

**COUNCIL**  
**14 SEPTEMBER 2017****REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH  
RESPONSIBILITY**

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**REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY  
FOR COMMUNITIES****Introduction**

1. It is my pleasure to submit my report as Cabinet Member for Communities to full Council on the work that has taken place in my areas of responsibility in the past year.
2. The role of Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities is a cross-cutting one covering a number of services from across the Council. I am pleased to report that over the last 12 months there has been significant progress in all areas of my portfolio as we continue to transform service delivery in order to provide high quality services, within the budget available, that are valued by Worcestershire's residents.

**Libraries including The Hive**

3. Libraries saw an increase in participation throughout 2016/17. Visits increased by 2.1%; the number of one-to-one digital support sessions increased by almost 25% and there was a 75% increase in the number of adult learners attending courses in libraries. This is a fantastic achievement as the Library service, throughout 2016/17, also delivered a further £556.6k Future Fit savings and implemented a small reduction in opening hours in September 2016 to support the delivery of staff savings.
  4. The Libraries re-modelling programme has seen Wythall Library co-locating with Woodrush High School at the Woodrush Community Hub with subsequent significant increases in visitors, issues and new library members. The programme also included the relocation of Bewdley Library to the new Bewdley Medical Centre and the signing by 'Upton Villages Together' of the lease to maintain, manage and fund Upton Library building. Ministerial approval was achieved for the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) co-location projects at Kidderminster and Redditch Libraries.
  5. Worcestershire Libraries achieved top place in the regional table of Summer Reading Challenge participants and young volunteers. The Service has also extended its health and wellbeing offer through the implementation of Dementia Friendly and Autism Friendly standards and through the introduction of a collection of mental health self-help books for young people, funded by Public Health. The number of hours gifted by volunteers in libraries increased by 2.7% to 19,632 hours
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and, following the implementation of the new Borrowbox eBook service in early 2017, issues of e-books increased by over 100%.

## **The Hive**

6. The Hive, as well as celebrating its 5th anniversary in July 2017, reached 4 million issues and visits in December 2016. It also triumphed in the SCONUL Library Design Awards 2016 (Society of College, National and University Libraries) and surpassed its energy targets with huge reductions in its electricity, gas and water consumption. We are now planning, with our University colleagues, the next five years of developments at The Hive and a new Strategic Plan will be signed off in the Autumn.

7. In November 2016 Worcestershire Libraries attended a national Libraries Taskforce workshop to showcase their co-location work with DWP as a model for other local authorities and in March 2017 the Hive hosted a meeting of the national Libraries Taskforce. A key focus for Libraries is to develop the service offer to meet the seven Libraries Taskforce outcomes and to continue to focus on delivering the County Council's corporate priorities.

8. The Library service will need to continue to transform over the forthcoming years in order to rise to the challenge of delivering an increasingly ambitious national libraries service offer. This will need to include a high performing technology offer that meets customer expectations and identify innovative solutions for sustaining library services for Worcestershire residents against a backdrop of diminishing resources.

## **Adult Learning**

9. The Adult Learning Service and 16-18 Education Service following the 'good' Ofsted Inspection in June 2016 has been brought together under one manager. This will provide a joined up approach towards data and quality assurance but also to provide a focus on customer journey from one service to the other.

10. The Adult Learning Service, in conjunction with the Skills Team in the Children, Families and Communities Directorate, has been successful in gaining a £1.3m European Social Fund bid to bring employability and vocational skills to unemployed learners, complementing the offer in its centres and working towards supporting learners closer to the labour market.

11. The Adult Learning Service has also continued to enhance and develop its leisure programme in the community through its close working relationship with the Libraries Service. The programme offers a range of courses from modern foreign languages to Tai Chi in libraries and other venues across the county. The growth in this programme has both earned its place as a core part of the offer since it began in 2015 serving approx. 1,500 learners in 2016/17 and supported the financial sustainability of the Libraries Service.

