

MEETING:	COUNCIL
DATE:	15 JULY 2011
TITLE OF REPORT:	LEADER'S REPORT

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards affected

County wide

Purpose

To provide an overview of the Executive's activity.

Recommendation

THAT:

The report be noted.

Report

1. This is my first report to Council as Leader, and I would like to take the opportunity to look forward as well as to report on the activity of the Executive in the first two months of the administration.
2. It has been pleasing to see that, once again, the council delivered a balanced budget in 2010/11. A challenging budget for 2011/12 was set, reflecting the national economic climate and the public sector policy changes, and a significant amount of work has already taken place in order to prepare for the further 'tightening of belts' that the public sector must deliver. The initial phases of the organisation design programme will, by the end of this financial year, have reduced senior management by 25%; when combined with the current phase of the programme estimated savings are expected to be in the region of £4.2m.
3. It is not enough simply to be cutting costs; service improvements must also be delivered. To do this we must prioritise services that deliver better outcomes for the people and businesses of Herefordshire and which focus on the most vulnerable; we must make it easier for customers to contact us, increase the opportunities for 'self service', and deliver services that are responsive to local needs; and we must work with residents, community groups, businesses and our partners to help people to be more self reliant, devolving services and building stronger communities. Transformation will not happen overnight, but already we have been working with parishes, partners and communities to begin planning future budgets and to develop the locality model of working, and this engagement will continue in the coming months.
4. A number of difficult decisions have had to be made to help move us forward. We have agreed proposals to change the model of delivered library services. The universal mobile

library service, which served less than 1,000 people is being withdrawn and replaced by a more extensive home delivery service supporting those most in need. The model for delivery of the music service to young people has been changed to one that reduces the administrative burden on schools and enables a more flexible responsive service to be delivered to pupils, whilst protecting the delivery of whole class and group music activities. A number of proposals have been agreed in relation to fees and charges, in particular in relation to car parking, schools transport, planning advice and adult social care. Even with these increases, Herefordshire remains competitive when compared with neighbouring authorities; without them more difficult choices would need to be made resulting in service reductions or cuts.

5. It would be very easy, reading the local paper, to take the view that not only this council, but the county as a whole, has a bleak future; I think such negative reporting does our county a huge disservice. We are no different to the rest of the country in the economic challenges we face, but we are in a better position than many to meet those challenges:
 - We have a well developed partnership with the National Health Service which has already delivered financial savings and improvements.
 - We have a vibrant and highly valued voluntary and community sector and a network of parish and town councils all of which are strongly focussed on delivering the best services to meet local need.
 - We have a strong business community who are actively engaged in working with us to ensure a strong local economy into the future.
 - We have a revitalised tourism partnership leading on the development and delivery of activities that will bring visitors into and back to the county.
 - We have schools to be proud of and who are committed to working together to secure the best education for our children now and in the future.
 - With our partners, we have a track record of securing resources for and delivering projects that support our vision for the future – the superfast broadband pilot, the new livestock market, the refurbishment of our city centre, the delivery of affordable housing in the county despite the housing downturn, leisure and arts facilities that continue to be developed to meet the needs of the local population.
6. For every negative story reported I could find ten positive ones – without having to look – and I challenge everyone who cares about the future of Herefordshire to do the same.
7. Because I know that we cannot deliver the vision for the future alone, I have established what I believe to be a much stronger model of Overview & Scrutiny. I know some colleagues have expressed reservations about the removal of the old style standing committees, but I believe the new model provides a much more flexible and dynamic way of providing challenge to and bringing a broader range of views and experience into the development of future policy. I look forward to working with colleagues to ensure the model is as effective as possible; as with the changes made to the planning committee structure during the previous administration, I will commit to reviewing the effectiveness of the model after twelve months of operation.
8. A number of national policy issues continue to be developed, most notably those relating to public health and those arising from the Localities Bill, and in the coming months we will, with our partners, be working through the impact of these as they become clear.

Other Issues

9. In addition, the Executive has considered the following issues:
 - a) *Budget and Performance Monitoring Reports* – Cabinet considered reports on 2010/11 performance and revenue and capital outturn and noted actions being taken to address areas of underperformance.

- b) *Joint Corporate Plan* – Cabinet has agreed the measures, targets and projects by which the Council's corporate plan will be implemented and against which performance will be measured.
- c) *West Mercia Supplies* – the Executive has considered options for the long term future of this procurement partnership and agreed a preferred course of action.
- d) *Targeted 14-19/SEN Capital* – the Executive has approved the allocation of this national funding, which is being used to support improvements for pupils at Barrs Court and Blackmarston special schools and the Language and Communication Centre at Hampton Dene primary school.
- e) *Enforced Sales* – the Executive has approved a pilot project to evaluate the use of enforced sales powers to bring long-term empty properties back into use through the enforced sale and also help to recover any outstanding registered local land charges currently owed to the Council
- f) *Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment* – In compliance with regulations and EU directive requirements, the Executive has authorised the submission of the Herefordshire Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment to the Secretary of State

10. Finally I must report meeting with both Herefordshire's MP's regarding our referendum promise to create a second river crossing and relief road. I am determined to bring plans forward for a relief road that takes traffic from the A49 fully around the city – not half way and not pursuing a route that stands no chance of success. The future without a full relief road is unthinkable, and I am committed to its delivery.