

Title of report: Leaders report to Council

Meeting: Council

Meeting date: Friday 29 July 2022

Report by: The Leader of the Council

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To provide an update on the work of the Cabinet since the meeting of Council held on 4 March, 2022 and on progress made in the previous year towards achieving the council's priorities and priorities for the coming year.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) the report be noted.**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options; the constitution requires the Leader to provide Council with reports on the activities of the executive.

Key considerations

2. It is a constitutional requirement that the Leader of the Council provides a report to each ordinary council meeting, other than the budget meeting, on the work of cabinet since the last meeting. At the first meeting following the annual meeting I am also required to report on the annual priorities of the cabinet and progress made in meeting those priorities.
3. Our Delivery Plan for 2022/23 (appendix B) entitled “Respecting our past, shaping our future” includes a review of 2021/22 showing what we have done so far, and what we plan to do in 2022/23. I would encourage all Members to read the document. We have much to be proud of in terms of protecting and enhancing our environment, and keeping Herefordshire a great place to live, strengthening communities to ensure everyone lives well and safe together, and supporting the economy which builds on the County’s strengths and resources. . All against a backdrop of Covid, now the war in Ukraine and increasing concerns about global warming. As the introduction to the plan says “The Covid pandemic has provided a powerful reminder of the importance of frontline services, and the council’s central role in supporting communities. It also confirmed that power of working together to address key issues and in making improvements to people’s lives”
4. In my report I include a summary of the matters decided by the cabinet, cabinet members, any decisions taken under the urgency provisions and those subject to call in.
5. It is customary for all of the decisions to be listed in an annex to this report (appendix A). These decisions have been made available on the council’s website. All councillors and members of the public have the opportunity to review these decisions as they are being made.
6. Of the decisions taken since my last report to Council, no key decisions were taken under the general exception provisions (giving more than five but less than 28 days’ notice) and none were taken under the urgency provisions (less than five days’ notice).
7. Included in my report is a summary of what I consider the most significant decisions since my last report to Council supporting the achievement of the County Plan, as well as some additional subjects that I hope will be of interest.

OFSTED Visit and update on Children’s Services

8. The Council is aware that OFSTED began their inspection on Monday, 18 July 2022. Their findings will become public on 12 September 2022.

The Children’s Improvement Plan

9. Officers within our children’s services continue to update the Children Improvement Plan following the High Court Judgement in 2021, the finding of the Ofsted Inspection (2018) and subsequent Focused Visits. Ensuring our children’s services are the best they can be has been the council’s number one priority since 2021. It will continue to be so until improvements to our services for our most vulnerable children, young people and families ensure that all children have the best start in life.
10. This revised Improvement Plan goes into more detail than the previous version, published in November 2021, and is informed by a clear set of outcomes to be achieved, and it sets out our priorities to improve, how we will do this, and what can be expected from improved activity.

11. We have already taken immediate steps since the High Court Judgement in 2021 of increasing capacity across the service and to start to build a new permanent senior leadership team. Additional funding from the Council has been received to resource our improvement activity and we have received support from the Department for Education (DfE) by way of a grant to support increased improvement activity during 2021-22. Delivery against the ambitions in the Plan are continuously reviewed by the Children's Improvement Board and reported regularly to the Corporate Leadership Team, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet, and full Council.

Update on Phosphate concerns within the County

12. Herefordshire Council is undertaking a lead role in efforts to support the restoration of the Wye, developing the UK's first development Phosphate Calculator, delivering Integrated Wetlands and an Agricultural Supplementary Planning Policy which is about to be published for consultation. The Council has been a driver for supporting improvement around the Nutrient Management Board and has invested in a significant national influencing role to progress river restoration.
13. On 28th January 2022 Council approved a motion calling for a WPZ. The response from the Secretary of State was disappointing. A fuller update on this is contained elsewhere in the papers for this meeting.
14. On 12th May 2022 we received notification from Natural England that they were introducing more stringent Phosphate targets for both the Lugg and the Wye, the previous one having been set in 2016. In July 2022, the latest source apportionment data was published indicating the main causes of phosphate pollution following sampling work in the river. This reported a further reduction from water companies and other sources and a 5% increase from agriculture;
 - 72% agricultural diffuse pollution including run-off
 - 23% sewage treatment works
 - 5% other (eg highways run off)
15. On May 31st, 2022 [RePhoKus](#) published its report "Re-focusing Phosphorus use in the Wye Catchment" with significant recommendations which local authorities including Herefordshire Council need to assess.
16. On 29th July 2022 George Eustice made a statement part of which included support for the approach to nutrient credits and wetlands that the Council has adopted. I consider that we are playing a part in leading on these issues.
17. However, the recent reports described above and failure to deliver a Water Protection Zone means that there is a need to consider what more can be done. A Cabinet Commission is proposed to undertake a more strategic and systems led review of river quality and in particular to consider how Herefordshire Council can use all the powers and influence available to it to progress the restoration of the Wye and Lugg.
18. In particular the Commission will consider whether it is now reasonable to use Planning Conditions and the Planning Enforcement regime to ensure that nutrient outputs from new developments are certified to ensure that they do not create down-stream impacts within the Lugg and Wye Catchments. The Commission will also address what more can be done to address river quality issues caused by current developments.
19. We are in discussion with the Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee to review the draft terms of reference at their July 26th 2022 meeting. Over the summer work will be undertaken