12. The Service has also supported refugee families successfully across the county easing their integration within local communities. Provision has included ICT courses, cookery courses and even some themed ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision to support several women wishing to enter work within the hair and beauty sector. This work is on-going and tutors are now working on a one to one basis to improve these refugee's CVs and interview skills.

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## Museums Worcestershire

13. The museums in Worcestershire continue to help make the county a great place to live, work and visit. Museums Worcestershire uses the power of objects from the museum collections to give people, including its team of 70 regular volunteers, an enhanced quality of life. All three museum sites have been awarded Full Accredited status by Arts Council England in 2017. Accreditation is a national measure of professionalism awarded to museums who meet a certain standard of visitor service and collections management.

14. Throughout the past year Museums Worcestershire has delivered a range of successful projects and exhibitions including:

- Museums Worcestershire continues to work with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust on the £5million Heritage Lottery-funded development of Hartlebury Castle to become a significant family and friends visitor destination. The County Museum received an 80% rating in the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme, being awarded full marks for customer care, staff efficiency and content of visitor attraction
- The Service has also secured more than £400k additional funding in grants and donations for projects throughout the county, including a £250k investment from Worcester City Council to transform the internationally important Commandery in Worcester with new displays, education programmes, café, and an ongoing income generation strategy. The renovation, which included a new heating system, and new displays was officially opened on the 29 July 2017 as part of wider celebration of the Cathedral Plaza development in Worcester City
- Suitcase Stories, which is a reminiscence, storytelling and music project funded by Arts Council England as well as all the district councils in Worcestershire. Taking museum collections as its starting point, the project has delivered positive health outcomes and improved wellbeing for 72 people living with dementia and their carers. The final performances have been viewed in person and online by 162,000 people.

15. A programme to review and improve the formal learning activities at all sites has already achieved a 4% increase in school visits. In 2016-17, the Learning team worked with schools, the University of Worcester, families and other groups to nurture 10,000 young visitors' love of their local history and engage with great art on their doorstep. 6,000 children visited the Pirates, Pants and Wellyphants exhibition at the Art Gallery and Museum.

16. A grant from Arts Council England has funded a large programme of audience research to ensure the museum service continues to be audience-focussed. This research highlighted that 57% of Museums Worcestershire's visitors want the opportunity to learn on their visit and 51% of visitors choose to visit our museums to spend time with their family and friends. The service continues to make a positive impact on the visitor economy with destination exhibitions at the Art Gallery and Museum contributing in the region of £500k to Worcester's local economy. This Green Earth welcomed 24,000 visitors of whom 54% travelled in from outside Worcester to see the exhibition.

17. Museums Worcestershire works with partners to develop and share our heritage expertise with the people of Worcestershire including:

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- Support for smaller local museums through skills-sharing courses with active hands-on sessions
- The continuing partnership with the Worcester News which reaches more than 21,000 readers every week, providing access to 52 rarely seen objects from the collections
- Through working with high profile national partners such as the British Museum and the Tate bringing world-class art to the County
- The Bredon Hill Hoard has toured the county to conclude the Art Fund grant-aided project to conserve Worcestershire's largest Roman coin hoard and to share it directly with the communities that supported its acquisition.

## **Arts Service**

18. The Arts Service continues to operate on a tight budget. It has successfully developed the schools arts project, 'Voices and Visions' and in 2017 over 100 schools and approximately 2,000 pupils took part in a large scale Visual Arts exhibition at the Cathedral. In addition, there were a further two performance events at the Cathedral and one performance event at The Hive plus a one-off special event at Kidderminster Town Hall called 1000 Years of Music. The Arts Service continues to run the Grant scheme and in 2016/17 the £20,000 that was invested, levered in approximately £500,000 of match funding from other sources.

