

AGENDA

Cabinet

Date: **Wednesday 21 September 2016**

Time: **2.00 pm**

Place: **Council Chamber, The Shire Hall, St Peter's Square,
Hereford, HR1 2HX**

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

For any further information please contact:

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If you would like help to understand this document, or would like it in another format, please call Sarah Smith on (01432) 260176 or e-mail sarah.smith1@herefordshire.gov.uk in advance of the meeting.

Agenda for the meeting of Cabinet

Membership

Chairman **Councillor AW Johnson**
Vice-Chairman **Councillor PM Morgan**

Councillor H Bramer
Councillor DG Harlow
Councillor JG Lester
Councillor PD Price
Councillor P Rone

AGENDA

	Pages
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE To receive any apologies for absence.	
2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest by Members in respect of items on the Agenda.	
3. MINUTES (TO FOLLOW) To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2016.	
4. FOUR YEAR FUNDING SETTLEMENT For cabinet to consider recommending to Council accepting the four year central government funding settlement.	7 - 24
5. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR THE PERIOD 2016-2019 To approve the communications strategy with associated communication protocols for the period 2016-2019.	25 - 64
6. INTERIM POSITION STATEMENT UPON HOUSING DELIVERY To approve an interim position statement on housing delivery.	65 - 74

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Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	21 September 2016
Title of report:	Four year financial settlement
Report by:	Economy and corporate services

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates and because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the county.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

County-wide

Purpose

For cabinet to consider recommending to Council accepting the four year central government funding settlement.

Recommendation

THAT:

- (a) **cabinet determines whether to recommend to Council acceptance of the four year central government funding settlement for 2016-17 through to 2019-20.**

Alternative options

- 1 It is open to cabinet to recommend alternatives to accepting the four year settlement. However, should not accepting the deal result in further funding reductions, compensatory savings proposals must be identified.

Reasons for recommendations

- 2 The council's budget and policy framework rules require that cabinet share their recommendations to Council on budget and policy framework items.

Key considerations

- 3 The four year financial settlement offer was made as part of the 2016/17 final central government funding settlement in February 2016. The offer, if accepted, will confirm Herefordshire's revenue support grant, rural services delivery grant and transitional grant funding up to and including 2019/20.
- 4 The Secretary of State wrote to all local authorities' leaders and chief executives in March 2016 with further details of the four year settlement offer, a copy of the letter and annex are provided at appendix 1 and 2. The offer requires an efficiency plan to be produced showing the benefits that will be gained from those that wish to accept it.
- 5 The offer excludes the current business rate income top up grant that Herefordshire receives (£6.9m in 2016/17). The offer letter goes on to say that for those that accept the four year offer there will be no changes to the business rate tariffs and top-ups will "not be altered for reasons related to the relative needs of local authorities". This implies that there may be changes as a result of the 2017 revaluation of business rates, new rateable values are due to be shared later in September 2016. The result of revaluation changes are expected to remain fiscally neutral but in doing so may mean a change to the value of any top up grant.

Background

- 6 The council has seen significant funding reductions and budget pressures since 2010. The council has risen to this challenge by delivering £59m of savings in the financial years 2010-11 to 2015-16, and is targeting an additional £28m in the financial years 2016-17 through to 2019-20. This gives total savings for the financial period 2010-11 to 2019-20 of £87m.
- 7 The current savings plan is shown below; by accepting the funding offer this plan remains appropriate.

Directorate	2016-17 £m	2017-18 £m	2018-19 £m	2019-20 £m	Total 16-20 £m
Adults and wellbeing	4.1	2.3	1.8	1.7	9.9
Children's wellbeing	1.6	1.3	1.4	1.0	5.3
Economy, communities and corporate	5.2	3.4	2.3	2.3	13.2
Total	10.9	7.0	5.5	5.0	28.4

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Josie Rushgrove, head of corporate finance tel (01432) 261867

- 8 Successfully delivering savings of this scale requires longer term planning; knowing the grant element of longer term plans enables increased accuracy in targeting the financial challenges ahead.
- 9 If the offer were not accepted council funding would continue to be allocated under the current existing yearly process. The annual allocations could be subject to additional reductions to the current offer dependant on the fiscal climate and the need for central government to make further savings to reduce the national deficit. There is at this stage no indication of the potential levels of support which could be expected under such a system, and the council would be less able to rely on longer term plans. It is also possible, although currently not considered likely, that if national policy changed during the settlement period funding allocations could increase.

The four year funding deal: 2016-17 to 2019-20

- 10 The four year funding offer is shown below. The offer excludes a number of significant grant funding streams but does provide a degree of increased funding certainty. The offer has been labelled as a guaranteed minimum grant funding envelope however central government reserves the right to change the settlement due to unforeseen circumstances.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	£000	£000	£000	£000
Revenue Support Grant	17,470	10,090	5,370	620
Rural Services Delivery Grant	5,069	4,093	3,149	4,093
Transitional Grant	572	576	0	0
Total	23,111	14,759	8,519	4,713

Efficiency statement and business rate retention

- 11 The funding offer is conditional on the publication of an efficiency statement. There are no mandatory requirements for the efficiency statement however the published plan must demonstrate increased efficiency over the four year period.
- 12 The draft efficiency statement is included at appendix 3 and is based on the current medium term financial strategy (MTFS) approved by Council in February 2016, <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/4506617/medium-term-financial-strategy-2016-20.pdf>.
- 13 The efficiency statement supports the council's journey to self-sufficiency; from 2019-20 it is intended that all councils will be funded locally from council tax and full business rate retention. The exact details of how this funding mechanism will be implemented is yet to be shared and the council is currently preparing a response to the open consultation process. The intended timetable in respect of moving to full local business rate retention is as shown below:

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Josie Rushgrove, head of corporate finance tel (01432) 261867

Summer 2016	Consultation on the approach to 100% retention
Autumn 2016	Further technical consultation on the specific workings of the reformed system
Early 2017	Legislation introduced
April 2017	Pilots of the new approach
Before May 2020	100% business rates implemented

Implications of not accepting the offer

- 14 The funding offer confirms the implications of not accepting the offer as follows:

“Those councils that chose not to accept the offer, or do not qualify, will be subject to the existing yearly process for determining the local government finance settlement. Allocations could be subject to additional reductions dependent on the fiscal climate and the need to make further savings to reduce the deficit. At present we do not expect any further multi-year settlements to be offered over the course of this parliament”.

Timeline

- 15 The offer must be accepted before 14 October, with this in mind the following timetable has been set:

Date	Action
5 September 2016	General overview and scrutiny committee
19 September 2016	Cabinet
30 September 2016	Council
14 October 2016	Deadline

Community impact

- 16 The MTFs, associated budget and funding demonstrates how the council is using its financial resources to deliver the priorities within the agreed corporate plan.

Equality duty

- 17 The Public Sector Equality Duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying “due regard” in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. This funding offer is in line with our current MTFs therefore there would be no additional adverse impact on different protected characteristics if the offer is accepted.

Financial implications

- 18 As set out in the report.

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Josie Rushgrove, head of corporate finance tel (01432) 261867

Legal implications

- 19 There is no requirement to accept the four year settlement. If the council chooses not to accept the offer, or does not qualify, we will be subject to the existing yearly process for determining the local government finance settlement. The only legal requirement under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires a council to set a balanced budget which should be possible under either settlement process however accepting the offer provides increased longer term certainty and improved planning opportunities.

Risk management

- 20 By accepting a longer term funding offer, the risk of unbudgeted spend is decreased. The most substantial risks have been assessed as part of the budget setting process and reasonable mitigation has been made. Risks will continue to be monitored through the year and reported to cabinet as part of the budget setting and monitoring process.

Consultation

- 21 The views of the general overview and scrutiny committee on accepting the four year central government funding deal were sought on 5 September. The committee requested additional information, included at appendix 4, and requested a further meeting which was held on 19 September. If the committee determines that there are specific matters it wishes cabinet to consider in making its recommendation to full council these will be shared either through a supplement to this report or verbally at the cabinet meeting on 21 September.
- 22 Consultation on the budget proposals for 2017/18, based on the indicative funding allocations within the funding offer, have commenced and the outcome of the consultation will be used to guide decisions within a balanced budget. A link to the live consultation can be found here

<http://newsroom.herefordshire.gov.uk/2016/july/council-launches-budget-consultation.aspx>

and the 2017/18 budget setting timetable is shown below:

Date	Action
29 July to 7 October	Budget consultation open
14 November 2016	Both scrutiny committees
1 December 2016	Cabinet – capital budget
16 December 2016	Council – capital budget
19 January 2017	Cabinet – budget, MTFs & Treasury Management Strategy
3 February 2017	Council – budget, MTFs & Treasury Management Strategy
3 March 2017	Council – council tax setting

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Josie Rushgrove, head of corporate finance tel (01432) 261867

Appendices

Appendix 1 – letter from secretary of state to council leaders

Appendix 2 – annex to letter from secretary of state to council leaders

Appendix 3 – draft efficiency statement

Appendix 4 – general overview and scrutiny committee request

Background papers

- None identified.



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

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10 March 2016

Dear Colleagues

MULTI-YEAR SETTLEMENTS AND EFFICIENCY PLANS

On 17 December I announced a historic opportunity for councils to achieve greater certainty and confidence from a 4-year budget. I see this as a key step to supporting you to strengthen your financial management, at the same time as working collaboratively with your local partners and reforming the way services are provided.

The settlement consultation process showed great support for this approach and identified a number of queries about what the offer includes and the requirements for applying to accept this offer. I have therefore set out some further details in the attached annex. But I want to reiterate that I want this offer, and the production of an efficiency plan, to be as simple and straightforward as possible, and reassure you that this is not about creating additional bureaucracy.

If you wish to apply to accept the offer you simply need to send an email or letter to MultiYearSettlements@communities.gsi.gov.uk by **5pm on Friday 14th October** and include a link to your published efficiency plan.

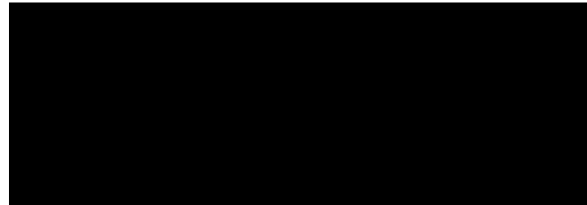
I do not intend to provide further guidance on what efficiency plans should contain – they should be locally owned and locally driven. But it is important that they show how this greater certainty can bring about opportunities for further savings. They should cover the full 4-year period and be open and transparent about the benefits this will bring to both your council and your community. You should collaborate with your local neighbours and public sector partners and link into devolution deals where appropriate.

Of course this offer is entirely optional. It is open to any council to continue to work on a year-by-year basis, but I cannot guarantee future levels of funding to those who prefer not to have a four year settlement.

I have been delighted by the response of councils all over the country to the offer of four year budgets and I look forward to hearing from you if you would like to avail yourself of it.

For any further queries, please contact officials at the above address.

Yours sincerely



THE RT HON GREG CLARK MP

Annex

Conditions of the multi-year settlement

The Government will offer any council that wishes to take it up a four-year funding settlement to 2019-20. This includes:

- Common Council of the City of London
- London borough councils
- district councils
- county councils
- Council of the Isles of Scilly
- Greater London Authority
- metropolitan county fire and rescue authorities
- combined fire and rescue authorities.

The Government is making a clear commitment to provide minimum allocations for each year of the Spending Review period, should councils choose to accept the offer and if they have published an efficiency plan.