to finalise the Commissions terms of reference, work programme and timetable with regular progress reports to be provided to Cabinet. Additional capacity will be created by commissioning support where existing gaps exist. It is envisaged that the Commission will want to draw on expertise, leading national experts, other impacted local authorities and from our national regulatory partners.

Integrated Wetlands

20. I am pleased to say the work to assure ourselves that the issue of Nutrient Neutrality can be addressed has been completed and Cabinet will consider this at our meeting on 27th July 2022 enabling trading to commence soon afterwards. We will also be producing a forecast of when credits are likely to become available from our other sites.
21. The capital budget of £2m for the Integrated Wetlands project is funded through use of the Council's New Homes Bonus, and is supplemented by a £1m capital grant allocation from the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership through the Getting Building Fund.

Market Town Business Briefings

22. As an administration we are committed to improving communication with business. The six monthly market town business briefings combined with the quarterly business briefings and the regular CEO blog have improved our engagement and given an opportunity to listen to the views of business and communicate what the Council is doing.

Stronger Towns Fund

23. In terms of the Stronger Towns fund the County Plan states 'We will work with partners to maximise the Stronger Towns Fund grant (up to £25m) awarded to Hereford and to support investment programmes across all our market towns'. The regeneration of the city centre, and opportunities to develop the historic cathedral quarter are likely to be priorities in the emerging City Centre Masterplan and the Big Economic Plan. The two projects will also compliment and work closely with other investments such as the Hereford City Centre Improvements £6m public realm and greening project, creating a new vibrant city and playing a critical role for the county as a whole for many years to come.
24. Both the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery project and the Maylord Orchards Library and Learning Resource Centre are flagship projects in the Hereford Town Investment Plan. These projects were approved at the Cabinet meeting held on 29th June 2022 and briefed to all Councillors at various other meetings. I would like to thank Cllr Davies and the library team for their extraordinary energy in getting these projects to their current state.
25. The Hereford Town Investment Plan recognises that 'Hereford's strongest assets are its unique heritage and distinctive rural identity, with 316 listed buildings, 12% of its total footprint given over to green space, a fabulous river corridor and a globally significant collection of treasures including its Cathedral, Magna Carta, Mappa Mundi and the Herefordshire Hoard'.
26. The proposed projects will also support the development of Hereford as a university city, enhancing the cultural offer, and establishing a new modern library for all to access resources, and to study at the heart of the city.

27. The Stronger Towns Fund Board has been an interesting example of the Council, business and the community working together. It was a government requirement that the Board be business led, with limited involvement with the Council, whilst at the same time the Council took on the obligation of Accountable Body. Navigating this was not easy and there has been tension at times. The result is something that all should be proud of. I would like to publically thank Cllr Chowns in particular for her commitment and contribution to this project.

Levelling Up

28. The UK Government has announced an initial £4 billion for the Levelling Up Fund for England over the period up to 2024-25. Funding will be delivered through Local Authorities. The Levelling Up Fund is an opportunity to secure external funding to help support the county's economic future.
29. Herefordshire has the lowest county tier Gross Value Added (GVA) of any county in England and is the second lowest in the UK (second to our neighbour Powys). Average weekly wages are 20% below the national average, 39% of residents have a NVQ level 4 or above qualification compared to a national average of 43%, 24% of the population are aged over 65 , and the county is a Higher Education and social mobility 'cold spot'.
30. We are responding to these challenges. Recent and upcoming investment in NMITE, Hereford Enterprise Zone, Hereford Towns Fund programme and Leominster Heritage Action Zone demonstrate significant opportunities that the proposed Levelling Up Fund bids will add value to. The county and council are encouraging a move towards a greater higher education provision, stronger investment in jobs and productivity, and partnership working on key infrastructure priorities.
31. Cabinet approved 3 bids for the second round of Levelling Up Funding. For the second round of funding, Herefordshire has rightly been identified as a priority 1 area (previously priority 2 area). Herefordshire faces some significant long term economic challenges, including the lowest Gross Value Added per hour of any county in England. We are pleased that in this round the prioritisation for funding support has been recognised.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

32. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a separate fund of £7.45m over three years. Both Jesse Norman MP and I wrote to the Secretary of State comparing this allocation to the last EU programme period, where we benefitted from c.£25m of European Regional Development Funding and European Social Funding. The net £6.6 million of funds is a significant reduction. The UKSPF prospectus suggests that the allocations are 70% based on population, and only 30% on local need. The per capita focus significantly disadvantages rural areas with lower levels of population but with some of the greatest areas of need which is at odds with the levelling up white paper. The response from the Secretary of State was not sympathetic. I will continue to press for a proper allocation for our County in Government allocation of funding.
33. As required in the UKSPF guidance, the council has also formed a strategic partnership board to oversee the development of the Investment Plan. The Herefordshire Sustainable Growth Strategy Board (HSGSB) was formed in June 2022, and includes representation across the county's business sectors, geographies, communities, and the chairs of other local stakeholder groups such as the Herefordshire Business Board, Skills Board and Climate and Nature Partnership. The membership of the HSGSB can be found in appendix 1 to the report which is due to go to Cabinet on 28 July. I am pleased to see this further engagement with the

community. It is important that such consultation is not lip service and attendees must see their attendance as worthwhile and making an impact.

34. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all officers involved in setting out the business case and putting Herefordshire's bids together on both of these funding opportunities. They have been delivered at pace and have given the council a very credible evidence base.

Herefordshire County Business Investment District

35. The new Herefordshire County BID has requested a loan from the council for the first year of its operation. It will be repaid as the levy is collected from businesses. This will support the set up costs and the initial marketing activity to promote tourism in the county. A similar facility had been put in place for the Hereford City BID when it was first set up. As the council is the billing authority it would be responsible for collecting the levy and would deduct the repayments from the funds collected. There is no financial risk to the council as nationwide figures show only a very small percentage of businesses fail to pay and the loan will be recouped in less than a year.
36. I have joined the Board of the County Business Investment District and look forward to playing a part in encouraging the tourist (and retail) sector of our local economy which is so important to us.

Herefordshire Local Plan – replacing the current Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy

37. Work on the Herefordshire Local Plan 2021-2041 is underway which will replace the current Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy. The third public consultation; Place Shaping options for the new Local Plan began on Monday 13 June and will continue until Friday 29 July. The consultation sets out possible options and/or potential strategic development areas for Hereford, each of the County's market towns together with a range of alternative settlement hierarchies for rural parts of Herefordshire.
38. The strategic approach is to focus most development in Hereford and the Market Towns as its basis was the most supported in the Spatial Options consultation held in January and February. In rural areas of the county, there was a general preference expressed in development to be less dispersed. Therefore the options consider alternative ways to distribute development to fewer settlements than currently identified in the Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy.
39. It is important that this consultation provides the opportunity for everyone to have their say at a formative stage of plan making. The consultation does not set out firm proposals, which will come later in the process. A number of events have taken place across the county as well as on-line sessions for Members and Parish Council's. Please encourage local residents and businesses to look at the consultation material on-line <https://hlp.commonplace.is/> and respond to the consultation. Further public consultation on a draft plan will take place later in the year.

Waste Management Strategy

40. The council's county plan states that we will improve the sustainability, connectivity and wellbeing of our county by strengthening our communities, creating a thriving local economy and protecting and enhancing our environment. Our [Waste Management Strategy 2021 - 2035](#) is the

embodiment of this vision. It will help us address the management of waste across Herefordshire now and in the future with the following key targets:

- Target 1 - Net zero carbon by 2030
- Target 2 - Reduce residual household waste arising's to less than 330kg /per house per year by 2035
- Target 3 - Achieve national municipal reuse and recycling rate targets of 55% by 2025, 60% by 2030 and 65% by 2035
- Target 4 - To meet the requirements of the Environment Bill
- Target 5 - No more than 1% of municipal waste to be sent to landfill from 2025 and zero waste to landfill by 2035
- Target 6 - Improve reuse and recycling at all HWRC sites to achieve a reuse and recycling target of 85% by 2035.

