

COMMUNITY FORUMS

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

7TH SEPTEMBER, 2006

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To receive a report on the June - July 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. The East Herefordshire Forum was cancelled in this round. The Chairman considered that there were no items for the agenda that would attract sufficient numbers of people to make the Forum viable. He felt that it would be better to present a topical agenda in October.
3. The Forums were advertised in more than 30 Parish Magazines and in the local press. The Hereford City Forum was advertised on Radio Hereford & Worcester. Colour posters were issued to all Councillors for display in their local area. Letters and agendas were sent to every Parish Clerk explaining the importance of Forums and asking them to inform all Parish Councillors.
4. Attendance varied. Figures were:

Hereford City	14
Golden Valley	19
Ross-on-Wye	3
North Herefordshire	10
Central Herefordshire	14
East Herefordshire	Cancelled
5. Total attendance was 60 at five Forums. This compares with total attendance of 62 at six Forums in April 2006. Average attendance was 12, compared with 10 in April. In April, the highest attendance was 20 at Hereford City Forum and the lowest was three

at the Central Herefordshire Forum. In July, the highest attendance was 19 at the Golden Valley Forum, and the lowest was three at the Ross-on-Wye Forum.

6. There was a 35% response rate to the feedback forms. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 was very worthwhile and 1 not worthwhile at all, 74% rated the Forums very worthwhile or quite worthwhile. This compares with 73% in April and 79% in January.

Consultees

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

COMMUNITY FORUMS: JUNE-JULY 2006**Issues presented at more than one Forum:****Dealing with litter**

This item was presented at the Ross-on-Wye Forum and the Central Herefordshire Forum. Presentations were given by Andy Middlecote, Assistant Area Manager, Highways Department, Area Services South, and Shirley McKay, Support Services Manager, Highways and Transportation. They explained that the County was split into three areas for the purposes of street cleaning. The Southern area covered a wide area from the outskirts of Ledbury in the East to Hay-on-Wye in the West. The Council was taking an integrated approach to environmental issues to address direct services, such as street cleaning, dog fouling and graffiti, and indirect services, such as highways maintenance and ad hoc repairs. This initiative, entitled "Streetscene", covered not only dealing with environmental problems, but with designing public spaces to discourage anti-social behaviour and littering. There were three strands to the initiative:

- Engineering: including coating pavements to make removal of chewing gum easier and using paint that made it easier to remove graffiti;
- Education: The "Streetscene" brand was being used to highlight the initiative in schools and as a means of educating the public generally;
- Enforcement: It was difficult to catch people in the act of dropping litter or vandalising public areas, but the Clean Neighbourhood Act gave the Council new powers to impose penalties.
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Implementing Streetscene involved Council Directorates working together, and partnership initiatives to allow joint working with other bodies and public involvement. The Council aimed to engage the community, and had set up a Streetscene hotline, for reporting incidents, on-site record sheets to record public toilet cleaning, Highway inspectors and Town Monitors. Incidents could also be reported to the Info Shop at Swan House. There were a number of strands to the strategy for dealing with environmental issues in the future, including education, design of new buildings and infrastructure, performance indicators and enforcement. Current performance was assessed in terms of engineering (bin location, toilet monitoring, methods of working), education (targeting schools, engaging staff, working with businesses, the "lay-by safari"), and enforcement (fly-tipping, breaches of planning regulations, dog-fouling). The new Clean Neighbourhood Act gave the Council powers to impose and enforce fixed penalty notices. The fine for litter, fly-posting and graffiti would be set at the statutory maximum of £80, to be reduced by half for payment within 14 days. The Council would provide assistance to property owners wishing to remove graffiti from private property. There were plans to reduce signage by removing redundant signs. Planning applications for new housing could be made subject to Section 106 agreements, under which the developers would work with the Council to ensure a clean environment. The Council was working with Encams, a government body that was working to reduce litter. Litter bins had been placed in lay-bys on trunk roads and this had considerably reduced the litter on those roads. There were problems with the A40 because litter-picking involved lane closures and the cost was around £18,000 plus about £30,000 to conduct the litter-pick. Funds had been saved by timing litter-picks to coincide with grass cutting.

