

# COMMUNITY FORUMS

## PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

16TH MARCH, 2006

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### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

To receive a report on the January 2006 round of Community Forum meetings.

### Key Decision

This is not a key decision.

### Recommendation

That the report be noted.

### Reasons

To comply with the agreement that issues raised and discussed at Community Forums should be presented to Cabinet after each round of meetings.

### Considerations

1. A full report of the Forum meetings is set out at Appendix 1. The issues raised provide a useful indicator of local concerns for Cabinet to consider.
2. In addition to advertising in more than 30 Parish Magazines and in the local press, colour posters were issued to all Councillors for display in their local area. Posters were sent to every Parish Clerk, with a letter explaining the importance of Forums and asking them to inform all Parish Councillors.

Attendance varied. Figures were:

Hereford City	28
Golden Valley	50
Ross-on-Wye	27
North Herefordshire	13
Central Herefordshire	3
East Herefordshire	16

3. Total attendance was 137. 63 people (46%), completed feedback sheets. Of these, 40 (65%) had attended a Forum before. Of those who had attended before, 98% said they would attend again and one person was not sure whether they would attend again. 22 (35%) had not attended before. Of these, 64% would attend again and 36% were not sure whether they would attend again. No-one said they would not attend again. As only 46% of those who attended Forums completed the feedback sheets, no reliable conclusions can be drawn. However, these figures, taken together with the September 2005 figures, suggest that, in terms of community involvement, it

is largely the same 70 - 90 people who attended the Forums in each round, but that around 10 – 15 new people attend each round, who think they will attend future Forums.

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was very worthwhile and 1 not worthwhile at all, 36% rated the Forum very worthwhile (5); 43% rated it quite worthwhile (4); 14% rated it OK (3); and 7% rated it not very worthwhile (2). No-one said it was not worthwhile at all. Of the 22 respondents who had not attended a Forum before, 20 (90%) answered this question. Of these, seven (35%) rated it very worthwhile (5); seven (35%) rated it quite worthwhile (4); four (20%) rated it OK (3), and two (10%) rated it not very worthwhile (2).

## **Consultees**

Community Forum Chairmen; Cabinet Members and the Leader of the Council.

**COMMUNITY FORUM MEETINGS: JANUARY 2006****AGENDA ITEMS PRESENTED AT MORE THAN ONE FORUM****Council Tax and the budget (All Forums)**

Presentations were given by Sonia Rees, Director of Resources, Andrew Tanner, Assistant County Treasurer and David Keetch, Assistant County Treasurer. The presentation outlined the Council's expenditure for 2005/06, showing the percentage spent on each service area. The presenter explained that the budget setting process continues throughout the year, taking account of national and local factors and priorities. There were pressures on Council Tax from the responsibilities imposed by central government, which were not always adequately funded by government grant. In order to maintain service provision at a reduced cost, it was necessary for the Council to make efficiency savings. This would be achieved by efficiencies in procurement, ICT and operational improvement, rationalising Council accommodation and focusing on priorities. It was emphasised that Herefordshire was a low-spending, low funded Council. The Council had achieved a score of 3 out of 4 in independent assessments for Value for Money and the Corporate Performance Assessment. In response to questions, it was explained that:

- The Government Grant and business rates were set by central government and the Council had no control over them. For that reason, any increase in spending had to be funded from Council Tax;
- The Council was trying to impress on central government the particular problems facing rural counties. The Council was campaigning consistently and was working with the Local Government Association (LGA), to gather evidence to support this;
- The Council was committed to making efficiency savings. Council staff pay increase was 3% this year. Directors' pay was driven by national market prices and was linked with good management. Major services had been contracted out. Staff vacancies were not automatically filled, and a system was in place for the responsible Cabinet member to approve any requests for extra staff. Improvements in and greater use of ICT would help to achieve efficiencies;
- The sale of existing buildings would help to fund a rationalisation of Council accommodation;
- Although there was no known research, the change to a Unitary Authority almost certainly resulted in substantial savings. Compared with other authorities, where there were district, city and county councils who did not always share interests, unitary authorities had far fewer costly administrative structures;
- Herefordshire was on course to receive a substantial financial return for Public Service Agreement targets achieved;
- The Government was now using updated census statistics to calculate the Government Grant;
- The problem with free transport for older people being provided in the towns, but no buses being available in rural areas where there was a clear need, would be taken up with the Transport Officer;
- The Council acted only as a collection agency for fire, police and parish revenues;
- The proposals for a revaluation exercise had stopped and it was not known when they might resume. The Lyons Report might impact on this;

