

15 May 2014

11. REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY

(a) REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

1. It is an honour to lead politically and strategically in three important areas for Children's Services:

- Learning and Achievement
- Social Care
- Early Help and Partnership.

2. As statutory Lead Member, with the support of Cabinet and other colleagues, my work helps to build on our joint achievements: the reduction in the budget deficit (saving just over £70m in the last 3 years) the efficiencies, the ambitious Broadband Project, our move to early intervention and commissioning, Act Local, and Open for Business. Children's Services have significantly contributed to BOLD in many ways including building capital receipts.

3. Everything I do builds on our joint key aims; to live within our means, maintain if not improve the standard of core services to residents and target support at the most vulnerable. Whilst savings are a driver in Children's Services, outcomes, ambition, the rightness of what we do for children is key; for example we have taken £100,000 out of a transition redesign, but we are getting better outcomes.

4. 'Children and Families' is a clear priority in the Council's Corporate Plan, but pleasingly each Directorate is beginning to contribute, or has increasingly contributed to outcomes for children and young people.

5. Open for Business, in addition to growing Worcestershire's building base and enabling infrastructure, has strengthened our countywide skill base and encourages and facilitates links to business.

6. The Health and Wellbeing agenda not only contributes to important transition arrangements for children and young people but owns and promotes the Children and Young People's Plan.

7. **The Key headlines** are: Learning and Achievement changes are about even further ambition for our children. Social Care, Stronger Families and Early Help are inextricably linked, and schools are partners in the agenda as well as parents.

8. A key part of my role is to ensure I know the "must knows "

That the Council is:

- effective in keeping children and young people safe,
- serving the most vulnerable well,
- taking a strategic lead in education,
- supporting children and young people who are disabled or have special educational needs.
- Ensuring effective partnerships are in place with good co-operation.

That my role is:

- understand the needs of my area and what service users want,
- understand our performance – where we are at,
- am ensuring you are making best use of scarce resources,
- support young people into adulthood,
- leading key partnerships for children and young people.

This is achieved by:

- Working together – with the Director of Children's Services, the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Board, the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, Heads of Service and the Cabinet,
- Being clear around Government policies and their implications, sector- led initiatives, Ofsted changes, peer reviews, key authority data, needs analyses, our performance, risks, other council's performance, governance, well informed on costs, quality, areas of spend, value for money,
- Paying attention to the statutory nature of the role: understanding demand for school places, the admissions process, funding allocations, arrangements for school building programmes, corporate parenting responsibilities, respite, safeguarding,
- Leading on a corporate vision for children and families: the shift to prevention, children at the centre, workforce reform, the redesign,
- Being a champion: for educational excellence, vulnerable pupils, safeguarding, looked after children, care leaver, those in transition, vulnerable groups,
- Listening to: users, the community, front-line staff, partners, children, young people, families.

9. The text below hopefully gives you an honest, no surprises flavour of where I think we are and how I evidence where we are:

Learning and Achievement

10. The current landscape within which Learning and Achievement sits is more complex than it was years ago. The relationship between the Council and key stakeholders has changed with the growth in the number of academies; a direction of travel the Cabinet supports, also and for example the development of sector-led support and challenge through Teaching Schools. This is challenging territory. The Learning and Achievement service is currently going through the commissioning cycle, with the majority of services to be commissioned to an external provider by April 2015.

11. There is some really good news. In the last four terms over 50% of our schools have been re-inspected by Ofsted and our overall Ofsted profile is above national average, and joint highest for the West Midlands. Currently, 86% of our schools are judged by Ofsted to be good or better. At KS2, the number of schools below the Government's floor standard has fallen from 16 in 2011 to 8 in 2012 to 4 in 2013. At KS4, we have no schools below the national floor standard.

Early Years

12. Whilst 86% of our settings are good or outstanding, a statistic higher than national average and our statistical neighbours in terms of the early years goals, we have dipped in literacy and numbers and only 49% reached or exceeded the expected national goals for a good level of development. This may be due in part to how the teachers assess. Additional training has been given to build confidence. More work is needed to ensure readiness for school.

13. In addition to the quality of provision, a key focus is ensuring sufficiency of places, which links to the Council's Open for Business strategy.

KS2

14. KS2 is a mixed picture. We see improvements in writing and maths though we still remain about 3% below the national average. Progress 4-11 is not as good as we would like; across the county it is too variable.

15. If we spilt out the results and look at the impact of 2- and 3-tier systems of education, compared with national scene, primary (2-tier) schools perform above the national average, while 3-tier (middle schools) perform below the national average.

