

COMMUNITY FORUMS

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

25TH MAY, 2006

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To receive a report on the April - May 2006 round of Community Forum meetings.

Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

Recommendation

That the report be noted.

Reasons

To comply with the agreement that issues raised and discussed at Community Forums should be presented to Cabinet after each round of meetings.

Considerations

1. A full report of the Forum meetings is set out at Appendix 1. The issues raised provide a useful indicator of local concerns for Cabinet to consider.
2. In addition to advertising in more than 30 Parish Magazines and in the local press, colour posters were issued to all Councillors for display in their local area. Posters were sent to every Parish Clerk, with a letter explaining the importance of Forums and asking them to inform all Parish Councillors.
3. Sue Brazendale, a representative of the Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly, attended three forums and has arranged for a note about the forums to be placed in the HVA newsletter.
4. Attendance varied. Figures were:

Hereford City	20
Golden Valley	10
Ross-on-Wye	7
North Herefordshire	12
Central Herefordshire	3
East Herefordshire	10
5. Total attendance was 62. This was less than half the number who attended the January forums. 31 people (50%), completed feedback sheets. Of these, 21 (68%) had attended a Forum before. Of those who had attended before, 19% said they would attend again and two people were not sure whether they would attend again. 9 people (30%) had not attended before. Of these, 8 (89%) would attend again and one

was not sure whether they would attend again. No-one said they would not attend again. As only 50% of those who attended Forums completed the feedback sheets, no reliable conclusions can be drawn.

6. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was very worthwhile and 1 not worthwhile at all, 32% rated the Forum very worthwhile (5); 39% rated it quite worthwhile (4); 25% rated it OK (3); and 4% rated it not very worthwhile (2). No-one said it was not worthwhile at all.

Consultees

Community Forum Chairmen; Cabinet Members and the Leader of the Council.

COMMUNITY FORUM MEETINGS: APRIL -MAY 2006**AGENDA ITEMS PRESENTED AT MORE THAN ONE FORUM****The Age Concern “Older People’s Voices” project (All Forums)**

Presentations were given by Mary Fielding and Judith Ellis, who had been commissioned by Age Concern to conduct the study.

The presenters explained that they had been funded for six months to find out how older people in Herefordshire and Worcestershire wanted to be involved in, and have their voices heard in, matters that concerned them. Given the limitations of time and funding, their study had focused on a market town (Ross), the City of Hereford and a rural area (Leintwardine). They had sought the views of older people through various organisations and groups, as well as by approaching older people directly. Their questions had been designed to stimulate discussion. They had received over 100 responses, mainly from individuals, but some from organisations representing groups of older people. Issues raised included the rising cost of Council Tax and fuel, attitudes and behaviour towards older people, access to and availability of health services, transport, fear of crime and access to information about help and services available. Older people received most information from the local press and local radio, and general press and TV. Respondents felt that the best ways to get their voices heard were through groups and organisations, local councillors and MPs and local press and radio. Forums and public meetings were low on the list, partly because of transport and health issues, but also because meetings were often held in the evenings. It was not felt that there was a need for new arrangements, but that existing structures and procedures should be simplified and that a good communications system should be developed, with resources to maintain it. Discussion points raised included the question of why, given that older people were a substantial and growing proportion of the population, there was a need for a special voice for them, and what was meant by “older people”. The concerns and needs of over 50s, for example, were very different from those of over 70s. A Report of the study would be presented to Age Concern at the end of May, and the findings would be made available to the public.

