax benefit for 2013/14, but some are consulting on making changes for 2014/15. The proposed changes include the following:

- Limiting the maximum liability CTR can be based on
- Abolishing second adult rebate
- Restricting the amount of CTR awarded to a Band E property.

MEETING	COUNCIL
DATE:	17 JANUARY 2014
TITLE OF REPORT:	GENERAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT – HEREFORD AND WORCESTER FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY CONSULTATION RESPONSE
REPORT BY:	CHAIRMAN OF THE GENERAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Classification

Open

2. Key Decision

This is not an executive decision

3. Wards Affected

County-wide

4. Purpose

To inform Council of the work undertaken by General Overview and Scrutiny Committee's task and finish group on Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority's Community Risk Action Plan 2014-2020 Consultation and the response submitted to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

5. Recommendation

THAT: the report be noted.

6. Key Points Summary

- On 18 November 2013, Council passed a Notion of Motion requiring General Overview and Scrutiny Committee to prepare a report on Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority's Community Risk Action Plan 2014-2020 Consultation.
- A task and finish group was established to examine the proposals and form recommendations.
- The finalised report was approved at the meeting of General Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 January 2014.
- Due to the 10 January 2014 deadline for responses to the consultation, the task and

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Gemma Dean, Scrutiny Officer
on Tel: (01432) 260088

finish group report was endorsed by Councillor Seldon and the Leader of the Council, Councillor Johnson on 9 January. The report was then submitted to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

- Council is asked to note the report.

7. Alternative Options

7.1 There are no Alternative Options.

8. Reasons for Recommendations

8.1 To comply with the Notice of Motion passed on 18 November 2013.

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix One – General Overview and Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Report

10. Background Papers

10.1 None identified.



Task & Finish Group Report

**Hereford and Worcester
Fire and Rescue Service
Consultation Response**

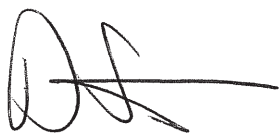
Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service Consultation - Review Report

1 Chairman's Foreword

- 1.1 I have pleasure in presenting this report following the Notice of Motion passed by Herefordshire Council in October 2013.
- 1.2 The contents of this report are self explanatory. Therefore, I will not repeat any here. However, I will say that the proposals do not appear to bring the service to a point of collapse but they seem to remove some of the resilience within the service. Only time will tell how detrimental this will be.
- 1.3 I would like to thank Mark Yates, Chief Fire Officer, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority and Rob Allen, Staff Officer, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority for attending a Task and Finish Group meeting and offering their views in a frank and forthright manner.
- 1.4 My thanks also to Cllrs Lloyd-Hayes and Preece for their invaluable contributions, and our Officers, Gemma Dean and Ben Baugh.
- 1.5 I commend the report and its recommendations.

Councillor Alan Seldon

Chairman, General Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Signed: 

This report is endorsed by Councillor Anthony W Johnson, Leader of Herefordshire Council.

Signed: 

2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 Herefordshire and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority are currently undertaking a consultation exercise on proposed service changes. The full Community Risk Action Plan and consultation documents can be found at <http://www.hwfire.org.uk/consultation/>
- 2.2 At the meeting of Full Council on 18 October 2013 a Notice of Motion was passed which required General Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the consultation and form a response which would go before Full Council in January 2014. A copy of the Notice of Motion is attached at Appendix One.

3 Composition of the Task and Finish Group

- 3.1 Members of the Task and Finish Group were:

Councillor Alan Seldon - Chair of the General Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chair of this Task and Finish Group
Councillor Marcelle Lloyd-Hayes
Councillor Robert Preece
Scrutiny Officer - Gemma Dean
Democratic Services Officer - Ben Baugh

4 Context

At What Were We Looking?

- 4.1 The consultation questionnaire deals with a large number of proposals from within the Draft Community Risk Action Plan 2014-2020. The Group determined that they would only look at the proposals that deal specifically with Herefordshire.

To Whom Did We Speak?

- 4.2 In December 2013, the Group convened a meeting and conducted an interview to gather as much background information. In doing this, the Group spoke to the following people:
- Mark Yates, Chief Fire Officer, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority
 - Rob Allen, Staff Officer, Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority

What Did We Read?