In response to questions raised, the following answers were given:

- Some dog-owners had set up groups to report on dog-fouling, in a similar way to the scheme described in Jersey;
- A document published by DEFRA would help Councils with the implementation of the Clean Neighbourhood Act;
- Parking attendants would, in future, be called Civil Enforcement Officers. Their role would not include clearing litter, as this role was better performed by Highways Officers;

- The phone number for reporting fly-tipping is 01432 260993. Reports of littering could be e-mailed to the Council;
- The Council had recently written to every parish council not currently taking part in the Lengthsman Scheme, inviting them to do so. This was a very popular scheme and funding in the county was higher than in most other areas. The scheme provided for funding at £100 per kilometre for the first three years, after which time it would reduce to £75 per kilometre. This was because once the scheme had bedded in it should be cheaper to maintain it, and the money released could be used to fund new schemes elsewhere in the county. Administration of the scheme was calculated at about 10% of the total cost, and it was thought that this role should not fall to the Parish Clerk;
- Lengthsmen would not work on A Roads for Health and Safety reasons, although they could report visibility problems on A Roads, and this could help to speed up the process of dealing with problems;
- The main responsibilities of lengthsman were hedging and ditching, and cutting back where grass and leaves concealed road signs;
- It was difficult for the Council to get discounts on the bulk purchase of litter bins because Local Authorities tended to be the only customers for such items;
- The Roman Road was included in the routine maintenance plan for verge cutting and collecting litter;
- New toilets in the City would be of a vandal-proof design and so would be able to be kept open for longer hours. These toilets were not popular with some members of the public, but the policy would be kept under review;
- Pot-holes in the road in Wellington would be put on the inspection system and dealt with;
- There were a number of initiatives in the County to educate people about litter. In particular, schools and young people were becoming increasingly involved in initiatives.

The Flood Alleviation Scheme

This presentation was given at the Hereford City Forum and the Central Herefordshire Forum by Stephen Oates, the Council's Head of Highways and Transportation, who explained that a Planning application had now been received from the Environment Agency for the Belmont Flood Alleviation Scheme. He outlined the Environment Agency's proposals for a flood alleviation scheme for Hereford. Under the proposals, the first phase would cover the area from Greyfriars Bridge to the Old Wye Bridge. Because the number of residential properties affected by flooding was small, Hereford would not be considered a priority for flood alleviation were it not for the ASDA development. The funding from ASDA was time limited so it was vital to the project that plans were completed and submitted to the Council soon. The Environment Agency's proposals had been modified following debate. In particular, the proposed walls would be lower than originally designed, with slot-in panels when flooding threatened. This would enable views of the river to be retained and the wall would be more aesthetically pleasing.

In response to questions, the following answers were given:

- Bishops Meadow and King Georges Fields were areas that flooded naturally and would continue to be flood water storage areas. This was important in ensuring there would be no increased flood risk up or down stream of the flood defences, and the proposals meant that the scheme should have no adverse effect on the north side of the river, nor the area upstream;
- Lowering the river bed would make very little difference to the flooding risk, and dredging would be very expensive to maintain;
- Although it was hoped that some trees might be saved, it would be necessary to cut through the roots, and the planning application would need to be considered

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on the basis of the worst case. It would not be in the interests of either the Environment Agency or Hereford Council to damage trees unnecessarily;

- Once the planning application was received, there would be an opportunity for extensive discussion and debate about the details. However, it was important to get the application in, because the £2m pledged by ASDA would be available for only five years and the work was scheduled to take place in 2007-8;
- Although it was acknowledged that the Environment Agency had not advertised the public consultation as well as it might have done, nevertheless, changes to the proposals had been made as a result of public and Council representations;
- The application would go before the main Planning Committee in September or October.