What the offer includes

On 9 February we provided summaries and breakdown figures for each year to your s151 Officer. From those figures the relevant lines that are included in the multi-year settlement offer, where appropriate, are:

- Revenue Support Grant;
- Transitional Grant; and
- Rural Services Delivery Grant allocations.

In addition, tariffs and top-ups in 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 will not be altered for reasons related to the relative needs of local authorities, and in the final year may be subject to the implementation of 100% business rates retention.

The Government is committed to local government retaining 100% of its business rate revenues by the end of this Parliament. This will give them control over an additional £13 billion of tax that they collect.

To ensure that the reforms are fiscally neutral local government will need to take on extra responsibilities and functions. DCLG and the Local Government Association will soon be publishing a series of discussion papers which will inform this and other areas of the reform debate.

The new burdens doctrine operates outside the settlement, so accepting this offer will not impact on any new burden payments agreed over the course of the four years.

The Government will also need to take account of future events such as the transfer of functions to local government, transfers of responsibility for functions between local authorities, mergers between authorities and any other unforeseen events. However, barring exceptional circumstances and subject to the normal statutory consultation process for the local government finance settlement, the Government expects these to be the amounts presented to Parliament each year.

Process for applying for the offer

Interest in accepting this offer will only be considered if a link to a published efficiency plan is received by 5pm Friday 14th October. We will provide confirmation of the offer shortly after the deadline.

Efficiency Plans

Efficiency plans do not need to be a separate document. They can be combined with Medium Term Financial Strategies or the strategy set out in the guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-flexible-use-of-capital-receipts>) on how you intend to make the most of the capital receipt flexibilities if appropriate.

The Home Office will provide guidance on the criteria and sign off process for efficiency plans for single purpose Fire and Rescue authorities. All Fire and Rescue authorities, including those which are county councils, should set out clearly in their efficiency plans how they will collaborate with the police and other partners to improve their efficiency.

Process for those who do not take up the offer

Those councils that chose not to accept the offer, or do not qualify, will be subject to the existing yearly process for determining the local government finance settlement.

Allocations could be subject to additional reductions dependant on the fiscal climate and the need to make further savings to reduce the deficit.

At present we do not expect any further multi-year settlements to be offered over the course of this parliament

Herefordshire council's draft efficiency statement: 2016/17 to 2019/20

Herefordshire council provides public services costing approximately £328m per annum alongside capital investment in the county of approximately £75m per annum. Since 2010 Herefordshire council has delivered £59m savings whilst protecting and enhancing the services it provides to the county's citizens. Herefordshire have been developing a platform to deliver further efficient working.

- Fastershire <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/broadband>
- Waste Treatment <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/environmental-protection/waste-management/refuse-area-waste-strategy/waste-treatment>
- Joint management of public health with Shropshire Council
- Non-constituent member of the West Midlands combined authority
- Lowest highways cost of road per head
- Ofsted rating was moved out of intervention
- Improvements in educational achievements
- Rationalisation assets

Herefordshire is unique in its sparse rural population, making delivering services to the public challenging. Herefordshire has a large proportion of small businesses, which funded the delivery of services through business rates.

The council is focussing on becoming self-reliant, being funded wholly through local resources, from 2019-20. It has set its plans in line with this and how this will be achieved whilst ensuring essential services continue to be provided in recognition of increasing budget pressures. To achieve this will require the delivery of savings over the intervening period to ensure the budget available is enough to fund local demand.

Focussing on the longer term enables different service delivery modules to be considered and implemented providing longer term sustainability.

Following consultation the council has reconfirmed its priorities, which are to:

- Enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives
- Keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life
- Support the growth of our economy
- Secure better services, quality of life and value for money

These objectives set out our priorities to focus on to make sure we make the best use of resources and deliver services that make a difference to people in Herefordshire.

Herefordshire council has approved its medium term financial strategy (MTFS) and corporate plan both to 2019-20.

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/8060372/corporate_plan_2016-20.pdf

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/4506617/medium-term-financial-strategy-2016-20.pdf>

The MTFS specifically addresses the financial challenges being faced over the period. The council has already delivered savings of £59m and is targeting a further £28m ahead of 2020, a total of £87m between 2010 and 2020. Herefordshire intends to deliver these savings through growing its local economy, reducing costs, managing current and future demand. Details can be reviewed here:

<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/s50031032/App%204%20Directorate%20Savings%20plan%20to%2019-20.pdf>

The Corporate Delivery Plan identifies the key projects planned for the year to achieve progress towards the council's priorities in the Corporate Plan.

https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/4763825/2016-17_corporate_delivery_plan.pdf

Directorates within the council produce a business plan which sets out how they will progress the achievement of the corporate objectives, the objectives specifically for the directorate, the changes it will go through to achieve them and the performance targets it will monitor to check its progress.

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/government-citizens-and-rights/performance-and-risk/performance-reports>

Both plans will be continuously reflected upon as more of the anticipated changes and their effects become known. For example, the implications of leaving the European Union, localising business rates, additional responsibilities, the future of new homes bonus and pension fund reviews. These changes are largely outside the council's control however the council will play an active role in consultations and reflect on the implications on a regular basis in tandem with the delivery of local savings already targeted.

The council recognises it can't successfully navigate the journey alone and understands the importance of working effectively with its partners. Herefordshire has in place a Better Care Fund with Herefordshire clinical commissioning group; it is an active member of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership; it is working on a devolution deal and its Sustainability Transformation Plans. In addition to this Herefordshire has recently become a non-constitution member of the west midlands combined authority. This ensures collaborative working delivers the best outcomes.

Herefordshire council is currently in the process of consulting on the 2017/18 budget and has a number of specific consultations live to ensure we consider the full views of residents of the county when changing the delivery of the services we provide.

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/government-citizens-and-rights/democracy/council-finances/budget-consultation-2017>

Herefordshire council reported its 2015/16 outturn on 16 June delivering a small under-spend which has been added to reserves. This means that Herefordshire's prudential general reserve balance at 31 March 2016 was £7.3m, representing 5% of the 2016/17 net budget.

<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/s50035709/End%20of%20year%20corporate%20performance%20and%20budget%20report.pdf>

The general reserve balance is expected to increase by £4.5m in 2016/17 to give an estimated total general fund reserve of £11.8m as at 31 March 2017. The increase is due to the additional rural and transitional grant funding received in the final 2016/17 funding settlement from

government confirmed after the budget for 2016/17 was approved by Council in February 2016. This one off grant funding will be used to provide increased resilience in the MTFS supporting rural service delivery.

The audit of the 2015/16 statement of accounts is almost complete, the draft statements and annual governance statement are available to view here:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/4740382/unaudited-accounts-201516-and-draft-ags.pdf>

The previous year's audit reviewed the financial resilience, value for money and statement of accounts of the council by looking at key indicators of financial performance, its approach to strategic financial planning, its approach to financial governance and its approach to financial control. The overall conclusion was rated as green in all of these areas, meaning adequate arrangements are in place.

Monthly reviews of the budget position, performance to targets and challenge are held in tandem with public reporting. The budget setting timetable and monitoring reporting is shown below.

	Health and wellbeing overview scrutiny committee	General overview and scrutiny committee	Cabinet	Audit and governance committee	Council
2015/16 financial and performance outturn			16.06.16		
2016/17 Q1 finance and performance			21.07.16	22.09.16	
Draft 2017/18 budget and medium term financial strategy (MTFS)	14.11.16	14.11.16			
2016/17 Q2 finance and performance			01.12.16		
2017/18 capital programme			01.12.16		16.12.16
Detailed 2017/18 budget, MTFS and treasury management strategy			19.01.17		03.02.17
2016/17 Q3 finance and performance			09.02.17	20.03.17	
Council tax for 2017/18					03.03.17

This efficiency plan demonstrates how Herefordshire council is using its vision, policies, opportunities and challenges in its journey to local financial sustainability. The key to this success will be delivering the councils priorities and plans which will ensure Herefordshire council moves to:

- self-reliant, vibrant communities;
- growing the economy;
- supporting the most vulnerable through ensuring their families, friends and communities can support them;
- people helping themselves through the choices they make.

Approved for publication on by:

.....

Leader of the council

.....

Chief executive of the council

I confirm that the above efficiency statement is likely to achieve and sustain a balanced budget position, subject to the delivery of targeted savings, over the four years to 2019-20.

.....

S151 of the council

General overview and scrutiny committee request

Information requested on 5 September	Information currently available
<p>Is there scope to make representations at “Council for Europe” in relation to the UK being in breach of the Charter of local government in providing the four year funding offer?</p>	<p>It would have to be established what legal basis the Charter of Local Government has and whether a breach can be identified and whether it can be actionable.</p>
<p>Additional information is requested in relation to business rates including information on the numbers of small businesses, the impact of business rate proposals on them and the current business rate consultation paper.</p>	<p>The four year funding offer is entirely separate to 100% local business rate retention in the final year of the offer. The intended timetable for implementation of full local rate retention is provided in paragraph 14 of the covering report and commences with two consultations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="699 860 1401 927"> <p>1. Self-Sufficient local government: 100% business rates retention</p> <p><i>This consultation is being run by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and seeks views on the implementation of the Government’s commitment to allow local government to retain 100% of the business rates that they raise locally.</i></p> <li data-bbox="699 1146 1401 1214"> <p>2. Fair Funding Review: Call for evidence on Needs and Redistribution</p> <p><i>As announced at the time of the 16-17 settlement the government is conducting a fair funding review of what the needs assessment formula should be following the implementation of 100% business rates retention.</i></p> <p>Both consultations close on 26 September and further technical consultation is expected to begin thereafter. The acceptance of the four year funding offer deadline, 14 October, will be ahead of the government’s response to the consultations.</p> <p>In early August the Society of County Treasurers and the Society of District Council Treasurers submitted a joint response to DCLG, LGA and HMT outlining their key priorities and issues. The letter raised concerns about the complexity of the system and how this will be exacerbated by asymmetrical devolution of services across the country. The two societies also highlighted the levels of uncertainty around the quantum available and how this would be affected by pilots and devolution deals before any unfunded pressures could be considered.</p> <p>Herefordshire is currently preparing a response addressing the</p>

	<p>local specifics of the consultation questions.</p> <p>Additional business rate reliefs from April 2017 were announced in the last budget. The actual impact of these cannot be shared yet because we do not know the new rateable values (revaluation to be based on 2015 rentals, current billing is based on 2008 rentals) which also come into force in April 2017. We also do not know what the taper will be for businesses with a rateable value of between £12k and £18k but the main impact is where small business rate relief of 100% is awarded to businesses with a rateable value of £12k, previously £6k. Although we cannot provide an accurate assessment at this time indications are that small business rate relief currently allocated at £6m pa could increase to £13m pa, an increase of £7m pa. Herefordshire loss of income due to additional reliefs is expected to be compensated through specific central government grant funding.</p>
Confirmation of the views of other local authorities, in particular comparator authorities.	A recent survey of unitary authorities concluded that 47% have accepted the four year deal, a further 32% confirmed that they intend to accept and none stated that they will not accept the offer. The main reason given for accepting the offer is to provide certainty in forward planning.
Sharing of the current information on lobbying/what the LGA is doing.	The LGA announced on 15 January 2016 that it <i>“welcomes the offer of a four year settlement. We have long called for local government to have the same planning horizon as government itself. This is a step towards financial certainty.”</i> In February Lord Porter, Chairman of the Local Government Association, went on to say <i>“Giving councils the option to fix longer-term funding settlements is hugely significant. The LGA has long-argued that it is crucial for councils to be able to plan ahead for more than 12 months at a time. This is an important step towards the financial certainty councils need to run important local services to the high standard our residents deserve and will allow councils to review the level of financial reserves they need to hold.”</i>
Is there any clarity on whether council tax capping and additional 2% adult social care precept will remain?	There have been no indications of changes to the current capping and adult social care precept setting restrictions on council tax increases.
Confirmation of Rural Services Network stance.	The Rural Services Network (comprising SPARSE Rural, the Rural Assembly, the wider Rural Services Partnership and the RSN Community Group working with Rural England) welcomed the recognition of the particular costs of providing services in sparse rural areas by increasing the Rural Services Delivery Grant by more than fivefold from £15.5m in 2015/16 to £80.5m in 2016/17 (see table below). The network will continue its work in ensuring fair funding for rural communities through supporting the review of the needs assessment moving towards the 100% business

