

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>COUNCIL</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>23 NOVEMBER 2012</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>LEADER'S REPORT</b>

## **1 Classification**

Open

## **2 Wards affected**

County wide

## **3 Purpose**

To provide an overview of the Executive's activity since the last meeting of Council.

## **4 Recommendations**

**THAT:the overview of the Executive's activity be noted.**

## **5 Report**

### **Planning for the Future**

5.1 Building on the Quality of Life survey undertaken before the summer, 23 community based 'Your Community; Your Say' engagement events have taken place, with some 450+ people from the community attending and an additional 400 young people's views gathered. What people have told us at these events will help us, through the root & branch reviews and our budget setting process, to understand and explore:

- Whether the Council is focusing on the right priorities;
- Whether the Council is providing the services people believe are needed;
- Which services matter most to the residents of Herefordshire and which are less important; and
- How services could be delivered differently in future

A member's seminar on all the results of the 'Your Community – Your Say' engagement programme is being planned, and I would encourage all members to attend.

5.2 Cabinet has considered reports from the first phase root & branch reviews covering: Older People; Customer Services; Streetscene; and Housing, Economic and Regulatory Services and agreed proposals for development and implementation by officers. Cabinet has also considered proposed revisions to the corporate plan which appear elsewhere on the Council agenda today. Throughout these planning processes we are conscious of the ever tightening financial constraints existing within the public sector. Council will be considering our budget proposals at its next meeting, and we will not know our provisional funding allocation from central government until December although the indications are that we must plan for a reduction of some £5m central government funding in each of the next two financial year.

This, together with increasing pressures in adult social care and in safeguarding, mean that difficult decisions will need to be taken in the coming months to ensure we continue to focus what resources we have on supporting vulnerable people and creating a successful economy.

- 5.3 At its meeting on 12 July 2012 Cabinet agreed a timetable for a draft Core Strategy to be presented to Cabinet in December. The report outlined a number of outstanding matters that would need to be substantially resolved to enable the draft plan to be prepared, these matters included:
- the examination of possible impacts that the Core Strategy proposals may have upon the River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC);
  - further analysis of the viability of the package of development proposals contained within the plan; and
  - work to develop an appropriate set of rural policies in the light of the changes to the planning system.
- 5.4 Significant progress has been made in all three areas during the intervening period. However, the issues have not yet been sufficiently resolved to enable a final set of policies to be drafted at this time. Work is proceeding which should enable the draft plan to be presented to Cabinet in February, before consultation takes place, and it remains our intention to submit the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State in the autumn of 2013 and to adopt it in the spring of 2014, following an Examination in Public.

### **Herefordshire's People**

- 5.5 Members will of course be aware that, following a recent unannounced inspection, Ofsted judged safeguarding services for children and young people to be inadequate in Herefordshire. A robust improvement plan has been developed that involves all organisations working to protect children in Herefordshire; an Improvement Board, with an independent chair, Paul Curran, has been set up to drive forward the necessary changes. Whilst we are obviously disappointed in the outcome of this inspection we accept the findings and are determined to work with our partners and drive forward improvements as quickly as we can to make sure that Herefordshire's children and young people are protected from harm.
- 5.6 Following our consultation on the adult social care charging policy the changes to charges have now been confirmed. Having listened to the concerns raised by carers we have amended the proposals to ensure that carers, who play such a significant role in supporting people to remain in their communities, are not subject to charging.
- 5.7 A new taxi marshalling service will operate in Hereford city centre this winter to ensure that people safely find a taxi to take them home on weekend nights. Following a temporary trial last December, the scheme has been commended and supported by West Mercia police, who saw a reduction in crime and disorder and traffic offences. Lasting twelve months and supported by Herefordshire Council, the scheme will see taxi marshals in high visibility jackets working in pairs to aid night-time revelers on their way home, helping to ensure that people stay safe while the city's nightlife remains vibrant.
- 5.8 As I indicated in my September report the Government is ending the national Council Tax Benefit scheme and has required every council to come up with a local system instead; Cabinet has taken account of the feedback received from residents and interested organisations in formulating its recommendation to Council which appears elsewhere on the agenda today.
- 5.9 Children in care are getting a better deal thanks to new ways of working in the council's looked after children's services, but demand for people willing to give a child a loving home

continues to increase. Following adoption week earlier in the month, and to encourage people living in Herefordshire and neighbouring counties to consider giving a child a family for life, an adoption information event is taking place on Saturday, 24 November from 10.30am to 1pm at Moor House, Widemarsh Common, Hereford.

- 5.10 Further to my report to Council in July, following a request from the school's governing body as a result of very low pupil numbers and the statutory consultation, the decision was taken on 16 November to formally close Holme Lacy Primary School; no pupils had been in attendance at the school since July. Small and declining numbers of pupils and small class sizes do affect the viability of individual schools and their future sustainability in delivering first class education to their pupils; given national government proposals to alter the balance of funding across the educational system these pressures will place greater demands on school governing bodies and we will continue to support governing bodies in addressing these challenges.

