

MEETING:	COUNCIL
MEETING DATE:	18 JULY 2014
TITLE OF REPORT:	LEADER'S REPORT
REPORT BY:	LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Classification

Open

Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To receive a report from the Leader on the activities of Cabinet since the meeting of Council in March and an overview of key activity in 2013/14.

Recommendations

THAT:

- (a) the report be noted.

Alternative Options

- 1 There are no alternative options; it is a requirement of the council's constitution.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 To ensure members are aware of the activities of Cabinet.

Key Considerations

- 3 A list of the decisions taken by the executive since the last report to Council on 7

March is provided at appendix A; no executive decisions taken during 2013/14 and none taken in 2014/15 to date were taken under the urgency provisions.

- 4 Council has received regular reports on the activities of the Cabinet during the year and I do not intend to repeat them here. I do want to highlight the significant progress that has been made to support the delivery of the corporate plan priorities, despite the significant financial challenges faced by the council.

People

- 5 With partner organisations and under the leadership of the Herefordshire Safeguarding Children's Board, we have made progress in delivering our children's safeguarding improvement plan. We have recently undergone a further inspection which recognised the improvements made to date, finding no widespread or serious failings and no instances of children being harmed or at risk of harm. Whilst finding overall that services required improvement (progress from the previous finding of inadequate), Ofsted particularly highlighted the improvements that have been made to the quality of social work in the county through a significant reduction in case loads and positive staff morale and commitment. It is particularly pleasing that our adoption services were rated as good. Although we know there is much more to do to ensure our services in this area are as consistently good as we want them to be, the inspectors view has confirmed that we are on the right path and we will continue to drive forward improvements in this area.
- 6 The changing landscape within health and social care, the financial challenges and the local demographic changes particularly in older people has meant that improving joined up working for health and social care has been a priority. During the year, some significant changes have taken place, including organisational and management changes. However, progress has been made with increased focus to ensure that adult social care services are appropriate to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community, and enable individuals to take responsibility for their own care to the greatest degree possible. Through the Better Care Fund, a national initiative, and working very closely with the Herefordshire Clinical Commissioning Group we are developing much clearer joined up commissioning plans drawn up in partnership with service users and carers to ensure these changes are delivered efficiently and effectively.
- 7 2013/14 saw the council assuming responsibility for many local public health services and more will be transferred to the authority in the coming years. This provides us with the opportunity to make a real difference to the way preventative services are delivered in an integrated way with health and social care services to keep people healthy and living independently.
- 8 Following extensive lobbying with colleague local authorities Herefordshire's pupil premium (funding targeted to the most disadvantaged pupils) for 2014/15 rose to £1,300, an increase of £400 per pupil which is the largest increase the initiative has seen. Although the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) per pupil in Herefordshire remains 5% below the average for education authorities this increase in the pupil premium is welcomed. The government has announced that DSG will increase in 2015/16 and we await confirmation of the figures which are expected at the end of the calendar year; we will continue to lobby for fairer funding of our children's education.

Economy

- 9 During 2013/14 the old livestock market site and adjacent road network underwent

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transformation and, as we entered the new municipal year, the county's residents are seeing the benefit of the hard work and private inward investment with access to new shops cinema and restaurant facilities. That eastern side of the city, which had been severed from the historic city centre by the inner ring road, now has an easy and attractive access route flowing between the two enabling shoppers and visitors to move easily between the facilities and attractions offered across the whole city centre. In the coming years we will continue to work with development partners to deliver the remaining elements of the Edgar Street Grid masterplan and again make Hereford the vibrant county town we all know it can be, and which our community rightly expects.

- 10 Following lengthy and challenging negotiations we have, jointly with our partners Worcestershire County Council, secured an extension to our waste management contract which will both be financially advantageous and meet the county's waste disposal needs in a responsible manner when our landfill capacity is reached.
- 11 As with many other rural councils across the country the lack of central government investment in our roads and the consequent condition of many of our roads has been a major cause for concern; this has been exacerbated by a series of challenging winters with snow, ice and heavy rain all contributing to an increase in potholes. Following a competitive procurement process and reviewing the council's capital programme we have been able to secure a new delivery partner, Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP), and make significant additional investment of £20million (bringing investment to a total of some £40million) to drive forward the pace of improvement in the condition of our roads. This investment will be further enhanced following our latest success in bidding for additional central government funding recently made available to council's able to demonstrate both need and ability to meet that need. The benefits of this investment is becoming apparent as BBLP implement the improvement programme, having initially focussed on emergency works necessary following the most recent flooding.
- 12 Members and residents alike will be fully aware that, as part of our initial negotiation with BBLP to deliver significant savings, we reduced the frequency of grass cutting across the county. I cannot pretend that we have yet got this right and can assure members that we are working with communities and BBLP to address the issue. In the short term BBLP will bring forward their current programme which will focus on play areas and parks in Hereford and the market towns over the next few weeks to get them ready for the school summer holidays. Across the rural road network Balfour Beatty has continued to keep the highway safe by cutting the visibility splays, carrying out weed spraying and maintaining the trees. However, there will now be an additional cut across the whole network starting at the end of July to tidy things up before the autumn. Details of the revised grass cutting schedules are available on the council website. The issue has already been aided significantly in some areas by the willingness of local councils, community groups and individuals in the community to become involved and help improve their areas. We will continue to work with those groups and individuals to ensure that services that are valued in the community are supported in the most effective way and have recently launched a Green Spaces Community Grant scheme to help support local people to improve their local environment; again details are available on the council website.
- 13 Working in partnership with the private sector and other councils in the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area, we submitted a strategic economic plan for the