	<p>rates retention.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="711 250 1375 658"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="711 353 963 412"></th> <th data-bbox="963 250 1182 353">Provisional Settlement</th> <th data-bbox="1182 250 1375 353">Final Settlement</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="711 353 963 412">2015-16</td> <td data-bbox="963 353 1182 412">£15.5m</td> <td data-bbox="1182 353 1375 412">£15.5m</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="711 412 963 470">2016-17</td> <td data-bbox="963 412 1182 470">£20.0m</td> <td data-bbox="1182 412 1375 470">£80.5m</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="711 470 963 528">2017-18</td> <td data-bbox="963 470 1182 528">£35.0m</td> <td data-bbox="1182 470 1375 528">£65.0m</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="711 528 963 586">2018-19</td> <td data-bbox="963 528 1182 586">£50.0m</td> <td data-bbox="1182 528 1375 586">£50.0m</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="711 586 963 658">2019-20</td> <td data-bbox="963 586 1182 658">£65.0m</td> <td data-bbox="1182 586 1375 658">£65.0m</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Provisional Settlement	Final Settlement	2015-16	£15.5m	£15.5m	2016-17	£20.0m	£80.5m	2017-18	£35.0m	£65.0m	2018-19	£50.0m	£50.0m	2019-20	£65.0m	£65.0m
	Provisional Settlement	Final Settlement																	
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2018-19	£50.0m	£50.0m																	
2019-20	£65.0m	£65.0m																	
<p>Sharing of more analysis of options.</p>	<p>Paragraph 15 of the covering report states that not accepting the four year funding deal would result in annual funding settlements. More analysis of the funding offer was provided at the all member seminar held on 26 July which confirmed the advantages of accepting the offer are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A step in the direction of what LAs have been asking for • Provides a degree of certainty over the longer term • Increase focus on the longer term • Enables better financial planning <p>And the drawbacks are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount guaranteed is relatively small & excludes other significant funding streams • Acceptance of reduced funding • Year 5 is probably the most uncertain in living memory • Requirement of an 'efficiency plan' • Funding not guaranteed – government reserves the right to change the settlement due to unforeseen circumstances 																		



Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	21 September 2016
Title of report:	Communications Strategy 2016-2019
Report by:	Cabinet member economy and corporate services

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the county.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

Countywide

Purpose

To approve the communications strategy with associated communication protocols for the period 2016-2019.

Recommendations

THAT:

- (a) the communications strategy 2016 to 2019 at appendix 1 to this report is approved; and**
- (b) the accompanying communication protocols at appendix 2 are approved.**

Alternative options

1. Continue working in current arrangements without a fit for purpose, current guiding strategy or accompanying protocols. This is not recommended as would result in an ad-hoc approach to communication and engagement with residents, businesses and partners.
2. To reduce the level and range of communication and engagement across the council knowing there is pressure on the budgets due to reduction in Government grant and

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Alexandra Floyd on Tel (01432) 261899

the need to focus resource on areas of high demand. This is not recommended at this time as would reduce the capacity of the organisation to engage during a period of change and development, with key activities and programmes being implemented over the next few years in line with the corporate plan.

Reasons for recommendations

3. It is important that the council communicates to residents and businesses with over 188,000 people living in the county and some 10,948 businesses in Herefordshire¹, each of which need a varying degree of interaction with the council and differing requirements.
4. The previous communications strategy covering 2010-2014, was formed at a point when Herefordshire Council was working in a close partnership with the then NHS Herefordshire. The proposed communication strategy has a greater emphasis on working with communities to deliver services and is a better reflection of the way to work in the changing financial climate. The strategy also identifies that engagement and communication is across service and the entire organisation, and not isolated to a communications team.
5. The strategy provides a framework for the council's communication, alongside the protocols and principles to help guard and mitigate risk. It also informs the organisation and supports it to become more efficient and effective.

Key considerations

6. The communication strategy will support delivery of the corporate plan approved by Council in February 2016, with outlined priorities and future delivery. The strategy also supports the council's need to become 'digital by default'- reflective of the changing way in which people communicate.
7. As well as communication and engagement with residents and businesses, the strategy addresses internal communication with the workforce and members, to aid a joint understanding of the issues being addressed by the authority, and new initiatives and service models being developed.
8. Whilst relaying the key council messages, the strategy supports communications based on type of message and the audience. This will assist effective engagement to; help manage expectations; provide information on service changes; and outline the rationale for council decisions. The improvements in channels of engagement aim to enable individuals and communities to source the information, which can reduce unnecessary contact with the council and where possible provide pre-emptive information and guidance.
9. The protocols outline the delivery of best practise communications and area reference point that both officers and members need to work towards.
10. Specific actions emerging from the strategy include:
 - Provide timely and engaging online news content from across the organisation
 - Improve web content for Herefordshire Council, linking to other public sector organisations
 - Use of insight and data to understand the needs and trends of service users and customers

¹ with a HR postcode via the MINT UK Database

- Refine the internal communications with employees and council members
- Bespoke media and social media training for designated spokespeople and online community managers
- Refreshed branding to better suit digital channels and replace existing branded documents
- Conduct brand audit and refresh public-facing and internal branded signage
- Produce locally relevant imaging and photo stock for corporate and service use

Community impact

11. There is much the council needs to communicate to the community and an equal amount that the community needs to say to the council. How that is done will vary between levels of need and particular audiences. Whilst a large proportion of our audience are online and increasing use of social media can reach a wide audience with target messages, there will be some requirement for more bespoke contact.
12. Figures from the Office of National Statistics show that 11% of the Herefordshire adult population have never been on the internet. This suggests that there is significant potential, and for many people an expectation, that the local population interact with the council online. This still leaves a proportion of people who do not interact on line and other mechanisms need to be considered to reach these people where via the media or specific service support. Due to diversity across the Herefordshire community, it is important that the council communicates effectively with the right people, at the right time, in the right way.
13. The communication strategy will help the local community understand the key council priorities, as approved in the corporate plan 2016/20. It is important for citizens of the county to know what the council does, and the areas the council needs to focus on. Sharing those priorities is fundamental to creating a joint understanding of the role, purpose, and functions of the council.
14. Targeted communications will be implemented using knowledge gathered through a range of readily available data tools, though with the potential of further data collection necessary to ensure the council can continue to support the best methods of communication.

Equality duty

15. The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). In particular, the council must have 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty when taking any decisions on service changes. This requires effective, targeted communication to any of the groups who need access to services, are affected by service changes or who are the target for a campaign.
16. A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under this Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

17. Where a decision is likely to result in detrimental impact on any group with a protected characteristic it must be justified objectively. This means that attempts to mitigate the harm need to be explored. If the harm cannot be avoided, the decision maker must balance this detrimental impact against the strength of legitimate public need to pursue the service remodelling to deliver savings. Effective engagement is a pre-requisite, along with supporting information to find alternative suppliers or services.
18. The implementation of digital services will mainly affect the protected characteristic of age – especially older people. It is important to address any instances where engagement has been available online only to avoid discrimination toward this protected characteristic. This can be overcome through effective, targeted offline information.

Financial implications

19. The implementation of the strategy will be resourced from existing communication budgets in addition to the specific reserve which was set-aside in 2015/16. Current staffing budgets will provide for the necessary officer time. The existing communications budgets will also cover the following anticipated costs of supplies and services:

	£000
2016/17	53
2017/18	30
2018/19	30
Total	113

Legal implications

20. There is no legal requirement to have a communication or engagement strategy.

Risk management

Risks if the report is approved

21. Pressure on budget and staff capacity due to increased communications activity
Mitigation: Current actions contained within the budget; additional spend would be through additional income.
22. Internal communications are not undertaken to staff on new protocols and processes
Mitigation: Effective roll-out with presentations, workshops and new communications toolkit.
23. A whole council approach to effective communications – internal and external.
Mitigation: Commitment from senior managers and members on the roll-out of new protocols and principles. Communications team to lead on support at operational level with a whole organisation commitment to best practise communication and engagement.

Consultees

24. Insight has been gathered through existing data from Understanding Herefordshire survey, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, internal staff surveys and the council's Hereford 2020 communications survey.

General Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the strategy and protocols on 26 July 2016 and a further version of protocols on 5 September 2016. The following recommendations were made to inform cabinet's consideration of the communication strategy with associated communication protocols for the period 2016-2019:

- The use of a chat facility on the website should be pursued taking into account how an operator's time can most effectively be used.
This is hoped to be incorporated as part of the new website, although time scale for this part of the project is not yet confirmed.
- The opportunity for the community to interact on-line quickly and easily should be fully explored.
The new website puts the citizen at the heart of every process, it will aim to take as many processes online as possible and start a continued commitment to becoming 'digital by default'.
- Clarification be provided as to how it is intended to implement the "spend within our means" approach outlined in section 3 of the strategy at appendix 1: "making tough but necessary choices which will include ceasing to provide some services and working with communities to help them run services important to them";
This is an operational issue and will be addressed at service level so has not been included within the communications strategy.
- The wording of paragraph 5.13 of appendix 2 to the report relating to the access of the press to premises be reviewed and clarified.
The wording to reflect access to premises has been reworded to reflect access to restricted areas only, this can now be found in 6.13.
- In relation to paragraph 3.1 of the protocol further clarification was needed on when it was appropriate to use the word "Council" in communications when referring to such matters as Council policy and when further distinction was needed between a decision taken at full Council and a decision by an individual cabinet member or an officer.
This depends on the context and the role of the member. The protocol sets out (at para 3.1) a range of different roles and the context in which members may speak 'on behalf of the council'. If further clarification is needed based on individual circumstances, members should refer to the governance team.
- Paragraph 3.4 needed further clarification in particular regarding the role of local ward members.
Wording has been updated to reflect ward members position. If further clarification is needed based on individual circumstances, members should refer to the governance team.
- Paragraph 4.2 - greater clarity was needed on the application and operation of paragraph 4.2.
Wording has been updated to reflect committee chairman role. If further clarification is needed based on individual circumstances, members should refer to the governance team.

- Paragraph 4.5 also required consideration and clarification. Wording has been updated to reflect the role of Chairman as spokesperson for committees.
- An additional paragraph should be added providing guidance as to how members should approach communications as a council appointee to an outside body. This has been included in section 3.6.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Communication Strategy 2016 to 2019

Appendix 2. Communications Protocols and Principles

Background papers

None.

Communications Strategy

2016-2020



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Introduction

Good communication and engagement can create a positive experience for those who interact with the council. It helps residents, employees, partners, and the media understand Herefordshire Council's objectives, values, services, challenges and achievements.

There are over 188,000 people living in the county and there are around 11,000¹ registered businesses in Herefordshire. Effective communication and engagement should be a two way process where information and views are shared. It is only by working collaboratively with residents, and across the public, private, education and voluntary sectors that Herefordshire can sustain what is important and be a vibrant, sustainable county.

