

Meeting:	Council
Meeting date:	Friday 13 October 2017
Title of report:	Leader's report to council
Report by:	Leader of the council

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To receive a report from the leader on the activities of the executive (cabinet) since the meeting of Council in July 2017 as required by the constitution and to provide transparency about decisions taken by the executive.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) the report be noted.

Alternative options

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

Key considerations

2. A list of the decisions taken by cabinet and cabinet members since the last report to Council (covering the period between 17 June and 22 September 2017) is provided at appendix 1. Five key decisions were taken under the general exception provisions (giving more than five but less than 28 days' notice). One key decision was taken under the

urgency provisions (less than five days' notice). No executive decisions were subject to call in.

3. Following Councillor Patricia Morgan's decision earlier in the year to step down as cabinet member health and wellbeing, there have been a number of cabinet changes. I have appointed Councillor Lester as deputy leader, Councillor Rone has taken on the health and wellbeing portfolio, Councillor Shaw's portfolio now includes the housing brief, and I am pleased to welcome Councillor Durkin to the cabinet as he picks up the transport and roads portfolio. The revised portfolio responsibilities are shown in full at appendix 2.
4. I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to Patricia for the dedication she has shown both to the portfolio and the county; the challenges of maintaining services which are essential to some of the most vulnerable in our community at a time when finances for both health and social care are under such pressure should not be underestimated and her steadfast championing of those services has been much appreciated.
5. The unauthorised overspend on the Blueschool House project has been a cause for serious concern and I am grateful to the Audit and Governance Committee for their oversight of actions to ensure that all members can be assured about the robustness of the internal control processes and officer compliance with those processes.
6. The Chief Executive has approached the Local Government Association with a view to establishing a peer review of leadership and culture in this area to ensure that we can collectively learn from this process. I expect this review to also consider potential improvements to our existing monthly directorate performance reviews where cabinet members, political group leaders and scrutiny chairs have the opportunity to challenge performance.
7. All members, and officers, must uphold the council's values and corporate governance ethics in seeking to develop a culture where performance and actions can be challenged constructively with a view to driving improvement and demonstrating to the public that resources are being used to best effect. Whilst we have much to be proud of, we have not been able to live up to our values on this occasion and must, quite simply, collectively do better.
8. The provisional education exam and assessment results have been received and show that Herefordshire's youngest pupils achieved improved outcomes in the full range of assessments last academic year. Results for children in reception, pupils taking the year 1 phonics test and pupils sitting the key stage 1 assessments at the end of year 2 were all above national average. This is a considerable improvement on the county's performance a few years ago.
9. At key stage 2 the percentage of pupils who met the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was broadly in line with the national average for the second year running.
10. At key stage 4 pupils and staff experienced the first year of the new GCSE numerical grading in English, English literature and maths, with a grade 9 representing the very highest achievement. A grade 4 is considered to be a 'standard pass' and a grade 5 is defined as a 'strong pass'. Across Herefordshire, in English 78.6% of pupils achieved a grade 4 or better with 63.7% achieving grade 5; this is higher than the provisional national average. In mathematics 71.8% of pupils gained a standard pass with over half of entries achieving the tougher 'strong pass' grade; this again surpassed the emerging national figure.