41. By implementing this strategy we will deliver on our strong commitment to recycle more, reduce our waste and meet the goals established in our climate emergency declaration. The strategy also forms the basis for our response to changes to legislation set out in the Environment Act 2021 and provides the direction to the service from 2021 to 2035 (the last target year in the national strategy). Our strategy also provides the framework for the planned procurement of new waste collection and disposal contract(s),
42. On 21st July, cabinet approved the commencement of a competitive procurement process to include the procurement of a separate cargo bike food waste collection service in central Hereford City. In the next year we will be undertaking pilot projects alongside the winding down of the current collection contract. This will be a significant change moving from the current green and black bin collection service to separate food, garden twin-stream recycling and residual waste, offer the public better ways to recycle.

Ukrainian refugees

43. The Government launched the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme on the 18th March 2022. The Council mobilised operations and set up a team to lead on all of the essential checks that are required on sponsors and their families. This includes DBS and home checks to make sure that the host accommodation is safe. The team also ensure that all of the prescribed payments are made to both hosts and guests as they arrive. The operational team are managing the tremendous work of collection, distribution and support based at unit 37 on the Three Elms Trading Estate, co-ordinating the support for Ukraine response.
44. Herefordshire Council receives a grant of £10,500 per person. Of this sum £200 is paid to each individual arriving as an initial payment. The remaining £10,300 is to be used to cover costs incurred by the local authority as a result of the scheme and to facilitate and extend community based support through voluntary, community and public sector organisations.
45. As a county we should all take a huge sense of pride in the generosity and friendship extended to Ukrainian refugees. On behalf of this council I would like to thank the many families offering their homes and helping the families to integrate into our communities and society. There has been an extraordinary response to the scheme and the wider plight of Ukrainian people from communities across Herefordshire. Herefordshire has the second highest number of arrivals in the West Midlands, second only to Birmingham. As at 21 July 2022:

- I. There are 208 unique sponsors from Herefordshire on the [Governments Foundry System](#).
 - II. There are 618 unique guests seeking to come to Herefordshire.
 - III. 387 guests have arrived to-date, coming to a total of 125 sponsors located across the county.
46. As of July 21 the council has placed 111 children to allocated school places by the Councils schools admissions team. 70 of primary age and 41 secondary. 7 other children awaiting a decision. The demand for school places is broadly distributed around the county with demand being monitored carefully for potential pressures on certain areas/schools.

A refugee champion

47. I have proposed that a new member champion is appointed dedicated to supporting refugees arriving in the county. Initial considerations include:
- I. Promoting Herefordshire as a place that welcomes refugees, a safe haven and home
 - II. A role that promotes the work of the council, and our partners, in our collective assistance for refugees relocating to the county
 - III. A role that demonstrates 'leadership and example' for others to follow in extending their support to refugees
 - IV. A sign post for those in the county seeking to offer their homes and support for refugees and their families
 - V. A focal point to help show case the contribution that refugees make in our communities, to our economy and our diversity as a county
 - VI. A role that highlights the generosity extended by the many families of Herefordshire who are extending their homes to accommodate the refugees arriving in our county, both through the family scheme and the national home scheme to local support being provided, principally, to Ukrainian refugees

The Herefordshire Hoard

48. The campaign to acquire the Herefordshire Hoard for the people of Herefordshire is gathering momentum. Of the £70,000 identified as being raised from the public campaign, around £30,000 has been donated so far. Of the £706,250 to be raised from external grants, a large grant has been secured from a national funder. The Herefordshire Museum Service Support Group (HMSSG) has also made applications to national and local funders. Eight public engagement events in Hereford and around the county have taken place so far and been received with great interest and enthusiasm. Talks have also been well attended, particularly the talk from the British Museum expert on the Hoard which attracted over 100 people.
49. There has been outreach activity with local business resulting in further donations and there are still a number of engagement events to go. The campaign is very grateful to all the volunteers who are supporting the museum team at events and behind the scenes, particularly HMSSG members who are contributing a great deal of their time and skills.

Hoople

50. Hoople continues to expand its services in the Council. It recently won two awards at the Geoplace Exemplar Awards – a Platinum Award for street data and a Best in Region Award in relation to the quality and improvements in the street data Hoople manage on behalf of

Herefordshire Council. The data custodian role is within Hoople, but works closely with the Council's departments to manage the data in line within national standards and guidelines. Its focus is on Local Land and Property Gazetteer [LLPG] address and Local Street Gazetteer [LSG] street data.

