

MEETING:	COUNCIL
DATE:	5 MARCH 2010
TITLE OF REPORT:	LEADER'S REPORT

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards affected

County wide

Purpose

To provide an overview of the Executive's activity during the past three months.

Recommendation

THAT:

The report be noted.

Report

1. Cabinet has met on four occasions since the November meeting of Council and, in addition to the Budget & Policy items appearing separately on Council's agenda either today or in February, has considered the following issues:
 - a) *Budget and Performance Monitoring Reports* – Cabinet particularly noted that robust action plans had been implemented for all LAA indicators; Cabinet also received a briefing on the provisional local government finance settlement for 2010/11;
 - b) *Joint (Council and NHS Herefordshire) Strategies & Policies* – Cabinet approved a joint corporate property strategy; Cabinet supported the implementation of the joint customer strategy and agreed that regard should be given to it in the development of future plans, commissioning of services and budget decisions; Cabinet noted the key findings from the joint Strategic Needs Assessment, noting that regard be given to them in the development of future plans, commissioning of services and budget decisions; Cabinet approved the revised joint Risk Assurance Policy and accompanying risk management assurance guidance;
 - c) *Responses to Scrutiny Reviews* – Cabinet agreed the executive's response to the scrutiny reviews of Tourism and of the Economic Development Strategy;
 - d) *Herefordshire Schools*– Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Herefordshire Schools Task Group following the formal consultation undertaken by the group and endorsed the cluster working and school leadership proposals; the principle of establishing sustainability criteria and thresholds were endorsed with further detailed analysis requested. This further work will be brought back to Cabinet in due course. Cabinet separately agreed to progress the statutory process necessary to secure the

amalgamation of Leominster Infant & Junior schools.

To try and secure the best possible future for our children's education in the future, working with the F40 group of local authorities (representing those authorities that are the poorest funded), and through a Herefordshire delegation to the Minister of State for Schools and Learners, we have been lobbying strongly for fairer funding for schools in our county.

Herefordshire is rightly proud of its track record for delivering high quality education in the county, but it should be recognised that this is achieved against a backdrop of being a poorly funded authority facing reduced funding due to falling pupil numbers. The rural dimension further adds to costs and there is a strong expectation, both nationally and locally that rural provision should largely be maintained. Compared to both the national average and comparable local authorities, Herefordshire holds comparatively little funding centrally with most funding going directly to schools, but despite that we are seeing increasing numbers of schools facing budget challenges, leading to a rise in redundancies in response to diminishing budgets.

The government has recently undertaken a review of school funding to inform any national change to be implemented in 2011; we will continue to make every effort to press our case for a fairer share of resources to be made available to Herefordshire's schools by, for example, seeking the adoption of a formula based on the number of school-age children per hectare, thereby taking proper account of the impacts of sparsity in a rural area;

- e) *Local Development Framework* – Cabinet approved the Shaping Our Place paper for consultation and later in my report I provide an update on the progress of that consultation;
- f) *Assessments and Inspections* – Cabinet received presentations on the outcome of Herefordshire's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) results and the outcome of the Care Quality Commission assessment of adult social care; Cabinet also noted the Audit Commissions Annual Audit & Inspection Letter 2009;
- g) *Connectivity* – Cabinet approved the approach to addressing the challenges of delivering broadband throughout the county, recognising that a strategic and long-term vision for broadband is needed, with smarter and more collaborative procurement across all public sector bodies. The broadband vision for Herefordshire is to enable a fast and affordable broadband service that contributes to better outcomes for all the people in the county, with greater range of service delivery, competitive advantage for businesses and escalated learning opportunities; Cabinet separately approved the awarding of the contract for the supply of the community network;
- h) *Herefordshire & Worcestershire Waste Disposal Contract* – Cabinet gave support in principle to the proposals made by the council's waste disposal contractor for the development of an Energy from Waste plant and authorised officers to progress further negotiations. Cabinet also agreed to reimburse reasonable costs incurred by the contractor should the proposed development prove abortive;
- i) *Shared Services* – Cabinet has received reports on progress and accepted the business case for shared services. Approval was given to further develop the shared services programme and authorisation given to officers to progress further negotiations prior to seeking formal decisions as necessary.

Shaping our Place 2026/Local Transport Plan Consultations

2. Since January we have been running, in parallel, consultations on the Local Development Framework, which will be the blueprint for planning and developing Herefordshire for the

future and the Local Transport Plan, which will drive the county's transport strategy for the next 15 years.