16. The gap in performance between pupils eligible for Free School Meals and their peers is above national average, and is a key focus for the work of the service.

17. Looked after Children are a small cohort, but there is evidence schools are starting from a lower base and progress is good.

KS4

18. This is an area where improvement for 5 years in a row puts us above both the national average and that of our statistical neighbours for the key indicator of the proportion of students attaining at least 5 GCSE grades A*-C. It has moved us 40 places up the league table to 50th place, but of course my ambition is that we move

further up the table. At KS 4 there is no discernible difference in outcomes between students being educated in the 2- or 3-tier systems of education.

KS5

19. Performance at KS5 is disappointing compared to our statistical neighbours and nationally. We take fewer qualifications, 3.3 compared to 3.7, particularly in the colleges (2.7). 1/3rd of the cohort attend the colleges. The 6th Form College performs at the same level as schools but the college performance overall is more variable. Colleges are considering mergers to affect sustainability with a strong influence on better outcomes. Whilst schools and colleges focus on increasing points per pupil, business is focussed on the skills they need. School to business engagement continues to be vital.

20. Finally there is an emerging scene change:

- Between 2016 and 2023 around assessment arrangements; from assessment at entry into reception, to 85% as the floor standard at the end of KS2, will be a challenge and make year-on-year trend analysis difficult.
- To sustain Worcestershire's educational improved outcomes and give value for money for our taxpayers we are looking at embracing new more modern ways of working such as strategic commissioning of support services and encouraging partnerships to create capacity, unlock innovation, energy and creativity of partners to deliver even better visions and outcomes. Supporting schools through the transition from currently provided in-house services to an external provider should not be underestimated.
- The Children and Families Act, including SEN changes, and the consequential funding, organisation changes at a school and authority level will all need to be handled carefully.

21. Engagement, governance and a partnership approach will be vital as we move to the outcome of the procurement process to have a new provider being found and in place by April 2015. Many of the ways we deliver services in learning and achievement will change from next April.

22. To meet required outcomes we will be enabling and importantly holding partners/providers to account. In many areas (those in scope) we don't actually have to be the deliverer of services to shape delivery and review core functions in line with national and local policies, ensure challenge and support of underperforming schools/settings and that available budgets, resources (human and financial) are focused on the areas of greatest need.

23. We will ensure services complement the Early Help Strategy, keep safeguarding at the heart of service delivery and ensure the educational outcomes of Looked After Children are improved. We will continue to work with schools to fuel their ambition and link schools to business

24. The indicative announcement of additional school funding for 2015/16, around £4.9m, is to be welcomed, especially as Worcestershire has played such a part in

the F40 fight for fairer funding. However, Members should be aware that a number of secondary schools are seeing a reduction in funding for 2014/15, due in the main to falling numbers of pupils. A number of academies are also being allocated funding from the EFA which is different than expected from that notified by the Council, due to changes in allocation methodologies and reductions in funding for central services which is in line with reductions seen by the Council for maintained schools.

Social Care

25. This is really tough territory. I chair the Children's Services Performance Board quarterly. The quality assurance from self-assessment, learning from peer reviews and sector-led challenge and the independent chairs and the views of the reviewing officers all feed into my and the Cabinet's grasp of where we are. The Cabinet's Star Chamber process is rigorous in this respect. Visiting frontline areas of the service enables me to pick up softer more anecdotal evidence and learning which I share with the Director of Children's Services and Head of Service.

26. My headlines are that this is an area rightly where we are still on the journey, post redesign, in terms of changes and embedding practice to ensure no child in Worcestershire will be unsafe. The landscape is more secure week by week. There is no quick fix as the profiling of social care nationally confirms. The redesign of children's social care is settling down but until the workforce complement is complete there will be teams with caseload challenge and external pressure on individuals in specific teams due to the demands of processes and the courts which impact prioritisation.

27. Since Christmas 2013 data shows that sickness in social care staff is heading in the right direction, with many long-term sickness episodes having been resolved which is good both from the staff point of view and the Council. I am hugely proud of the teams' commitment and the front-line energy as they work towards the quality level required.

28. Key to where we are is the vision of the Director of Children's Services and Head of Service supported by the Leadership Team. We have more work to do, but I am confident we have the right plans in place, which we are continuing to pursue, rounding off the edges and settling down the whole service. Overall there still remain some areas of inconsistency but these have reduced and practice will improve further as the workforce stabilises and settles.

