

MEETING:	COUNCIL
DATE:	2 MARCH 2012
TITLE OF REPORT:	LEADER'S REPORT

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards affected

County wide

Purpose

To agree revisions to the timetable for production of a policy framework item; and to provide an overview of the Executive's activity since the last meeting of Council.

Recommendations

THAT:

- a) the revised timetable for the production of the Local Development Framework, as set out at paragraph 11 below, be agreed; and
- b) the overview of the Executive's activity be noted.

Report

Herefordshire's Future

1. Members will be aware from the debate at Council last month of the challenges we face as a council and a county. Seen in a national and even a global context, Herefordshire is by no means unique; but I am satisfied that we have the building blocks in place to enable us to move confidently into the future.
2. We have set a budget that ensures we maintain focus on our priority areas: helping the vulnerable within our communities, and supporting the economy so that Herefordshire can strengthen its resilience moving forwards. This does not mean that there will not be difficult choices to make in the coming months. We will of course maintain a strong focus on reducing costs of delivery as opposed to reducing service; however, as nationally, choices will need to be made to ensure that sufficient resources are available to deliver high quality services that are important to local people, and that meet identified need.
3. A number of key frameworks are already, or will shortly, be in place to guide our next steps. Council has already approved an economic development strategy for the county, and at our meeting on 16 February, Cabinet approved a strategy providing a co-ordinated approach to addressing child poverty in Herefordshire. In the coming months we will be considering guiding principles for Herefordshire's learning community, the strategic delivery plan for transforming adult services in the county, and of course the strategic planning document for the county, the Local Development Framework.

4. As a council we cannot, and should not, be attempting to do all this alone; the role of public services generally and local government in particular must evolve to meet the challenges of the future effectively. In keeping with the national agenda for localism, we need to work with our partners and the local community to ensure that we have a shared vision for where we want our county to be and, as importantly, understand what role we expect each player – whether an individual citizen, community group, business, local council, public sector body or ourselves – to play in helping to realise that vision.
5. This administration, with our local partners, is therefore beginning a broader debate within the community to affirm the vision for the future of this county, and to explore the role, not just of the council as a democratic body and a provider or commissioner of services, but each of us can play to ensure Herefordshire fulfils its potential. I would urge everyone to get involved – we must work together to ensure we can meet the needs of Herefordshire both now and into the future.

County Achievements

6. Persistent lobbying by officers and elected members at a regional and national and European (through our MEP's) level has opened the door for rural cities in the region to bid into the European Regional Development Fund's Sustainable Urban Development Fund. Hitherto only available to the bigger conurbations such as Birmingham, Coventry, Stoke and the Black Country up to £16 million will be freed up for capital projects in Hereford city, Worcester, Shrewsbury and Telford. Bids to support Hereford city redundant buildings grant scheme and greening businesses grant scheme will be submitted following the call for proposals to be published in March. Our targeted lobbying has also resulted in the Rural Development Programme England ring fencing a proportion of the fund specifically for Broadband.
7. Project development officers within the regeneration team have, through their advice and support to community groups and public sector partners, enabled in excess of £2m external funding to be secured for Herefordshire in the last year, supporting 24 projects ranging in scale from drama workshops for young people to helping to plan major capital projects such as the Master's House in Ledbury. This is a real achievement in the current economic climate.
8. The council continues to buck the national trend to deliver new homes in the continuing difficult climate. As well as releasing council owned land to support delivery of affordable housing, work the council is also actively working with the owners of empty homes to bring them back into use for residential accommodation. As a result, 95 properties have been brought back into use through various means, 58 of which had been empty for more than six months.
9. Following the re-modeling of the delivered library service, which included withdrawal of the universal mobile library service, all 134 Parish Councils in the county were invited to consider whether they wished to engage in the formation of a community library, operating on a voluntary basis with support from the county library service. We had over 20 approaches and I'm delighted to say that we have just opened the sixth community facility; a real demonstration of the Big Society at work.
10. Thankfully, we don't appear to have had such a harsh winter this year, however we have launched a new online system for school closure notifications or school transport disruptions in the event of bad weather; there is also an option for parents to sign up for email alerts, demonstrating how we can use technology more effectively to make it easier for our residents to access services and information.

Local Development Framework

11. A revised timetable for the Local Development Framework was approved by Council in November 2011, in order to allow for consultation upon a Revised Preferred Strategy. That

consultation has now been undertaken and has achieved a significant response. In order to ensure that these responses can be properly analysed, it is proposed that Cabinet consider the LDF in June this year, rather than May. There are no other changes to the agreed timetable, with consideration for Council continuing to be programmed for July 2012.

Other Issues

12. In addition, the Executive has considered the following issues:

- a) *Budget and Performance Monitoring Reports* – In December Cabinet considered reports on 2011/12 performance, and revenue and capital outturn. Actions being taken to address areas of underperformance were noted.
- b) *Food & Drink* – I have approved a sustainable food and drink strategy for Herefordshire, providing a response to the challenges and opportunities which lie behind the production of food and drink in the county, both now and into the future.
- c) *Herefordshire COMPACT* – The Cabinet Member Economy & Culture has approved the compact which is an agreement through which the public and voluntary sectors agree to work well together to meet the needs of local citizens.
- d) *Waste Contract* – Cabinet has received an update on progress regarding a variation to the existing contract and agreed, alongside Worcestershire County Council's Cabinet, the parameters to guide further negotiation.
- e) *Youth Service* – Cabinet has considered options for the future provision of youth services in the county and is currently consulting on a proposed way forward.
- f) *Cultural Services* – Cabinet has considered options for the future management of cultural services and delegated authority to the Director for Places & Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member to agree the final arrangement; Overview & Scrutiny Committee have been asked to give their views on the options.