3. These consultations are vital if we are to provide the right frameworks to provide the growth needed in the county to address the following:
 - Herefordshire has below average wage levels for the region but above average house prices.
 - There are some 5,000 people on the county's housing waiting list and demand is high for homes that are decent and affordable.
 - Herefordshire is recognised as providing a good education; but without a university, or sufficient higher education to build skills and qualifications, or good career prospects, we know young people are more likely to find better prospects elsewhere.
 - The county also needs more enterprises, offering high quality jobs. More space for employment land has to be found. Growth in the county will provide stronger markets for local firms to thrive and prosper - and safeguard local essential public services.
 - Sorting out Hereford's traffic problems is a major priority. Previous consultation shows that most local people feel that a blend of public transport improvements and a new relief road and second river crossing is the preferred solution. However, the route – either to the west or the east of the city – needs careful consideration and the consultation details the implications of either option. Leominster is also identified as requiring a southern relief road.
 - We want to further promote the role of the market towns as service and economic centres for their rural hinterlands and also improve links with Hereford.
 - Several villages could see development designed to increase affordable housing and sustain essential services, including schools, and new shops, along with rural transport improvements.
4. When we planned the consultation events we set out to deliver the most ambitious consultation exercise since the creation of the Council in 1998. And with one week to go we have already engaged with more people than any previous consultation. This is perhaps not surprising given that the two documents will shape the future of the County up to 2026.
5. The consultation exercise has already touched many groups and organisations as well as individuals. Meetings have been held with local businesses, schools and a variety of other local organisations. Many Town and Parish Councils have held specific meetings within the consultation period and the roadshows have been well attended. By way of example 507 people visited the exhibition in High Town on Saturday 13 February and generated 345 comments on the Hereford relief road. The council's website, together with the wrap-arounds in both the Ad Mag and the Hereford Journal have helped ensure that everyone is aware of, and can participate in the consultation.
6. The consultation period closes on 12 March. Thereafter the responses will be assessed and fed into the final Core Strategy to be considered by Cabinet/Council in the Autumn. The Core Strategy will provide the context for the preparation of the Hereford Area Action Plan (2011) and the Market Towns and Rural Areas Action Plan (2012).

Leading the West Midlands Recovery

7. The West Midlands Leaders Board has launched its Statement of Intent, not only setting out how we will work together and why local authorities should be taking the lead but also our four key commitments to set the West Midlands on a road to recovery.

8. 'Leading the West Midlands Recovery - A Statement by the West Midlands Leaders Board' was officially launched at the West Midlands Leaders Board Conference on 28th January, having been agreed and signed by all 33 local authority leaders earlier in the month.
9. It outlines four key areas of priority:
 - Improve the economic position of the West Midlands so that business can grow and prosper again
 - Show local government's leadership role in forging solutions to our problems and holding partners to account for delivering those solutions
 - Improve the image and reputation of the West Midlands and lobby government with one voice so that we secure the resources we need
 - Maximise the effectiveness of local government and speak with authority on the challenges facing us
10. Each of these commitments has a number of priority actions and an annual report will be produced setting out progress made to deliver those commitments across the West Midlands.
11. In order to create a more prosperous region it is recognised that public sector agencies must, with the private sector, work in partnership together. Six broad sub-regional partnerships have been identified:
 - Birmingham
 - Black Country
 - Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire
 - Staffordshire & Stoke
 - Herefordshire, Shropshire & Telford and Wrekin
 - Worcestershire

However these are not rigid or exclusive partnerships and authorities should and must work in any combination of these partnerships and their neighbours necessary to achieve prosperity for the region.

Resources to better reflect our aging population people

12. Herefordshire recently participated in a review, undertaken by the Communities and Local Government department into how local strategic partnerships are preparing for an ageing population. During our discussions, we raised our concern that the way that Revenue Support Grant is calculated does not take sufficient account of the increasing pressures across all services of increasing numbers of older people within an area, and subsequently have provided evidence supporting that concern and to lobby for changes in the calculation methodology.

Widemarsh Street

13. Work has now begun on the £1.3million refurbishment scheme for Widemarsh Street (including Maylord Street) in the city. Following consultation during 2009, the design aims to create a flagship street that is attractive for local businesses, residents and visitors and will encourage visitors and shoppers to move between the historic core of the city and the attractions proposed for the old livestock market site which is subject to a £650million redevelopment.

14. Having listened to the concerns raised by local businesses about the reliability of the electricity supply, Herefordshire Council has held detailed negotiations with Central Networks, resulting in their agreeing to renew the mains supplies along the street. To minimise disruption, this work will be undertaken in conjunction with the overall refurbishment works which will be carried out in five phases during the year, the main paving works scheduled for completion before Christmas 2010.
15. Inevitably there will be a level of disruption whilst these works are undertaken, and a community liaison specialist has been appointed by the contractor, Alun Griffiths Ltd of Abergavenny, to ensure that traders and shoppers are kept informed during the works and disruption is kept to a minimum.