- 4.3 The Group was provided with a large amount of background information to undertake this review. The documents that were used and are appended to this report are:
- Meeting of Full Council on 18 October 2013, including minutes and the Notice of Motion <http://go.m-gov.eu/064M4986>
 - Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service Draft Community Risk Action Plan 2014-2020
http://www.hwfire.org.uk/PDF/fire_authority/fra_agenda/fra_agenda13/CRMP2020Draft-1-10-13.pdf
 - Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service consultation documents <http://www.hwfire.org.uk/consultation/>

5 The Proposals

5.1 Question 5 of the consultation document refers to the proposals that would impact Herefordshire. These proposals are:

Proposal 1: The removal of one of the two wholetime fire engines from Hereford fire station

Proposal 2: The removal of one of the two on-call fire engines from each of Bromyard and Ledbury fire stations.

Proposal 3: North Herefordshire – the removal of one of the two on-call fire engines from Leominster fire station **or** closing Kingsland fire station. South Herefordshire – the removal of one of the two on-call fire engines from Ross-on-Wye fire station or closing Whitchurch Fire Station.

Proposal One

5.2 The Task and Finish Group were concerned with the reduction of one full time fire engine that the capacity to deal with emergencies would be greatly affected. Specifically, issues were raised concerning the sparsity of Herefordshire and whether the reduction of one wholetime fire crew would affect the capability to mobilise specialist appliances. The Group were advised that the specialist appliances do not have a primary crew. At present, the two fire engines are manned by four and five wholetime firefighters. If a call came in for specialist appliances, the wholetime firefighters or the retained firefighters (if suitably trained) would take the required vehicles to an incident. Therefore, there should be no change to the arrangements if the proposal were implemented.

5.3 The Group raised the unique geographical area of Herefordshire and in particular, the increased risk of flooding. Then Group were concerned that the proposed changes may adversely affect the ability to respond to floods. The Group were advised of the distinction between unpredictable water rescue incidents and predictable flooding events. The Environment Agency provided such specialist forecasting that nowadays it was possible to anticipate flooding and as such ensure that sufficient cover was available in the County. This would still be the same scenario under the new proposal.

5.4 The Group still had concerns over the sparsity of Herefordshire and in particular the continued ability of the Hereford fire station to support responses to incidents in market towns. The Group were also concerned about the particular concern in Herefordshire regarding road traffic collisions.

5.5 The Group were advised that although the removal of 22 firefighters at Hereford station appeared significant, this actually meant a reduction from 9 to 5 on duty firefighters. Furthermore, the resources would remain the same in terms of specialist appliances and retained firefighters. Hereford do provide specialist appliances but the arrangements going forward under this proposal would be no different to those already in place for towns such as Kidderminster.

5.6 The Group were advised that it was easier to recruit retained firefighters in Hereford centre and that the availability of these firefighters was generally very good. The Group were concerned that in light of the reduction in wholetime firefighters, that the demand on these retained firefighters would increase significantly. The Group sought an assurance that the demands on retained firefighters was closely monitored and that the possibility of recruiting more retained firefighters was kept open.

- 5.7 The Group were advised by Mr Yates that he did not have any concerns about the proposed reductions concerning day-to-day fire cover. Mr Yates further confirmed that he was comfortable with the proposals for Hereford based on his professional judgement formed on experience around country and expectations associated with a conurbation of 60,000 people.

Recommendation 1: That the geographical nature of Herefordshire should be carefully considered when proposing any reduction in staff and vehicles.

Recommendation 2: That the increased demands that will be placed upon retained firefighters should be carefully monitored.

Proposal Two

- 5.8 The position with regards to the Bromyard was that there qualified acceptance of the position by local firefighters but only if absolutely necessary.
- 5.9 The position regarding Ledbury had not been established but the Group were advised that the local town council had made comments and that a Local Ward Member had not welcomed the proposals.
- 5.10 The Group were advised that the best that could be hoped for would be 'reluctant acceptance' of the proposals and that the proposals would not be being brought forward but for the significant financial pressures facing all public services.
- 5.11 Mr Yates spoke highly of the professionalism by staff at all of the fire stations during this difficult period of change.

Proposal Three – Leominster/Kingsland

- 5.12 The Group were very concerned about the sparsity of North Herefordshire. More specifically, the Group were concerned about the rural nature of the road network.
- 5.13 Mr Yates advised that, along with the Stanford Bridge area of West Worcestershire, these areas had the sparsest fire cover in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.
- 5.14 The Group also highlighted the fact that there were a large number of industrial units within Leominster.
- 5.15 The Group resolved that in light of the areas of concerns raised, that it would be the preferred option to retain one on-call fire engine at Leominster and Kingsland.