A communications strategy

Herefordshire Council is a very different organisation from what it was only a few years ago. Its roles and responsibilities have shifted - it is a smaller organisation yet it has needed to respond to the increasing demands of the most vulnerable in the community. We will need to work more closely with communities to support the services valuable to them. This will enable the council to focus more on its priorities: Helping people remain safe, healthy, and independent, giving children a great start in life, and supporting economic growth for the county.

The county is influenced by global and national events, advances in technology, Government policies, and trends that affect how we live our lives. Against a background of continuous change, communication becomes increasingly important - especially considering the role of the council as a community leader responsible for long-term development and charged with bringing together the work of different organisations.

The communications strategy is driven by the priorities, services and activity outlined in the corporate plan. Whilst the focus is on the work of the council, there will be strong links to other organisations to create a single voice for the county.

Herefordshire Council needs to communicate, engage and align with a wide range of stakeholders, including residents, businesses and charities, as well as other public sector services. By providing efficient and effective engagement the council can improve local understanding, perception and involvement. It can respond in a crisis, share information and inform on future developments, explaining why certain things have to be done in a particular way, working with our community and workforce to share the right messages, at the right time, in the right way.



DAVID HARLOW.

Councillor DG Harlow
Cabinet Member Economy and Corporate Services

¹MINT UK database

What we do

Vision

People, organisations and businesses working together to bring sustainable prosperity and well-being for all, in the outstanding natural environment of Herefordshire.

Priorities

- Enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives
- Keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life
- Support the growth of our economy
- Secure better services, quality of life and value for money

Values

Herefordshire Council's PEOPLE values guide and shape our culture and services.

- People:** Treating people fairly, with compassion, respect and dignity
- Excellence:** Striving for excellence, and the appropriate quality of service, care and life in Herefordshire
- Openness:** Being open, transparent and accountable
- Partnership:** Working in partnership and with all our diverse communities
- Listening:** Actively listening to, understanding and taking into account people's views and needs
- Environment:** Protecting and promoting our outstanding natural environment and heritage for the benefit of all



Audience:

Herefordshire Council has a wide range of audiences and stakeholders. It is important that we target communications to the right audience, so that we communicate with the right people at the right time, in the right way.

These include:

-  **businesses current and future**
-  **Government**
-  **Councillors**
-  **local and national charities**
-  **public sector partners**
-  **funders**
-  **the media**
-  **employees**
-  **city, town and parish councils**
-  **local residents, including groups e.g. children, youth, adults, carers, employers and parents**



Key messages

The key messages are the values which illustrate how the council uses its resources and focuses its energy to meet its priorities.

1. Empower the local community

Helping the local community stay independent and resilient, and providing them with the tools needed to independently resolve their issues is key. This approach gives ownership and responsibility to individuals, families and the community, whilst enabling the council to assign resources to areas of high need. By challenging perception on who holds the power and responsibility, and by providing tools for people to help themselves, we will:

- Provide individuals and families with the right information and direction to resolve local issues
- Reduce the necessity to contact the council by enabling people to access council services via self-service
- As much as possible put the control of people's care in their own, or their family's hands
- Encourage feedback on how things could be improved and provide supportive processes
- Provide local opportunity through community ownership of assets and direct delivery of other services previously operated or supported by the council.

2. Deliver priority services

With decreasing levels of funding due to reductions in Government grants, the council will prioritise the delivery of services. It will meet statutory services obligations and provide services that people cannot access through any other means. The council will focus its effort and funding to:

- Protect residents and provide care for the extremely vulnerable within the community

- Help residents take responsibility for their health and wellbeing, and to look after others in their family and community
- Provide education and skills to give young people a good start in life
- Provide infrastructure and services to facilitate business and growth opportunities
- Take responsibility for statutory services and those functions essential to living and working in the county, e.g. road maintenance, waste collection, street cleaning
- Be clear on areas of responsibility and when other organisations can take the lead

3. Spend within our means

The council has to make difficult decisions to balance its budget and protect service delivery in the future. This means managing spend carefully, ensuring value for money and reducing borrowing. Through partnership working, the council and others will share knowledge and resources knowing that through collaboration more can be achieved. This includes:

- Creating effective partnerships across the voluntary, community, business and public sectors to drive innovation and achieve savings
- Making tough but necessary choices which will include ceasing to provide some services
- Working with communities to help them run services important to them
- Being transparent over our expenditure
- Ensuring value for money and test costs through procurement processes
- Working more collaboratively with partner organisations
- Identifying opportunities and generating income to help sustain services
- Reducing debt but also investing in schemes that can create a long-term financial return.

Communication and engagement objectives

There is much the council needs to communicate to the community and an equal amount that the community needs to share with the council. How that is done will vary between levels of need and particular audiences. Whilst the website can reach a mass audience and an increasing strategic use of social media can reach a wide audience with target messages, there will be some requirement for more bespoke engagement.

When engaging with audiences the council aims to:

- Centre on the citizen and operate as a joined-up organisation
- Encourage two-way dialogue with residents
- Celebrate success and innovation of our workforce, residents, businesses and organisations
- Help people feel informed and proud of living in Herefordshire
- Support employees, members and partner organisations to act as proud local ambassadors for the council's work
- Be clear, open and honest without creating a negative impact on other people, services or partners

The following ten objectives will help guide and inform our communication and engagement activity:

1. Ensure we communicate effectively, taking into account diversity and accessibility needs
2. Use the most cost-effective method of communicating and engaging relevant to the audience
3. Promote the council as a trusted and approachable organisation focused on the public and their needs
4. Strengthen the reputation of Herefordshire Council with a focus on shared understanding of priorities and objectives.
5. Build and maintain a professional corporate identity for consistent and co-ordinated use throughout the organisation and by third-party providers
6. Work with public sector partners to ensure effective sharing of information during emergency or high-risk situations
7. Communicate council decisions, news, events, plans and major announcements
8. Assist elected members and council employees to be ambassadors for council services and initiatives
9. Improve communication and engagement and skills within the council
10. Be a responsible and communicative employer, by retaining a skilled, productive workforce and create a reputation as an employer of choice.



Delivering our objectives

Some people, organisations and businesses interact with the council regularly, however it is important that communication and engagement reaches the whole community, to be fair and transparent to all. To ensure a wide reach, a range of channels and techniques will be used.

Media and PR

There is a need to maximise the opportunities to use the media to communicate messages to a wide audience. These include:

- Media releases based on news stories and features
- Be proactive and pre-emptive when it is clear a decision or approach may be controversial
- Respond to inaccurate information or misleading interpretation of the facts
- Support media releases with good quality photographs to help draw attention and increase the likelihood of a feature being used
- Develop responsive and positive relations with the media which will ultimately help in communicating to local residents.

Websites and mobile app

Digital is increasingly becoming people's preferred method of communication and engagement. This is reflected in the council's aim for its website to become the preferred point of customer contact. As part of the digital strategy, the web team will ensure:

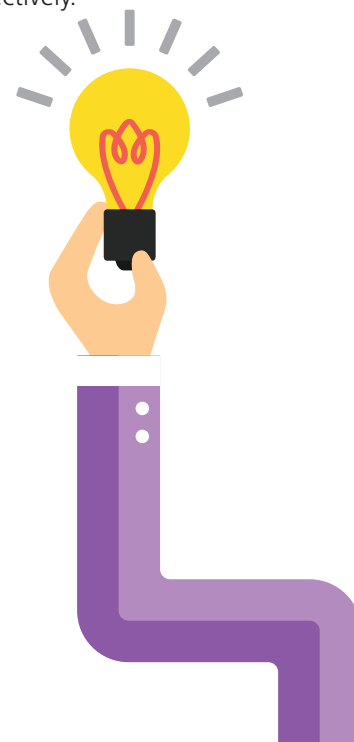
- Website content is engaging, accessible and accurate,
- Opportunities for the community to interact on-line quickly and easily to perform key activities such as making payments, returning forms, arranging appointments and completing applications

- The website and its functionality is fully mobile responsive
- That an app is developed to improve engagement that provides a good customer experience and integrates easily to allow engagement with services

Social media

Social media provides a quick and easy way for the public to receive information and engage with the council. The insight and ability to target specific audiences provides opportunities to support campaigns and key messages. The communications team will:

- Grow our social media communities to assist the fast and effective sharing of news in emergency situations
- Monitor the engagement and channel feedback to services to help prove and improve levels of service
- Manage and support council social media community managers to use social media and technology more efficiently and effectively.



Campaigns

The council, often in partnership with others, will run specific campaigns that bring together a number of communication tools that raise awareness and engagement in an issue. This will specifically focus on the priorities of the council, but also promotion of the county as a place of investment by funders, national government and the private sector. Specific campaigns include public health promotion, the 2020 vision for Hereford, digital inclusion and fostering and adoption.

Internal communications

Good internal communication is important to inform staff of roles and responsibilities, changes to their employment and work environment, and to involve them in shaping services to improve delivery and meet budget reductions.

Both members and employees should be inspired and engaged by the commitment to make Herefordshire a great place to live, work and learn, supported by regular reminders of the difference the council, and they, make to people's lives. Employees and members of Herefordshire Council are natural ambassadors and advocates for the council's work. We will:

- Provide improved communications and engagement channels for employees and councillors, to support access and flow of information to help promote the key council messages and priorities and support in wider communication and engagement

- Keep employees and councillors informed of latest council news and provide sources for further information
- Provide and promote communication and engagement protocols and principles and other supporting documents.

Design and print

As the news and media landscape changes and services engage with new technology, more focus will be on creating infographics, social media and shareable digital content. A brand refresh will coincide with the roll out of the digital strategy. Some services will be supported to create sub-brands to identify and promote services or campaigns.

Print is a decreasing communication tool, often costly and untargeted. However, particular demographics linked to targeted campaigns may mean print has a part to play.

Commissioned services and contractors

In the role of the council as a commissioner, it is important that communication responsibilities and objectives are articulated at the procurement stage. Effective partnership branding can benefit all parties creating an understanding of providers and enhancing reputations. Working with commissioned services to identify partnerships and opportunities will help present an identifiable presence.

Consultations

Herefordshire Council will adhere to the [Government principles](#) to be more effective in consulting the public and to help avoid consultation fatigue. The council will use more digital methods to help involve a wider group of consultees at an earlier stage in the policy forming process. The use of technology, clear language and plain English in consultation documents will help the public engage, contribute their views.

Advertising and sponsorship

Advertising and sponsorship can provide a revenue income stream and will be accepted where relevant to the service and not detrimental to the customer experience. The council will establish mutually supportive relationships with other organisations in the public, private and charity sector to collaborate on reaching audiences - this means the council in certain circumstances will also place adverts.

Brand and reputation management

A brand is built and affirmed every time the customer has contact with the council, and needs to be consistently delivered across all platforms, online and in person. The brand can also affirm the roles and responsibilities of the council, communicating the wide range of services the council runs and supports.

A brand refresh and roll-out supports the commitment to the digital strategy and helps ensure consistency both online and off-line. Specific venues and services could benefit from a dedicated brand identity to help market more effectively for wider promotion and income generation (e.g. the museum venues).

The council has a duty, often a legal obligation, to conduct activities that are sometimes unpopular – especially in areas of social services and budget saving, as well as enforcement of planning, licensing and environmental controls. These are necessary roles to ensure the law is followed, communities are protected and the quality of environment which Herefordshire enjoys is retained. Some decisions affect the reputation of the council and have a negative impact on other services. In such instances the justification for the action needs to be explained and communicated.