Hereford City, Committee Room 1, The Shire Hall, Hereford	Tuesday 27 June 2006
Present: Cllr D Fleet (Chairman) Cllr Mrs J French (Cabinet representative) Cllr P Edwards Cllr Mrs P Andrews Cllr Mrs G Powell Cllr Mrs U Attfield Cllr Mrs M Lloyd-Hayes Cllr B Wilcox Cllr A Williams	Simon Hairsnape, Deputy Chief Executive, Herefordshire Primary Care Trust Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation, Herefordshire Council Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
Members of the public	14

Agenda

- The NHS in Herefordshire
- The Flood Alleviation Scheme

The NHS in Herefordshire

Simon Hairsnape, the Deputy Chief Executive of the Herefordshire Primary Care Trust, outlined the PCT's achievements against its targets for 2005/06. Key issues for the PCT included reducing waiting times, improving NHS dentistry, developing cancer and stroke services, and financial breakeven. There were 11 key issues in the Local Delivery Plan in total. There had been a good record of achievement against all targets. Particular achievements were the reduction on waiting times for treatment, the creation of over 10,000 new NHS dental places, and the financial breakeven target. There was active debate about radiotherapy services and the development of local chemotherapy services and it was noted that there was a new stroke unit at the County Hospital. The PCT had been awarded two stars for 2004/05 under the Healthcare Commission ratings.

Objectives for 2006/07 included closer working with Herefordshire Council, further choice for patients, further reductions in waiting times and reducing MRSA rates. Particular objectives were improving sexual health in the county and a reduction in smoking. As with the previous year, the PCT aimed to maintain a financial balance. Simon Hairsnape emphasised the importance of the partnership between the PCT and Herefordshire Council. This partnership had been an important factor in the decision to retain Herefordshire PCT as a separate body. He highlighted the ways in which Council Services could affect the health and well-being of people in the County, and this impacted on the demand made on the health services.

Conclusions were:

- Herefordshire PCT was in a much better position than either Worcestershire or Gloucestershire, because its finances had been better managed
- 2005/06 had been a good year for the PCT;
- Most targets had been achieved;
- Progress had been made against all targets
- 2006/07 would be a challenging year financially;
- 2006/07 would be a year of reform
- There was a determination to move forward in the current year.

In response to questions raised, the following answers were given:

- Special baby care was very staff intensive and there were a fixed number of cots in Hereford Hospital. In addition, there was no neonatal intensive care. This meant that very occasionally, where it was clinically unsafe to keep a sick baby in Hereford, where no specialists were available, the baby might be sent to one of the big centres of excellence. It was not possible to provide the range of services in a rural county. It was acknowledged that this could be difficult for families, but it was emphasised that the clinical safety of the baby was paramount;
- Financially, this year and next would be years of growth in the NHS, with funding running at 7 – 8%. However, this level of funding would dry up by April 2008, because the reform programme should be completed at that time and the level of service was expected to be self-sustaining. It was recognised that this would prove challenging when funding returned to 4 – 5%;
- GPs should now be offering patients choice about where they received treatment. In practice, most residents in the City would be likely to choose Hereford Hospital, but all 24 GP practices in the county should be offering a choice of four providers;
- Patients sent to distant hospitals for clinical reasons could have transport paid, but patients attending distant hospitals as a genuine choice would need to pay their own transport costs. Patients in receipt of benefits could claim transport costs. The booklets issued to patients should clarify this;
- The use of Hillside as a centre for Stroke patients would not result in any net loss of Community Care beds;
- Waiting times were now calculated from the date the GP made an appointment with the specialist to the date treatment started. This was a clear improvement on the previous system of three waiting lists, and maximum waiting times were now 18 weeks;
- Complaints to the PCT averaged one a day. All complaints were acknowledged within three days, with a substantive response being sent within 22 days. All complaints were taken very seriously, with major complaints being logged with the Health Authority. All hospital staff should know about the complaints procedure;
- Two years ago, GPs had been told that they must offer appointments within 48 hours. This had led to some GPs offering only same day appointments. However, patients were entitled to ask for a pre-booked appointment and GPs had an obligation to provide that service;
- It was expected that the system allowing patients to choose the time and date of specialist appointments would prevent many cases of failure to keep appointments, because patients would be in control of their appointments.