- A decision on the Council Tax increase for the next financial year would be made by the Council taking account of advice from the Chief Executive and the Director of Resources. It was thought that the Government might cap increases at 5%, and the Council was provisionally considering an increase in line with that, but the final decision would depend on the Government Grant;
- Local authorities were under increasing pressure from central Government to provide more services, but without corresponding increases in grants. These were statutory responsibilities, sometimes originating in EU requirements. The new licensing laws were an example of a costly new statutory duty imposed on councils;

### **The Primary Care Trust consultation (All Forums)**

The first presentation was given by Tamar Thompson, the Director of Modernisation and Nursing for the West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority. Other presentations were given by Simon Hairsnape, the Deputy Chief Executive of the Herefordshire Primary Care Trust. Others present were:

#### For the West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority:

Mike Deakin, Director of Public Health and Clinical Engagement  
Bronwen Bishop, Director of Primary Care Development and Corporate Services  
Colin Bexley, Director of Strategic IT  
Grace Hampson, Locality Director

#### For the Herefordshire Primary Care Trust:

Paul Bates, Chief Executive  
Ted Willmott, Chairman  
Julie Thornby, Director of Corporate Development  
Mike Thomas, Director of Operations  
Brian Handford, Director of Finance, Information & Performance  
John Campbell, Director of ICT  
Dr Richard Cook, GP Locality Director - Ross  
Christine Penning, Non-executive Director  
Trish Jay, Director of Clinical Development, Lead Executive Nurse

#### For the Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust:

Joanna Newton, Chairman

The Primary Care Trust was conducting a public consultation exercise on behalf of the Secretary of State for Health on proposals for new arrangements affecting the Primary Care Trust (PCT), the Strategic Health Authority (SHA), and the Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust. The preferred option for the PCT was to leave Herefordshire PCT in its present form. There were many advantages to having the PCT co-terminus with the County (ie: sharing the boundary), for example, the links between hospitals and care homes. This debate was important to the future of both Herefordshire Council and the PCT. There was a good track record of co-operation between Herefordshire Council and the PCT, and this had been a factor in preserving the PCT. The fact that the PCT was able to work within its budget was also a major factor. It was emphasised that it was important for the public to take part in the consultation if they wished to ensure the retention of the Herefordshire PCT, since the other options were still open for consideration.

For the Ambulance Trust, it was proposed that 11 ambulance service trusts should be established across England. There were currently four Ambulance Trusts in the West Midlands area. It was proposed to create one West Midlands-wide Ambulance Service. There were no proposals to change the model of service provision locally; Local Delivery Units would be created to ensure local focus was maintained. The proposals would provide better capacity in terms of planning, particularly for major emergencies and disasters.

In terms of the Strategic Health Authority (SHA), it was proposed to replace the three existing SHAs in the West Midlands with one. With a reduced number of Primary Care Trusts, three SHAs would be unnecessary. This new SHA would share boundaries with the Government Office of the West Midlands, offering advantages in terms of influencing decisions affecting the provision of health services.