29. Recruitment, which leads to more appropriate caseloads, is key to providing a robust service. It is beginning to improve. Since Christmas 2013, we have had 36 new social care starters of which 17 were previously filled by agency. We have offers out for a further 24 Social Workers (including 9 NQSW in early April) of which 7 have start dates in April and May. The leaver figures for social care since Christmas 2013 were low with only 2 social worker leavers. This is all good news supporting direction of travel.

30. Additional good news is the role of the Principal Social Worker. This role is making a difference, the access centre is working well and the relationship between the Early Help Hub and the Access Centre coupled with the buddy system and threshold management is good. There is more partnership work to come through

the development of a Multi- Agency Safeguarding Hub with police and health interaction at our access centre level and at the District bases level.

31. Pleasingly and importantly I note children and young people have a louder voice in the practice and the changes in social workers following the redesign is being addressed.

32. I am also focused on our arrangements for Children in Need to ensure they are robust.

33. Mindful of our 2013/14 overspend and to ensure we have "the right child, in the right place for the right price" we have a clear and robust LAC placement strategy, which is scrutinised and monitored weekly. I anticipate fewer LAC budgetary surprises in the future. This is supported by the additional £3.5m budget approved by the Council in February and the Family Justice process, which has become much quicker. A level of innovation in terms of documenting, costing and forecasting placements, is setting a new bar and beginning to attract interest from other Authorities. Populating the database with 100% accurate plans based on properly assessed outcomes takes time it is still an ongoing challenge but we are getting there. Key elements to highlight are: our three invest-to-save children's homes is enabling us to bring vulnerable young people in county; our highly-regarded children homes; our reunification strategy with kinship and special guardianship approaches; our move to a more preventative approach with respect to how we use our homeless intervention team; more managed moves with parents; our supported living approach and our positive moves contract.

34. Our fostering service continues to seek and retain more foster carers but conversions from pre-initial training of foster carers could make the difference we need. The opportunity to grow our internal foster care service is something I encourage us all to promote and support. Finally, despite the Balanced Score Card picture, which is viewed over three years, our recent Adoption transformation is impressive with increased placements of children with adopters - 50 matches for children have been presented to panel during the first 9 months of 2013/14 compared to a total of 31 for whole 2012/13 period. We recently placed a 7.5 week old child before 10 weeks. The West Mercia Adoption Partnership an expansion of the collaboration between the four local authorities of Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin to move to a single Adoption Service covering West Mercia Region has the potential of including a partner from the voluntary sector.

35. Of course, we don't keep children safe on our own in isolation. This is everyone's business, including members, and partners such as schools, the Health Service, police and the voluntary sector, come to the table strategically at the Local Children's Safeguarding Board to work together to this end. It is not possible always to ensure all children are safe, in all circumstances, but in these very small number of cases, Serious Case Reviews help partners identify areas for practice improvement.

36. Members' engagement in Corporate Parenting is strong. The partnership with agencies is maturing. Key areas of focus are improving the percentage of health assessments and increasing opportunities for care leavers – barriers to improvement, such as computer systems not talking to each other are being resolved.

37. The Youth Offending Service (YOS), now a West Mercia Service, continues to provide good outcomes for our young people. The current YOS_hosting arrangement with Probation are being realigned due to large-scale national changes to the delivery of probation functions and Worcestershire County Council will be the host during an interim period.

Early Help (Stronger Families) and Partnership,

38. A good news story is Ofsted has rated 82% of children's centres either good or outstanding.

39. Our Stronger Families programme forms part of the Early Help Strategy and between March 2012-2014, 727 families have been supported. Worcestershire remains on track to work with the expected 900 families by March 2015. We are demonstrating positive results, which will enable us to claim results-based payments. The Government has now announced a budget for Phase 2 which we will use to develop our approach with partners. Louise Casey, the Stronger Families Tsar, visited and was impressed with our co-working arrangements: we have social care 'pods' working with early help in three schools in the county. A business case is being prepared for a variation on the model to be piloted in a fourth area so that flexibility is built into future service development to meet identified needs. The areas chosen relate to levels of needs and links with the Stronger Families programme. The pod social workers co-ordinate the multi-agency meetings with other professionals involved in the whole family.

40. The implementation of Worcestershire's Early Help Strategy has progressed throughout 2013/14. Four out of the six 0-19 Early Help district services are now in place with the remaining two (Malvern Hills and Bromsgrove) currently negotiating contracts with the preferred provider. These district service arrangements, which include the provision of Children's Centres, have been phased in, district by district, in order to balance the speed of implementation whilst ensuring quality and effectiveness of provision. This is new territory in a challenging area but early case study evidence is supportive. Evidence to date indicates a better relationship with early help, other agencies and a joined up service for children and families.