The following responses were given to questions raised:

- Neighbourhood Watch organisations and the Churches could provide very good points of contact for older people, where they could get information and make their views known. These organisations were often more aware of all the people in their communities, and, in some areas, the Churches issued a free news sheet to everyone in the area;
- Herefordshire Council could consider arranging for “Herefordshire Matters” to provide information specifically aimed at older people;
- Older people had a greater need for services, but were put off by too much paperwork;
- Older people were more comfortable in their own surroundings with familiar people, and would be more likely to express their views if issues were taken to them at, for example, day centres. Day Centre co-ordinators could then be used to feed back views;
- Many older people were happy to attend a Councillor’s surgery held in the local shop, and most were happier to speak to a Councillor who was well known in the area;
- There was a problem with rural bus services – older people received free bus passes but were unable to make full use of them because there were no buses;
- The Council was developing a single phone number for Council Services, where people would be able to get information and make comments on Council Services. This would need to be regularly publicised;
- The study suggested that, at present, ICT would not be the best way to provide information to older people, but this was changing all the time and in 10 – 20 years time, this could be the normal means of communication;
- There was scope for organisations such as Age Concern to work with inter-generational groups. Older people and younger people had much to learn from each other, and the

Youth Council could provide a model for an Older People's group. However, it was recognised that younger people would be more likely to travel to meetings;

- There was a great deal of information available to older people and targeted on older groups, but most people tended to disregard it. It was only when they really needed something that they wanted the information;
- An important element in communicating with older people was health and safety education. This was particularly important where hospital beds were reducing and the aim was to enable people to live in their own homes for as long as possible;
- Much of the voluntary sector depended on volunteers from the older age groups;
- A web page would be set up with the results of the study;
- The new "PayDay" organisation was an Age Concern initiative, and it would be interesting to follow its progress;
- Although it was acknowledged that young disabled people had special needs that could be seen as more pressing than older people's concerns, young disabled people were smaller in number than older people and there were already a number of organisations committed to providing services for them;
- Carers were a special group in particular need of information about the help available to them;
- Recognising that it was necessary for organisations to approach older people, rather than the other way round, it was suggested that Parish Councils, using their local knowledge and contacts, could appoint older peoples' champions.

Coping with Climate Change (Central Herefordshire, Ross-on-Wye, North Herefordshire, East Herefordshire, Golden Valley)

Presentations were given by Trish Marsh, the Sustainability Manager for Herefordshire Council, and Matthew Turner, an Assistant Sustainability Officer for Herefordshire Council.

The presenters explained the current situation regarding climate change. One of the major causes of climate change was the burning of fossil fuels. There was a target of 60% reduction in Carbon Dioxide emissions by 2050 in the UK. Evidence of climate change was the hurricane off the coast of Nova Scotia in 2004. This was the most northerly hurricane ever recorded, and in March 2004, the first hurricane ever recorded in the South Atlantic occurred. Hurricanes were caused by a rise in sea temperature above 25°C. Although hurricanes occurred far from the UK, the effects could be felt here. There were linkages between climate change and biodiversity, forestry, air quality and diversification. Facts emerging were that we would experience higher fuel prices in future, for example, electricity costs would rise by a third in 2005-6, and gas prices by almost two thirds, and oil prices had increased by 110% in 2004-5. It was necessary to plan for inevitable climate change. Mitigation measures included saving energy, reducing travel and offsetting what could not be avoided. We could also adapt by planning for the increased risk of flooding and changing farming practices and crops. Herefordshire Council was promoting biomass power and heat systems because they retained wealth in local communities, provided increased supply security and were cost effective. The Council was also encouraging Carbon Management Action Plans in the public sector, including schools, the police and the Primary Care Trust. The launch of the Council's Climate Change Strategy would be publicised. At present 40% of emissions came from agriculture and 52% from energy use. Savings in emissions had been made year on year since 2000-2001. In the future, winters would be up to 35% wetter, and summers up to 30% dryer. The Wye flood indicator had increased steadily since 1980. Realistic measures to address the problems of climate change were reducing travel, saving energy and using products from companies that offset CO₂ emissions by, for example, tree planting.

