

MEETING:	COUNCIL
DATE:	28 SEPTEMBER 2012
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.

Recommendations

THAT:

- a) **the overview of the Executive's activity be noted.**

Report

Planning for the Future

1. Building on the Quality of Life survey undertaken before the summer, the locality based 'Your Community; Your Say' engagement events are now taking place. The local headlines from the survey will be fed into these local events, which are part of a broader engagement programme and provide the opportunity for communities to inform the root and branch reviews as well as the overall council corporate planning process. In the continuing economic recession, with resources being squeezed ever tighter, having a good understanding of the views of residents about what matters most to them and what support or information they need to enable them be as self-reliant as possible is essential.

Herefordshire's People

2. Despite the national difficulties experienced in relation to the GCSE English language examinations this year, which were mirrored in Herefordshire, I am delighted to say that provisional results suggest that Herefordshire has maintained its strong profile regarding the numbers of students achieving five or more GCSE grades at A*-C which was well above the national average last year and currently stands at 87 percent for the county. Improvements in maths GCSE and the results achieved by our looked after children have been particularly pleasing – I am sure members would wish to join me in congratulating all those young people who have worked so hard to achieve these results.
3. The recent consultation on the adult social care charging policy has now concluded. There has been an excellent response and we are reviewing what changes we need to make to our initial proposals to respond to the feedback received during the

consultation. Whilst demands on adult social care services remain our most significant pressure we must ensure that any charges made to cover the cost of the service provided are applied as fairly as possible.

4. At the end of July consultation began on the future strategy for carers in the county; the consultation ends on 12 October and I encourage all carers and relevant support organisations to respond to the consultation, details of which are available on the consultation page of the council's website.
5. The Government is ending the national Council Tax Benefit scheme and has required every council to come up with a local system instead. This means that Herefordshire has to plan its own Council Tax Support scheme and decide who should be eligible for help to pay their council tax, and by how much, for introduction in April 2013. A consultation is currently underway seeking the views of residents and interested organisations on how we should plan the local scheme in order to help us make a decision that is as fair as possible. The consultation ends on the 26 October and again details are available on the consultation page of the council's website.

Herefordshire's Economy & Communities

6. Members will be aware of Northern Racing's recent decision to end their operation of Hereford's racecourse at the end of 2012. We remain committed to supporting racing on the site and positive discussions have taken place with Arena Racing Company about securing racing in Hereford. We will of course keep members informed of progress.
7. With nearly 5,000 people on the housing register for affordable housing across the county, the council is taking action to help local landlords get their properties refurbished and back on the market. Working with West Mercia Housing, we have launched a new loan scheme to help bring some of the almost 1,500 privately owned empty properties in the county back into use. Anyone interested can find further information on the council's website at the following link: http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/empty_homes/3563.asp.
8. At its meeting on 13 September Cabinet agreed arrangements to finalise negotiations for the delivery of improved Broadband infrastructure; and as part of those arrangements agreed the council's financial contribution to the project, enabling match funding of £10.1m to be brought into the county. The project is one element of the overall programme supporting delivery of superfast Broadband to the county and would be directed to those areas (primarily rural) of the county where deployment of broadband technologies is not commercially viable. The Borders Broadband project covers Herefordshire and Gloucestershire and is one of four national pilot projects to address the challenge of poor broadband coverage in rural areas. The project is a key element of the county economic development strategy and also a vital element in helping people retain their independence through greater choice and control. The related decision to exclude the public for part of the discussion of this item was taken under urgency procedures in accordance with the Local Government (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 which came into force on 10th September.

Other Issues

9. In addition, the Executive has considered the following issue:

a) *Local Authority Governor Appointments* – The Cabinet Member Education & Infrastructure has approved refreshed processes for the recruitment & nomination of local authority school governors, strengthening governance in support of local schools.

10. Finally, as this will be the Chief Executive's last Council meeting, I would like to place on record my thanks to Chris Bull for the dedication and commitment he has shown both to public services and to Herefordshire during his time as Chief Executive, and also for the support he has offered to me; I am sure colleagues will join me in wishing him well for the future.