

ANNUAL REPORT ON ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Report By: Cabinet Member for Economic and Community Services

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

To share with Members current issues and priorities for the next 12 month period.

Background

- For information the portfolio covers:
 - Cultural Services - libraries, arts, creative industries, tourism, heritage, sports development and the Courtyard contract;
 - Community Regeneration – Leader+ programme, South Wye regeneration, voluntary sector liaison, support for social enterprises, parish and rural services, grants (advice and distribution);
 - Economic Development – inward investment and infrastructure, support for business, area based development – north and south, redundant building grants;
 - Life Long Learning – family learning, adult community learning, address worklessness;
 - Community Safety and Drugs Partnership – CCTV, reassurance and marketing, drugs intervention programme, crime prevention and intervention;
 - Parks, Countryside and Leisure Development - public rights of way, parks, play areas, countryside access, commons, Halo contract, leisure provision at Kington and Wigmore.
- As part of the restructure of the Council the services are now located within two directorates – Cultural Services and Parks, Countryside and Leisure Development are within the Environment and Culture Directorate, whilst the remaining services are within the Regeneration Directorate along with Strategic Housing, Planning and Transportation. Both will be subject to restructure arrangements to take into consideration changes of management and focus of the services.

Herefordshire Council base budget for service area	£ (2008/9)
Cultural Services (includes the Courtyard)	£4 million
Parks, Countryside and Leisure Development (includes Halo)	£3.5 million
Economic Development (includes ESG)	£1 million
Community Safety (match fund for external funding)	£117,000
Community Regeneration (includes grants to external groups e.g. Citizen's Advice, Community First, HALC)	£1 million
Life Long Learning (match fund for external funding)	£46,000
Total	£9.7 million

Summary of Achievements

- Herefordshire as the regional capital for Enterprising Britain Award.
- Rotherwas Relief Road completed by the end of June 2008.
- Retail developer selected for Edgar Street Grid.
- Delivery of 23 Redundant Building Grants totalling over £800,000, which will ultimately create over 270 jobs.
- Increased completion of public path orders (5 orders made in 2006/07 compared to 46 completed in 2007/8).
- Completion of the Museum Resource and Learning Centre, Royal Opening in April 2008.
- Completion of Phase 2 of Aylestone Park.
- 6 new schools acquiring Arts Mark gold.
- Herefordshire Compact in place to promote and support partnership working between the Voluntary and Community Sector and public bodies.
- 2 new mobile library vehicles with access to the library catalogue.
- More accredited sports clubs who have achieved 'clubmark' with 32 in the County and working with another 12 clubs for 2008/09.
- Sports Referral Project nominated for the Midlands 'Power of Sport' award.
- 95% of the babies and young children population receiving book start packs.
- 500 children taking part in 30 events in libraries in the summer holiday, and 1,345 children involved in the Summer Reading Challenge.
- Completion of a new £500,000 Joint use artificial turf pitch in Ross on Wye.
- Two new fitness suite extensions at halo centres and refit of Fitness Suite at Kington Leisure Centre.
- £180,000 parks infrastructure investment funded by Hereford City Council.
- Doubled the number of visitors to the annual Food Festival to 8,000.
- A successful Herefordshire Business Conference.
- The incorporation of Visit Herefordshire to lead the promotion of tourism in the County.
- Developing a vision and strategy for Hereford City Centre with the Hereford City Partnership.
- Herefordshire is being approached by Advantage West Midlands to run the Rural Development Programme England across the Region.
- Taking forward the development of a new business park at Model Farm, Ross-on-Wye.

Key Service Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

3. **Contingency Plan for Reductions in External funding** – a number of schemes and services are reliant on external funding; this includes the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership, the Leader programme, Life Long Learning and projects within arts and tourism e.g. the Food Festival. It is also important to recognise the need for private sector funding.
4. **Customer Demands** – customer demand is constantly changing and increasing. A key requirement is to be flexible with opening hours, specifically libraries and TICs where people want access to information at all times of the day, seven days a week.
5. **Planning Gain** – new guidance has changed to include funds for libraries, community centres, public art and heritage centres. This compliments existing focus on parks and countryside services and CCTV.