The consultation period would end on 22 March 2006. Detailed information about the proposals was available at the Forum for those present to take home. Details of how to respond and forms to complete were also available. In response to questions, it was explained that:

- The air ambulance was not included in the consultation because it was a charity co-ordinated by the Ambulance Trust, but not part of it;
- The proposals were for organisational change, not any change to the service provided, and would not impact on the working practices of frontline staff;
- The increasing role of the PCT as commissioners of services, rather than providers, would give patients genuine choice and strengthen the powers of GPs;
- The PCT currently managed three hospitals. There were no proposals in this consultation exercise to make changes to community hospitals;
- Administrative and managerial posts would be lost. The resulting reduction in bureaucracy would provide extra money for frontline services. Reorganisation and the loss of some management posts would provide around £250m nationally for frontline services;
- Partnership working between the PCT and Herefordshire Council was very good, for example, the links between mental health services, for which the PCT was responsible, and Herefordshire Council's Learning Disabilities Service;
- Over the last five to six years, ambulances had been positioned where patients were, rather than in ambulance stations. At this stage, there were no proposals to close ambulance stations, but even if some ambulance stations closed, the service would be maintained. The Ambulance Trust would consult with local people on the best way to provide services;
- There were no proposals in this consultation exercise for changes within the PCT, but this would be addressed over the next 1 – 2 years. It was acknowledged that "red tape" could cause frustration in individual cases, and the PCT was anxious to minimise this. The Government wanted PCTs to be commissioners of services, not providers. Kington and Ledbury Hospitals were currently managed by private sector organisations and were run as well as PCT managed hospitals;
- The waiting times for GPs on the Out of Hours Service were determined case by case, and were one, two or six hours. All Herefordshire GPs opted out of providing this service. The service was a Government initiative and PCTs had to work with it. The standards set for the service were a national issue;
- The PrimeCare contract expired in March 2006. Other options had been explored, but PrimeCare proved to be best able to provide the service required. There had been month on month improvements in their performance;
- The PCT balanced its budget and had no reason, therefore, to reduce services.

- Herefordshire Council had a record of successful joint working with the PCT, and strongly supported the retention of Herefordshire PCT.

### **National Grid Gas Connection Projects (Golden Valley and Ross-on-Wye)**

The presentations were given by Steve Knight-Gregson, the Consents Manager (Land and Development Group), National Grid. Other representatives of the National Grid present were:

Brian Smethurst, Project Manager  
Phil Allen, Assistant Project Manager  
Diane Owen, Community Relations Manager

Natural Gas terminals were under construction at Milford Haven and would be operational by October 2007. These would provide around 20% of UK gas requirements. The National Grid had a statutory duty under the Gas Act 1986 to develop and maintain a safe, efficient, co-ordinated and economical gas transportation system. Transmission System reinforcements and modifications would be needed to transport the gas. The project started in February 2005, and 16 route corridors had been identified and investigated for the gas pipeline following consultations with strategic-level statutory bodies, including the Environment Agency, English Nature and the Brecon Beacons National Park. All 16 options had been appraised and the preferred option – Felindre to Tirley – had been announced in October 2005. Whichever route was chosen, a temporary 44m wide construction corridor would be constructed to take 90% of all site traffic. Pipelines would be laid in 2.4m deep trenches with 1.2m cover. After pressure testing, all soils, drainage, hedgerows and land would be reinstated. A pressure reducing station would be needed at Treadow, attached to the existing Compression station. During 2006, work would commence on discussions with landowners, EIA surveys, refinement of the pressure reduction station and pipeline proposals, and other consultations. Answers to questions were:

- All farmers on the preferred route had been notified. However, the exact route had still to be finalised, and the National Grid were currently looking within a 1km-wide route. Parish Councillors had been offered the opportunity for a briefing meeting and the Project leaflet contained a Freephone number for enquiries;
- The National Grid would discuss traffic management plans with the Highways Department;
- Construction would take place during daylight hours on weekdays, with shorter working on Saturdays. The final consents from the DTI would carry conditions relating to working times and noise levels, including noise levels at the pressure reducing station;
- All other options including an offshore option, had been considered, but were unsuitable. A sea route would be much longer and substantially more expensive, and could not be delivered in the time available;
- The shippers had chosen Milford Haven because of the deep harbour. The National Grid had no control over that as they do not ship gas, but are responsible for transporting it;
- Work would be completed during the summer months (March to October) in 2007. Good weather would ensure good progress;
- The route of the railway was unsuitable because the pipeline was required to be 134m away from buildings and residential areas;
- Plans were still at an early stage, and there was a lot of consultation and discussion still to do;