Recommendation 3: That one on-call fire engine should be retained at Leominster and Kingsland station.

Proposal Three – Ross-on-Wye/Whitchurch

- 5.16 The Group were advised that the Whitchurch fire engine was not available 16% of the total time and 25% during the day. By comparison, Kingsland was not available 1% of the total time.
- 5.17 The Group felt that the area of Whitchurch was better serviced by a good road network in comparison to North Herefordshire. The Group were further advised that there no issues with cross-border co-operation.

5.18 The Group were keen that should Whitchurch station be closed, then the possibility of mothballing the station to reopen in the future if the financial situation improved. Mr Yates advised however that given the downward trajectory of call outs and the maintenance costs associated with retaining an unused asset, the likelihood of Whitchurch being re-opened would be difficult to foresee.

5.19 The Group were made aware that the Local Ward Member and council were currently undertaking their own review of the consultation and would be providing a report to Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service.

Recommendation 4: That should Whitchurch station be closed, then the possibility of mothballing the station is appropriately considered.

General Observations

5.20 The Group were concerned about the disproportionately high number of road traffic collisions in Herefordshire. The Group were advised that firefighters would often take directions from paramedics on the scene until they had stabilised the casualties, whereas in the past emphasis had been on the 'golden hour' to free individuals and take them to hospital. The Group were pleased to hear that firefighters were trained to trauma care level.

5.21 The Group were firmly of the view that wherever possible, in the closure of any fire stations or decommissioning of vehicles, that these be mothballed for future use should the financial situation improve. The Group were advised that whilst this may be difficult to do with regards to fire stations, that consideration was being given to holding some appliances as a strategic reserve.

5.22 The Group were keen highlight that continuous training of the retained firefighters would be crucial to the success of these proposals.

5.23 The General Overview and Scrutiny Committee seek an assurance that, despite the removal of fire appliances as proposed for Herefordshire, the necessary cover would be retained given the rural nature of the county.

Recommendation 5: That when any fire station is closed, then the possibility of mothballing the station is appropriately considered.

Recommendation 6: That when any fire equipment is removed, then the possibility of holding this equipment as a strategic reserve is appropriately considered.

6 **Recommendations**

Recommendation 1: That the geographical nature of Herefordshire should be carefully considered when proposing any reduction in staff and vehicles.

Recommendation 2: That the increased demands that will be placed upon retained firefighters should be carefully monitored.

Recommendation 3: That one on-call fire engine should be retained at Leominster and Kingsland station.

Recommendation 4: That should Whitchurch station be closed, then the possibility of mothballing the station is appropriately considered.

Recommendation 5: That when any fire station is closed, then the possibility of mothballing the station is appropriately considered.

Recommendation 6: That when any fire equipment is removed, then the possibility of holding this equipment as a strategic reserve is appropriately considered.

7 **Appendices**

Appendix One – Notice of Motion

Appendix One

AMENDMENT TO NOTICE OF MOTION – 18 October 2013

This Authority is concerned by proposals currently under consultation regarding a merger of the Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service with Warwickshire FRA. Such a combined Authority stretching from the Welsh Borders to Northamptonshire, may result in Herefordshire having even less influence than it does at present – an unwelcome democratic deficit.

This Authority whilst welcoming closer collaboration with any neighbouring Fire and Rescue Authority, would require assurance that any merger would not have a deleterious impact on the people we represent.

In addition, this Authority has concerns about a proposed reduction of staff or vehicles at the Hereford Fire Station for the following reasons: Hereford City is the only 24 hour station in the County; as a standalone station it is isolated from any other 24 hour support. Herefordshire covers an area larger than Worcestershire but relies on part time or retained fire fighters.

Worcester Fire Station, however, is supported by Kidderminster, Redditch, Bromsgrove whole time cover with additional back up from Droitwich, Evesham and Malvern.

Herefordshire is further disadvantaged by the current road infrastructure and lack of motorways. Any reduction in personnel could seriously affect the response times to the life threatening road traffic accidents and call outs to flooding incidents in this County: therefore this Authority whilst understanding the financial pressures facing all public bodies at this time would not support a reduction in staff, pumps or equipment at Hereford Fire Station without significant assurance of how service levels will be maintained in the county.

In order to inform the development of the response to this consultation which closes on 10 January, this Council resolves to request that the General Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider the impacts of the proposals to inform the response that Full Council will submit.