Channel shift

The council interacts with many members of the community face-to-face and/or over the telephone. Many of these interactions could be converted into online interactions, this would make us and the services more efficient, effective and available 24/7. Whilst there will always be the need to conduct some services via face to face and telephone contact, such as social services and safeguarding, we will prioritise and aim to achieve channel shift by improving the functionality, design and content of the website and prioritise digital communications such as email, social media and mobile apps.

Research and insight

Understanding the needs of a diverse community is important to inform how the council operates and changes services to meet changing needs. A range of mechanisms and tools can be used, including the sharing of information and data, research, and consultation results to form a comprehensive and accurate view of the needs, trends and aspiration of local people and businesses.



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Communications protocols and principles

1. Introduction and objectives
2. Scope
3. Protocols for members
4. Committees
5. Protocols for employees
6. Working protocols for communications team and media
7. Legal framework and political dimension
8. Using social media
9. Elections
10. Advertising and sponsorship

1. Introduction and objectives

1.1 Good communication and engagement creates a positive experience for those who interact with the council. They help residents, employees, partners, and the media understand Herefordshire Council's objectives, values, services, challenges and achievements. Through efficient and effective communication, the council will improve local engagement and understanding. However, without clear protocols the reputation of Herefordshire Council is vulnerable. These protocols form part of the code of conduct for employees and elected members. They have been developed to support and govern all communications and marketing activity within Herefordshire Council, including press relations.

1.2 The objectives of the protocols and principles are:

- To establish, promote and embed effective working protocols to govern and guide the way Herefordshire Council communicates and engages with a range of stakeholders.
- Present a professional, co-ordinated and consistent approach that is citizen centric and supports our audiences and services.
- Provide guidance for all employees and members to mitigate risk and promote council services and activity.

1.3 The communications team aims to provide guidance and leadership on communications and marketing activity. It will take responsibility for promoting and monitoring the communications protocols and principles, including highlighting instances when the protocols have not been observed and provide evidence to monitor the impact, which may include supporting any resulting investigation or disciplinary procedure.



2. Scope

2.1 Protocols apply to any Herefordshire Council communication, including:

- Press releases and statements to the media
- Digital content including web copy, visual/ audio content and social media
- Any communication or document prepared by Herefordshire Council services for public consumption, including advertising, leaflets, newsletters, reports, posters, banners, flyers or websites
- Any document or publicity with which Herefordshire Council is associated with. Even if the publication is produced in partnership or is a joint document then the communications protocols and brand guidelines still apply
- Any publication or work prepared for the public domain, by consultants or contractors when working on behalf of Herefordshire Council.
- Internal communications to staff and partners.

2.2 Protocols apply to everyone who works for Herefordshire Council in any capacity, or who represent the organisation in some way, including:

- All members
- All employees within the organisation, including those employed on an agency, freelance or consultant basis
- Volunteers working with council service teams
- Partners, providers and suppliers (including contracted or commissioned services) that may want to refer to Herefordshire Council in publicity material.

2.3 Employees should refer to the communications and marketing tool kit on the intranet for other communication resources which includes the communications strategy, brand guidelines, style guide and templates.

3. Protocols for members

3. Protocols for members

See also section 7 Legal framework and political dimension and section 9 Elections.

3.1 It is important members are supported and confident in communicating council processes, priorities, services and decisions. However, there is often a need for elected members to distinguish between when they represent Herefordshire Council in the press, on social media, and in public or when they are representing their personal views, those of their political group, or those of other groups of which they are members. Members should also have regard to the member code of conduct and the protocol on use of council resources by members when acting in any capacity as a member of the council. To assist in clarifying roles:

- The leader of the council - on combined portfolio and/or high profile issues
- Cabinet member– on subjects relevant to their portfolio including policy and decision making
- The chairman of the council - on civic matters
- Chairman of any committee– on the business of the committee (see later)
- Ward member – on issues specific to their ward or representing their ward’s views
- Group leader – giving the views of their group
- Individual members of the council – may express a personal view but should not speak on behalf of the council other than as above. If they are making representations on behalf of constituents or communities they should make clear that this is the case.

3.2 When members are representing the council and commenting on operational or service matters, they should work with the communications team to deliver a full and accurate response. Members should, in the first instance, use the relevant processes or channels for raising any concerns or complaints they may have about policy direction (with the relevant cabinet member) or operational matters (with the chief executive or relevant director) before making any comment externally to ensure their comments are informed and accurate.

3.3 To assist members and to provide the most effective communications and support compliance with the protocol on use of council resources and the code of conduct a member should not issue a press release, statement, letter for publication, or organise a press conference on behalf of Herefordshire Council, without notifying the communications team in advance. Political groups will have their own arrangements for issuing communications on behalf of their group. Members wishing to make comment as individuals are not required to notify the communications team in advance, but should ensure it is clear they are making such comment in a personal capacity.



3.4 If a member is contacted directly by a local or national journalist and asked to speak on behalf of Herefordshire Council, they should refer the journalist to the communications team. If this is not possible, they should advise the communications team and, if required, provide the statement issued to the press. For specific issues and issues relating to members' wards, members are able to refer to the communications team for support. This helps ensure consistency and accuracy.

3.5. Members should be aware of the legal framework and political dimension relating to communication as covered in point 6 of this document.

3.6. Appointees to outside bodies should refer to the body's own communications protocols. Statements or queries about Herefordshire Council's approach to the outside body should be directed to the appropriate Cabinet member.

4. Committees

4.1 Committees have a vital part to play in the effective running of the council, monitoring decisions and making recommendations to the cabinet and the authority as a whole.

4.2 The chairman of a committee may initiate, with the communications team, press releases or statements on matters determined by the committee. The chairman will be the designated press spokesperson and they will be quoted or featured in publicity such as press releases and photo calls, representing the views of the committee, but not their own personal or political party views.

4.3 The communications team will support the chairperson to issue press releases and statements on reports, liaising with the key spokesperson for comment and relevant officers for factual information.

4.4 At the beginning of a scrutiny review, consideration will be given by the chairperson of the reviewing body to the issuing of a press release. Where appropriate, a press release can be issued before the committee meeting in order to promote interest and understanding of the issues (although the decision of the committee must not be anticipated).

4.5 All enquiries from the media relating to any scrutiny review or committee agenda item will be handled by the communications team and discussed with the chairman before a response is given.

4.6 Press releases issued after a meeting must reflect the majority view of the committee and a range of members will be consulted on content, by the chairperson and the communications team.

5. Protocols for employees

5. Working protocols for employees

5.1 These guidelines provide the protocols and principles for day-to-day communication activities for the council. Individuals and service areas can seek advice from the communications team on a wide range of issues. The following section provides an overview on day-to-day protocols for the following areas, more information on specific topics can be found in other chapters in this document:

- Expectations and requirements when working with the press & media
- The use of social media
- Updating Herefordshire Council and other corporate websites
- Guidance and requirements for working with partners
- Help to promote consultations
- How to communicate internally
- Guidance on advertising and sponsorship

5.2 Working with the media

For the full protocols on working with the media, see section 7 'Working protocols for communications team and the media'.

5.2.1 Only employees who have received media training and communications team support should act as official spokespeople. The process of 'senior suitable' will apply and the communications team will provide guidance on the most appropriate person to speak to the media about Herefordshire Council matters.

5.2.2 Service areas should notify the communications team in advance of positive or negative issues that may be of future press interest. Statements or press releases can be prepared by the communications team in advance of enquiries, to help protect the reputation of the service and the organisation.

5.2.3 Employees of Herefordshire Council will often be asked by the communications team to respond quickly to media requests for interviews or background operational information. Those asked by the communications team to assist in responding to press enquiries should do so quickly, so that press deadlines are met and to help support the reputation of the service and the organisation.

5.2.4 All approaches by the media should be directed to the communications team. If an employee is contacted directly by a local or national journalist, the protocol is:

- Advise the journalist to contact the communications team in the first instance (by calling 01432 260006 or email communicationsteam@herefordshire.gov.uk) or offer to transfer their call.
- Take the name of the journalist, the publication they represent and their telephone number
- Notify the communications team immediately if the call is not transferred and provide the journalist's contact details



- The communications team will follow up with the journalist directly and identify the most suitable person to respond to the request.

5.2.5 Approved spokespeople may be approached directly by the press at meetings or events and may need to respond immediately to direct questions. The communications team should be involved before a meeting or event, to help provide expected questions and help formulate draft responses. If this is not possible the communications team should be made aware when a statement has been made.

5.3 Social media

For the full protocols on social media, see section 8 'Protocols for social media'.

5.3.1 The employee code of conduct applies both online and offline. An employee must not bring the council into disrepute via their social media activity (either as part of or outside of work). Failure to adhere to the code of conduct may result in disciplinary procedures.

5.3.2 No individual or service area may undertake a social media account as representing a service area or representing as Herefordshire Council, without prior agreement from the communications team.

5.3.3 Service areas that wish to manage a social media account will need to submit: A business case; background information; a commitment to the best practice guide for social media community management; and a commitment to mandatory training to help support the application. These will be reviewed and determined jointly by the communications team and information governance team.

5.3.4 A list of approved social media community managers will be maintained by the communications team. A full audit and on-going regulation will be implemented to ensure the quality of information and to mitigate risk.

5.3.5 Employees of Herefordshire Council will often be asked by the communications team to respond quickly to social media queries. Those asked by the communications team to assist in responding to social media enquiries should do so quickly, to help support the reputation of the service and the organisation.

5.3.6 Usage of corporate social media accounts will be monitored by the communications team. Any employee's access to platforms or services may be suspended as part of a performance management or disciplinary process. Reference is made to the employee code of conduct, which also applies to online.



5.4 Websites

5.4.1 The communications team will work in conjunction with the web team to help service areas provide a customer-focused web experience which supports channel shift to digital-by-default.

5.4.2 All websites should feature google analytics to allow accurate reporting and insight. The communications manager will monitor analytics to ensure sufficient engagement and promotion.

5.4.3 All content should adhere to the brand guidelines and style guide. All copy should be in clear English and avoid the use of jargon. All images should be cleared with the communications team and if possible, be locally relevant.

5.4.4 Services will be responsible for checking the accuracy and relevance of their web pages monthly to ensure content is current and correct. The web team are responsible for ensuring all web content is useful and useable.

5.4.5 When necessary, and with support from the communications team, services may produce dedicated websites to help support a sub-brand, service or business outcomes. A clear business case and objectives should be set when working with the communications team to deciding on potential return and the level of investment of funding and officer time.

5.5 Working with partners, contractors and commissioned services

5.5.1 Herefordshire Council will work closely with multi-agency partners, strategic partnerships and other independent groups and organisations to ensure effective strategic and operational communications.

5.5.2 The communications team will hold strategic communications meetings with officers managing key partnerships, and sometimes key partners, to assist in the identification and dissemination of key messages and communications. The communications team will support and circulate relevant information and participate in shared objectives to achieve combined priorities.

5.5.3 If Herefordshire Council branding or sub-branding is to be used by third parties, the material should be referred to the communications team to ensure proper and consistent representation.

5.5.4 The communications team may provide assistance to individual schools on sensitive and contentious communications issues. If a school is contacted by the media, they should liaise with the council's communications teams prior to responding.

5.5.5 The council will ensure that all schools and academies are updated with relevant information via timely communications, including a schools bulletin.



5.6 Consultations

5.6.1 All consultation will be conducted with data insight and advice from the strategic intelligence team or a suitable external agency. The communications team should be informed at an early stage to help support the timely marketing and promotion of the consultation.

5.6.2 Herefordshire Council will adhere to the new [government consultation principles](#) - a set of principles to be more effective in consulting the public and to help avoid consultation fatigue. This will include sufficient online feedback on the results of consultations.