19. The service drives the Worcestershire Arts Partnership (WAP), which is a broad based partnership that places arts at the centre of public and private sector agendas including health, children and young people and the economy. In March 2017 WAP officially launched its '1000 Days' strategy for Worcestershire that covers the period 2016 to 2019. The five priorities of the strategy are leadership and profile raising of the arts; artist development and resilience; arts and health; arts and young people; arts and the economy. The last three of these relate directly to the corporate plan priorities as they are about how the arts enables people to live healthy and independent lives, how arts can contribute to positive life chances for young people and how arts can help grow the local economy.

## **Severn Arts (formally Worcestershire Youth Music)**

20. Significant progress has been made over the past year in developing a new business model for Severn Arts to deliver its services outside the control of the County Council. I formally approved the business plan as of the week commencing the 4 September 2017 and recruitment of trustees for the new company limited by guarantee with charitable status has started.

21. By operating outside of the County Council, Severn Arts will be able to trade more efficiently and compete more effectively, whilst at the same time maintaining a positive impact upon the quality of teaching, pupil progress, learning outcomes and the social and emotional health of children and young people. This new delivery model will be in place after the 1 January 2018. Meanwhile relationships with schools continue to remain positive and buy-back into the service is in line with projections within the business plan.

## **Corporate Information Management Unit (CIMU)**

22. The service has been through a restructure following the transfer of the Subject Access Team from Children, Families and Communities. Part of the restructure was

to ensure that sufficient resource was allocated to ensure that the organisation as a whole was compliant with the various Acts pertaining to information.

23. The focus for the forthcoming year is the new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) that comes into force in May 2018 which has a number of significant changes compared to the Data Protection Act and improving processes surrounding Information Access. The impact of the new GDPR will mean some significant changes to how we manage our information and as such have implemented a project team to ensure that we meet the requirements within the timeframe provided.

### **Registration and Coroner Services**

24. The service received another favourable report from the General Register Office following the annual submission. The recent customer survey again highlighted very high satisfaction levels across the whole service. The service conducted more ceremonies this past year than ever before as efforts continue to diversify as much as the law allows meeting the growing needs and desires of those wishing to marry.

25. We, like many authorities, have struggled with the statutory timeframe of death registration. Although the public are very content with the service we provide, the manager is working with partners to try to improve in this area.

26. The Coroners officers are now co-located with the Coroner at the Court in Stourport. The introduction of a new IT system has enabled the reduction in duplication of work, move toward being less reliant on paper and improved transfer of documents. The introduction of a pilot referral system for our partners is reducing the need to input data and enables the referrals to be processed in a timelier manner. This will continue to be rolled out over the forthcoming months.

### **Countryside and Greenspace Service**

27. Waseley Hills Country Park, Worcester Woods Country Park and St. Wulstan's Nature Reserve have once again retained the nationally recognised Green Flag Award; evidencing the high standard of management for visitors and the natural environment.

28. One of the County Council's flagship sites, Kingsford Forest Park, transferred to the National Trust in May. This now means that the National Trust is responsible for the management of the whole of the Kinver Edge landscape area, which has been made even more poignant as 2017 marks the centenary of Kinver Edge coming into the Trust's care. The transfer of the site has generated savings of nearly £30,000 per year for the County Council, including staff time.

29. The Greenspace Team continues to work towards self-financing by generating income from its countryside sites, securing external funding, delivering chargeable services to others and reducing core costs. A considerable amount of work across the service is delivered by over 250 volunteers such as Parish Tree Wardens, Countryside Sites Volunteers and Health Walk Leaders.

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## **Road Safety Education**

### ***Bikeability***

30. The Road Safety Team delivers Bikeability National Standard cycle training across 3 levels to Worcestershire school pupils. Each year the team trains an increasing number of pupils and trained over 4500 pupils last year. A small number of adults have also received cycle training in the Wyre Forest area via a joint project with public health. Some reception age pupils also benefit from the teams Bikeability Balance training programme. The team currently have Department for Transport funding to support the delivery. The team are now at full capacity over the summer months in terms of instructor availability and volume of school requests.