51. I have recently been advised that in order to address a possible conflict of interest, the role of monitoring Hoople at a Cabinet Portfolio level should be carried out by someone who is not a Director of the Company. Accordingly the monitoring role is to be passed to the Portfolio holder for Finance and Corporate Affairs. This is reflected in the amended portfolio document attached. I will continue as a Director.

Finance year end outturn

52. At Cabinet on 26th May 2022 the quarter 4 results were considered. Cabinet was pleased to note that notwithstanding that the council had faced the largest in-year savings target ever, at over £11m, in addition to the continued challenges of Covid, the final outturn was an underspend of nearly £550k. Additional Covid grant support from central government has gone a long way towards meeting the additional costs incurred due to Covid but there were still significant impacts such as delays to delivery of capital projects. I would like to place on record my thanks, and the thanks of all Councillors, to the finance team and all the officers who have contributed to achieving these results.

Covid – recovery fund

53. Members will be aware that in September 2021 the government set out its investment fund as part of the Covid-19 Recovery measures. The council has used over £800,000 of this money to ensure that everybody will have access to free weekend bus services. Travel was within county only and additional bus services were commissioned for Sunday travel. This free service is due to end on 28 August 2022.
54. Bus travel remains free to residents of pensionable age, and those with a qualifying disability through the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). The council has been monitoring usage and will be able to assess a more accurate timescale for the duration of the scheme over the coming months. Suffice to say this free service has proved very popular.
55. Free weekend bus travel is just one element of the Covid-19 Recovery Plan, which is providing funding of £6.14 million to support the county in its recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Members will recall that additional measures included a complimentary £15 'spend local' card which was later topped up by a further £10. Many local business have highlighted that, following their many months of lockdown and closure, this money was helpful in increasing the level of business.

The annual Performance review and objective setting of the Chief Executive

56. The annual performance review for the chief executive has been undertaken and it was externally facilitated by West Midland Employers. Objectives for the current year have been set and these will be reviewed in the next year in line with the framework for assessment agreed by employment panel. These can be found at appendix C of this report.

Members Mandatory Training

57. I would like to thank all members who have recently undertaken the mandatory training as well as some of the optional training sessions offered by the council and by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). I appreciate this has been an extensive time commitment in and amongst your other duties as a councillor.
58. I know some members were unable to attend some of the mandatory training. Democratic services will be in touch shortly to run some further 'mop- up' sessions for those members who could not make every mandatory training session. Please make every effort possible to attend these follow up training events.

Councillor Briefings.

59. The new approach to member briefings to seek views on future decisions is in my view much more effective than the previous system of asking for written comments. Thank you to officers for providing these briefing sessions.

Community impact

60. The community impact of any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken. Reporting to Council the activities of the executive demonstrates the council's commitment to the code of corporate governance principle of implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

Environmental Impact

61. The environmental impacts of any decisions of the executive have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken. Reporting to Council the activities of the executive demonstrates the council's commitment to the council's [environmental policy commitments](#) and aligns to the following success measures in the County Plan.
- Increase flood resilience and reduce levels of phosphate pollution in the county's river
 - Reduce the council's carbon emissions
 - Work in partnership with others to reduce county carbon emissions
 - Improve the air quality within Herefordshire
 - Improve residents' access to green space in Herefordshire
 - Improve energy efficiency of homes and build standards for new housing
 - Increase the number of short distance trips being done by sustainable modes of travel – walking, cycling, public transport

Equality duty

62. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

63. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. As this report provides a summary of activity undertaken, we do not believe that it will have an impact on our equality duty. These considerations are set out in each of the relevant reports informing the decisions listed at appendix A, and will inform any future decision making.

Resource implications

64. There are no new resource implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The resource implications of any decisions of the executive listed at appendix A have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken and will inform any future decision making.

Legal implications

65. The council and committee, and cabinet rules within the constitution require the Leader to provide a report to Council on the work of the cabinet since the last meeting of Council and, at the first meeting to follow the annual meeting of Council (except in a year when there are ordinary elections), on the priorities of the cabinet and progress made in meeting those priorities. This report ensures these requirements are met.

66. There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report. The legal implications of any decisions of the executive listed at appendix A have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken.

Risk management

67. There are no risks arising from the recommendations of this report. The risks of any decisions of the executive listed at appendix A have been set out within the relevant decision report and taken into consideration at the time the decision was taken and will inform future decision making.

Consultees

None

Appendices

Appendix A: Decisions taken from 4 March to 21 July, 2022

Appendix B: Respecting our past, shaping our future. Delivery Plan 2022/23

Appendix C: Chief Executive Priorities

Background papers

None Identified