The following responses were given to questions raised:

APPENDIX 1

- Although solar panels on all new housing would be helpful, there was a slow payback (around 50 years), and other ways of conserving energy were necessary;
- There were national targets for recycling, and penalties for the use of landfill. The Council was doing everything possible and practicable to increase the use of recycling and discourage waste, but there were problems for rural areas that needed to be addressed. Although it was accepted that global warming was part of a natural geological process, there was still much that people could do to mitigate the damage done by CO₂ emissions;
- Energy Conservation Grants were concentrated in areas of deprivation, but the Energy Advice Centre could provide information and advice on the availability of grants;
- Because lifestyles had changed over the years, we were all using more resources;
- Over-packaging of goods was a problem that would need to be tackled nationally;
- Cycleways were built as part of other road schemes, such as the Roman Road, but would be very costly to build otherwise;
- The Council and other employers were developing staff travel plans to try to reduce car use;
- Education was an important feature of the climate change strategy. Schools were involved in this and this would draw in parents and grandparents;
- Other sources of information were the Council's Carbon Management Action Plan, the Energy Saving Trust web site and the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre;
- A wind turbine to provide all the power needs of the average house would cost £10-20K and would require planning permission. However, a small turbine to provide around a third of power needs, which would bolt to the house, would cost around £1,500. With Government incentives to use renewable energy, there would be a 3 – 4 year payback period, and as the cost of electricity rose the proportion of energy cost saved would increase;
- Although the link between CO₂ emissions and climate change was not proven, the weight of scientific evidence suggested a link. It would be irresponsible to do nothing and because the eco system was delicately balanced, even a small change could make a big difference;
- Herefordshire Council was working with an organisation which promoted recycling and conservation in business. Businesses such as shops sometimes felt that lighting their shop windows was a cost effective way to increase trade, and energy-saving measures would need to produce savings to be attractive to them;
- The aviation industry was excluded from carbon management measures on political grounds, but some airlines were offering passengers the opportunity to pay more for tickets to fund tree planting;
- Everyone could help conserve water supplies by using water butts in their gardens and using showers rather than baths;
- Measures were being introduced to ensure that new buildings would be energy-efficient;
- One way of enforcing recycling would be to collect only recyclable materials fortnightly and only non-recyclable waste in alternate weeks. The Council had no powers at present to force people to recycle and had no wish to be too draconian. The waste collection service had to be realistic, deliverable and cost-effective. The best way forward was to get people to understand the importance of recycling waste;
- The cost of recycling meant that in some rural areas it would not be cost-effective;
- There was one waste site in the county where it would be possible to extract methane for use and this was being explored;
- Bio diesel was being produced locally at Bishop's Castle and it was likely that, with the incentive of tax breaks and the new design of cars, more farmers might grow crops to produce fuel;
- The new Leominster Police Station would be highly energy-efficient, and a new village hall at Rock would be a model of energy-efficiency;

Central Herefordshire, Bartestree Village Hall	Tuesday 4 April 2006
Present: Cllr B Matthews (Chairman) Cllr DB Wilcox (Cabinet Member) Cllr M Wilson Cllr J Guthrie Cllr Mrs S Robertson	Trish Marsh, Sustainability Manager, Herefordshire Council Judith Ellis, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Age Concern Tony Geeson, Head of Policy and Performance, Herefordshire Council Sue Brazendale, Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	3

Agenda

- Coping with Climate Change
- The Age Concern “Older People’s Voices” project
- Questions and answers

Coping with Climate Change

See main report.

The “Older People’s Voices” project

See main report.

Other issues:

- It was suggested that each Parish could be asked to nominate a representative to attend forums;
- The Council was developing a single telephone number for queries about Council Services. It was suggested that Age Concern might utilise this as a contact point;
- A scheme had been implemented locally for older people to have fridge containers for information about all their medication so that, in the case of emergency, all the information would be readily to hand.

Hereford City, Shire Hall, Hereford	Thursday 6 April 2006
Present: Cllr D Fleet (Chairman) Cllr R Phillips (Cabinet Member) Cllr P Edwards Cllr Mrs G Powell Cllr Mrs P Andrews Cllr Mrs U Attfield Cllr Mrs E Taylor	Mary Fielding, for Herefordshire & Worcestershire Age Concern Peter Evans, Area Services Manager, Herefordshire Council Highways & Transportation Department Tony Geeson, Head of Policy & Performance, Herefordshire Council Marc Willimont, Principal Environmental Health Officer, Herefordshire Council Graham Dunhill, Environment Director, Herefordshire Council Sue Brazendale, Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	20