5.6.3 Digital methods that allow a supportive user experience should be employed to make it easier for the public to contribute and feed in their views, while clear language and plain English will be used in consultation documents, to help the public understand and engage.

5.7 Internal Communications

5.7.1 The communications team will be responsible for identifying key audiences and circulating information to the wider organisation. The communications team will also help all services include key council messages in communications internally and externally.

5.7.2 The communications team will embark on a programme to improve our internal communication channels and the flow of information to help employees of Herefordshire Council become natural ambassadors and advocates for the council's work. This will include revised digital news channels and an updated intranet.

5.7.3 The communications team will manage promotional opportunities both online and offline, working with services as well as partners, providers and contractors to ensure the correct and appropriate representation and messaging to ensure maximum impact, and the efficiency and effectiveness of all communications.

5.8 Advertising and Sponsorship

For the full protocols on advertising and sponsorship, see section 10 'Advertising and Sponsorship'.

5.8.1 The council can place advertisements where it will support audience reach. This might include paid-for advertising with third parties, as well as promotion on council property, vehicles, publications or other council assets, or those belonging to contracted or commissioned services. This should follow the principles of value for money where spend on advertising creates a direct return based on:

- The advert being the best method of reaching an audience for a defined purpose
- As part of a combination of communication activities that has a target audience in mind



- That the placing of adverts does not bring the authority into disrepute by association
- That the style and content within adverts is cleared by the communication team

5.8.2 Herefordshire Council or a council sub-brand may use sponsorship as a method of communication and promotion. Where an activity or event is sponsored by the council this will be on the basis:

- A relevant organisation and service linked to specific campaigns and priorities
- A political organisation or political association will not be sponsored
- The sponsorship arrangements should be approved by the communication team to ensure it does not bring the council into disrepute
- A sponsorship arrangement needs to ensure this does not constitute endorsement of the associated products or business
- The service will need to check that there are no disputes outstanding with the company being sponsored.

For the full protocols on advertising and sponsorship, see section 10 'Advertising and Sponsorship'.

6. Communication & Media Protocols

6. Communication and media protocols

6.1 The communications team will lead on the training and co-ordination of designated spokespeople (employees and members). The training will be updated and refreshed annually.

6.2 The following should apply in leading the communication:

- The leader of the council - on combined portfolio and/or high profile issues
- Cabinet member– on subjects relevant to their portfolio including policy and decision making
- The chairman of the council - on civic matters
- Chairman of any committee– on the business of the committee (see later)
- Ward member – on issues specific to their ward
- Group leader – giving the views of their group
- Chief executive – on election or electoral registration issues or overview of the operation of the council
- Director and assistant director on service operational issues
- Manager or officer who has received training via the communications team (within the last 12 months) specifically relating to a service

6.3 All local, national and trade or professional press calls should be directed to the communications team on 01432 260006 or emailed to communicationsteam@herefordshire.gov.uk

6.4 The communications team will liaise with the journalist, maintain contact, talk to experts within Herefordshire Council, support spokespeople to make the best use of each opportunity to present the position of the council accurately, within tight deadlines. Although every effort will be made to meet media deadlines, the deadline should not be allowed to compromise the accuracy of the response. The communications team will log media enquiries and response times.

6.5 Where opportunities to pro-actively promote the council's work are identified (and appropriate) the communications team will act as media liaison for spokesperson.

6.6 If Herefordshire Council discovers that it may be at fault in terms of the operation or delivery of its services or its internal processes, then it will, according to protocol and supported by the communications team, proactively tell the press and the public what has gone wrong and what it will do to put it right.

6.7 The value of integrity will be maintained. This sometimes means that there are matters where Herefordshire Council should properly respect confidentiality, particularly where it has a duty of care, for example to service-users, citizens, taxpayers, employees, elected members or non-executive directors.

6.8 Herefordshire Council will not discuss with the media individual cases relating to personal health, social care issues, individual employment matters, or where there is an ongoing legal process/ombudsman investigation. There may be other instances



where information is withheld due to its commercial sensitivity. Where we are limited in what can be said to the media, we will provide a reason why.

6.9 Herefordshire Council will not comment on information provided to the press anonymously or comment on quotes that will not be attributed. These anonymous comments can be inaccurate or even malicious.

6.10 If the media is materially inaccurate in its reportage, the communications team will seek to correct misinformation, working with the publication or programme as much as possible.

6.11 The communications team will monitor the letters pages and other media forums. If a question or an issue is raised by the public that Herefordshire Council can or should answer, then the communications team will work with the appropriate service area and cabinet member to facilitate a response.

6.12 Herefordshire Council will make committee meetings open to the press, encourage journalists to attend and offer good facilities for reporting these meetings. If previous media comment or reportage is discussed in public meetings, it should only help establish the facts and not overtly criticise members of the press.

6.13 The press are not permitted to enter restricted areas of Herefordshire Council premises or contracted service areas/ premises, unless officially invited to do so by a director or the communications team.

6.14 In managing the communication of issues that are likely to attract significant public interest, the communications team will undertake to inform key stakeholders, including employees. The communications team will always try to ensure that employees receive information that affects them before they read about it in the media.

6.15 Herefordshire Council will operate a corporate approach to press relations. All news releases and statements will be posted by the communications team on the Herefordshire Council website.

6.16 The descriptor 'Herefordshire Council' will lead the text in all council press releases. 'The council' can be used on secondary basis and only if appropriate. This is to ensure that the public know that a service is provided by Herefordshire Council.

6.17 Media are expected to respect embargoed press releases, which will be clearly marked as embargoed with the date and time by which the release can be published.

6.18 Press releases and statements will include contact details of the communications officer who will co-ordinate the information and provide a response service to enquiries.

6.19 Designated spokespeople and any additional employees and members should make themselves available for interviews if required via the communications team.



6.20 Press releases containing financial or legal information will be checked by the designated finance or legal officer or a suitable senior manager. Releases dealing with employee issues will be checked with the head of human resources. Press releases dependent on statistical information will be checked with the research team to ensure the information is used accurately and objectively.

6.21 Directors will be offered the opportunity to check key press releases (or if this is not possible for any reason, such as leave or being unobtainable before the press deadline, the appropriate spokesperson will be consulted). The communications manager will 'sign off' all key releases and maintain quality control on all press releases issued by the communications unit.

6.22 Press releases will be available to all members, employees and contracted professionals via the Herefordshire Council intranet and external website.

6.23 When strategic partners (such as BBLP, CCG, Wye Valley Trust etc.) are featured or participating in a press release, then that partner will be consulted on content before release. Press releases will be shared in draft between partners and approved as with council press releases. Partners will be asked to agree in advance the method, manner and timing of press releases. All strategic partners will receive a copy of finalised releases that may interest or refer to them.

6.24 The communications team will follow purdah guidance and provide support to services to ensure communications comply the run up to elections. More information can be found in section 8 of this document 'Elections'.

6.25 Structured training will be provided to maximise the effectiveness of message delivery. Guidelines on interview techniques will be included in the communications and marketing tool kit and the communications team will be responsible for arranging media training for elected members and officers as appropriate.

6.26 Communications need to ensure plain language is used in all publicity material and help avoid jargon and technical language within corporate and service communications.

7. Legal framework and political dimension

For more information, please see section 9- Elections

7.1 A strict legal framework binds publicity or public statements issued by the council, which must operate within the *Local Government Act (1986)* and *The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government Publicity*.

7.2 The code defines the main functions of local authority publicity as follows: "To increase public awareness of the services provided by the authority and the functions it performs; to allow local people a real and informed say about issues that affect them; to explain to electors and ratepayers the reasons for particular policies and priorities, and in general to improve local accountability."



7.3 The code covers the full range of publicity, including where it is used to comment on issues which are controversial, or where there are arguments for or against the views or policies of the council. The code states these issues should be handled with particular care and presented as clearly, fairly and as simply as possible.

7.4 The code states that where publicity is used to comment on the policies of central government, other local authorities or other public bodies, it should be 'objective, balanced, informative and accurate'. It should aim to set out the reasons for the council's views and should not be prejudiced, unreasoning or form a political attack on the policies or proposals in question or on the people putting them forward.

7.5 The code describes council leaflets or newsletters that are delivered unsolicited to all households as "inevitably more intrusive" than publicity available on application to the council, and states that particular care is required when drafting this kind of material. The code states that 'council publicity should never attack or appear to undermine generally accepted moral standards'. The codes of conduct for members and officers are also relevant.

7.6 The attribution of marketing, promotional and advertising materials that reach the public unsolicited should be clearly laid out. It should be clear that the council is responsible for the event or service, so the correct inclusion of the council's corporate branding as described in the brand strategy is a prerequisite.

7.7 Publicity campaigns are appropriate in most circumstances. They can form part of consultation processes where local views are being sought, promote the effective and efficient use of local services and facilities, or influence public behaviour or attitudes on such matters as health, safety, crime prevention or equal opportunities. Publicity campaigns can provide an appropriate means of ensuring that the local community is properly informed about a matter relating to a function of the local authority and about the authority's policies in relation to that function and the reasons for them. Local authorities, like other public authorities, should not use public funds to mount publicity campaigns whose primary purpose is to persuade the public to hold a particular view on a question of policy.

7.8 When the council is negotiating a commercial transaction, officers or elected members will not weaken the council's position by disclosing it publicly or to the press. To do so would compromise a number of statutory obligations including the duty of care we have to council tax payers who rightly expect the council to protect its financial position. In these circumstances only the communications team, working with legal services, will talk to the press.

7.9 Employees or members must not betray the council's duty of care. Only the communications unit, working with legal services, will talk to the press on issues in these circumstances. If this is not observed, it may result in disciplinary action in the case of officers, and a code of conduct investigation in the case of members. If an employee is subject to allegations or a disciplinary matter, the council will, or make arrangements to, investigate fully and fairly. If this involves suspension, this does not



imply guilt. Only the communications unit, working with legal services, will respond to press interest in these circumstances.

7.10 Case law has established that the public interest, and what interests the public, is not the same thing. The council has a duty to act in the public interest. The press may often be concerned with what interests the public. When these are in conflict, the council will always act in the public interest.

7.11 Elected members have obligations both individually and collectively. If they breach the requirements of the *Members Code of Conduct* – for example by ‘leaking’ confidential information to the press or by bringing the council into disrepute – this may lead to referral to the council’s monitoring officer, who will deal with the complaint.

7.12 There is a general prohibition on local authorities producing “party political publicity”. Section 2 of the Local Government Act (1988) prohibits local authorities publishing any material which in whole, or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party. Also councils should never use advertising as a means of giving financial support to any publication that could be associated with a political party. Publicity should reflect the tradition of a politically -impartial service, and the fact that local authority staff are expected to serve the authority as a whole, whatever its composition from time to time.

7.13 A communications officer will be assigned to cover the activities of the cabinet and full council, attending each meeting and offering communications advice as well as planning and agreeing press releases.

7.14 The communications team will aim to ensure that the release of news to the media at least accompanies the distribution of papers for meetings where there is likely to be press interest.

7.15 Publicity about individual members may include the contact details, the positions they hold in the council (for example, member of the cabinet) and their responsibilities. All publicity should be approved by the member prior to release. Publicity may include information about individual members’ proposals, decisions and recommendations only where this is relevant to their position and responsibilities within the council. All such publicity should be objective and explanatory, and whilst it may acknowledge the part played by individual members as holders of particular positions in the council, personalisation of issues or personal image making should be avoided.