### ***Road Safety Education & Training***

31. The Road Safety Team offers road safety education and training to all Worcestershire pupils. This provides pupils with lifelong behaviours and attitudes for safe road use anywhere, at any time, on any journey. The team offer class talks to any age group and practical pedestrian training to year 2 and 4. Each year they train over 10,000 pupils. The team also offer pre driver training workshops to students aged 16-18 in colleges or sixth forms which is delivered via the Safer Roads Partnership.

### ***School Crossing Patrol Service***

32. The existing School Crossing Patrol service covers 68 crossing locations to assist the safety of children travelling to and from school in Worcestershire, serving 58 first, middle and primary schools. The service is delivered in accordance to national set criteria. A review of the service is currently being undertaken and there are some sites that either no longer meet criteria or have been upgraded in recent times with a more formal crossing facility, such as a pedestrian crossing or zebra. Where there is a duplication of resources, sites are being consulted upon with a view to being closed. Six School Crossing Patrol sites remain vacant.

## **Malvern Hills AONB Partnership**

33. The County Council hosts the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB) Team (Unit) which supports a broad-based partnership overseeing the conservation and enhancement of this nationally designated landscape. The partnership's work is wide-ranging, covering many issues of relevance to Worcestershire County Council as well as helping the Council to meet its statutory duties in relation to the AONB. Examples of the partnership's work last year include:

- Delivering the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, to help preserve this most distinctive of Worcestershire habitats. So far over 300 volunteers have helped to restore 37 veteran orchards. Almost 50 able and less able volunteers have completed more advanced training, with some going on to act as traditional orchard ambassadors throughout the three counties. N.B The Council's Greenspace team is a delivery partner in this project
  - Providing £23,000 in sustainable development fund grants to support 15 local projects, which in turn has brought in almost £55,000 in cash and in-kind match funding. Successful projects for the year include those in the field of health and well-being. A grant to the National Childbirth Trust to buy slings supports new mothers and fathers who want to walk with their babies on the Malvern Hills whilst collaboration with a local business now allows those with
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limited mobility to hire an electric scooter to enjoy the wonderful views from the hills

- Supporting local people to secure sustainable development that befits the special qualities of the AONB. For example, Parish Councils in Malvern Wells and Little Malvern and Welland have been helped to progress 'landscape-led' Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP) which will protect the local environment. Cutting-edge guidance on how to integrate new development into different landscape settings has been produced and the AONB Unit has stimulated the reuse and recycling of Malvern's very distinctive building stone, including through securing the lease on a local 'stone bank'
- Working with colleagues in Worcestershire Highways, the Greenspace Team and local Parish Councils to better manage highway verges for wildlife in three parishes within the AONB. This included establishing two new Roadside Verge Nature Reserves as well as developing proposals for a landscape-scale pilot project commencing in Autumn 2017. This work is a practical manifestation of the Council's commitment to be a pollinator friendly county.
- Through its provision of advice and specialist support the County Council earned over £19,000 from the work of the AONB Partnership last year.

Further details of the AONB Partnership's activities in 2016/17 can be found in its annual review:

<http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/63383-Malvern-Hills-AONB-Annual-Report-201617-v01.pdf>

### **Gypsy and Traveller Services**

34. This self-financing service works to an agreed protocol alongside other local authorities, and the police where necessary, to reduce and manage unauthorised encampments in Worcestershire. The team is self-financed through its management of seven residential traveller sites, providing important accommodation for 121 gypsy and traveller families.

35. Work has continued with the community, the police and other agencies to address anti-social and criminal behaviour related to Cleeve Prior traveller site, of which the County Council manages a part. The County Council's lease of the site ends in May 2018 and in preparation for that, the County Council has been to court to gain legal possession of the site before securing it until the end of the lease.

### **Trading Standards and Animal Health (Regulatory Services)**

36. The service protects consumers and legitimate business by advising on and enforcing the criminal elements of numerous Acts of Parliament and a wide range of regulations which help maintain an honest and thriving trading environment. The service maintains the 'level playing field' for trading in Worcestershire by discharging around 250 of the County Council's statutory duties that have grown out of its role as the local weights and measures authority. This includes many areas of consumer protection, food law, animal health and business regulation.