6. **EU funding** – there is potential to access the new round of EU funding in learning, economic development and access to services.
7. **ICT requirements** - there are also a number of ICT pressures that need to be addressed in 2008/9 which have become critical to running the services. These include replacement of servers to operate library service; self-serve PC booking and print management system; improved Broadband at Rotherwas linked to Herefordshire Council provision.
8. **Sub-National Review** of National Economic Development and Regeneration – this document suggests a change in relationship with regional development agency, with far greater delegation of delivery and funding to local authorities.
9. **Pressure local services** – whilst there is a stronger focus nationally on working with neighbourhoods and communities, there is pressure on sustaining communities e.g. withdrawal of post offices and telephone boxes.

Priorities and Schemes

- **Grange Court, Leominster** – part funded by Government's Community Assets Transfer Fund this project will see the building dedicated for community use
- **Library Developments** – new library building in Ledbury, and development of Ross-on-Wye Library to incorporate Info Shop
- **Edgar Street Grid** – development of 100-acre site north of Hereford City Centre, that also includes a Civic Quarter and Library
- **Rotherwas Futures** – major infrastructure project to increase the viability of employment land in Hereford
- **New plan for Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership** – new approach, priority, targets, funding for community safety and drugs intervention for the county covering the next three years
- **Regeneration of Hereford City Centre** – working with partners to identify actions and funding to develop the city
- **Revise the TIC network** – to take forward plans to revise TICs
- **Access to local services** – explore ways of retaining and enhancing local services such as post office functions
- **Live Work and Home Working** – forward plans in Ross on Wye to establish Live Work units as a pilot scheme for the region and explore ways of supporting home based working
- **Regeneration Strategy for Herefordshire** – establish a whole county strategy that supports economic growth
- **Address worklessness** – provide support mechanisms for people to enter employment who have been out of work for more than a year

Expected Decision before Cabinet

10. Review of TIC and Tourism by Community Services Scrutiny Committee.
11. Review of Management Agreement with Halo by Community Services Scrutiny Committee.
12. Major Schemes – decisions regarding ESG; Rotherwas Futures; library facilities.
13. Update on the future of Post Office Services in Herefordshire.

Service and financial performance

14. In summary the Crime and Disorder PIs show the number of burglaries and reported domestic violence incidences have reduced in Herefordshire. However, poor performance in violent crime and criminal damage has led to an overall worsening of the crime and safety picture.

15. For Cultural Services performance in relation to the percentage of people satisfied with museums and galleries has improved on last years figure and has reached the predicted target for 2007. However, the performance in relation to the number of pupils in organised school trips visiting museums and galleries has fallen.
16. The performance of libraries continues to be below the national comparative position with only 69% of all residents being satisfied with libraries; however the Herefordshire Satisfaction Survey 2007 reported that 84% of users were satisfied with libraries.
17. The performance on the percentage of footpaths and rights of way which are easy to use has declined since last year. Internal discussions are ongoing to improve performance.
18. A key indicator for economic regeneration is the average (median) weekly earnings in Herefordshire compared to the average in the West Midlands and this continues to be low. However through the implementation of our Economic Strategy, particularly through up-skilling the workforce, the Council aspires to drive up average earnings in Herefordshire.
19. Consistently 79% of residents of Herefordshire are satisfied with the local community as a place to live however, the target for 2007 of 87% was not met. The number of people volunteering an average of 2 hours per week or more increased in 2007 however, the target of 22% was not achieved.
20. With the implementation of the white paper Strong and Prosperous Communities, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment will be replaced by the Comprehensive Area Assessment from 2008/09.

Transformation Programmes and External Inspections

14. **Ofsted Inspection of Adult Learning** – In April 2007 the Council's Adult and Community Learning provision was Ofsted inspected. The effectiveness of the provision was deemed 'good', with programmes found to be flexible in meeting the needs of the learners, with the guidance for learners on programmes being particularly good. Key areas for improvement were the use of initial assessment and the need to include stakeholders in the self-assessment process.
15. **Cultural Services Inspection** – In February 2007 the Audit Commission inspected the cultural service operated or funded by Herefordshire Council. The service was deemed to be a "*fair service that has promising prospects for improvement*".
16. A key area of transformation identified in 2007/8 was the re-engineering of Parks, Countryside and Leisure Development. This has resulted in:
 - Organisation of the management structures in Parks and Countryside
 - Address the back-log of public path orders, with an increase in performance
 - A more flexible approach to addressing the mixed needs of the service, with officers diversifying their skills to take on new areas
 - A joining of functions between PROW and Parks and Countryside.
17. Another area of transformation was the remodelling of the Tourist Information Centres. The Scrutiny Committee has produced a review of tourism including TICs and Ledbury TIC has moved to the Masters House creating a rent saving.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- **None identified**