Agenda

- Dealing with Litter
- The Age Concern “Older People’s Voices” project
- Questions and answers

Dealing with Litter

Peter Evans, the Council’s Area Services Manager in the Highways and Transportation Department, explained that the Council was taking an integrated approach to environmental issues to address direct services, such as street cleaning, dog fouling and graffiti, and indirect services, such as highways maintenance and ad hoc repairs. The Council aimed to engage the community, and had set up a Streetscene hotline, for reporting incidents, on-site record sheets to record public toilet cleaning, Highway inspectors and Town Monitors. There were a number of strands to the strategy for dealing with environmental issues in the future, including education, design of new buildings and infrastructure, performance indicators and enforcement. Current performance was assessed in terms of engineering (bin location, toilet monitoring, methods of working), education (targeting schools, engaging staff, working with businesses, the “lay-by safari”), and enforcement (fly-tipping, breaches of planning regulations, dog-fouling). The new Clean Neighbourhood Act would give the Council powers to impose and enforce fixed penalty notices. These powers had previously been limited to the police. Litter enforcement under this Act was due to commence in mid-April. The Council had a range of vehicles for cleaning, sweeping and collecting waste and 28 staff engaged in cleaning operations. There was a dedicated janitor for Hereford City.

In response to questions raised, the following answers were given:

- The fixed penalty would be £100, reduced to £60 if paid within 14 days;
- Money collected through fixed penalties would be retained and used by the Council;
- There was no definition of “litter” in the Clean Neighbourhood Act, but guidance on its application suggested it would include cigarette ends and chewing gum;
- There were initiatives for involving the community in cleaning, but the Council had to be aware of third party liabilities in this respect;
- There would be dedicated Highways Inspectors who would patrol known “hotspots” to approach offenders, warn them, take details and issue tickets. Members of the public wary of approaching offenders directly, could report them to the inspectors, or at other Councils venues;

- The Council would consider the question of dog bins filling up quickly and frequency of emptying;
- The Council could not use people serving Community Service Orders. Only registered charities could do this. However, this would include Parish Councils;
- Offenders could refuse to provide ID. Only the police had powers to require ID.
- New bins were designed for stubbing out cigarettes, and pouches were available for cigarette ends. The disposal of cigarette ends was a cultural issue, and publicity would help to address the problem;
- 50 – 60 schools had been involved in the street scene initiative. Whilst younger children were keen to be involved it could be more difficult to engage teenagers. Most schools were working hard to educate children about litter.

The “Older People’s Voices” project

See main report.

Other issues:

Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly

Sue Brazendale, of the Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly, explained that the VSA was an umbrella organisation representing and supporting all voluntary and community groups in Herefordshire. They aimed to influence the planning and policies of strategies affecting the voluntary sector. Assemblies took place on an annual basis, allowing people to come together to discuss issues affecting the sector, share good practice and agree common concerns and views. The Assembly would then work to ensure that the views expressed were taken into account in shaping policies. Information was displayed at the Forum, and leaflets were available for those wishing to know more or to become involved.

Eign and Rotherwas Sewage Works

Marc Willimont, the Principal Environmental Health Officer for Herefordshire Council, outlined the current situation in relation to the ongoing problem of smells from the Sewage Works. He explained that, following a meeting in late 2004 of the Residents and Welsh Water Liaison group (RAWW), Welsh Water had been asked to implement a number of significant improvements at the Eign works to minimise odour. Although this work was completed in summer 2005, complaints continued. Welsh Water then proceeded to implement the second stage improvements, the installation of odour control equipment at the filter towers at both Eign and Rotherwas. However, following the failure of one of the filters, Welsh Water agreed to replace both filters with new systems, which it was expected would considerably reduce odour. The Council had agreed this work, and would review the performance of the replacement plant when it was operational. The failure of the filter resulted in slippage of the agreed timescales to address the issue. However, it was thought that the eventual outcome would be better, since the filters had both been entirely replaced. The Eign filter would be replaced in autumn 2006 and the Rotherwas one as soon as possible after that. It was noted that complaints had reduced since the Eign filter had been out of action.