41. The Early Help Hub and the Social Care Access Centre (SCAC) have been co-located from the beginning of September 2013. This has facilitated more effective decision making by the EHH advisors and a better understanding of when a case should be passed through to Social Care. Referrals for Early Help are made through the Early Help Notification, an online referral form for professionals to request support for a family they are working with. Since April 2013, the EHH advisors have completed over 2500 EHN+ forms from various referrers.

42. A commissioning review of the Family Group Conferencing services provided evidence that the Family Group Conference service, which targets edge of care and Looked After Children, is effective in supporting a reduction in numbers of Looked After Children and associated costs. The FGC service delivered an estimated 12:1 return on the £90,000 investment in 2012/13 and the performance of the current provider of FGCs (Daybreak Family Group Conferences) has been of a high standard and the current provider is considered to deliver good value for money to the County Council.

43. The Children and Young People's Plan has been refreshed to meet current needs as have the governance arrangements for holding to account the delivery of the plan and the Early Help initiative: the Children's Trust and the Local Children's Trusts in the District. Corporate Parenting, Local Children's Trust, advocates for early help through Governor roles and engagement with commissioning and school funding changes particularly around SEN changes are all way in which you as Members can support this complex and far reaching agenda.

44. Whatever the Council does, whatever our strategy, all that we do is for Children and Families, and each one of us should never forget to champion our children who are our future.

Liz Eyre

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families

(b) REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR LOCALISM AND COMMUNITIES

Introduction

1. It is my pleasure to submit my first report as Cabinet Member for Localism and 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 Localism and Communities is a cross-cutting one covering a number of Council services, with a particular remit on taking forward Act Local as an approach by which we are working in partnership with communities and volunteers in shaping future delivery of services, helping us to achieve our Future Fit programme.
3. I am pleased to report that over the last 12 months, there has been significant progress in all areas of my portfolio, both in terms of transforming service delivery and also in achieving the challenging targets set within our Future Fit programme.

Libraries

4. The Libraries and Learning Service continues to be at the forefront of taking forward our Act Local approach in terms of radically shifting the way that we deliver services in a local area, involving local communities, supporting volunteers where possible and delivering the required savings without the need for closing individual libraries. This has been achieved through the hard work of a dedicated team of officers along with the commitment from parish and town councils, the local community and not least local County Councillors.
5. I am delighted to report that we are close to reaching a community solution in all of our smaller libraries and progress on these will be reported to Cabinet in July this year.
6. Examples include:
 - Working with Wythall Parish Council and Woodrush High School in Wythall over an interim and long-term solution in providing library services at the local high school.
 - Working with Upton Town Council and neighbouring parishes in delivering a sustainable Upton library service on the existing premises with local parishes in the area joining together to help fund the project of taking on the building through donations as well as increases in precepts.
 - Working with Hagley Parish Council on delivering sustained library services in the existing building but with support from Hagley Parish Council and local community volunteers.
7. In terms of our bigger libraries:
 - Malvern Library has recently reopened with Job Centre Plus now fully embedded as part of the offer.

- Stourport and Bromsgrove Libraries are part of corporate schemes which will bring together a number of public and voluntary services under the same roof, including sustaining local library services.
- We are working closely with Children's Services on relocating services into Redditch Library.

8. All this means that we are on track to achieve our Future Fit savings for libraries for this financial year without the need to close any individual library.

Lifelong Learning

9. The Lifelong Learning Service has continued to remodel itself through developing a Community Learning Trust in partnership with local colleges as a way of connecting and linking into the skills agenda which is a key part of our Open for Business approach.

10. The Lifelong Learning Service along with the Libraries Service within Culture and Community has recently achieved the Matrix Customer Care standard as recognised by Ofsted. It is very rare for such a large service to achieve the standard within Great Britain and demonstrates a customer first attitude throughout all levels of the organisation and I would like to offer my congratulations to all involved.

The Joint Museum Service

11. The Joint Museum Service has been working in partnership with the Hartlebury Trust in developing the Stage 2 application for the purchase of the Hartlebury estate by the Hartlebury Trustees. Plans are being developed to take this project forward. This is a very exciting project and demonstrates a further example of Act Local working with a locally led trust to develop a new and exciting visitor attraction within that part of Worcestershire, which will boost the local visitor economy.