## APPENDIX 1

- This project would not result in any further compressors at Peterstow Compression station;
- The pipelines would be heavy section made from 6mm special high resistance steel;
- Although residents near the route would not benefit directly from having a gas supply, 40% of electricity was generated from gas;
- Each section of pipe laying would be completed in a matter of weeks, and the land reinstated, so there would not be disruption in any one area over the whole period of the construction;
- The pressure reducing station would take about 12 – 14 months to complete, and should be completed by October 2007;
- Security issues would be regularly discussed with the Home Office and Special Branch, as they are at present for existing pipelines;
- There would be regular, but not predictable, helicopter inspections along the route;
- Pipelines must be designed to last 40 years, but in practice, will last at least twice that time. There would be regular checks on condition and potential lifetime.

<b>Hereford City, Committee Room 1, The Shire Hall, Hereford</b>	<b>Tuesday 10 January 2006</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr D Fleet (Chairman) Cllr Mrs J French (Cabinet representative) Cllr P Edwards Cllr Mrs P Andrews Cllr Mrs G Powell Cllr Mrs E Taylor	Sonia Rees, Director of Resources, Herefordshire Council Richard Wood, Sustainability Officer (Environment) Herefordshire Council Geoff Perrott, (Environment) Herefordshire Council Tamar Thompson, Director of Modernisation and Nursing for the West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority Other representatives of the SHA, Herefordshire PCT and Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust (See main report) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>28</b>

### Agenda

- Council Tax and the budget
- The Primary Care Trust public consultation
- Climate Change

### Council Tax and the budget

See main report

### The Primary Care Trust public consultation

See main report

### Climate Change

The presentation focused on three aspects: the fact that scientists were convinced that the climate was changing; what we could do to address the problem; and whether it was too late to do anything. There was a need to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 60% by 2050. Some of the unavoidable consequences of climate change were, for example, the need to build more flood defences and the government's "heat stroke strategy". The public had grown accustomed to relatively cheap fuel, in terms of the proportion of income spent on fuel. The cost of fuel could rise from around 5% of income to around 10% in the future. Herefordshire was one of the first counties to get 100% of its electricity from renewable sources, and in Herefordshire, the emission of greenhouse gases from landfill sites was offset by woodland, which absorbed 7% of greenhouse gases produced in the county. Agriculture produced 41% of the total output. Responses to questions were:

- All nuclear power stations had been switched off and could not be restarted;
- The Edgar Street Grid was carbon neutral because it would use a micro generator. It might be possible to sell electricity back to suppliers, and the Council was looking at all the available options;
- There was an education programme in place in schools, but people became less concerned as they got older. It was important to reach the 18 – 32 age group.

### Other questions

- Herefordshire Council's Environmental Health Officer was actively working with the Welsh Water Liaison group to address the problems of smells from the sewage works.



Cllr Edwards would ask for an update and make a written answer publicly available. There was a timetable in place for action;

- The Environmental Health Officers had tested noise levels at the Liquid Lounge Club. Doody's could not legally open. They had applied for a licence but did not have one at present. The third of three hearings would take place in a month's time;
- There had been a survey to assess the impact of the traffic lights at Folly Lane/Ledbury Road. Cllr Wilcox would report back on the results.

### **Other issues**

The Community Forum Co-ordinator would report back at the next meeting on the following issues:

- The underpasses had been resurfaced, and the gulleys and pumps to prevent flooding had been covered. This could present a safety hazard, particularly in freezing weather;
- In view of the forecast of a cold winter, the stainless steel street furniture installed at Eign Gate could present danger if anyone touched it.