Questions and answers

Free bus travel for older people

Cllr Fleet explained that the only change that would occur would be that the current half price bus travel would change to free travel. There had been some confusion as a result of certain publicity relating to the time of travel. Although off-peak travel was the statutory minimum, Herefordshire had decided to allow travel at any time. People could travel to a destination outside the area, but could not get off the bus outside the area and then get on another bus. The only route where this did not apply was the Cardiff route, where free travel was allowed only as far as Abergavenny.

Other questions

- The Victoria footbridge would be closed for repair from May to September. The Council had considered options for a temporary bridge, but had rejected them as too costly. The cost of spanning the river would be £0.25m, and no support could be placed in the river. Using a ferry would not be economical or practicable. Bailey bridges were no longer available;
- There was a planning application for an aerial on Hampton Park Church. Notices should have been placed on adjacent buildings. The application had not yet been considered, and it would be decided on its merits. Councillor Mrs Taylor was aware of the issue, and would ascertain the current situation;
- The traders at the Wednesday and Saturday markets had decided they did not wish the market to be held in High Town. There were signs advertising the markets. The Council received charges for the use of High Town for the French and Farmers markets;
- Although most HGV drivers were aware of the improved Roman Road route, avoiding the City centre, Marc Willimont would raise the issue of better signage with the planners to maximise the use of the road by traffic heading west.

Other issues

It was noted that the Shire Hall was unsuitable for access by disabled people. Suggestions for alternative suitable venues would be welcome.

Similarly, any suggestions for ways to attract more people to forums would be welcomed. Daytime meetings would limit attendance of working age people.

Ross-on-Wye, John Kyrle High School, Ross-on-Wye	Tuesday 25 April 2006
Present: Cllr G Davis (Chairman) Cllr D Rule (Cabinet Member) Cllr M Cunningham Cllr G Lucas	Matthew Turner, Assistant Sustainability Officer, Herefordshire Council Mary Fielding, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Age Concern Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation, Herefordshire Council Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	7

Agenda

- Coping with Climate Change
- The Age Concern “Older People’s Voices” project
- Questions and answers

Coping with Climate Change

See main report.

The “Older People’s Voices” project

See main report.

Other issues:

- Herefordshire was an area of low unemployment and relatively low Council Tax. It was also one of the healthiest counties.

North Herefordshire, Green Lane Methodist Church, Leominster	Thursday 27 April 2006
Present: Cllr J Stone (Chairman) Cllr R Stockton (Cabinet Member) Cllr S Bowen Cllr J P Thomas	Trish Marsh, Sustainability Manager, Herefordshire Council Judith Ellis, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Age Concern Sue Brazendale, Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly Andy Tector, Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards, Herefordshire Council Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	12

Agenda

- Coping with Climate Change
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Coping with Climate Change

See main report.

The “Older People’s Voices” project

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Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly

Sue Brazendale, of the Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly, explained that the VSA was an umbrella organisation representing and supporting all voluntary and community groups in Herefordshire. They aimed to influence the planning and policies of strategies affecting the voluntary sector. Assemblies took place on an annual basis, allowing people to come together to discuss issues affecting the sector, share good practice and agree common concerns and views. The Assembly would then work to ensure that the views expressed were taken into account in shaping policies. Information was displayed at the Forum, and leaflets were available for those wishing to know more or to become involved.

Questions and answers:

- Any difficulties with the Council’s web site should be reported to the Council so that they can be addressed;
- A sign placed on a green area saying “No ball games” had been removed within a day. It would be helpful if signs could be made more difficult to move, but the Community Support Officer should be informed as their local knowledge might help to identify the culprits;
- A suggested item for a future forum agenda was school meals in the county, and what use was made of locally produced and organic food;
- If bus shelters were made more substantial, they would be likely to be used by local youths for purposes other than waiting for buses.

