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| MEETING: | Council |
| MEETING DATE: | 6 March 2015 |
| TITLE OF REPORT: | Leader's report |
| REPORT BY: | Leader of the council |

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

To receive a report from the Leader on the activities of Cabinet since the meeting of Council in December and for the period of the administration.

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 between the last report to Council on 12 December and 20 February 2015 is provided at appendix A; seven were taken under the general exception provision (less than twenty-eight but more than five days'

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

notice) and in each case the relevant overview and scrutiny committee chairman was notified. None were taken under the urgency provision (less than five days' notice). One decision (Marches Enterprise Zone) was subject to call-in by the general overview and scrutiny committee. Following thorough scrutiny and all questions having been responded to, the committee endorsed the decision making no further recommendations.

Finance

- 4 Over the last four years we have bridged a £50m gap between income and expenditure whilst maintaining essential services; we have also kept council tax increases below 2%. Despite everything we are now in a position to deliver a balanced budget and contribute to general reserves, providing resilience for the challenging times ahead. Much remains to be done, but we have established budget plans for the next two years to meet what we know will be serious challenges.
- 5 Members have worked strenuously throughout these challenging times to ensure that public funds are prioritised to support those in need, to improve health and wellbeing outcomes, and to create and maintain a successful economy. Officers have faced considerable changes in both their working environment and in the services they deliver yet remain dedicated to ensuring those services are delivered as effectively as possible.
- 6 Cost reduction in accommodation has been an important part of overall financial performance. Apart from the move from Brockington there are several other sites where moves have taken place, are under way or are planned, to rationalise the buildings we use. The disruption to work flow and systems has been minimal and all staff are to be commended for their part in this smooth transition

Children and young people

- 7 Safeguarding services have improved from 'inadequate' to 'requires improvement'. The terminology is not complimentary but in fact this represents a significant move in the right direction recognised recently in a letter from the Department for Education noting "Our overall assessment is that the council has made good progress since we last visited in April 2014". The establishment of the multi agency service hub (MASH), having worked through initial teething problems, has settled down and is playing a major role in this vital work. We can in no way be complacent about the further improvements needed but can be assured that clear plans are in place and being delivered. I wish to place on record my thanks to all the staff, members of the cabinet and health & social care overview and scrutiny committee, and partners who have contributed to this vital work.
- 8 Herefordshire's families first programme has been accepted into the second phase of the national troubled families programme, following a successful phase one which saw 'turning around' our target of 310 families (267 families have reduced crime/anti-social behaviour and children are attending school regularly and 43 families have adults into continuous employment). This performance has secured an additional £1.2m funding into the county to continue this focussed work.
- 9 I am proud that our looked after young children and care leavers are so involved in improvements in Herefordshire. Over the year we have put in place our pledge for looked after children which was created with them; we've had our annual celebration event recognising each individual's achievements; we now have two care ambassadors to represent the views of our children and young people; and most

recently a new website has been developed by them.

- 10 Despite a series of reforms designed to toughen up the exams system, Herefordshire is one of only six local authorities to have improved. The percentage of children and young people 16-19 who were not in employment education or training continues a downward trend and is among the best in the West Midlands region.
- 11 A strategy to inform the future development and management of our schools estate is in development. The impending financial impact of the water and damp issues at Colwall primary school will be offset by the recent Government announcement of a grant to towards building a permanent replacement.