The Flood Alleviation Scheme

See main report.

Other questions

The following answers were given to general questions:

- The motor launch moored on the river could not be turned round to enable it to be painted. The issue was currently with the Ombudsman, but a detailed account of the current situation would be sent to the questioner, and brought to the next Forum;
- Under the Enforcement of Clean Neighbour and Environment Act, the Government would support Local Authorities in the collection and disposal of dry batteries. The Council was waiting for a Government directive and funding;
- Residents in urban areas, including those in blocks of flats, were entitled to have their waste recycled. The absence of recycling services at particular addresses

would be investigated and the residents advised. An update on the situation would be brought to the next Forum.

Other issues

It was agreed that, subject to agreement at the next meeting of Forum Chairmen, future Hereford City Forums would begin at 7.00pm;

The Chairman advised that the fine for litter, fly-posting and graffiti would be set at the statutory maximum of £80, to be reduced by half for payment within 14 days.

Ross-on-Wye, John Kyrle High School, Ross-on-Wye	Tuesday 4 July 2006
Present: Cllr Mrs A Gray (Chairman) Cllr G Lucas Cllr J Jarvis Cllr P Edwards Cllr M Wilson	Andy Middlecote, Assistant Area Manager, Highways Department, Area Services South, Herefordshire Council Geoff Hughes, Director of Adult and Community Services, Herefordshire Council Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator
Members of the public	3

Agenda

- Dealing with litter
- Care in the Community
- Questions and Answers

Dealing with litter

- See main report.

Care in the Community

Geoff Hughes, the Council's Director of Adult and Community Services, explained that the vision put forward in the Herefordshire Community Strategy aimed to improve the health and well-being of the people of Herefordshire by supporting people to live independently, promoting inclusion, providing fair access to care and support and achieving best value. It was important that vulnerable people played a full part in the community. The client groups were older people, people with learning disabilities, people with physical disabilities and adults with other needs such as autistic people. The demography of the county showed that the population was aging faster than the national average. This was partly due to younger people having to leave the county for higher education and work, and retired people being attracted to the county. The over 65 population was expected to increase from 35,500 in 2004 to 42,000 in 2011. Important features of the Service were assessment of individuals' needs, signposting (directing people to other services), advice on benefits, the falls prevention team and the LIFT programme. Future plans included a village warden scheme to improve the quality of life in rural areas and a foot care scheme, involving Age Concern. The Hillside Unit had 22 beds for use as active rehabilitation and for rehabilitating hospital patients before they went home. The STARRS team would assess needs for equipment to enable people to live independently. Future plans for long-term care at home included Telecare (for example, electronic monitors in the home), personalised care budgets for people to buy their own equipment and Extra Care housing.

In response to questions, the following answers were given:

- The need to help people remain fit as they aged was acknowledged. The Council would look at the availability of leisure and fitness facilities for older people;

North Herefordshire, Lady Hawkins Leisure Centre, Kington	Thursday 6 July 2006
Present: Cllr J Stone (Chairman) Cllr R Stockton (Cabinet Member) Cllr S Bowen Cllr J P Thomas Cllr J Goodwin Cllr J Hope	Peter Yates, Development Control Manager, in the Planning Department Herefordshire Council. Paul Murray, General Inspector School Improvement Service, Herefordshire Council Andy Tector, Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards, Herefordshire Council Craig Goodall, Democratic Services Officer, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	10

Agenda

- How Planners Think
- The Review of Provision of School Places
- Pest Control
- Questions and answers

How Planners Think

Peter Yates explained that the history of Town Planning as we knew it dated back to the Great Fire of London, and established the principle that just because a person owned land, that did not give them the right to build whatever they liked on it. Planning permission had to take account of the public interest, and planning applications normally listed the planning policies that the proposals met or exceeded. In considering an application, Planning Officers took account of the views of parish councils and any objections received. However, not all objections were planning considerations. Planning officers were subject to targets, including time scales. Although decisions on applications could be delayed, 88% of decisions were made within the time targets. The success rate for appeals against Planning decisions was higher in Herefordshire than the national average. Changes were taking place in the Planning Office. For example, planning applications would soon be available on line, and the Government had proposed a national planning application form. By mid-August, every application would include a design and access statement, which would explain how the development fitted into the local area. Access included disabled access and proximity to public transport. These changes would affect retail developments more than private individuals.

