

MEETING:	COUNCIL
DATE:	4 MARCH 2011
TITLE OF REPORT:	LEADER'S REPORT

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards affected

County wide

Purpose

To provide an overview of the Executive's activity since the last meeting of Council and over the period of the administration

Recommendation

THAT:

The report be noted.

Report

Meeting the Financial Challenge

1. From the debate at the February meeting of Council, all members will be aware of the scale of the financial challenge we face, and of the plans we have put in place to ensure that, as far as possible, costs are taken out of the system in such a way that the impact on front line services is minimised. We have not increased council tax in 2011/12, a move mirrored by a majority of our parishes in the county, and have, over the course of this administration, delivered in the region of £15m cashable efficiency savings.
2. We have been working in close partnership with NHS Herefordshire since September 2007, and the benefits of this more integrated approach can now be seen. Not only are we better placed than many to manage our way through these leaner times, we are beginning to see the implementation of significant changes that will deliver real improvements to the health & wellbeing outcomes for the people of Herefordshire. Provision of hospital, community health and adult social care services across the county are being brought together within a single integrated care organisation. This will enable the delivery of targeted services through improved care pathways by integrated locality-based teams – in other words, ensuring that the right people get the right care, in the right place, and at the right time.
3. A further element of change has been the selection of 2gether NHS Foundation Trust to modernise and deliver mental health and learning disability services for the people of Herefordshire.
4. We have, again with our health partners, agreed an overarching shared services programme to deliver shared back office support services, including the establishment of a joint venture

company. Once fully implemented, we expect the shared services programme to be capable of delivering £4.3m savings per annum, and approximately £1.02m of these savings have already been delivered.

National Policy Developments

5. The changing landscape for children's services, and in particular for education, will lead to significant change. Already Herefordshire has four schools with academy status and a further six are considering applying. Whilst academy status affords schools greater freedoms, we continue to work in partnership with the county's school community to facilitate a 'Herefordshire family of schools' approach to enable a range of differing schools models to operate collectively to ensure strategic planning and quality assurance of education provision in the county.
6. Undoubtedly the changes to the funding formula for schools, largely brought about by the top-slicing of our dedicated schools grant (DSG) by over £1.1m in the coming two years to fund academy schools, will impact on the county's schools. We are working with the schools community, through the Schools Forum, to assess the impact and to identify options for moving forward.
7. We continue to prepare for full implementation of the health reforms set out in the Health Bill. I have already mentioned our partnership with NHS Herefordshire, and the benefits we are seeing from having adopted such an integrated approach. The partnership in Herefordshire is recognised nationally as a model of public service integration focussed on place and, I am proud to say, contributed to the development of the government's agenda. Council has, elsewhere on its agenda, a report on the establishment of a shadow Health & Wellbeing Board, for which Herefordshire is acting as an early implementer. Similarly, our county's GP Consortium is a national pathfinder, and we are working with NHS Herefordshire to secure locally response transitional arrangements to the overall health system changes.
8. The government has now published its Localism Bill which has a focus on restoration of power and responsibility to a local level. As well as providing local authorities with a general power of competence, the Bill makes provision for greater empowerment of communities both to take on provision of services and to exercise local accountability. Amongst its other provisions, proposes reforms of the planning system, changes to facilitate the social housing sector to meet demand and changes to the standards regime.
9. We have for some time been progressing in the direction set out in the Bill. We have agreed a structure for locality working and Cabinet will, during March, be considering strategies to delivery both a locality approach and a framework for engagement with our communities. We are already discussing with the Herefordshire Partnership Board how this approach can be expanded to encompass not just local authority and health services but the broader public service community in our county. A new charter between Herefordshire Council and the town and parish councils in the county is currently being developed and will provide the framework for future discussions about devolution of local services.
10. Already we have positive examples of how local services or assets can be managed effectively by the community. The Tudorville youth service building in Ross on Wye, which had hardly been used for a number of years and was declared surplus, has been transferred to a local community group and is now the focus for community activity in the area. Similarly Grange Court, the iconic black and white house in Leominster, is undergoing a £2.8m refurbishment, with financial support from a range of sources including Community Assets Programme, AWM, Community Builders Fund, Leominster Town Council and Herefordshire Council. When complete, the building will be transferred to the Leominster Area Regeneration Committee to manage for the benefit of the community. We also have a model, at Peterchurch, for community involvement in the provision of library services, with volunteers

providing library services from a multi-use building in the village.