37. The service's revenue budget is around £450K per annum with 10.3 full time equivalent staff. The service remains co-located with the district councils' shared

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Regulatory Service at Wyre Forest House in Kidderminster to ensure continued cross working particularly around business support.

38. The focus of the service has inevitably had to narrow because of financial constraints to discharging the statutory elements and tackling the worst aspects of consumer detriment and commercial crime. Recent investigation activity successes include:

- A training academy for beauty technicians being prosecuted for knowingly offering training it could not certify which left many without qualifications they'd paid for and trained for
- The prosecution of a number of rogue home improvement traders who have committed fraud and financially exploited local consumers, especially vulnerable elderly victims, in relation to unnecessary or poor quality work
- The prosecution of several car traders who have significantly reduced the mileage indicated on vehicles and falsified service histories before offering vehicles for sale
- Seizing a herd of 50 cattle suffering due to the poor husbandry of their keeper. A prosecution file will follow.
- Following information from the National Trading Standards Safety at Ports surveillance project, the service discovered a consignment of over 60 unsafe hover-boards at the retailer's warehouse ready for supply. A suspension notice was issued, with which the business fully cooperated.
- An importer was identified in Worcestershire selling a wide range of products over E-Bay. Test purchases revealed a range of unsafe products being offered including upholstered furniture that fails flammability tests, unsafe toy scooters and unsafe electrical goods. All were suspended from sale, helping to prevent further harm, and a prosecution file is progressing through Court.

39. The service continues to develop its relationships with Worcestershire businesses through the provision of Primary Authority arrangements where businesses received assured advice for a fee. A number of larger businesses are signed up to this including Halfords and Worcester Bosch, and the list continues to grow. Businesses see the value of support from local regulatory services in helping them to grow. The service is also working closely with shared Regulatory Service colleagues and colleagues from the Local Enterprise Partnership and Economic Development to support business more widely. This includes work on the development of the Worcestershire Food and Drink Federation, which it is hoped will help to promote Worcestershire's food producers in the future.

40. Other services with clear linkages include Adult Social Care, especially in the area of safeguarding. The role of rogue home improvement traders who target the vulnerable has already been mentioned. Referrals are made to the Safeguarding Hub where officers have concerns about the mental capacity of victims, especially where there remains a risk of further victimisation. Ultimately, if rogue traders continue to financially exploit these older residents they will be unable to live independently and may need further support from the Council.

### **Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service (WAAS)**

41. The service works to protect, preserve, manage, record, interpret and promote the history and historic environment of Worcestershire. The staff includes archive and archaeological specialists, a conservation and digitisation team, a learning and outreach team and includes the County's statutory archive service. WAAS is based at The Hive but works across Worcestershire.

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42. The public services from The Hive are popular with a 98% customer satisfaction rating at the last survey. Commercial work includes archaeological projects in the West Midlands and further afield. WAAS has a turnover c £1,900,000 of which £1,300,000 comes from either commercial or grant income. It has 44.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff of which 28 FTE is externally funded. It is seen as a model of best practice by The National Archives and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. Staffing and services remain stable and in the next year the focus is on increasing external income to enhance services for the people of Worcestershire.

43. Over the last 12 months, the team has delivered a major project (soft launch August 2017) to increase commercial income with a particular focus on the family history market in Australia New Zealand and North America. The archaeological teams undertake commercial work and, with the District and County Planning teams, facilitate development in Worcestershire in a way that enhances the historic environment of the County. In addition they have completed a number of strategic projects commissioned by Historic England. These are intended to impact on professional practice across England and there more are in the pipeline.

44. Closer to home the service is in partnership with Museums Worcestershire to deliver a £137,000 (£97,000 Heritage Lottery Fund and £40,000 Arts Council funding) *Lost Landscapes* project. This will bring the history of Stone Age Worcestershire to life through a series of museum exhibitions, children's and family events, art installations and activities.