In response to questions the following answers were given:

- Not all Councils allowed the public the right to speak at Planning Committees. Herefordshire allowed only three minutes, but this ensured comments were to the point;
- Housing density was a simple concept: once it had been decided to use land for building, it was important to make the best use of it to avoid encroaching on green field sites. A good design might enable more than 50 dwellings per hectare;
- Planners provided applicants with less advice than they used to prior to submitting an application. In 2004-5, 2000 of the 3,600 applicants received advice – more than half;
- Where an application was turned down, it was not always possible to offer advice, but there could be problems where developers made repeat applications without making changes;

- Planning decisions could not be delegated to parishes, but there were high levels of delegation within the Planning Department, reducing the need for committee meetings;
- Decisions could be influenced by design statements, although statements did not have the same status as the Unitary Development Plan, which was a legal document.

The Review of Provision of School Places

Paul Murray, General Manager in the School Improvement Service, explained that the review began in Herefordshire earlier this year. The number of school pupils was falling nationally, and this trend was reflected in Herefordshire. It was expected that the number of pupils in the county would continue to fall until 2016. However, the fall in numbers was not evenly spread across the county. The Review was started in response to this trend to ensure that the problems generated by the trend could be addressed constructively and at an early stage. The main problem would involve funding, since a fall in the number of pupils would be reflected in a corresponding reduction in funding. Every school in Herefordshire would be affected by the review, but the first area to be subject to review was the North Herefordshire area. Numbers in this area were currently stable. Although the review would look at the issues in terms of four areas – North, South, East and West Herefordshire, it would also consider the county as a whole, since each area impacted on the others.

There would be wide consultation and, after taking account of all the views expressed, proposals would be put forward in September. Addressing the issues was not simply a case of closing schools. It was important that pupils received the best possible education, and options for change would be based on that objective. One possible measure would be revising catchment areas. Other options included schools working in partnership, sharing staff and resources, and federating schools to deal with recruitment problems. One of the problems facing the county was the difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers. Of every five Newly Qualified Teachers in the county, only two remained after five years. In addition, it was very difficult to recruit Head Teachers because of the long hours they were required to work. Recommendations for change would be put to the Cabinet who would make decisions on the proposals. The consultation document was available, and all comments would be welcomed.

In response to questions, the following answers were given:

- It was important to engage parents in the review. The federated schools option had been tried in Cardiff, but it had been difficult to get parents to accept the idea of sharing a Head Teacher between schools;
- Specialist Schools could work in partnership with other schools and with feeder primary schools;
- Parents could express a preference for schools;
- It was important to recognise the special problems affecting rural schools and the Council made frequent representations to DfES on these.

Pest Control:

Andy Tector, Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards, explained that the Pest Control service was not a statutory service, and there were charges for those using the service. There were five staff working in pest control. Control of rats and mice cost £40 for 2 – 3 visits, and control of wasps and bees cost £35. There was a discount for people receiving benefits. Nevertheless, the service was subsidised by Council Tax at £50,000 per year. The subsidies were directed at domestic users. There were two officers who worked with businesses. Rats and mice were generally a winter problem, with wasps and bees causing most problems in the summer. Squirrels also caused a lot of damage.

In response to questions, the following answers were given:

- Birds, especially pigeons and seagulls, were a growing problem, and were difficult to deal with because they always returned;
- Calls to deal with escaped animals were infrequent, although last year the Pest Control staff had been called on to deal with a Huntsman spider in Ledbury.

