

INTRODUCTION

This Cabinet Bulletin covers the meeting held on Thursday, 1st September, 2005 and reviews the agenda for the forthcoming meeting to be held on Thursday, 15th September, 2005.

Please note that meetings of Cabinet will start at 2.15 p.m. until further notice.

CABINET MEETING – 1st September, 2005

- (a) **Integrated Performance Report** - Cabinet has received a progress report on the Council's performance, integrating progress on the Annual Operating Plan, risk management and financial information. The integration of these key areas into a single report is central to the implementation of the Corporate Plan by means of an effective performance management system. Further reports will be presented for the periods ending September, November, January and March and will include and highlight progress on the Local Area Agreement when it is agreed. Cabinet has noted that there are about 10 areas of particular concern relating to progress on the Annual Operating Plan. In addition the section on Financial Performance and Risk Management reveals concern about likely overspends on Social Care (including the carry-forward from 2004/05) and Housing (mostly arising from the costs of temporary housing). These overspends are also identified in the Risk section as needing early attention.

Cabinet has asked that the format of the report be reviewed, and that, in future, the Cabinet Member be given the opportunity to approve the report before publication. A detailed report on the projected overspend within the Social Care budget will be submitted to a Cabinet meeting in October 2005.

- (b) **Audit Services Assurance Report 2004/05** - Cabinet has received a report on Audit Services activity during the year 2004/05. It has noted that, following assessment of the Council's overall level of internal control, a satisfactory level of control has been achieved. Core financial systems had been identified and annual review of their effectiveness showed that all except one were given satisfactory audit opinions or better. Although issues have been identified at service level, there are no material issues that affect the Council's overall level of internal control. However, it is likely that the Audit Commission's annual management letter will refer to fundamental systems which have a marginal or worse opinion. The key issues relate to the overspend in Social Care and the Council overall disaster recovery arrangements. Management continues to respond positively to recommendations and has agreed to take action on 95% of the recommendations made, which is broadly the same as last year. Audit follow-up of previous recommendations has shown that action was being taken on some 89%. Critical recommendations and progress being made on them will be highlighted in future reports to the Audit Committee who can recommend further action, if required.
- (c) **Herefordshire Thinks Rural** - Cabinet has received a report on "rural proofing", the means by which local authorities and other organisations, test out their service delivery, policies and strategies in a rural context. In Herefordshire the need to reflect this was originally demonstrated through the impact assessments required to comply with the Race Relations Amendment Act within the Diversity agenda. During various inspections Officers and Members have been asked to evidence what we do differently or what is the result of operating in a rural area and what impact this has on our thought process. Our response, in the past this has been that this is almost intuitive. However, it was

considered that, as the question was raised so often, that a study be made to define what it is that makes Herefordshire distinctive, to look at current practice in relation to rural proofing and to construct an action plan which the Council could use to move its thinking in this area forward.

Cabinet has endorsed the content of "Herefordshire Thinks Rural", has agreed that a members' workshop be held to permit any further refinements and that a more detailed report on how the action plan can be delivered be submitted to the Cabinet meeting on 29th September, 2005.

- (d) **Housing Strategy for Herefordshire** - Cabinet has noted that the Council is no longer required to submit an annual Housing Investment Strategy but is required to develop a Housing Strategy that is rated as "Fit for Purpose" following assessment by the Government Office for the West Midlands.

The Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005/08 has been developed to encompass the requirements set out for achieving Fit for Purpose. In doing so appropriate consideration has been given to the evaluation of the challenges faced within Herefordshire, the relative priorities and the actions planned to achieve the agreed priorities. Appropriate regard has been given to the important role of partnership working to identify and deliver the priorities including reflection on the successes that have been achieved to date.

The priorities for action over the three year period covered by the strategy are: to achieve a more balanced housing market; to address the increasing levels of homelessness in the County; to ensure that vulnerable people needing housing linked to support have their needs met in all parts of the area; and to improve housing conditions in Herefordshire across all tenures.

Cabinet has approved the Housing Strategy for Herefordshire 2005/08, subject to any alterations required to achieve Fit for Purpose rating from the Government Office for the West Midlands.

- (e) **Relocation of the Livestock Market** - Cabinet has received a confidential report identifying a preferred site for a new Rural Business Park which would incorporate a new livestock market. It has agreed that officers be instructed to develop a partnership agreement with the landowner and submit a planning application for the redevelopment of the preferred site.

FORTHCOMING CABINET MEETING – 15th September, 2005

- (a) **Treasury Management Activities 2004/2005** - Cabinet will receive a report on the Council's Treasury activities for the period 1st April, 2004 to 31st March, 2005 and the outturn of Prudential Indicators for the year 2004/05.
- (b) **Asset Management Plan** - Cabinet will be asked to approve the 2005 edition of the Council's Asset Management Plan.
- (c) **Small Business Friendly Concordat** - Cabinet will be asked to consider whether it wishes the Council to sign up to the principles set out in the Small Business Friendly Concordat.
- (d) **Older People's Strategy** - Cabinet will be asked to approve the production of a county-wide strategy for older people in Herefordshire through engagement with the Local Strategic Partnership and key stakeholder organisations.

- (e) **National Health Service Organisation Change** - Cabinet will receive a confidential report on proposed organisational changes to the local Health Service as a result of a Department of Health paper on "Commissioning a Patient-led NHS" and will be asked to respond to the Strategic Health Authority Consultation.

N.M. Pringle
Chief Executive

(01432) 260044

*Copies of the agenda are available at the meeting or on request from:
Mrs. C. Dyer, Members' Services Manager and Executive Officer on (01432) 260222.*