<b>Golden Valley, Peterchurch Community Centre</b>	<b>Thursday 12 January 2006</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr D Taylor (Chairman) Cllr C Mayson (Cabinet representative) Cllr P Turpin Cllr J B Williams	Andrew Tanner, Assistant County Treasurer, Herefordshire Council Simon Hairsnape, Deputy Chief Executive, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust Other representatives of the Strategic Health Authority and Herefordshire Primary Care Trust (See main report) Steve Knight-Gregson, Consents Manager, National Grid Other representatives of the National Grid (See main report) Mike Willmont, Southern Team Leader, Planning (Development Control) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>50</b>

**Agenda**

- Council Tax and the budget
- The Primary Care Trust public consultation
- The National Grid gas pipeline proposals

**Council Tax and the budget**

See main report

**The Primary Care Trust public consultation**

See main report

**The National Grid gas pipeline proposals**

See main report.

<b>Ross-on-Wye, John Kyrle High School, Ross-on-Wye</b>	<b>Tuesday 17 January 2006</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr Mrs A Gray (Chairman) Cllr D Rule (Cabinet representative) Cllr Mrs M Cunningham Cllr Mrs J Davis Cllr R Lincoln Cllr G Lucas Cllr M Wilson Cllr S Thomas	Sonia Rees, Director of Resources, Herefordshire Council Simon Hairsnape, Deputy Chief Executive, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust Other representatives of the Strategic Health Authority, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust (See main report) Steve Knight-Gregson, Consents Manager, National Grid Other representatives of the National Grid (See main report) Mike Willmont, Southern Team Leader, Planning (Development Control) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>27</b>

### Agenda

- Council Tax and the budget
- The Primary Care Trust public consultation
- The National Grid gas pipeline proposals

### Council Tax and the budget

See main report

### The Primary Care Trust public consultation

See main report

### The National Grid gas pipeline proposals

See main report.

<b>North Herefordshire, Lady Hawkins Leisure Centre, Kington</b>	<b>Thursday 19 January 2006</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr J Stone (Chairman) Cllr J Hope Cllr JP Thomas Cllr R Phillips	Stephanie Canham, Head of Social Care (Adults), Herefordshire Council Andrew Tanner, Assistant County Treasurer, Herefordshire Council Simon Hairsnape, Deputy Chief Executive, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust Other representatives of the Strategic Health Authority, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust (See main report) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>13</b>

### Agenda

- The Learning Disabilities Service
- Council Tax and the budget
- The Primary Care Trust public consultation

### The Learning Disabilities Service

Stephanie Canham, the Head of Social Care (Adults), explained that the term Learning Disabilities covered a range of conditions from very mild difficulties to very severe conditions, such as Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy and Autism (including Asperger's Syndrome), requiring a high level of support. There were around 3,400 people in Herefordshire with learning disabilities, representing a wide range of dependency, of whom 580 received support from the statutory authorities. However, a number of young people with disabilities lived with carers, normally their parents, who were over 70. The Service was working with those families to plan ahead for meeting the needs of the disabled person when the time came. The aim was to allow people to live as independently as possible in the community, contributing to the community through paid or voluntary work where appropriate. It was important to ensure they could live safely in the community with the appropriate level of support from the statutory authorities. Answers to questions raised were:

- While it was true that some people needed the security and support provided by institutional care, this level of care could be provided in normal accommodation. It was important not to be over protective, but to balance this with care appropriate to the needs of the individual;
- Herefordshire Centre for Independent Living provided advice and help to enable disabled people to make the best use of funds they received. They will play an active role in ensuring value for money as people receive cash to buy services, rather than directly provided services;
- Rural communities presented a challenge to the Service because, as such communities change, they become less likely to support disabled people within the community and it was more expensive to provide support in rural communities than in towns;
- Independent living was not necessarily a cheaper option than providing institutional care;
- "Workmatch" was a Hereford based organisation sponsored by Herefordshire Council, which trained disabled people in life and work skills. They were involved in setting up co-operatives, paying normal wages for work done. Profits were used to help those involved, and there had been some successes.