Other issues

Answers to other questions were:

- The Council had received a Waste Efficiency Grant from DEFRA, which had been used for two extra waste recycling vehicles. Waste for recycling cost £200 per ton to collect. The Council would be happy to speak to Kington Town Council about recycling in the town;
- Comparing costs of waste collection with other authorities was difficult, as figures for two-tier authorities did not always reflect the cost of both district and county collections. Herefordshire had a target of £485kg of waste per head of population, and reducing the amount of waste produced would be a factor in achieving this;
- Glass and metal were easy to recycle, while plastics were more difficult because there was a limited market;
- Recycling was very labour-intensive and cost about £200 a ton compared with £60 a ton for landfill.

Suggestions for future agenda items:

- Recycling of waste
- The Lengthsman Scheme

Central Herefordshire, The Simpson Hall, Burghill	Wednesday 12 July 2006
Present: Cllr B Matthews (Chairman) Cllr DB Wilcox (Cabinet Member) Cllr M Wilson Cllr Mrs S Robertson Cllr C Mayson	Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation, Herefordshire Council Shirley McKay, Support Services Manager, Highways and Transportation, Herefordshire Council Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	14

Agenda

- Dealing with Litter
- The Hereford Flood Alleviation Scheme
- The Livestock Market
- Question and Answer session

Dealing with Litter

- See main report.

The Livestock Market

Cllr Mayson explained that the six potential sites for a new Livestock Market were still being considered in detail, and the Council was also continuing to look at the general principle of building a new market. The move would free up circa £10m for development of the Edgar Street grid and represented a good business case. Cllr Mayson challenged those opposing the scheme to present an equally good business case. One of the reasons that no decision had been made as yet was that the owners of five of the sites were overpricing their land. Compulsory purchase would be a difficult option as it would be necessary to demonstrate that there was no alternative. Although there was pressure to proceed, it was not judged sensible to proceed at any price and make a poor land deal.

In response to questions, the following answers were given:

- Although much of the traffic associated with the Livestock Market arrived well before the morning rush hour, moving the Market away from the centre would improve traffic flow;
- The Local Transport Plan had recently been submitted, and one of the long term aims was for a second river crossing. The Government would not approve funding for by-passes to relieve congestion, but, as with the Rotherwas scheme, would provide funding for regeneration and redevelopment of an area;
- The old bridge at Bridge Sollers had been so weak that it had to be replaced. The Government would not have provided funding to improve the Madley road and the intention was solely to provide a reliable bridge;

The Flood Alleviation Scheme

See main report.

Question and Answer session

In response to questions, the following answers were given:

- Green waste was not part of the normal waste collection, and a charge could be made for collecting. The Council wanted to encourage composting of green waste;

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- There was a backlog of gulley clearing. The aim was to clear all gulleys once a year. Stephen Oates would investigate why only part of the gulley on the Lower Portway A4110 had been cleared and ensure it was dealt with.

Golden Valley, Madley Village Hall	Tuesday 18 July 2006
Present: Cllr P Turpin (Acting Chairman) Cllr C Mayson (Cabinet Member)	Sgt Rob Davis, West Mercia Constabulary Constable Christine Griffiths, Local Policing Officer, West Mercia Constabulary Claire Keetch, District Manager, Citizens' Advice Bureau Hazel Lavelle, Community Forum Co-ordinator, Herefordshire Council
Members of the public	19

Agenda

- The Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Policing in the Golden Valley