Supporting the community and local economy

11. I must place on record my thanks to all those who contributed to the delivery of services during some of the worst winter weather the county has seen in years. Amey's gritting teams gritted 44,000 miles of road in the 2010/11 winter season to the end of 2010 compared with 23,000 miles in the equivalent period of the 2009/10 season; FOCSA, our waste collection partners missed only two days of collection during the whole period; and tribute must be paid to the many other workers, in the council and in the wider county who managed not only to get into work, but to reach vulnerable residents in often inaccessible areas, to ensure they were not left without access to services. Once again the extreme weather conditions have taken their toll not only in terms of the costs of the additional gritting runs needed, but in the aftermath of potholes that will require attention. Although clearly a challenge, given the national recognition Herefordshire received in relation to our response to the winter weather the previous winter, I am confident we will manage these impacts to the best of our abilities aided by last week's announcement of some further funding by the Government.
12. Having mentioned waste collection, it is pleasing to see that, following the introduction of the wheelie bin recycling facility in the current year we expect to collect an estimated 16,800 tones of waste for recycling from households through the fortnightly collection; some 97% of the county's households have this service.
13. Securing future economic growth and prosperity for our county has remained a constant priority throughout the period of our administration. The linkages a prosperous local economy and the health and wellbeing of a community cannot be underestimated. We have enjoyed a strong working relationship with the former Regional Development Agency and have been active in working with Shropshire and Telford Councils in setting up a Local Enterprise Partnership in response to the new coalition Government's economic agenda. To this end we have been progressing a number of key projects in the county. As well as agreeing a Broadband Strategy setting out a blueprint for rolling out broadband across the county, we are a pilot area for the delivery of superfast broadband to benefit rural and remote parts of the county.
14. With Hereford Futures we continue to deliver improvements focussed on the city but which will have benefits for the whole of the county. The new £7m Livestock Market is scheduled to open in June; we are about to commence the £4.2m Yazor Brook flood alleviation scheme, and the agreement completed with Stanhope is already proving fruitful. Hereford will host a new multiplex cinema, a new food store and a new department store are scheduled to be built in 2012. The retail development, together with the housing development being progressed with Sanctuary housing, will be the vehicle by which the essential infrastructure for the city will be improved. Electricity and drainage systems are already at capacity and improvements in the resilience and capacity of both will be secured. Transport improvements will also be delivered.
15. The historic city centre continues to receive similar focus. The future of the city can only be secured by delivery of an integrated package of improvements, which cannot and must not be seen as competing. As well as the upgrading of High Town, Eign Gate and most recently Widemarsh Street, we continue to progress the development of the Buttermarket site. The masterplan for the Edgar Street area has been significant in ensuring the continued protection of the city centre as it is used in the consideration of planning applications for out-of town retail provision.
16. The past year has seen the opening of a new school building for Earl Mortimer (formerly Minster) College in Leominster. This is in addition to new primary schools at Sutton St Nicholas and Riverside, and a further new school is in development for Leominster primary age children.

17. The number of vulnerable older people requiring care support continues to rise, as evidenced by the rise in adult safeguarding referrals to 680 in 2009/10 - a 45% increase since 08/09. I have already mentioned the development of an integrated care organisation in the county, and the associated plans to improve the range of care options available and reform the way in which care is provided. This is not a challenge that we can meet alone and the support of individuals, third and private sector providers, partners and the community as a whole will be essential in ensuring that vulnerable people throughout the county can receive high quality care when and where they need it.

Other Issues

18. In addition, Cabinet has considered the following issues:
- a) *Budget and Performance Monitoring Reports* – Cabinet considered quarterly reports on performance and revenue and capital outturn and noted actions being taken to address areas of underperformance.
 - b) *Scrutiny Reviews* – the Executive has agreed its response to three reviews completed by the scrutiny committees: those of home care services in the county, pupil achievement at swimming in key stage 2, and communications with the public about services and access. I would like to place on record my thanks to all those who have been active in the scrutiny process. The challenge provided by the overview and scrutiny function, whether in informing the development of future policy direction, reviewing a particular service we provide, or exploring an issue of concern raised by the public, is always welcome and is a visible demonstration of democracy in action.
 - c) *Local Development Framework/Local Transport Plan* – Following the resolution passed by Council in November 2010, and taking account of the subsequent publication of the Localism Bill, Cabinet has agreed the principle of conducting a community poll within the context of wider consultation on the framework. Cabinet has also proposed a revised timetable for the development of the framework and, as an interim measure, the re-adoption of the current Local Transport Plan; a report on this matter appears elsewhere on Council's agenda.
 - d) *Third Sector Support* - Cabinet considered the outcome of a review of the support and development services provided to the voluntary and community sector and agreed the principles for future delivery of these services. The third sector in the county has always been active and highly valued; as we embrace the principles of the Big Society, the role of the third sector will increase and it is essential that, whilst recognising the financial constraints we are all operating in, we work together to ensure that voluntary and community groups across the county receive efficient and effective support and development services to enable them to thrive in the future.
 - e) *Capital & Asset Management* – Cabinet, alongside our NHS Herefordshire partners, approved a joint capital & asset management strategy setting out our approach to capital investment & disposal to deliver core priorities.
19. This is the last Council meeting of this current administration and I should like to place on record my thanks to all the officers and members of this authority, partners and community organisations who have supported me in delivering a wide and comprehensive programme of services and activities to our County. We have seen a considerable amount of capital investment particularly in our schools and roads, the overwhelming majority backed by supportive borrowing from Government together with our own prudential investments which I believe strengthens Herefordshire's economic and community wellbeing.