

## **Chief Executive Announcement**

It is now one year since I joined Herefordshire Council as Chief Executive. It has been a challenging but rewarding year, as we take huge strides in changing and improving both the way we run the organisation and our services for residents. I have learned a great deal about Herefordshire, its people, its history and its geography. I have met many people from the community doing wonderful things and have been humbled by the way the county has accepted me. Herefordshire has a true sense of community and I thank you all for the way you have supported me over the last year.

My arrival as Chief Executive for Herefordshire Council coincided with a High Court judgment on Herefordshire Children's Social Care Services. Shortly after that we received a non-statutory Improvement Notice from the Department for Education. It was clear that Herefordshire Council needed to make major changes to its Children's Services. As a father, I was upset and saddened to hear of the ways we have let children and families in the county down, and as an incoming Chief Executive I made it my top priority to ensure we make the changes required, so that children and families in Herefordshire get the support they need and are entitled to.

We took immediate action to address the serious issues highlighted by last year's judgment and we are now one year into a three-year improvement plan, recognising that such significant changes take time and investment. We have undertaken a thorough analysis of all aspects of our children's social care practice, which has informed our decision to significantly invest in Herefordshire Children's Services. We know that our practice and processes still need improvement in some areas and we are committed to making the changes needed to provide better services for children and families in Herefordshire. Our Social Workers continue to do their best, often in very difficult circumstances, to support families and protect vulnerable children in our community.

We've welcomed a number of new directors into our restructured corporate leadership team, which will soon be complete with the arrival of Hilary Hall as Corporate Director, Community Wellbeing in June. This new team is providing strengthened leadership for the delivery of local services, with a focus on delivering County Plan priorities, service improvements and the economy. The new team is working with a corporate focus and will provide welcome stability following a period of change with the organisation. The support provided to staff during this time has been hugely important and our now established regular staff briefings are providing a welcomed opportunity for staff to hear direct from the leadership team and for sharing ideas, questions and comments. The briefings, which are consistently well-attended, are a forum for sharing immediate challenges and opportunities alongside new developments and projects, and where we can recognise the hard work and commitment of colleagues.

Throughout the last year, we have celebrated many successes and I am proud of the initiatives we have brought to residents. As part of our Covid Recovery, we have channelled £6million of government funding into a programme of work to help the county's economic and wellbeing recovery in the wake of the pandemic. Our 'Bus It' campaign has been well received and it has been great to be able encourage residents to travel around our beautiful county by bus every weekend, absolutely free. I know this has been appreciated during the current financial climate, as residents face the national cost of living increase. We have been helping people get out and about as they get back into their community, and we now have 46 Talk Community hubs, which offer local services and support from friendly faces you know in your community. It was great to hear how businesses benefitted from the funding invested into our Shop Local card, where local residents were provided with a pre-paid card for up to £25. There were 91,494 transactions made at 2,017 individual shops, the vast majority of which are independently owned, with a total of

£1,002,684 spent in the County. Money spent at a locally-owned business stays in the local economy and continues to strengthen the economic base of the community. Although it wasn't only about the money- by connecting residents with their local shops and traders, we also helped people connect to their local community, by meeting new people, discovering new activities, places to visit and groups to meet with.

We've also provided a range of activities to encourage residents to get active, provided free swims for over 10,000 people, a Revive and Thrive grants programme to help small and growing businesses and the LoyalFree app to reward local shopping. We've also helped hundreds of businesses access £46m of grant funding towards equipment, new premises and faster broadband.

The last year has also seen exciting development in our schools, with the opening of a brand new special needs sixth-form facility, the Beacon College, and improvements for Mordiford, Marlbrook and John Kyrle High Schools. The opening of the Station Approach student accommodation has helped attract new students to the city's colleges and our work with NMiTE continue to grow as we attract and invest new life into Hereford to support their revolutionary new campus and their unique approach learning.

Our work continues as we develop the 2050 Big Plan to build a vision for Herefordshire together with our businesses and communities. It was exciting to see Herefordshire promoted on TV as a tourist destination and the marketing campaign we have delivered together with Visit Herefordshire has reached millions of people across the country.

We continue with our plan to ensure Herefordshire is as kind to the environment as possible. Our commitment to ensure Herefordshire is carbon neutral by 2030 is ambitious but important. As a council we have already reduced our carbon footprint by 59.6% since our first carbon management plan in 2008/09. The forthcoming changes to our bin collections will allow us to recycle more and reduce our waste, while our Greener Footprints campaign brings together businesses and community groups to help find new ways of changing for the better.

Thank you for your continued support.