

Cabinet Member Report - Community Services

In response to the invitation of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee I am pleased to present the following report.

1. Community Youth Service

The Community Youth Service has a revenue budget of approximately £1m, employs 55 staff, operates from 11 buildings and has the use of 1 mobile unit. It also works in partnership with a number of local organisations to deliver youth work via shared accommodation.

Although still delivering short of National Standards, the service has seen sustainable improvements against all 4 key performance indicators since their introduction.

Major challenges still exist in terms of sustaining sufficient resources on the ground to deliver core programmes.

Future priorities include the further development of young people's consultation and involvement work and the formation of a Herefordshire Youth Council.

'Youth Matters' – the Youth Green Paper has been published (after nearly a year's wait) with the Government's proposal for the future of Youth Services post Every Child Matters.

2. Leisure Services

This service comprises Leisure Partnerships and Sports Development & Physical Activity forms part of the Diversity and Community Leisure Partnerships service area. There are approx 12 directly employed staff and a revenue resource of £1.5m (£1m is paid to Halo as a management fee). The service is currently delivered via a number of local partnerships which include Halo Leisure Services, Herefordshire Sports Council, Herefordshire & Worcestershire County Sports Partnership, Herefordshire County Football Association and the Facility Management Trusts at Kington and Wigmore.

I consider that the opening of the new North Herefordshire Swimming Pool in January 2006 will be one of the most significant achievements of this Council. This development alongside the ongoing service improvements secured by Halo has led to a transformation in quality terms of Herefordshire's leisure provision. Other major successes have included the Herefordshire School's Sport Partnership, the Sports Referral Project and the South Herefordshire (SHAPES) project emanating from the highly successful LIFT scheme.

The challenges facing the service are not new. Sustaining external funding to support exercise referral and sports development programmes and the availability of capital to modernise Leisure Centres remain major pressures. However, some of the sports development initiatives and the Quality Standard (QUEST) for Leisure Centre management rank the Authority well in comparison with national competition. The future view is optimistic. Further planned capital investment is likely to see a sustained improvement in participation figures especially in the light of new community use sports halls being under construction at Kingstone and Weobley High Schools. Also, work with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) is also likely to see an extension of the sports development/LIFT programmes to help tackle the rising trend in childhood obesity.

3. Parks & Countryside

The Parks & Countryside Service has a revenue budget of approximately £1.5m and directly employs 19 staff. It operates from Queenswood Country Park and has responsibility for the management of some 1400 public open spaces. In addition to the management of Council owned land, the service also manages play areas, sports pitches and the Council's interests in the Wye Valley and Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Significant partnerships involve Herefordshire Jarvis Services (principal contractor), Herefordshire 'In Bloom' Committees, the Bodenham Lake and Queenswood Advisory Panel and a number of emerging

'Friends of' groups. Recent successes have included the development of a major new 44 acre park for Hereford City and the refurbishment of 3 major play area facilities. Interest in the Countryside Service and its principal visitor sites has grown dramatically since the aftermath of the foot and mouth epidemic.

The major challenge for the service is the revenue pressure on the grounds maintenance budget. This has been eroded on an annual basis due to inflationary pressures and the adoption of new land into the Council's ownership.

In terms of performance, the service has led the way in the regional 'In Bloom' awards securing incremental successes over a 5 year period. It has also been recognised by Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents for its safety record in managing children's play areas. Future priorities included greater community engagement in the management of the service and its assets and further progress in infrastructure replacement and renewal.

4. Social & Economic Regeneration Service

The service incorporates 3 areas which sit within the Community Services portfolio. These are: -

Lifelong Learning

The service employs 9 staff and currently holds a £400k revenue support budget (this figure varies however on an annual basis). The service works with partner organisations to provide learning opportunities for persons who have left school with no or few qualifications. Its most significant partners are the Learning and Skills Council and the Herefordshire Learning Partnership. A 2005 re-inspection by the Adult Learning Inspectorate has confirmed a 'Good' status for the service. During the academic year August 2004 – July 2005 the lifelong learning department enrolled/supported 920 learners.

Voluntary Sector Grants

This service has recently been subjected to an overarching review covering Council support to the voluntary sector as a whole. A number of significant changes have been proposed which are likely to see a move away from 'one off grants' to a system which will see a more strategic approach to procuring services through the voluntary sector on behalf of the Council. The existing scheme operated for 2005/6 has seen an overall allocation of £138,000.

Community Safety and Drugs

The service area has control over a partnership budget of approximately £2m and employs 14 staff who are based principally at Plough Lane, Hereford with a small proportion based with Stonham Housing and 1 in Leominster. The Partnership combines the resources of a number of statutory agencies and has representation from registered social landlords. One of the recent successes for the Partnership has been the development of an Alcohol Arrest Referral project which has been part funded by a major producer (Bulmers).

As with other services, its main challenge is to secure sustainable funding to support its programmes, but despite this, its performance compares very favourably with national competition. The performance of the Partnership impacts significantly upon the PCT's star ratings and Corporate Performance Assessment outcomes. Its contributions will feature heavily in the Local Area Agreement target outcomes.

5. Cultural Services (Arts, Tourism, Heritage and Libraries)

The service which has a £4m revenue budget operates from some 30 premises and employs at any one time approximately 200 staff. It also has responsibility for the care and conservation of some 100,000 objects.

Service delivery takes place across the County centred principally in the market towns although in the case of libraries and heritage, mobile provision is afforded.

In addition to direct service delivery, the service areas operate in close partnership with community organisations who add value to their work. The most significant of these are the Courtyard, the Cultural Consortium, 'Friends of' and user groups and Tourism Associations.

Major service successes include the award of Cultural Pathfinder for the Creative Industries Programme, and the development of the Friar Street Heritage Resource Centre and the Ross Creative Learning Centre. The Library element of the Bromyard Centre now rates alongside other such facilities as having secured some of the longest opening times in the Country.

In terms of challenges, the consolidation of service delivery points and the ability to sustain external funding programmes are of high priority. Delivery against Library Standards and associated budgetary pressures remain problematic as is the challenge to secure a new central library for the City.

Future developments will see a restructuring of the service alongside a review of key accommodation requirements. The movement towards the formation of a Herefordshire Destination Management Partnership will be a priority for the future development of strategic tourism service.

Factual Highlights summarising resources employed in delivering Community Services

Staff employed	- Over 300 at any one time.
Revenue resource	- In excess of £10m.
Operating premises	- Approximately 30.