

Report from Cllr Bramer – Cabinet Member (Resources)

Introduction and Background

What we do

The Resources Directorate plans, manages and supports the use of financial and property assets to meet Herefordshire's corporate objectives and hence our customers' needs. The Resources Directorate also provides assurance that Herefordshire Council conducts its business in a way that supports and enhances local democracy.

We provide these services to ensure that:

- Use of resources and Value for Money is maximised for the benefit of everyone who lives, works or visits Herefordshire.
- Corporate and service planning is done in the context of available cash and property resources.
- Cash and property resources are allocated in line with Herefordshire's priorities.

1. Directorate Organisation & Management

1.1 The Directorate consists of approximately 268 staff divided into four key areas of activity:

- a. Asset Management & Property Services (AMPS).
- b. Audit Services (AS).
- c. Benefit & Exchequer Services (BES).
- d. Financial Services (FS).

1.2 The Resources Leadership team (RLT) consists of the following members of staff:

- a. Director (David Powell).
- b. Head of Asset Management & Property Services (Malcolm MacAskill).
- c. Audit Services Manager (Tony Ford).
- d. Head of Benefit & Exchequer Services (Mike Toney).
- e. Head of Financial Services (Anne Phillips).

1.3 The Leadership Team meets twice a month, once formally to agree internal policy and set the directorate's direction and once informally to discuss cross service information. Whilst meetings scheduled for the beginning of the month (the formal RLT), support the delivery of the corporate Team Talk briefing RLT also covers other key issues with particular emphasis on:

- a. Progress achieving key priorities.
- b. Sharing key messages from Joint Management Team
- c. Performance management including budgets
- d. Review of the directorate risk register.
- e. Forward Planning

1.4 The Director keeps the Cabinet Member (Resources) briefed on key issues on a weekly basis.

- 1.5 Performance to date against the directorate and service plans for 2010/11 is as expected at the end of the first quarter.
- 1.6 Performance objectives have been agreed between the Director of Resources and the Chief Executive and these are linked through to the Head of Service objectives, service plans and performance appraisals.

2. Service Planning And Performance Management Arrangements

- 2.1 The directorate and service priorities supports the following theme in the council's Corporate Plan.

Priority	Action
Children & Young People	Administering free school meals
	Financial Systems Team makes payments to foster carers and monitors direct payments in respect of children with disabilities
Health & Well-being	We make direct payments which enable people to choose their own care arrangements
	Paying housing and council tax benefit to those on low incomes to help them meet their rent and council tax liabilities
Older People	Direct payments to users to help with care services
	Working with the council's Joint Team to promote benefit take-up
Economic Development & Enterprise	Raising awareness of rate reliefs for small and rural businesses
Organisational Improvement and Greater Efficiency	Improved performance management and data quality resulting in increased benefit subsidy
	Contributing to the use of resources assessment through effective income collection and debt management
	Providing local payment facilities through Post Offices and Payzone outlets
	Introduction of online access for customers to council tax and benefit records

- 2.2 The directorate has three key priorities in support of the Corporate Plan theme and priority as follows:
- a. Better Outcomes
 - b. Delivering Value for Money.
 - c. Improving Customer Experience

- 2.3 These priorities form the basis of the business plans for each of the four services.
- 2.4 One key improvement for this year is that the directorate and service plans for Resources have all been approved and placed on Performance Plus with national and local indicators linked directly to the corporate plan.
- 2.5 The directorate and service plans have been used to establish and agree personal objectives for the year for staff in the directorate. Individual priorities are therefore linked to Corporate Plan priorities for 2010/11.
- 2.6 Since July 2009 there has been a consistent performance management reporting system for the directorate. The current system helps track progress at team, service and directorate level. The system is now under review to ensure it dovetails with the new corporate approach to performance management that is more exception based rather than being based on the collection of significant amounts of data. Alignment with the new Performance Plus system has been achieved.

3. Key Achievements For 2009/10

3.1 Asset Management & Property Services

- In December 2009 we completed the purchase of the Plough lane site including additional land. At £4m this was lower than previously anticipated
- The new Livestock market is now proceeding on plan and the sod cutting ceremony takes place this Friday, 25th June. Willmott Dixon are the main contractors.
- Earl Mortimer College (formerly Minster School) continues on plan.
- Work has started on Hereford Academy – Willmott Dixon are the main contractors and are actively promoting community involvement.
- Tendered for co-locality funding however this is dependent on new coalition government funding.
- Regular meetings with Halo regarding day-to-day management issues as well as wider strategic proposals.
- We have seconded David Carmichael from Gloucestershire Council to assist in the rent reviews for smallholdings ; these have now been completed and implemented
- Riverside Primary School – School was handed over in December and is now in use
- The Joint Corporate Property Strategy was passed by cabinet; this document incorporates a disposal policy, a community asset transfer policy, a maintenance strategy and strategies for operational and non-operational properties.
- Savings of £95,000 per annum have been achieved through successful rating appeals for school premises.
- The Head of AMPS is a Member of the Technical Assessment Team providing advice to the ESG (Edgar Street Grid) Board and the Council on the preferred developer for the Retail Quarter development and on the preferred Strategic partner for the Urban Village development.