12. The Joint Museum Service is also working closely with Worcester City Council in developing a new offer for both the Museum and Art Gallery and the Commandery, which ties up with the Worcester City Council vision of achieving City of Culture status 2021. It will also be a key part of developing Worcester City's profile both regionally and nationally, alongside helping to promote the wider county and its hidden treasures working with partners such as Destination Worcestershire.

Archives and Archaeology Service

13. The Archive Service has recently achieved the new accreditation standard set by the National Archives Service and was the second service in the country to do so. It has also remodelled its front of house Archives service at The Hive in order to achieve Future Fit savings without impacting on actual services provided at The Hive. Over the past few months, we have met twice with the senior managers of the National Archives who were most interested to see how the service was being delivered. The service was also successful in winning a large sum of National Lottery Funding to be spent on commemorations around the First World War across the county.

14. The Historic Environment Records Unit has achieved a significant amount of grant income in order to take forward a number of projects, including a cross-county

approach as to how planning applications are dealt with, in order to support sustainable development that protects and celebrates our historic landscape and architecture.

The School Music Service

15. The County School Music Service has completely transformed itself over the past 12 months and is now a zero-funded service in terms of County Council funding, whilst still providing music tuition for over 5,000 children across Worcestershire.

16. A report is to be brought to Cabinet in the Autumn on the potential of outsourcing the service to create a stand-alone Worcestershire Music Trust.

The County Arts Service

17. Although a very small service, this service continues to network and matrix work across the county in terms of raising art opportunities as a way of supporting Council priorities, e.g. Open for Business and Health and Wellbeing. The impact of the service is shown by the spending of £49,000 in grants which brought in £1,687,315 of investment into the county during 2013/14.

18. The Arts Service continues to work with Adult Social Care using personalised budgets for arts activity. Alongside this, they support arts groups such as Vamos who perform across the county, often in residential and care homes. The Arts are also leading the way on an Open for Business approach in looking at the economic impact of particular arts venues and festivals around the county as a means of developing the visitor and tourism economy within the county.

Corporate Information Management Unit (CIMU)

19. Our CIMU service has had the forethought of inviting the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) to perform a peer review, in order that we as a County Council are in the best position to move forward on our strategic commissioning journey knowing that we have a strong and safe information governance structure in terms of our management of information across all services in the County Council and the sharing of data with present and future partners. For those of you who do not know, they are based in the old County Records Office.

Registration and Coroner Services

20. As with the other services in Culture and Community, the Registration Service is currently going through a remodelling process in order to deliver Future Fit savings. This is looking at how we provide Registration services around the county. Whilst we are meeting the needs of the customers, this will involve some remodelling of how the service will be delivered in a number of districts within the county. We are looking to maximise the level of income that we bring in for Registration, while providing a service that is customer led. A recent survey carried out with customers of the Registration service achieved a 98% satisfaction rating.

21. In terms of our Coroner Service, we continue to have a very effective partnership with the County Coroner and we are currently working with him on relocating the Coroner's Court as part of the Stourport Forward project.

Countryside Services

22. The provision of countryside green spaces and advice to communities continues to be delivered to a high standard, with the retention of 3 nationally recognised Green Flag Awards at Worcester Woods Country Park, Waseley Hills Country Park and St. Wulstan's Nature Reserve. This demonstrates the high quality of management of these sites for visitors and the natural environment.

23. The Greenspace Team which already brings in significant income continues to strive towards becoming self-financing as part of its Future Fit programme. A considerable amount of work delivered across the service is done so through volunteers such as Tree Wardens, Parish Paths Wardens, Countryside Sites volunteers and Health Walk Leaders.

24. The Community Payback project which is jointly funded via the Probation Trust continues to carry out much needed work, with offenders carrying out projects on Countryside Sites and Public Rights of Way, as well as helping to deliver community initiatives.

Gypsy and Traveller Services

25. The Gypsy and Traveller Service continues to work closely with communities and local gypsies and travellers to provide residential sites and support, and also reduce and help manage unauthorised encampments within the county.

26. The difficult issue of illegal horse grazing is being carefully managed by the service in partnership with other local Council's and the police, with action being taken to address this issue where appropriate.

27. This service provides another example where the cost to the Council Tax payer is minimal, with residential sites providing accommodation for residents, whilst offsetting the costs of running the service.

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

28. The Changing Futures Fund has entered its third year and has provided support to 180 organisations around the county so far. It has recently been agreed that the Fund will continue into a fourth year to ensure the full investment is used for the benefit of voluntary sector organisations.