7.16 Whilst it may be appropriate to describe policies put forward by an individual councillor which are relevant to her/his position and responsibilities within the council, and to put forward her/his justification in defence of them, this should not be done in party political terms, using political slogans, expressly advocating policies of those of a particular political party or directly attacking policies and opinions of other parties, groups or individuals.

7.17 The communications team will seek legal clearance where appropriate for any issues that may be contentious, subject to a legal dispute, or part of a regulatory process.

8. Social media

8.1 The communications team will maintain a list of approved users. A full audit and on-going regulation will be implemented to help ensure the quality of information and to mitigate risk. Only those who have completed training on the approved social media channel may communicate on behalf of the council.

8.2 No individual or service area may undertake a social media account as representing a service area of or representing as Herefordshire Council, without prior agreement from the communications team.

8.3 The communications team will monitor social media and if a question or an issue is raised by the public that Herefordshire Council should answer, then the communications team will work with the appropriate service area to facilitate a response.

8.4 Service areas that wish to manage a social media account will need to submit: A business case; background information; and a commitment to the best practice guide for social media community management to help support the application. These will be reviewed and determined jointly by the communications team and information governance team.

8.5 Service areas that are successful in their application for a service-level social media account will be subject to mandatory annual training organised by the communication team.

8.6 The communications team and all social media managers will use plain language and avoid jargon and technical language.

8.7 Herefordshire Council may not comment on information on social media that is deemed to be posted anonymously.

8.8 Usage of social media accounts will be monitored by the communications team. Any individual's access to specific platforms or services may be suspended as part of a performance management or disciplinary process. Reference is made to the [employee code of conduct](#), which also applies to online.

8.9 An employee must not bring the council into disrepute via their social media activity (part of or outside of work).

9. Elections

9.1 Communications during the run-up to elections may be particularly sensitive and there are restrictions contained with the Code of Conduct on Local Publicity. To ensure the continued political impartiality of Herefordshire Council and its employees, it is recommended that the restrictions on communications apply also to national elections. The same extent of control does not apply to by-elections. Subject to compliance with the code of conduct, publicity about individual members who are not involved in the by-election is permitted (although great care should be taken in the managing of local issues that could be influential in a by-election).

9.2 The period of restriction in question relates to the day when formal notice of a local or national election is given, up to and including the day of the election – this is known as the pre-election or ‘purdah’ period and guidance is issued by the council on each occasion and published on the council’s website.

9.3 Any local authority is prohibited from publishing any material that appears to be designed to affect support, positively or negatively, for a political party.

9.4 Careful consideration should be given to the style, content, timing of material and the likely effect it will have on the audience. Material is prohibited if:

- It refers to a political party of a person identified with a political party
- It promotes or opposes a point of view on a question of political debate or controversy
- It supports a view or issue identifiable as the view of one political party and not of another
- It identifies with individual elected members or groups of members
- It is part of a campaign associated with a political view
- It contains quotes from politicians outside of the council, such as members of parliament, who are clearly identified as part of a political party.

9.5 Consideration also applies to proactive events, organised by Herefordshire Council which should not involve elected members or political candidates during this period.

9.6 However, even during the run up to a local or national election, communications and marketing can continue as follows:

- It is acceptable for the communications team, on behalf of the council, to distribute press releases and respond to legitimate service enquires provided the content is factual and not party political. The safest option is for press releases not to quote elected members during this period and particularly not members or individuals standing for election.
- It is admissible for elected members of the council holding key positions to comment in an emergency or where there is a genuine need for a member level response to an important event outside the authority’s control.
- Publications can continue as long as content is neutral and takes account of the restrictions outlined above. Sometimes long lead-in times associated with such



publications can pose an extra challenge. It should be remembered that it is the time of publication, not the time when the content is drafted, that is most crucial.

9.7 Electronic communication also comes into scope. Any material posted on social media, intranet or website during the period is subject to restrictions.

9.8 Consultation should not be undertaken on issues that could be seen as politically sensitive.

9.9 All these restrictions apply to other organisations that receive local authority funding and officers should check with community groups they fund and with third sector organisations that may be planning publicity around election time.

9.10 In general the question to ask of all publications, documents or events is; 'can it wait?' And if not, 'will the subject matter be regarded as influential on voting behaviour?' This will be the case with controversial subjects and needs to be avoided altogether.

9.11 If an elected member asks an employee of the council to publish something that the employee considers to be inappropriate or is against communications protocols, the concerns need to be raised with legal services and the communications team. If something cannot be distributed as a member has suggested then the employee should explain why and offer an alternative form of words. Again guidance and support is available from the communications team.

9.12 If the document has a high corporate profile or deals with a strategic issue then the chief executive or a director should clear the final version.

10. Advertising and Sponsorship

This Advertising and Sponsorship protocols replace the previous Advertising Policy.

Advertising and Sponsorship received by Herefordshire Council

10.1 A third party may advertise with Herefordshire Council or sponsor a particular campaign, event or asset. In that instance this should consider:

- Upholding the council's reputation and corporate identity
- Link to the council's priorities
- Secure best value for money and maximise income

10.2 Ensure compliance with legislation, [advertising industry codes](#) and other council policies.

- Support development of commercial partnerships with the private sector
- Safeguard the image and environment of the county.

10.3 The council will accept advertising and sponsorship on its own platforms that supports its priorities.

10.4 The council will not permit any advertising or sponsorship that represents a conflict of interest or is likely to cause serious or widespread offence. Particular care should be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of race, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation or disability. Content that is not permitted for advertising includes, but is not limited to, advertising that contains, infers or suggests any of the following:

- Advocacy of, or opposition to, any politically, environmentally or socially controversial subjects or issues
- Disparagement or promotion of any person or class of persons
- Promotion or incitement of illegal, violent or socially undesirable acts
- Promotion or availability of tobacco products, weapons, gambling or illegal drugs
- Advertising of financial organisations and loan advancers with punitive interest rates
- Promotion or availability of adult or sexually orientated entertainment materials
- Advertising that infringes on any trademark, copyright or patent rights of another company
- Claims or representations in violation of advertising or consumer protection laws
- Promotion of any political party.

10.5 The council abides by the Town and Country Planning Act. The control of Advertisements Regulations provides rules on displaying advertising. The council has the duty to ensure all advertising on council owned platforms falls within this legislation and will liaise with the appropriate authority/district council to ensure planning law relating to the display of advertisements is complied with.

10.6 The council will advertise its own services and offers as appropriate using its own platforms. This may include adverts relating to traded services or services which generate an income, or linked to a campaign. These should be identified and reviewed in collaboration with the communications team.

10.7 The council holds personal data of service users and careful consideration needs to be given to whether it is appropriate and legal (Data Protection Act) for this to be used for any advertising or direct marketing purposes. Wherever possible people should be asked whether they are willing to 'opt in' to receive news, information or advertising messages from the council when personal data is gathered. More guidance is available from the access to information team.

10.8 All advertising and sponsorship agreements should be recorded in the contracts register.

10.9 Advertising and sponsorship is not a way for any company or organisation to be viewed favourably by the council in any other business arrangements they might be a party to. Herefordshire Council will monitor and publish all information on advertising and sponsorship opportunities and income.



Advertising and Sponsorship Placed by Herefordshire Council

10.10 The council can place advertisements where it will support audience reach. This might include paid-for advertising with third parties, as well as promotion on council property, vehicles, publications or other council assets, or on those belonging to contracted or commissioned services. However, any such advertising must be conducted in line with the principles set out in section 10.1 above.

10.11 Herefordshire Council or a council sub-brand may use sponsorship as a method of communication and promotion for an event or activity. Where an activity or event is sponsored by the council this will be in line with the advertising principles set out in section 10.1 above. In addition, to this, the Council reserves the right to verify that the sponsorship complies with the following principles:

- Originates from a relevant organisation or service linked to specific campaigns and priorities
- Does not result in sponsoring or promoting any political organisation or political association
- The sponsorship arrangements will be approved by the communication team to ensure it does not bring the council into disrepute
- A sponsorship arrangement needs to ensure this does not constitute endorsement of the associated products or business
- The service will need to check that there are no disputes outstanding with the company being sponsored

For further information on the topics within this document, please contact the [Communications Manager](#)



Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	21 September 2016
Title of report:	Interim position statement on housing delivery
Report by:	Cabinet member: infrastructure

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising one or more wards in the county.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

Wards affected

Countywide

Purpose

To approve an interim position statement on housing delivery.

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) the draft interim position statement upon housing delivery (at appendix 1) be approved; and**
- (b) the need for such a statement be reviewed on an annual basis or earlier if it is clear that the council is able to demonstrate the existence of a five year supply of available housing land.**

Alternative options

- 1 Alternative options to preparing an interim statement would include:
 - 1) Continuing to process planning applications without an interim statement. This would not provide a positive response to the lack of a five year housing supply and would result in significant difficulties at planning appeals in justifying why adopted policy SS3 – ensuring sufficient housing land delivery of the core strategy was not being fully implemented.
 - 2) Undertake a partial review of the core strategy or adoption of new development plan documents. Policy SS3 does provide the option for a partial review of the core strategy in order to increase the supply of housing land. This option is not recommended given how recently the core strategy was approved and that adopting this option would require the identification of additional strategic allocations and would not provide a solution in short/medium term. Given the rate at which neighbourhood plans are now being finalised and adopted, and the potential for a positive improvement in the overall housing land supply within that period, to undertake a partial review or adopt new development plan documents is not currently recommended; it is proposed that the position be reviewed annually.

Reasons for recommendations

- 2 To provide planning officers and planning committee with advice regarding the approach to dealing with planning applications for housing in the absence of a 5-year supply of available housing land.

Key considerations

- 3 In order to ensure an ongoing and adequate supply of housing land developers should be encouraged to advance proposals for suitable and sustainable developments to meet the county's housing needs Paragraph 49 of the national planning policy framework (NPPF) states that "Housing applications should be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Relevant policies for the supply of housing should not be considered up-to-date if the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply.
- 4 The core strategy inspector considered that the the five year housing land supply was "marginal but realistic" more recently inspectors at appeals have determined Herefordshire Council could not demonstrate a five year supply.
- 5 The housing supply position as of April 2016 has now been reassessed. and the position set out in the five year housing supply position statement (www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/8060801/5-year-supply-july-16.pdf). The methodology used in this statement is that which was agreed at the core strategy examination. It considers a range of sources of housing supply including:
 - 1) Extant planning permissions;
 - 2) Sites which have received a resolution to grant planning permission between March 2015 - April 2016

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- 3) Strategic proposals in the adopted core strategy;
 - 4) Proposals which are included in neighbourhood development plans (NDPs);
 - 5) A “windfall” allowance – sites not specifically identified but are expected to come forward.
- 6 In determining whether a five year supply can be demonstrated the report compares the supply against the five year requirement, based upon the agreed core strategy trajectory and taking account of the past shortfall in completions and the need to include a 20% buffer (in accordance with the NPPF). The requirement consists of
- 1) planning commitments (outstanding planning permissions);
 - 2) sites which have received a resolution to grant planning permission between March 2015 - April 2016;
 - 3) an estimated level of housing delivery on the core strategy strategic urban extensions;
 - 4) an estimate of the housing delivered through Neighbourhood Plans over the next 5-years;
 - 5) an estimate of other sites which will come forward (windfall allowance).
- 7 The resulting calculation is set out below and indicates that the housing land supply in the county stands at 4.49 years supply.