3.2 BES

Workload & Performance

- Improvements in processing times despite the increase in benefit caseload increased of 10.1% (from 13,799 to 15,193 achieved) between January 2009 and March 2010.
- Other performance indicators were as follows:

	2009/10	2008/9
Average time to pay for purchases (creditors)	14.99 days	17.54 days
Percentage of Council tax	98.54%	98.57%
Percentage of Business rates collected	98.9%	98.57%

- Continuing low level of benefit error meant that we maintained our level of increased subsidy income.
- Increased number of council tax payments made by direct debit (70.1% in 2009/10 and 68.7% in 2008/9)
- Increase of 10.5% in the number of applications for small business rate relief (2523 properties receive relief), 34.5% of all business properties now receiving this relief.

Service Improvements

- Contract with Allpay for processing payments offers a wider choice of payment locations, twenty-four hour telephone payment option and a lower cost per payment than payments through cash offices
- Electronic change of address form for council tax – developed with electoral registration
- Closer working with customer staff through our staff located in Garrick House
- Cabinet Member vision agreed for benefits service including take up strategy that targets hard to reach groups in rural communities.
- Data matching through the National Fraud Initiative for council tax sole occupancy discount
- Reduced service costs to deliver better value for money. Council tax cost per property for 2009/10 was £10.39 compared to a benchmarking average of £16.34

Planned actions in 2010/11

Customer Consultation to:

- Provide greater awareness of customer need
- Focus on closer working with other organisations to address the needs of the 'hard to reach' groups.
- Enable us to target better our benefit take up campaigns.
- Electronic benefit claims
- Improving working with Customer service
- Further improvement in value for money

3.3 Financial Services

Anne Phillips joined us as Head of Financial Services in October 2009. Anne joins us from Powys County Council and whilst her most recent experience was in local government prior to that she spent a considerable amount of time in the NHS working for Trust and Health Authorities.

We delivered an underspend in 2009/10 of £68k. This was due to the continuing performance of Benefit Services and their impact on our subsidy claim.

- Final Accounts approved by statutory deadlines: Statement of Accounts approved by Audit and Corporate Governance Committee on 19th June 2009. The accounts were unqualified.
- Prepared and planned for implementation of international Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS):
 - Impact assessment was carried out with Hereford and Worcester Financial Managers Group on 6th March.
 - Sub groups were set up to review key changes.
 - Key Changes identified at meeting on 6th March.
 - Key finance, property and HR staff have been identified.
 - Key finance staff attended CIPFA/PWC training.
 - CIPFA in house training for finance and property held in December.
- Development of corporate framework for identifying and recording value for money
- Introduction of a standard budget monitoring pack for Financial Services to be sent monthly : Automated reporting to all budget holders.
- Increase level of financial support to school: Staff role is now to visit schools and provide regular support and advice. Governor training is being provided regularly
- Work with external agencies to identify areas for improvement, such as West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Programme (WMRIEP), Stenmore Procurement has worked with us to improve spend analysis and identify areas for tendering and PA Consulting identified further opportunities. Working with the WMRIEP on specific projects like Transport has helped in developing new procurement processes.
- CIPFA benchmarking Accountancy Services undertaken, survey completed and results published.
- Continued to provide financial training appropriate to specific staff groups: 4 - Level 1 courses held to date, 4 - Level 2 courses held to date, 1 - Level 3 courses held to date
- Expanded SLA for schools finance distributed to schools for 2010/11 offering a choice of a basic service or an enhanced support service.
- Supported directorates deliver overall balanced revenue position.

4. What's Changing in 2010-2013

- Due to the launch of the Shared Services initiative by HPS, Connects has merged with this into the Transformation Project. Staff could be transferred into the new organisation late in 2010, with reconfiguration and amalgamation commencing in 2011. The Finance Ledger will go live on 1st April 2011.
- Procurement management has been transferred to the Deputy Chief Executives' Office, Procurement is expected to deliver £600k savings towards the £1m target for 2010-11.
- European Energy Directive – Enhanced Display Energy Certificates to be shown in our buildings.
- Carbon Reduction Commitment – with Property Services supporting delivery of the enhanced target.
- Create integration with NHS Herefordshire such as the joint Integrated Finance team.
- Total Place and Place Shaping will be delivered via the Localities project.
- Joint Value for Money Strategy to be in place this year.
- Joint Medium term Financial Plan to be in place.
- Accommodation Strategy delivery following agreement of strategy by Cabinet in December 2009.
- Transfer of learning disabilities properties from PCT to Council ownership – This took place from 1st April 2010 and AMPS will assist in the delivery of outcomes.
- West Midlands Construction Framework - Working in conjunction with Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police and a number of public authorities, the Council is participating in a new West Midlands Framework Agreement. This will provide an alternative method of procuring large building schemes between £1m-£10m using a framework contractual arrangement.
- Delivery of re-organised and downsized Audit function after an external review carried out in May 2010.
- The Resources Directorate played a central role co-ordinating Use of resources and informed feedback from the Audit Commission was positive. However, the abolition of Comprehensive Area Assessment means the results will not be announced.

