

Chief Executive's announcement

As you know, my arrival at Herefordshire Council has coincided with the judgment on Children's Services. As a Father, and as Chief Executive, I am disturbed and saddened by the way the family were treated. I am committed to ensure that we make all the necessary improvements to our Children's Social Care Services. We have received a non-statutory improvement notice by the Department for Education and have been allocated an Improvement Advisor for at least the next year. We welcome Gladys Rhodes White OBE to support us on our improvement journey and to provide accountability and reassurance to Government that we are making the necessary changes.

I am enjoying getting to know Herefordshire and learning more about this beautiful county. Over the next few weeks I will be meeting more councillors and their wards, and look forward to attending group meetings. I met with all staff on my first day to introduce myself and share my approach, along with my initial thoughts and areas of focus for the coming months. I also held directorate staff presentations and 'question and answer' sessions during my first two weeks. I am learning more about our teams and services and visiting our work 'on the ground'. I am keen to progress my learning to help shape and inform where we can make organisational improvements, along with opportunities for immediate and sustainable changes, and to set my key priorities for action. I've posed the question to staff, councillors, parish councillors and partners on what I can do, as Chief Executive, to make their role better. I have had many useful and informative responses and look forward to discussing more with individuals to learn more about the suggestions and identifying possible improvements. I will also be meeting with our partners from across the county and the wider area – learning more about the work we do together, finding opportunities for further development and building stronger relationships.

I look forward to bringing forward the Covid Economic Recovery Plan to you in the coming weeks. It is important we look at the wider impact of Covid on our community- on education, mental health, physical health, as well as the economy. We will work to keep the things we valued throughout the pandemic such as the environmental benefits, work/home life, and family time during lockdown, while ensuring there are opportunities to provide a more resilient county, with support for specific issues that have been created or exacerbated by Covid and lockdowns. We also need to prepare for the impact any variants of concern may have on our vulnerable residents and health services, and the related lockdowns that impact our whole community. I would like to pay a personal tribute to the fantastic effort and commitment that staff have put in over the last year to deliver services – during this time the Council had additional £10m of Covid related costs and achieved a financial outturn for the year of a £38k overspend. We have also provided £106m in business grants with over 25,000 payments to businesses and our discretionary grant is still open for applications.

Like many organisations, our staff are keen to understand what the requirement for returning to work in offices, following the national unlocking as part of the Covid roadmap. I am keen to combine the positive aspects of remote working that staff have developed during lockdown, alongside the opportunity for collaborative working in person and the support for those who are not able to, or prefer not to, work from home. We will be working with staff to develop the most suitable approach and are piloting an approach at Plough Lane to allow staff to work together in a Covid safe way.

Finally, I'd like to take a moment to thank each and every person working for Herefordshire Council for their commitment and effort throughout the pandemic over the last year. The word is often overused, but last year has truly been unprecedented. Staff have been working hard through the pandemic response, for public health, community response, and to continue to provide essential services for local people. We have been through lockdowns, outbreaks, and the

tier system which led to Herefordshire being in different restrictions every week during December. Herefordshire has sadly lost 337 people to Covid-19, with our health and social care staff working on the front line. We are exploring ways that we can recognise and mark this important time in an appropriate way for our staff and our community.

Thank you for your support and I look forward to working with you.