Source	Homes
a) Core strategy 2011 – 2031 target	16,500
b) Core strategy requirement 1/4/2011 – 1/4/2016 (5 yrs)	3,000
c) Homes completed (net) 1/4/2011 – 31/3/2016 (5 yrs)	1,974
d) Core strategy requirement for next five years 2016 – 2021	4,250
e) Plus residual shortfall (b minus c)	1,026
f) Plus 20% buffer (required by NPPF)	1,055
g) Total requirement (2016 – 2021) = d + e + f	6331
h) <i>Annualised requirement = (Total g divided by 5 years)</i>	1,266
i) Total deliverable dwellings* *(as set out in paragraph 6 above)	5,692
Housing supply (i divided by h)	4.49 yrs

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- 8 As a result of not being able to demonstrate a five year supply of housing land paragraph 49 of the NPPF will need to be considered when planning applications are determined. Core strategy policy SS3 provides the policy framework for where dwelling completions are below the target figure. The policy indicates that priority will be given to increasing housing supply using appropriate mechanisms including; the preparation of an interim position statement utilising evidence from the strategic housing land availability assessment.
- 9 The approval of an Interim position statement would provide a short/medium term response to the housing supply issue in accordance with adopted policy SS3. A draft interim statement is attached in appendix 1, The statement provides a commitment to continue to increase housing land supply in the county by:
- 1) utilising existing evidence as identified by the strategic housing land availability assessments to give preference to sustainable sites identified in strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA) with low constraints, before those with significant constraints;
 - 2) ensuring that appropriate weight is given to the policies and proposals in adopted/emerging NDPs; and
 - 3) recognising that despite being considered out-of-date weight can continue to be given to the housing supply policies of the core strategy in appropriate circumstances.
- 10 This statement will be an important document which will guide the council's planning committee in determining planning applications for housing and set out a positive approach to encouraging developers to come forward with proposals for suitable housing developments to meet the county's needs. However, although it will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications the approval of the statement will not constitute a new local plan policy and should be considered as an implementation mechanism of core strategy policy SS3.
- 11 The council is already working hard to facilitate the delivery of housing growth in Herefordshire. In addition to the interim statement other mechanisms to increase delivery of new housing have already been identified and are starting to be addressed and these include:
- a. pro-active work with the developers/owners/agents of the strategic sites to progress these as soon as possible to application and approval stage. With this in mind a major sites delivery board has been established in order to help with this process.
 - b. the procurement of a development partner to contribute to housing growth targets through the development of new homes on council-owned land; and
 - c. continuing encouragement of neighbourhood development plans to include housing allocations. This is important as there remains a significant element of the housing requirement for the county to be met in rural areas and market towns. Crucially national planning policy guidance (PPG) states that where a local authority cannot demonstrate a five year land supply the local decision maker should take account of the relevant Neighbourhood Development Plan in force. It is therefore important that Parish Councils pursue the completion of NDP's for their neighbourhood area.

- d. the council is also proactively progressing the delivery of essential transport infrastructure which supports the housing growth targets set out in the Core Strategy.

Community impact

- 12 The principal aim of the interim position statement is to help implement the policies set out in the adopted core strategy in order to ensure that there are sufficient homes provided for all members of the community.

Equality duty

- 13 This report proposes a course of action which will implement an element of policy contained within the adopted core strategy. The core strategy was subject to an equality impact assessment which has been completed. The assessment ensures that there is no potential for discrimination and that all appropriate opportunities have been undertaken to advance equality and foster good relations

Financial implications

- 14 There are no specific costs associated with the approval of the interim statement. However, its use in processing planning application should reduce the likelihood of costs being awarded against the council at planning appeals.

Legal implications

- 15 The core strategy is part of the statutory development plan for Herefordshire as required by relevant provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The preparation of an interim statement upon increasing housing land supply is a specific mechanism referenced within policy SS3 of the council's core strategy to safeguard the delivery of the core strategy housing target. The NPPF paragraph 17 bullet point 1 requires that Local Plans are kept up to date and are consistent with Government Household projections. This interim position statement will also assist the Council to ensure sufficient housing land delivery.

Risk management

- 16 By making a formal decision to implement a key element of policy SS3 of the core strategy the council will be seen to be developing positive mechanisms to increase the housing land supply in the county. Not approving the interim statement will not provide additional advice to planning officers and planning committee and may increase the risk of the loss of planning appeals.

Consultees

- 17 A Member briefing regarding the 5 year land supply position was held in July 2016. The core strategy was subject to significant consultation during its preparation.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interim position statement upon housing delivery.

Background papers

- None identified.

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**Interim position statement upon housing delivery
September 2016**

Introduction

1. The council adopted the Herefordshire local plan core strategy in October 2015 which sets out its long term land use planning policy. This included plans to deliver 16,500 new homes across the county by 2031 supported by improvements to infrastructure and proposals for new employment development to bring forward growth in the economy and jobs. Prior to the adoption of the core strategy, an examination in public was held and the independent inspector concluded that the plan's housing target was "reasonable and justified".
2. The Government's National Planning Policy Framework requires local planning authorities to identify a 5 year supply of housing land and currently there is only around 4.5 year housing supply in Herefordshire. A number of large strategic housing sites across the county, including at Holmer West and Three Elms in Hereford, are expected to come forward in the near future which will help to address this under supply.
3. Delivering new housing development is important for the future of the county and the Council is responding proactively to increase the supply and delivery of new homes in the county in order to meet adopted targets. The measures include working closely with developers of forthcoming large developments to ensure their timely release and significant progress is being made with neighbourhood development plans across the county which will also deliver housing growth.
4. Work on the Hereford area plan has commenced and recently, the council announced plans to procure a development partner to contribute to housing growth through the development of new homes on council-owned land. The council is also proactively progressing the delivery of essential transport infrastructure which supports the housing growth targets set out in the core strategy.
5. This interim statement provides an additional mechanism to help provide policy advice to support delivering housing growth in accordance with the core strategy during a period where a five year supply of housing land cannot be demonstrated.

Five year housing supply position

6. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of housing sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing against their housing requirements. The core strategy inspector in her report of September 2015 considered that the five year housing land supply was "marginal but realistic" more recently inspectors at appeals have determined Herefordshire Council could not demonstrate a five year supply.

7. The housing supply position as of April 2016 has now been reassessed and the position set out in the five year housing supply position statement (www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/8060801/5-year-supply-july-16.pdf). The methodology used in this statement is that which was agreed at the core strategy examination. It considers a range of sources of housing supply including:
- Extant planning permissions;
 - Strategic proposals in the adopted core strategy;
 - Proposals which are included in neighbourhood development plans (NDPs);
 - A “windfall” allowance – sites not specifically identified but are expected to come forward.
8. In determining whether a five year supply can be demonstrated the report compares the supply against the five year requirement, based upon the agreed core strategy trajectory and taking account of the past shortfall in completions and the need to include a 20% buffer (in accordance with the NPPF). The requirement consists of:
- planning commitments (outstanding planning permissions);
 - Sites which have received a resolution to grant planning permission between March 2015 - April 2016;
 - An estimated level of housing delivery on the core strategy strategic urban extensions;
 - An estimate of the housing delivered through neighbourhood plans over the next 5-years;
 - An estimate of other sites which will come forward (windfall allowance).
9. The resulting calculation is set out below in Table 1 this indicates that the housing land supply in the county stands at 4.49 years supply.

Table 1: Five year housing supply position at April 2016

Source	Homes
a) Core Strategy 2011 – 2031 target	16,500
b) Core Strategy requirement 1/4/2011 – 1/4/2016 (5 yrs)	3,000
c) Homes completed (net) 1/4/2011 – 31/3/2016 (5 yrs)	1,974
d) Core Strategy requirement for next five years 2016 – 2021	4,250
e) Plus residual shortfall (b minus c)	1,026
f) Plus 20% buffer (required by NPPF)	1,055
g) Total requirement (2016 – 2021) = d + e + f	6331
h) <i>Annualised requirement = (Total g divided by 5 years)</i>	1,266
i) Total deliverable dwellings* *(as set out in paragraph 6 above)	5,692
Housing supply (i divided by h)	4.49 yrs

8. Therefore, in the absence of a five year supply and in order to increase the delivery of new housing in the county Herefordshire Council positively encourages developers to come forward with proposals for suitable and sustainable housing developments to meet the county's needs.
9. Core strategy policy SS3 (see Appendix 1) provides the policy framework for where dwelling completions are below the target figure. The policy indicates that priority will be given to increasing housing supply using appropriate mechanisms including:
 - a. A partial review of the local plan; or
 - b. The preparation of new development plan documents (DPDs); or
 - c. The preparation of an interim position statement utilising evidence from the strategic housing land availability assessment.
10. This paper represents the interim position statement as set out in criterion c above. In determining sustainable planning applications for new housing developments the evidence available on sites identified in the strategic housing land availability assessment (SHLAA) process will be given weight as a material consideration. In particular, those sites in sustainable locations which have an indication of having no or a low level of constraints will be preferred to those sites which are identified as having significant constraints. Details of the SHLAA can be viewed on the Herefordshire Council Website at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-evidence-base/herefordshire-strategic-housing-land-availability-assessment> and <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-evidence-base/herefordshire-housing-land-assessments-2015>.
11. In addition, appropriate weight will be given to the policies and proposals in adopted/emerging NDPs which have reached at least Regulation 16 stage, particularly where the proposals are identified as emerging site allocations and plans are clearly consistent with the policies of the core strategy. Details of the NDPs in the county can be seen at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning>.
12. It should be recognised that this positive approach of Herefordshire Council does not mean that all applications for new housing development will be permitted. The NPPF itself recognises that in reaching a decision upon new housing the housing land supply position will need to be balanced against other factors in the development plan and/or NPPF which could result in the refusal of planning permission. The footnote to paragraph 14 of the NPPF identifies a list of areas where development should be restricted.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf
13. Finally, it should also be noted that although the housing supply policies are considered to be out-of-date whilst a five year supply of housing land cannot be demonstrated, this does not mean that no weight should be attributed to these policies of the core strategy. The weight given to such policies is a matter of planning judgment and it may still be sufficient to justify a refusal of planning permission. For example this may be the case where acknowledged environmental interests would be

harmed. This may also be the case where a development is proposed which would result in a development disproportionate in scale to its location which would have a serious impact upon the role or function of a local settlement.

Appendix 1: Herefordshire Local Plan – Core Strategy policy SS3

Policy SS3 -Ensuring sufficient housing land delivery

A sufficient supply of housing land will be maintained to ensure the delivery of the Core Strategy housing target as set out in Policy SS2 over the plan period. The rate of housing delivery and supply will be assessed through the annual monitoring process. If monitoring demonstrates that the number of new dwelling completions is below the cumulative target figure over a 12-month monitoring period (1 April to 31 March) as set out in the housing trajectory in Appendix 4 the Council will prioritise increasing housing supply in the following monitoring periods using appropriate mechanisms which, depending on the scale and nature of potential under-delivery, will include:

- A partial review of the Local Plan – Core Strategy: or
- The preparation of new Development Plan Documents; or
- The preparation of an interim position statement and utilising evidence from the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment to identify additional housing land.

A range of strategic housing proposals are identified which are key to the delivery of the spatial strategy. In addition there are elements of key infrastructure which will need to be provided to enable full delivery of the strategic housing targets. The Council will work with developers and other stakeholders to ensure the timely development of these strategic proposals and the key infrastructure requirements.

Appendix 5 sets out the relationships between the delivery of housing and the timing of the main infrastructure requirements. It also identifies actions necessary to safeguard the integrity of the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) from adverse effects. The Council will actively monitor the relationships identified in this appendix. Any material delays in the implementation of identified infrastructure or environmental safeguards and which will lead to under-delivery of housing supply will inform the implementation of the range of measures set out above to ensure plan-led corrective measures are put in place.