11. At key stage 5, the provisional results for Herefordshire's maintained schools and academies with sixth forms show the percentage of our students achieving the top grade of A* was 10.6%, exceeding the national average of 8.3%. The overall A* - E pass rate was also high and broadly in line with the national figure of 97.9%.
12. These results demonstrate the talent of our students and teaching staff and I am sure members join me in offering congratulations to all concerned.
13. The Worcester Family Justice Court, which makes the key decisions for those children at greatest risk, is currently the highest performing court in the West Midlands and in the top five across England. There are national timescales for court proceedings which mean that a decision should be made within 26 weeks. Between April and June of this year, the Worcester Court averaged just over 19 weeks, and not one Herefordshire child took longer than 26 weeks to have a decision made. This success is a testimony to the hard work of our social workers, our legal team and our colleagues in the justice system who have together worked hard to ensure that children do not have to wait an undue time for a life-changing decision to be made.
14. Herefordshire Council continues to be the leading council in the country for neighbourhood planning. We have 29 made neighbourhood plans with a further four referendum dates arranged. Over 40 plans now have material consideration in determining planning decision. Nearly 60 of the 108 local communities involved in neighbourhood planning in Herefordshire have reached their draft plan stage. This is the greatest number of parish councils in one council area in the country. Parish councils, and the neighbourhood planning team are to be congratulated on their progress. Any areas not covered by a neighbourhood development plan which are highlighted for growth within the core strategy will be covered within the Rural Areas Site Allocation Development Plan Document.
15. The council's highway service has achieved the highest band 3 status in the Department for Transport's (DfT) Incentive Fund assessment process. This means that Herefordshire has secured the maximum that is routinely available from Government for the maintenance of its highway assets. This is a regular annual investment of £11.25m. In addition, £1.9m received from the National Productivity Investment Fund is mainly being invested in improving the condition of our bridges.
16. We have been successful in our bid to the Local Highway Maintenance Challenge Fund, securing an additional £5m funding – the maximum available through this fund. Together with £3m from the council's own capital programme, this funding is being invested in this financial year to provide over 25 miles of carriageway resurfacing and 12 miles of surface dressing to some of the county's most important routes, making this one of the largest highway maintenance schemes in the country. These road maintenance works will return the A465 (south of Hereford), A438 (west of Hereford) and the A4103 to a good condition throughout and resulting in improvements to the transport routes leading to Herefordshire's Enterprise Zone which is a world-class business hub hosting in excess of 200 companies.
17. Of course there is more to do to sustain the improvement in the condition of our roads and bridges and I have asked for a report to be brought to cabinet later in the year setting out options for achieving this.
18. Consultation on the budget for 2018/19 ended in September, and the results are being analysed before presentation to general overview and scrutiny in November. The financial challenges we continue to face cannot be met by efficiencies alone, although this is of course an important element of securing sustainable service delivery. Sustainability will

only be achieved if we continue to support economic growth, improvement in health and wellbeing outcomes, and to explore innovations in service delivery.

19. One such element is the Integration and Better Care Fund plan 2017-19 recently approved for submission to NHS England by the Health and Wellbeing Board. This plan demonstrates the progress made during 2016/17, details key milestones for 2017/19 and describes the future vision for care in the county. Although locally the health and social care system are working well together there remain real challenges and risk to the council in relation to delayed transfers of care targets set by NHS England. Whilst the council's performance in this area is good overall, local system targets, which were only set nationally in July to be achieved by September, appear unachievable
20. NHS England's position is that those councils where system targets have not been met (regardless of the council's own performance) will not have their submitted plans approved and therefore not receive the cash transfer from the NHS to protect adult social care. For Herefordshire Council, this would create a deficit in the budget of around £4.5m. I have joined with council leaders across the West Midlands region in writing to the Secretary of State for Health to seek assurance that this vital funding to support the most vulnerable in our area will not be withheld from councils.
21. I would like to thank the general overview and scrutiny committee for their recommendations in relation to the council's response to the Police and Crime Commissioner's consultation on fire governance arrangements in West Mercia. Cabinet accepted all the committee's recommendations and I have responded to the consultation accordingly confirming the council's objection to the proposals. I will continue to work with council leaders in the West Mercia area to explore alternative options to maintain efficient and effective public services with appropriate democratic accountability.
22. Finally, I would like to offer my thanks to all those involved in responding to the recent incident at Rotherwas involving excavation of 24 phosphorus bombs from the 2nd World War.

Community impact

23. 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. Reporting to Council the activities of the executive demonstrates the council's commitment to the code of corporate governance principle of implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

Equality duty

24. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

25. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this is a report for information it does not directly impact on our equality duty. However these considerations are set out in each of the relevant reports informing the decisions listed at appendix 1.

Resource implications

26. There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The financial implications of any decisions of the executive listed at appendix 1 have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Legal implications

27. There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The legal implications of any decisions of the executive listed at appendix 1 have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Risk management

28. There are no risks arising from the recommendations of this report. The risks of any decisions of the executive listed at appendix 1 have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Consultees

29. None.

Appendices

1. Appendix 1: Executive decisions taken 17 June to 22 September 2017
2. Appendix 2: Cabinet portfolios.

Background papers

3. None identified