East Herefordshire, St Katherine's Hall, Ledbury	Monday 8 May 2006
Present: Cllr T Hunt (Chairman) Cllr DB Wilcox (Cabinet Member) Cllr R Mills Cllr D Rule Cllr R Stockton	Matthew Turner, Assistant Sustainability Officer, Herefordshire Council Judith Ellis, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Age Concern Stephen Oates, Head of Highways & Transportation, Herefordshire Council Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	10

Agenda

- The Age Concern "Older People's Voices" project
- Coping with Climate Change
- Questions and answers

The "Older People's Voices" project

See main report.

Coping with Climate Change

See main report.

Other issues:

Leadon Bank Residential Home

Councillor Rule explained that Leadon Bank was a Registered Residential Care Home and, as such, had no provision for nursing care. There were plans for "extra care" flats, where residents would live independently, but with occasional nursing care available when needed. Residents requiring 24 hour nursing care would need to move to a Registered Nursing Home to receive that level of care. Local Authority Social Services Departments purchased places in private Nursing Homes. The Council had a responsibility to improve the residential care home provision in the County, and was working in partnership with Shaw Homes, a reputable organisation which managed care homes on behalf of the Council. However, Leadon Bank had never been intended to provide nursing care.

Public toilets

The Council had a comprehensive plan to improve the provision of public toilets. This would mean better quality provision, but a reduction in number. The Council had provided a budget of £200,000 a year for the improvement and maintenance of toilets. When capital became available from selling old buildings, it could not simply be allocated to a specific project. Capital released in this way went into central funds, which were then allocated between Council services as agreed by the Council. The project to improve public toilets would take several years, and existing facilities would not deteriorate at the same rate. It was suggested that an interim review might be conducted to check whether the comprehensive plan was achieving the aims in the right way.

Questions and Answers

APPENDIX 1

- Forums were advertised in the local press and by means of posters displayed on local notice boards. Poor turn-out at Forums would be discussed at the meeting between Chairmen, Cabinet members and the Leader of the Council;
- The Council contracted with Jarvis for street cleaning. Jarvis decided on the most appropriate equipment and methods of cleaning, but it was acknowledged that there might be specific areas where cleaning was less effective than it should be. It was recognised that educating the public about litter was an important element in keeping the streets clean;
- The issue of waste lorries backing over grass verges would be taken up with the Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards;
- It was important to recognise that the Council provided over 700 public services, and all tax payers contributed to the overall good of the community, even though they may not benefit from all the services.

Golden Valley, Peterchurch Village Hall	Thursday 11 May 2006
Present: Cllr D Taylor (Chairman) Cllr P Edwards (Cabinet Member) Cllr N J Davies	Matthew Turner, Assistant Sustainability Officer, Herefordshire Council Mary Fielding, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Age Concern Peter Evans, Area Services Manager, Herefordshire Council Highways & Transportation Department Sue Brazendale, Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	10

Agenda

- Coping with Climate Change
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Coping with Climate Change

See main report.

The “Older People’s Voices” project

See main report.

Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly

Sue Brazendale, of the Herefordshire Voluntary Sector Assembly, explained the purpose of the VSA, and provided information about their work.

Questions and answers:

Responses to questions raised were:

- It was difficult to separate out rural areas where there was no waste recycling, when distributing leaflets about recycling;
- Parish Councils could make arrangements for temporary recycling facilities, but would have to be responsible for managing it;
- The construction of passing bays on the Bridge Sollers to Madley road was on the programme for 2006-7, and work was due to start July-August 2006;
- The Area Services Manager in Herefordshire Council’s Highways & Transportation Department would investigate the absence of any weight limit on the bridge at Bridge Sollers and report back via Madley Parish Council;
- Signs would be placed on the Brecon to Hereford road to direct traffic to the improved Roman Road;
- A meeting would be arranged to discuss how the parish could conduct its own traffic survey;
- Severn Waste were contracted for 25 years to provide waste services for Herefordshire and Worcestershire. It was a matter for Severn Waste to find ways to address new directives and regulations introduced since the contract was awarded;
- The planning application from Estech remained open. The Council was awaiting detailed responses to the two points they had been instructed to consider following the judicial review;
- Decisions on planning applications were based on material planning reasons.