### **Herefordshire's Economy & Communities**

- 5.11 I am delighted to report to Council that, following the decision taken by Cabinet earlier this month, the development of the Old Livestock Market site is now progressing. I would also like to place on record my thanks to Overview & Scrutiny Committee for their robust scrutiny of the decision. This landmark deal provides Herefordshire not only with the only retail scheme to open in the UK in 2014, but also the creation of significant numbers of construction, retail and service industry jobs and further additions to the overall retail attraction of our county town. The traditional heart of the city remains a vital part of the overall Hereford visitor and shopper experience and we will continue to support promotion of the city retailers as a whole, and retailers in the market towns through initiatives such as Shop Herefordshire (<http://www.herefordbest.com/>), hosted by Hereford Futures, and Truffle Herefordshire (<http://www.truffleherefordshire.co.uk/>) which provide an excellent demonstration of the range and quality of goods already available in Hereford and the county. By providing further reasons for visitors to come to the city and shop, we know that existing retailers can benefit – as evidenced during the recent Flavours of Herefordshire event.
- 5.12 H.Energy week provided a timely opportunity for the Council to demonstrate its commitment to environmental sustainability by becoming a signatory to 'Climate Local' focussing on carbon reduction actions. Three particular projects are being explored to provide a practical demonstration of this commitment: the extension of our existing programme replacing street lights and traffic signals across the county with state of the art LED lighting to cut carbon emissions, reduce costs and maintain community safety; the delivery of a network of electric car charging points across Hereford and all market towns through a joint project with the 'Plugged-in Midlands' grant scheme; and rolling out solar panels across public buildings providing an exciting opportunity for local people to jointly invest in this project though the development of community owned energy co-operatives. This approach builds on the success of schemes already completed at Hereford Crematorium and the Leominster Community Solar Co-operative which deliver strong financial returns, reduce carbon emissions and improve local energy security.
- 5.13 Following consultation with the respective town councils who were encouraged to submit options that met their resident's local needs, annual increases in car parking charges are being implemented this year because of the ongoing budget challenges due to demographic pressures, reductions in central government funding and the council's continuing commitment to look after our most vulnerable citizens.
- 5.14 We have decided to put on hold proposals to carry out a major development of Broad Street, Hereford; instead, we are planning a major expansion of city cycle networks Funding for the Broad Street development came from 'Destination Hereford' a programme funded by the Department of Transport aiming to reduce congestion, increase low carbon transport use and

support sustainable economic growth around Hereford. Following a number of consultation events with the local community organised by the council, it became clear that, whilst there was support for the refurbishment scheme generally, the lengthy period of disruption (over 12 months) whilst construction was underway, could harm local businesses. We listened to and acted on this feedback to reallocate the funding to a programme of other pedestrian and cycling projects aimed at supporting sustainable travel in the city.

- 5.15 Once again 'Flavours of Hereford' demonstrated what a wonderful range of high quality products Herefordshire has be proud of – our producers should be congratulated; the new location and style of the two day festival, organised by Visit Herefordshire and sponsored by allpay, linked the event more closely to the city centre and was welcomed by exhibitors and visitors alike. It is especially pleasing to note that visitor numbers reached a record 32,000 this year and I understand that some existing retailers in town experienced an up to 50% increase in sales over the period showing how much benefit additional retail attractions can bring to the overall retail economy.
- 5.16 Another demonstration of the creativity and talent in the county could be seen at the Hereford Contemporary Craft Fair at the Courtyard Theatre; many of the exhibitors are based in the county and particular congratulations go to Ita Drew who won the new exhibitor's award this year.

#### **Other Issues**

- 5.17 In addition, the Executive has considered the following issues:
- a) *Performance and Budget Monitoring* – Cabinet has considered reports on performance and budget outturn for the past quarter.
  - b) *Accommodation Strategy* – Within the overall framework of the strategy, the Cabinet Member Enterprise & Culture, approved the principle of the development of the Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre at Rotherwas, and the next steps necessary to secure development on the site.
- 5.18 As we enter the winter period, once again we and our partners have been preparing for the coming winter. Amey have ensured that gritting supplies are in place to keep our key road networks running, and the annual programme of flu vaccination to those most vulnerable is well underway. Whilst public services provide a range of support to people during severe weather, we also know there is much that individuals and the community can do to help themselves and each other. Some basic advice on some of these actions is available on our website at the following web link:  
[http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/advice\\_and\\_benefits/winteradvice.asp](http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/advice_and_benefits/winteradvice.asp)
- 5.19 Finally Cabinet. This is an information item only and is for receiving without debate. I have reduced my cabinet support team by two member and increased my Cabinet by one with the addition of Councillor Johnson to the Cabinet team. Attached at Appendix 1 to this report is the list of portfolio holders.