

Chief Executive Announcement

Full Council 29 July 2022

As I write this report the spell of unprecedented hot weather is just coming to an end. The extreme heat, the likes of which we haven't seen before across the country, has impacted on people and infrastructure. I would like to take this opportunity to thank staff in teams across the council for their preparation and response to the Level 4 heat alert. Our talk community hubs have offered cool spaces and water to those who needed it, and support has been extended to the most vulnerable in our communities through their established networks. Emergency packs were handed out to all street homeless clients which included a £5 voucher for food and cold drinks, a battery operated fan and factor 30 sun cream along with guidance on how to keep cool and to spot signs of dehydration. And our delivery partners ensured the bins continued to be collected by starting earlier in the day and that our roads remained open with gritters on stand-by with dust treatment.

Our children's services are currently the subject of a routine Ofsted ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) inspection. We are on an improvement journey and we are still only in the first year of our three year plan. We know a great deal of work still lies ahead of us however our staff are working hard to make the positive changes needed and we hope that Ofsted will recognise this. We will use the feedback from the Ofsted inspection to help us achieve our top priority of improving our social work practice to ensure that we provide much better support for Herefordshire children and their families. Once Ofsted conclude their inspection we expect to receive their formal feedback report in September.

Our work to support families forced to flee from the war in Ukraine continues. Currently we have 387 Ukrainian guests living with residents across the county that have arrived under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. We continue to operate our donation centre at Three Elms trading estate to offer furniture, clothing, bedding and other essential items to help these families start to rebuild their lives. Arriving families are also provided with a range of support including from the Early Help team for children aged 18 and under, interpreting services through the Herefordshire Language Network, support with school admissions, community based support through Talk Community and access to financial support and employment through various partner agencies.

A number of exciting developments are on the horizon for Hereford and across the county. Through #StrongerHereford we recently submitted a £8million bid towards the redevelopment of Hereford museum and library as part of a major cultural investment in our City. Full business cases for these transformational projects were among 15 submitted to government by the Hereford Stronger Towns Board earlier this month, with a decision expected in the autumn. Three bids totalling £44million have been submitted to the government's Levelling Up Fund for the upgrading of public spaces in Leominster and Ledbury, development of business land opportunities in Ross and a package of transport and active travel measures to improve connections across the City. We've also developed an investment plan which seeks to secure £7.6m funding allocated to Herefordshire from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, to support new business and growth, create opportunities in the cultural and creative economies in the county, and develop workforce skills. With several bids for funding submitted to government we are hopeful of a successful outcome that will lead to these projects coming to fruition and benefitting the county. I would like to thank the many staff who work hard to develop projects and detailed business cases often at very short notice. Without this groundwork we wouldn't be able to secure the national funding required to progress our ambitions for growing our county's economy and improving the lives of residents.

The health of our rivers is vital to our county in so many ways, and the council has been instrumental in much of the progress towards understanding and acting on pollution damaging the Wye and tributaries including the Lugg. I'm delighted with the ongoing progress of our innovative scheme to develop wetlands that will help to secure the health of our rivers while allowing some development to restart nearby with the introduction of our national-first phosphates credit scheme which we anticipate will start trading this August.