Marches LEP area as a result of which I am delighted to report that the Marches LEP has secured a total of £75.3m from the Government's Local Growth Fund to support economic growth in the area, over £40million of which will come to Herefordshire. One of the first projects to benefit from this funding will be the Hereford City transport package, which includes a new link road, unlocking the potential of the city and its investment prospects. Funding has also been earmarked in future years to support delivery of the South Wye transport package, recognizing the impact an A49/A456 link road would have on helping to develop the potential of the Enterprise Zone at Skylon Park and leading to the creation of hundreds of jobs and new homes. This is fantastic news for Herefordshire and the Marches.

- 14 We have continued to make progress in increasing access to broadband across the county and it is estimated that by the end of 2016 around 90% of premises will have access to fibre broadband with every premise having access to the government's Universal Service Commitment of at least 2Mbps. This has been enabled by BT's commercial roll-out that is complete in Hereford, Ledbury and Leominster combined with the "fastershire" programme funding from Herefordshire Council and National Government, with £10m from each partner delivering faster broadband in the county. The deployment has already started in the first area with over 4,000 premises in Herefordshire having received a fibre service as a result of the project. Further details are available at www.fastershire.com. It remains our ambition to ensure access to faster broadband to anyone who needs it by 2018. To deliver this ambition the Government has allocated an additional £5.52m for Herefordshire to extend the broadband deployment and a new Fastershire Broadband Strategy for 2014-18 reflects how additional coverage could be achieved.
- 15 After a number of years of extensive work and consultation, Council approved the draft Local Development Framework in 2013. The final pre-submission consultation has just been completed and the Plan will be submitted to the inspector for examination in public, the next stage of the formal adoption process, in the early autumn.
- 16 Adoption of the Plan alongside extant planning permissions will provide the county's five year housing land supply mitigating the risks of uncoordinated granting of planning permissions which exist in the absence of an adopted Plan. The council has continued to support and encourage the delivery of affordable housing and exceeded its targets for 2013/14.

Resources

- 17 2013/14 began with considerable budgetary uncertainty and I am pleased with the progress we have made to ensure that the services we need to deliver are adequately resourced. This has meant that we have had to take some difficult decisions to reduce the level of some services, look at other ways of delivering them, encourage and assist others to take responsibility for service delivery and in some cases ending services – all at a pace which I can only describe as challenging. As is often the case, adversity has driven out some really innovative solutions from the community and I am delighted that in areas such as public toilets, libraries, open space management, and community based assets we are starting to make real progress in enabling groups and residents within the county to do more to help themselves and others.
- 18 We spent within our budget in 2013/14, have a three year budget strategy which will ensure that we continue to focus what resources we have on those areas we know

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(because our communities have told us) are of highest priority. I wouldn't want to suggest we can now take our foot off the pedal, as there are still significant financial reductions to be delivered and further pressures to be faced particularly in the area of social care, but the council's own finances are now in much better shape.

- 19 I have recently reviewed the portfolios of Cabinet Members and, to ensure that portfolios are manageable and reflect these continuing priorities have created a Cabinet Member portfolio focussing on transport and road delivery – I welcome Councillor Paul Rone to this role. The revised portfolios have previously been circulated to all members but are shown at appendix B for completeness.
- 20 I would like to place on record my thanks for the continuing support and challenge provided by members of the two overview and scrutiny committees. The role played by these committees is absolutely vital. Far from being seen as a 'voice of opposition' they are key contributors to developing policy, providing challenge and ensuring that decisions take account of all relevant information including the views of the community.
- 21 Finally I would also like to thank the council's employees who have worked with us to deliver these improvements, often whilst managing significant change themselves; their continued support is appreciated.

Community Impact

- 22 The community impact of any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Equality and Human Rights

- 23 Cabinet have paid due regard to the public sector equality duty in their decision-making as set out in the relevant decision reports.

Financial Implications

- 24 The financial implications of any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Legal Implications

- 25 The legal implications of any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Risk Management

- 26 The risks associated with any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Consultees

27 None.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Executive Decisions
- Appendix B – Cabinet Member Portfolios

Background Papers

- None identified.