- Although the Disability Discrimination Act placed requirements on employers in respect of the employment of disabled people, this was not always easy to enforce. However, people with learning disabilities generally made good employees.

**Council Tax and the budget**

See main report

**The Primary Care Trust public consultation**

See main report

<b>Central Herefordshire, Bartestree Village Hall</b>	<b>Monday 23 January 2006</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr B Matthews (Chairman) Cllr DB Wilcox (Cabinet Member) Cllr M Wilson Cllr J Guthrie  Apologies received from Cllr Mrs J Pemberton	David Keetch, Assistant County Treasurer, Herefordshire Council Simon Hairsnape, Deputy Chief Executive, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust Other representatives of the Strategic Health Authority, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust (See main report) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>3</b>

**Agenda**

- Council Tax and the budget
- The Primary Care Trust public consultation
- Climate Change

**Council Tax and the budget**

See main report

**The Primary Care Trust public consultation**

See main report

**Climate Change**

Speaker unable to attend.

**Other issues:**

Simon Hairsnape, the Deputy Chief Executive of the Primary Care Trust, answered some questions about the provision of NHS Dental care in Herefordshire. Answers to questions were:

- Dentists were small businesses and were free to decide whether, and to what extent, to contract with the NHS to provide dental services. The contracts had become unattractive and many dentists had chosen to end them;
- It was difficult to attract new young dentists in rural counties. They were more likely to opt for towns and cities and places where there were more private practices;
- About 18 months ago, the PCT set up Dental Access Centres to plug the gap in provision. The Centres provided routine NHS treatment and an emergency service. Waiting times for a routine appointment were about 4 – 6 months;
- About 50% of the Herefordshire population were registered with an NHS dentist. A new eight surgery NHS dental practice to be built in Leominster would substantially improve the situation, raising the figure to 65%. Some people chose to use private treatment;
- New NHS contracts would be used from 1 April 2006 and these should prove more attractive to dentists;
- The supply of dentists was only part of the solution. It was also necessary to look at children's diet, as poor nutrition was a major cause of dental decay in children. The second issue was the fluoridation of the water supply. Although this had been shown to reduce dental decay, there was some public opposition. The Council would address this issue with the Water Companies next year.

<b>East Herefordshire, St Katherine's Hall, Ledbury</b>	<b>Wednesday 25 January 2006</b>
<b>Present:</b> Cllr T Hunt (Chairman) Cllr P Edwards (Cabinet Member) Cllr R Mills Cllr D Rule Cllr R Stockton Cllr S Thomas	David Keetch, Assistant County Treasurer, Herefordshire Council Simon Hairsnape, Deputy Chief Executive, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust Other representatives of the Strategic Health Authority, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust and Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Trust (See main report) Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
<b>Members of the public</b>	<b>16</b>

**Agenda**

- Council Tax and the budget
- The Primary Care Trust public consultation
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**Council Tax and the budget**

See main report

**The Primary Care Trust public consultation**

See main report

**Climate Change**

Speaker unable to attend

**Other issues**

Responses to questions on waste management were:

- Recycling was an environmental issue, not a cost-saving one. Recycling cost more than using landfill. Since the introduction of a tax on landfill and fines for overuse, the Council had made even greater efforts to recycle where it was practicable and economic to do so. The greater costs of recycling made it uneconomic in some rural areas;
- A request for more recycling bins in the Little Marcle area would be passed to the relevant Council officer;
- The Colwall paper recycling bin was a private enterprise. The Council had to be aware of potential noise problems arising from bottle and can recycling bins. The supermarkets provided recycling facilities.