

INTRODUCTION

This Cabinet Bulletin covers the meeting held on Thursday, 29th September, 2005 and reviews the agenda for the forthcoming meeting to be held on Thursday, 20th October, 2005 at **2.15** pm.

Please note that from November 2005 meetings of Cabinet will start at 2.00 p.m.

CABINET MEETING – 29th September, 2005

The Leader, Councillor RJ Phillips, announced that he had appointed Councillor DW Rule MBE to the post of Deputy Leader.

(a) Capital Strategy – Cabinet has approved a revised strategy for capital investment which will influence capital programme considerations in future years and also provides a comprehensive view on all capital issues. Cabinet has noted:

- The Capital Strategy is intrinsically linked to the Herefordshire Plan and the Council's Corporate Plan and their objectives and priorities, and there needs to be a balance between the investment in existing assets and in new initiatives.
- The relaxation of borrowing powers through the Prudential Code has had a significant and positive impact on the Council's capital programme.
- Prudential borrowing within the constraints of capped Council Tax increases.
- The policy of increasingly seeking to fund assets over their actual life will continue, thus minimising the build up of debt over the long term.
- There are several major strategic issues which will affect the capital programme in the future eg the Edgar Street Grid, Local Area Agreements, office accommodation and associated projects.

The County Treasurer was thanked for the work he had carried out on the Capital Strategy since his appointment and he paid tribute to the staff who had assisted him.

(b) Change for Children

Cabinet has received progress reports on a number of issues affecting Children's Services.

Safeguarding Children

The second joint national Chief Inspector's Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children, published in July 2005, found that:

- some agencies still give insufficient priority to safeguarding and children's interests;
- there are still considerable concerns about the differing thresholds applied by social services in their child protection and family support work and about the lack of

understanding of the role of social workers by other agencies; and

- continuing difficulties in recruitment and retention in some services affect their ability to safeguard children effectively and may restrict their capacity to deliver the new Every Child Matters arrangements.

Cabinet has noted the number of children in the different categories of education, fostering and adoption placements and the costs which ranged from £300 per child per week to £4,500 depending on their individual circumstances and whether the placement was in or out of area. Cabinet has also noted that, officially, children placed 20 miles from Hereford are considered to be "out of area" even though some of those placements are within the County.

The final Adoption Service report has judged that the service provides excellent practice and although there were some deferrals before placements, all these were now deemed safe.

Integrated Services for Children and Young People in Herefordshire

Cabinet has been informed of a consultation exercise on integration of services for children, currently underway with key partners and stakeholders, including schools. The strategy proposes an arrangement which will combine local primary schools, extended schools and children's centres, alongside multi-professional teams covering the seven proposed locality partnership areas - Bromyard, Golden Valley, Hereford City, Kington/Weobley, Ledbury, Leominster, and Ross-on-Wye.

Cabinet has been assured that partnership arrangements for the three children's centres at Leominster, Greencroft and Hunderton/Hollybush are working well and there is a commitment to providing more centres based in the other market towns and the Golden Valley.

Moving towards a Children's Trust

The Council has reviewed progress in meeting the requirements of the Government's policy for Children's Services.

- (c) **Customer Services Strategy** - Cabinet has received a report on the Strategy which outlines the Council's vision for Customer Service over the next three years. The Strategy aims to "put the customer first", and recognises the importance of the diversity of customers' needs in Herefordshire. It sets out an ambitious plan to ensure the Council provides levels of customer services that are among the highest of any council in the country.

The changes required to achieve these aims fall into four main categories:

- the attitudes the Council has and the way the Council behaves;
- the way the Council does things;
- where the Council is located and how it is structured;
- the ICT Systems the Council uses.

It is intended that the Council adopts a front and back office approach. This will allow the public to contact the Council through one point, Info, and to have a dedicated member of staff assigned to their query. The Strategy requires a fundamental change in the way services are delivered and staff will be trained and rewarded accordingly. Advances in IT mean that the ICT system will play a crucial role in the success of the

scheme.

Cabinet has agreed the proposed way forward.

(c) Staff Opinion Survey 2005 - Cabinet has received a report on the key findings of the Staff Opinion Survey 2005 which was carried out in July.