The Citizens' Advice Bureau

Claire Keetch, the District Manager of the Herefordshire CAB, explained that the CAB had been established in 1939, when most of the problems dealt with concerned ration books, evacuees and other wartime issues. In contrast, their work now was dominated by debt and other financial problems, such as benefits, housing and consumer matters. A survey of 25 cases identified over £700,000 worth of debt. People also asked for help with finding an NHS dentist and problems with Council services. The Herefordshire CAB dealt with around 20,000 problems each year. There were currently around 70 volunteers, of whom 50-55 were advisers and the rest administrative staff. There were 700 CABs around the country which, whilst they were independent bodies, belonged to the national organisation "Citizens' Advice". This meant that each CAB had to find its own funding. Four key principles underpinned the work of the CAB: All the advice given would be free; confidential; independent and impartial. It was not the role of the CAB to tell people what to do, but to help them identify the options for dealing with their problem, and the likely consequences of each option. The CAB was staffed mainly by volunteers, but it was a professional service requiring thorough training. On average, each volunteer undertook 18 months' training and gave about a day a week to the CAB. Whilst the work was rewarding, it did require commitment. The CAB could be approached in person at one of the main offices in Hereford and Leominster or at one of the weekly surgeries in the market towns, or by letter, e-mail or telephone. Some CABs also used local facilities for video conferencing, and this could be increasingly useful for rural communities.

In response to questions, the following answers were given:

- The increasing caseload was due in part to inadequate education in financial matters and sometimes an irresponsible attitude to money. Citizens' Advice was lobbying government for funding for education in financial literacy;
- The CAB received about £117,000 a year from the Council, but needed to supplement this with grants from other sources;
- Information could be obtained from the local CAB website and the national Citizens' Advice website.

Policing in the Golden Valley

Sergeant Rob Davis explained the recent changes in police coverage for the Golden Valley, when Herefordshire moved to a system of local policing. This was based on "neighbourhood policing" which was proposed in a government White Paper, "Building Communities", in 2003, and would be rolled out nationally by April 2008. The system in Herefordshire was based on the 14 electoral wards, and the staffing for each area was determined according to

population, the level of deprivation and the demands on police services. The three wards in the Golden Valley did not represent a great demand on the police, although it was recognised that incidents did occur from time to time. On the basis of the staffing criteria, the Golden Valley would have one Local Police Officer, Constable Christine Griffiths. Constable Andrew Bundy would cover the Hereford Rural (South) area, and both would be based at Peterchurch under Sgt Davis. By August 2007, there should also be six Community Service Officers, three in each area. The officers would make themselves available as much as possible, and Constable Christine Griffiths would make her mobile phone number available to the public. There would be a press release with photographs of the officers and a map showing the areas covered.

In response to questions, the following answers were given:

- It was hoped that an officer would attend Parish Council meetings;
- There was a government –driven aim that every person should have a named point of contact with the Police. In the past, the priority had been responding to calls, but the emphasis would now be on meeting, and being part of, the community. However, there was a huge rural area to be covered;
- CSOs would have 60% of the powers of Police Officers. Chief Constables had the power to give CSOs more powers, but the Chief Constable for the Herefordshire area had decided to limit their powers in this county. Parish Councils could write to the Chief Constable if they wished to try to influence this decision;
- The key role of CSOs was reassurance. They were uniformed, used marked cars and radio contact with the Police;
- Core hours for policing would be 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. There would also be weekend shifts until midnight or 2 a.m. Outside these hours, Hereford police would be available;
- Although the police were happy to encourage Neighbourhood Watch schemes, where people wanted them, there was some public apathy about the schemes.

Question and Answer session

In response to general questions, the following answers were given:

- A public enquiry had been held in the mid 1990s about a by-pass for Hereford, but the Inspector had ruled against it at that time. The Government would not permit a by-pass and the Council could not go ahead without Government backing. The decision by the Council to continue with the Rotherwas Relief Road, despite the refusal of the Government to provide funding, was encouraging. Once that road was built, it would be easier to make a good case to continue building to make a by-pass;
- Stephen Oates, Head of Highways and Transportation, would be asked what progress had been made on making passing places on the Bridge Sollers to Madley road;
- The new bridge had been necessary because of the condition of the old bridge. It was built to a European standard in order to get funding, but it was acknowledged that there was now a poor road serving a good bridge. Some people would be concerned about upgrading the road, since that would increase traffic. The condition of the road imposed a safety restriction;
- Plans for an incineration plant might come before the September meeting of the Planning Committee;

Suggestions for future agenda items:

- Waste Treatment Plant, and the impact on wildlife;
- Traffic problems in the Golden Valley