29. Volunteering is a key deliverable for the Council's Future Fit programme and the Council is working closely with the Worcestershire Voices Board who are leading the development of a countywide, cross-sector volunteering strategy. A Worcestershire Volunteering Research Report was produced in July 2013 and provides a picture of volunteering in Worcestershire and recommendations for partners who have an interest in the growth of volunteering for the future.

Regulatory Services

30. Trading Standards and Animal Health staff working within Worcestershire Regulatory Services on our behalf continue to focus on the key County Council priority around supporting the local economy by working with legitimate businesses,

especially manufacturers and importers, whilst tackling the worst rogue trading activity, a proportion of which is committed by organised criminal groups operating across local authority borders.

31. A number of high profile prosecutions took place last year across a diverse range of areas such as product safety, weights and measures, food, product counterfeiting, animal health, doorstep crime and false claims about motor vehicles.

32. On the business support side the number of businesses with Primary Authority (PA) agreements with the service has increased to six and the service will continue to develop this area as it can provide a source of limited funding to help support service delivery. A business with a PA agreement can receive assured advice from our officers, which other local regulatory services are obliged to take into consideration when addressing any alleged failings. Regulatory Services are also working within the partnership looking at ways to deliver the Future Fit savings targets required.

The Hive

33. The Hive during year 2013/14 became the second most visited library in the UK with just under one million visitors. I would urge those councillors who have not done so yet to go and visit the building to see how interesting it is.

34. The Hive has achieved 13 national awards so far and has recently been shortlisted by booksellers for the prestigious Library of the Year award. Our partnership with the University and our PFI contractors continues to grow as The Hive continues to develop as an exemplar project, noted at a regional and national level. We are always looking at how to improve the customer experience at The Hive and we are looking at making a number of improvements around soundproofing and the layout of the café.

Act Local

35. As lead Cabinet Member for Act Local, I am well aware of the importance of this approach in terms of working through our transformation of services across the Council in order that we can have a much closer partnership with local communities in the future delivery and commissioning/sustainability of services.

36. The Future Lives Programme is one example where we are working very closely with our colleagues in ASH on identifying new ways of developing volunteers to support the transformation of services within Adult Social Care. This principle also applies to services across BEC including Community Transport, Culture and Community Services and Highways.

37. A significant part of Act Local work is now focused around developing volunteers in Worcestershire through the voluntary sector. We are working closely with the Worcestershire Voluntary Voices Board and our colleagues in district councils in developing a county-wide strategy for the development of both informal volunteering and formal volunteering across the county. We are looking at technology and marketing as a way of promoting volunteers. We also have events coming up at the start of June which will celebrate the work of volunteers in the county and we want to identify good practice both within the county and beyond. I am very excited about the Act Local work and see this as a key plank in taking

forward our future operating model in terms of how local services will be commissioned/delivered within the county over the coming years.

38. Those of you who attended the Act Local Workshop last year will know how successful the event was and the ideas that stemmed from it. In June, we are going to be holding another event which will be focused around the volunteer. The event is on 2 June 2014 here at County Hall commencing at 7.00pm.

39. Work has also been carried out developing a refreshed Act Local website, which will link in with the Worcestershire Voices website, which is led by the sector itself.

Open for Business

40. A key feature of the work within my portfolio is how individual services are adapting and transforming themselves to be in a position to support the Council's Open for Business agenda. Our Cultural Services, in particular, have as a core priority the development of the visitor economy. Examples include:

- Backing the Worcester City of Culture ambition for 2021.
- Developing a cohesive cultural offer in Worcester/Worcestershire as part of selling Worcester/Worcestershire on the regional and national stage in terms of visitor destination.
- Carrying out detailed research on the potential impact of key cultural venues and festivals in developing the future visitor economy.

Conclusions

41. I would like to place on record my thanks to the Chief Executive and the Director of Business, Environment and Community, along with the relevant Heads of Service for their commitment and work over the past 12 months. I believe we have a high calibre of officer 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.

42. It is recognised that the financial climate facing the Council continues to be very challenging. I see that within my portfolio significant progress has been made in meeting these financial challenges. However, I am aware that this will continue and through areas such as Act Local, I hope that within my portfolio I can be a key catalyst and contributor to achieving long-term Future Fit goals, sustaining services that local communities wish to sustain but delivering them in very different ways.

43. I submit this report to the Council. Thank you.

Lucy Hodgson

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Localism and Communities