45. A new partnership is with Children's Services. In October a joint team comprising of Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, Green Fingers Project and the University of Worcester will pilot a project funded by Heritage Lottery Funding to involve Looked After Children in archaeology. This is based on work by Professor Carenza Lewis (previously of *Time Team*) which has proven to increase confidence and aspiration in adults and children. Carenza has not worked with Looked After Children before and will be supporting the joint team with the evaluation of the project.

46. This year is the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Worcestershire Archives and so it was particularly pleasing that WAAS was awarded the Archives and Records Association Award of *Record Keeper of the Year 2017* in recognition of their innovative business model and achievements in maintaining a high standard of service over the last 5 years.

### **Scientific Services**

47. The Scientific Services Unit currently comprises of three commercially focused teams; Laboratory, Occupational Hygiene and Waste Pollution Control. These are supported by a business administration function. From a statutory perspective the County Council is required to have access to a Public Analyst (need not be directly employed) and a Waste Pollution Control resource.

48. Current tendering activity is low and the services are finding competing in the commercial environment challenging. Corporately the County Council is re-evaluating its primary functions and identifying its core activity. Scientific Services and its portfolio of activity will be reviewed in the autumn.

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## **Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)**

49. Volunteering is a key deliverable for the Council's Future Fit programme and the council is working with a range of organisations to develop its volunteering approach, 'Enabling Communities'.

50. There has been excellent progress in promoting Digital Inclusion across Worcestershire through the GoOn Worcestershire Partnership. A Partnership Development Coordinator was recruited to this project and has been central to this work, which engaged 8,703 people in the development of digital skills between September 2015 and June 2017. The current focus is on providing digital skills training for Digital Champions and they are exploring ways of ensuring the impact of the project is sustainable so that access to the internet is not a barrier to Worcestershire residents.

51. Social value guidance has been produced for all suppliers wishing to deliver contracts on behalf of the council and includes suggestions about working with and developing local VCS as part of council contracts. The Find it in Worcestershire (FIIW) business breakfast meeting has been expanded to include VCS organisations so that they can benefit from networking opportunities alongside private sector companies. The November 2016 FIIW focussed on corporate social responsibility and the role that the local VCS can play.

52. Through the Resident Viewpoint survey, local residents have been engaged with to determine their drivers of volunteering and a new indicator has been added to the balanced scorecard to monitor levels of volunteering across the County.

53. The County Council ran a successful VCS celebration event in the summer of 2016 at the Hive (to coincide with National Volunteering Week), highlighting the work done by volunteers and VCS organisations. During the 2017 National Volunteer week the County Council and partner agencies showcased the excellent work of volunteers across the county. This was recognised by the chairman presenting a number of groups and volunteers Black Pear Trees awards.

## **Partnership Working**

### **Syrian Refugee Resettlement**

54. Over the past 18 months, 12 families from Syrian refugee camps have been successfully resettled in Worcestershire. The programme has been led by the Leaders of the District Councils as well as the County Council and has seen families being resettled in Redditch, Worcester and Kidderminster under the stewardship of Refugee Action and Spring Housing. The project coordinator for the whole council has worked with government partners as well as District Councils to ensure that the programme has worked. The programme has shown that the families have been successfully integrated into their local communities and have been assisted by the local resettlement welcome groups.

## **Conclusions**

55. I would like to place on record my thanks to the Director of Children, Families and Communities and the Director of Economy and Infrastructure along with the relevant Heads of Service for their commitment and work since my last report. I believe we have a high calibre of officers within the County Council and the commitment shown by officers at all levels has meant we have made significant progress in all areas of my portfolio.

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56. I do recognise that the financial climate facing the Local Authority continues to be very challenging and I see that within my portfolio significant progress has been made in meeting these financial challenges. However, we are aware that this will need to be done whilst sustaining services that local communities may wish to keep but will have to be delivered in a different way.

I submit this report to the Council. Thank you.

**Lucy Hodgson**

**Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities**

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