Adults & Wellbeing

- 12 Herefordshire's social care system faces unprecedented challenges including demographic change, implementation of the Care Act in 2015/16, greater integration with health by 2017, an increase in the number of people diagnosed with long term conditions such as dementia or developed as a result of lifestyle choices such as smoking, and reducing resources. Despite these challenges, we have maintained good social care performance and significantly improved the financial sustainability of the service. A peer review of our adult social care recognised the progress that had been made in transforming our services and confirmed our direction of travel.
- 13 Public health transferred from the NHS to the local authority in 2013 and since then progress has been made on transforming the commissioning of pathways ranging from sexual health to annual health checks. The wellbeing innovation fund has been launched, and a range of community based developments strengthening community resilience have commenced. Understanding Herefordshire our joint strategic needs assessment continues to be used extensively and the team has undertaken extensive consultation and engagement to deliver the health and well being strategy for Herefordshire by the end of March 2015.
- 14 Strategic housing has delivered its targets on affordable housing, despite challenging economic conditions; we have transformed our housing solutions process, and consistently avoided placing people in bed and breakfast accommodation and prevented homelessness through a range of partnerships with other welfare and housing providers. We have also developed new pathways for older peoples housing, and other specialist need such as learning disability and mental health.
- 15 To meet our challenges we know we need to work collaboratively with a range of providers, communities and other stakeholders to create a single community-based support system across the county focused on health and wellbeing. This requires a significant cultural and transformational change across the whole of local government and the wider public sector and the development of a new relationship with individuals and communities where individuals take more responsibility for their own care, and families and communities are supported to help those individuals to be as independent as possible. Not an easy task. We have in place, with our health partners, plans to deliver the transformation needed to achieve this ambition and have already delivered changes which have enabled adult social care to bring their spend under control.

Economy

- 16 We have been investing significantly in improvements to our roads network and been successful in securing external funding to support this work.
- 17 Hereford's livestock and retail market sites are proving to be very successful bringing new business and jobs to Herefordshire. The operators of the new livestock market have confirmed that they are attracting more customers from further afield than ever with records for sales regularly being broken. The retail market, despite predictions of negative effects on High Town, attracts a growing number of visitors who would otherwise have gone elsewhere without damaging trade in High Town. Many traders in fact report an improvement in trade.
- 18 Expressions of interest have been received from groups wishing to invest in Hereford's iconic Buttermarket, and the process of selection is underway. Together with money identified for the refurbishment of the old part of the city this will contribute to our intention to grow the city as a whole.
- 19 Following submission to the secretary of state in September 2014, the core strategy is currently undergoing the examination process. This is the largest piece of planning undertaken by the council, setting out as it does the basis for the economic future of the county. Together with the economic master plan in development, these documents will form the blueprint for what must be done if we are to attract badly needed businesses, investors, jobs and higher wages. The establishment of the core strategy is also central to defence against predatory developers.
- 20 The new University project continues to progress and, on its own, would make a huge contribution to our economy. Realisation of its full potential however will depend on overall development of the Herefordshire economy.
- 21 The Marches local enterprise partnership (LEP) has been instrumental in securing some £45m of government funding for the county to date. A joint executive committee has been established comprising the Leaders of the partner authorities, to provide democratic accountability for decisions of the LEP. The LEP is about to begin construction of the list of priorities for the next bidding round and members will be advised of progress.
- 22 The enterprise zone at Rotherwas goes from strength to strength with continuous enquiries from would be customers. Fully developed the zone would provide some 4,000 jobs with the additional associated spend in the county.
- 23 Comments are made that only businesses in the county move there. Even if this was universally true (and it is not) the zone enables growth for those moving to expand whilst they vacate smaller properties making them available to smaller start up companies.
- 24 With our partners in Gloucestershire and the delivery partner BT, we are on our way to delivering a new high speed fibre optic broadband network across both counties, enabling around 90 per cent of homes and businesses to have access to fibre broadband.
- 25 Construction of the energy from waste plant being developed jointly with Worcestershire County Council is well under way with the basic groundwork virtually complete. The latest projections show reduced costs of approximately £41m over the

life of the plant against doing nothing.

- 26 It is worth remembering that all viable and proven options were thoroughly considered before deciding on this particular solution. Our present landfill arrangement has little more than 10 years life left before we would be forced to an alternative. The lead time to any alternative is significant and the cost of landfill rises ever more sharply.
- 27 This council has done a tremendous job given the pressures, resources and conditions over the last four years. I would like to thank the Chief Executive and his entire staff team for their work, willingness and good humour under the most trying of circumstances. My thanks go also to all members for the, generally thankless, hours they put in and in particular, to those members who will retire in May.

Community Impact

- 28 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

- 29 Cabinet and cabinet members have paid due regard to the public sector equality duty in their decision-making, as set out in the relevant decision reports.

Financial Implications

- 30 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

- 31 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

- 32 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

- 33 None.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Executive Decisions

Background Papers

- None identified.