5 What do our employees think of our performance?

The Leadership Team set up an Improvement Group to help us deliver improvements coming out of the employee survey. It has successfully delivered improvement to the Resources Directorate over the past two years and continues to focus on key areas raised by staff.. There are 24 statements where the service area results are significantly better than the Council.

- Herefordshire Council is good to work for.
- Senior management is visible.

- Senior management is approachable
- Opportunities for development within the council are good.
- There is good understanding and co-operation between different directorates/ departments
- I am kept informed about the council's plans, priorities and Performance.
- I understand the vision that the council and primary care trust are working towards together.
- I know what the new shared values for the council and primary care trust are.
- I am given enough information to understand why changes need to happen in the council.
- I feel my views on changes affecting my area of work are valued.
- I receive Team Talk verbally each month.
- I believe that Team Talk is relevant and helpful to me
- Usually, I have the resources to do my job properly
- The targets / standards set in my work area are achievable.
- I have confidence that senior management's decision making is fair.
- Relations between senior management and employees are good.
- My appraisal (SRD) was a worthwhile discussion.
- I have adequate training and development for the work I do
- I have control over planning and doing my work.
- Employees are treated equally and fairly whatever their position in the organisation.
- I can meet the requirements of my job without working excessive hours
- I am able to do my job to a standard I am personally pleased with
- I am confident that my manager responds to health and safety matters.
- I am satisfied with my physical work environment.

There are 8 statements where the service area results are significantly worse than the council.

- I believe that action will be taken on problems identified in this survey.
- I am kept informed about how the council and the primary care trust are working together.
- My manager communicates effectively when changes are happening in the council.
- My service area works with the communications team to ensure we secure positive recognition for the work we do.
- I am kept informed about my service area's plans, priorities and performance.
- I am encouraged to learn from things that don't work and share learning and best practice.
- I am satisfied with my current terms and conditions of employment
- Opportunities for flexibility in my hours / job help me to avoid having problems in meeting home / work commitments.

There are 36 statements where this year's result is significantly better than previous years.

- Herefordshire Council is good to work for.
- The council is open, honest and accountable to all its customers.
- Opportunities for development within the council are good.
- I believe that action will be taken on problems identified in this survey.
- There is good understanding and cooperation between different directorates /departments.
- I am kept informed about the council's plans, priorities and performance.
- Herefordshire Council is good to work for.
- The council is open, honest and accountable to all its customers.
- Opportunities for development within the council are good.
- I believe that action will be taken on problems identified in this survey.
- There is good understanding and cooperation between different directorates.
- I am kept informed about the council's plans, priorities and performance.
- I get recognition for a job well done.
- Morale within my work area is generally good.

- Usually, I have the resources to do my job properly.
- The targets / standards set in my work area are achievable.
- Communications within my service area work well.
- I have a say in setting my service area's direction and priorities departments.
- I feel valued by my immediate line manager / supervisor.
- I get feedback on how I'm doing from my immediate line manager / supervisor.
- I have a clear understanding of my job priorities and objectives.
- I have confidence that my immediate line manager / supervisor's decision making is fair.
- I have confidence that senior management's decision making is fair.
- Relations between senior management and employees are good.
- I have adequate training and development for the work I do.
- Employees are treated equally and fairly whatever their: Religion/Race/Sexual orientation/Disability Status/Age/position in the organisation.
- I sometimes feel bullied/harassed by: Customers / clients / service users.
- I can meet the requirements of my job without working excessive hours.
- I am confident that my manager responds to health and safety matters.
- I am satisfied with my physical work environment.
- I understand the impact of my work upon the environment.

There are 20 statements where this year's results are significantly worse than previous years.

- The council is open, honest and accountable to all its customers.
- The council takes into account the views and diverse needs of its customers.
- Generally, plans, policies and processes are understandable.
- Opportunities for development within the council are good.
- I intend still to be working for Herefordshire Council in 12 months' time.
- I believe that action will be taken on problems identified in this survey.
- I get recognition for a job well done.
- I am kept informed about my service area's plans, priorities and performance.
- I am encouraged to learn from things that don't work and share learning and best practice.
- I feel valued by my immediate line manager / supervisor.
- I have confidence that my immediate line manager / supervisor's decision making is fair.
- Senior management is visible.
- My appraisal (SRD) was a worthwhile discussion.
- Employees are treated equally and fairly whatever their: Religion/Race/Disability status.
- I sometimes feel bullied/ harassed by Managers.
- I sometimes feel bullied/ harassed by: Colleagues.
- I am satisfied with my current terms and conditions of employment.
- Opportunities for flexibility in my hours/ job help me to avoid having problems in meeting home / work commitments.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Resources Directorate continues to direct all its efforts into supporting corporate priorities through effective management of resources.