40% of employees took part in the survey compared to 38% in 2004. The work the Council has done, and is doing, to improve has clearly made a difference to what employees think and there are a number of areas which received more positive responses than previous years; eg

- more employees think that the Council is good to work for,
- more employees think that their targets and standards are achievable,
- more people are confident that they will still be working for the Council in 12 months time,
- more people agree communications in their service is working well,
- confidence in immediate managers continues to be high and confidence in senior management has improved,
- over two thirds agreed that they have a Staff Review and Development discussion annually and the quality of the discussion has also improved,
- employees were far more confident that there were opportunities for development,
- more agreed that the Council takes into account the views and diverse needs of its service users, that the Council is open, honest and accountable to all its customers and that customer/client relationships are well managed.

There were two main areas where employees said things had not improved: the requirement to work long hours and the physical work environment.

The Council compares well against the average for local government in many areas, including: the Council being a good employer and providing recognition for a job well done; understanding about job priorities and objectives, being kept informed about plans and priorities and being involved in decisions and being consulted over changes; training opportunities, having adequate resources for the job, physical work conditions and work-life balance.

(d) Herefordshire Thinks Rural Action Plan - Cabinet has agreed the actions set out in the Herefordshire Thinks Rural Action Plan, previously considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 1st September, 2005. The Action Plan deals only with those areas designated "quick wins". Councillor J.C. Mayson, Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration and Strategy) has been appointed the Council's "rural champion".

(e) Local Area Agreements (LAA) Framework – On 19th May, Cabinet gave consent for interest to be registered with Government Office West Midlands (GOWM) in obtaining a Local Area Agreement. The Council was successful in its bid and was required to submit an outline proposal by 30th September, 2005. The LAA has to be jointly agreed by the Local Strategic Partnership and the Council. The LAA work will continue to run in parallel with the re-launch of the Herefordshire Plan and provide further focus for the work of the Herefordshire Partnership. Cabinet has approved the submission noting that the Agreement will be negotiated over a six-month period which will give further opportunity to comment on its content. It has also thanked the staff involved for their

efforts in completing this work within a very tight timescale.

- (f) **Communication Strategy** - The Council's Communications Strategy has been updated to ensure that the aims and ambitions within the Council's Corporate Plan and the Herefordshire Plan are communicated to all its audiences, internally and externally. The Strategy provides an overarching framework for all communications activity within the Council. It also aims to communicate the achievements of the Council and its partners and emphasises the crucial role every elected members and member of staff plays in communications. The key messages have been revised to incorporate the Corporate Plan's strapline "Action for a better Herefordshire". Cabinet has approved the revised Communications Strategy for 2005/06.
- (g) **Review of Community Involvement Strategy** – Cabinet has approved a revised Community Involvement Strategy and related action plan. The previous strategy, approved in early 2004, outlined the Council's commitment to involving residents of Herefordshire in decisions that affected them. Recent changes in government requirements necessitated some changes to the Strategy. An important aspect of consultation was to feed back to those who had been consulted as well as local Members on issues affecting their wards.
- (h) **Relocation of Livestock Market** - Cabinet has reconsidered its decision on the relocation of the Livestock Market, following a call in by the Strategic Monitoring Committee. The Cabinet Member (Rural Regeneration and Strategy) has recommended and Cabinet has agreed that a site search for relocating the Hereford Livestock Market be recommenced and that all options in the north west quadrant of the County should be examined with full public consultation. The consultation period is expected to last six months.

Strategic Monitoring Committee had requested that, in considering alternative sites, Cabinet be mindful of environmental issues such as flooding and terrain, consider carefully whether it was realistic to seek to link a livestock market to a rural business park and ensure that the report to Cabinet on options be detailed and robust, including a clear assessment of the costs of each of the options and in particular the cost to the Council of developing a site outside its ownership.

FORTHCOMING CABINET MEETING – 20th October, 2005

- (a) **Community Forums** - Cabinet will receive a report on the September/October 2005 round of meetings.
- (b) **Race Equality Annual Report** - Cabinet will receive the annual report which sets out progress against the action plan that accompanies the Council's Race Equality Scheme.
- (c) **Strategic Monitoring Committee** - Cabinet will receive the report of the Strategic Monitoring Committee to Council

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*Copies of the agenda are available at the meeting or on request from:
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