

## **Chief Executive Announcement**

### **Full Council 21 October 2022**

Following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in September, I would like to thank all council staff involved in the respectful co-ordination and delivery of Operation London Bridge along with our partners, the Cathedral and town and parish councils. The provision of condolence books and, in particular, the Proclamation ceremony on Sunday 11 September, was a moment Herefordshire can be proud of, and I know that this gratitude was shared from the Chairman of the Council and His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Herefordshire.

In September we saw publication of Ofsted's report following July's inspection. Ofsted has judged our Children's Services as being inadequate in all areas. As a result, the Department for Education has issued us with a statutory notice and Eleanor Brazil has been appointed as the Children's Commissioner for the council's Children's Services.

The report is a hard and upsetting read, and I welcome Eleanor's support as one of England's most eminent and well-qualified Children's Commissioners. Eleanor will be reviewing the council's capacity and capability to deliver the required improvements in Children's Services. If she believes we can improve with time and support, then we'll continue our improvement journey. Otherwise Eleanor may conclude that we need to look at another option to deliver Children's Services, whether that's in partnership with another local authority or through another operating model such as a Children's Trust. Eleanor will report to the Minister and set out her recommendations on 20 December.

I was pleased the inspectors took time in the report to recognise the commitment and dedication of all staff across Children's Services, and I want to share my appreciation too. Improving outcomes for children and young people is the number one priority for our council, and this isn't just about Children's Services - this is about how the whole council and our partners take collective responsibility to deliver and improve Children's Services.

Our digital transformation programme is also looking to improve the way we deliver our services to residents. We're investing in a partnership with PwC and we'll use their learning and experience from other organisations and bring that to Herefordshire. The first stage of this collaborative process will be to invite ideas from staff about how we could make better use of digital technology in our services and systems. The team from PwC will review all our organisational

systems and the ways residents contact us, such as through our website and customer service centres. I will ensure Members remain fully briefed throughout the transformation programme. We need to make this huge step forward as we're probably some years behind other local authorities. Improving access to our services and making our systems effective and efficient will mean an improved customer experience for our residents – that's going to be really good news for us and will have a high impact.

In Herefordshire, we continue to welcome and support families forced to flee from the war in Ukraine. Currently we have over 400 Ukrainian guests living with residents across the county that have arrived under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. In September, we allocated central government funding to open the community integration grant scheme. Through Talk Community, voluntary and community organisations, constituted clubs and registered charities can apply for grants of up to £100,000 to support our guests with the services and activities that many of us take for granted in our day to day lives, such as family support, community and access to training or employment.

As we head into the final months of the year, our focus is very much around budget planning. Our initial thinking is there's a budget gap of around £21million in our budget for 22/23/24. We are all experiencing rising prices and, like all councils across the country, we anticipate significant financial challenges due to inflation and rising costs. So we've got some work to do to balance our budget. We're not expecting a blank cheque from government but we do know there's an opportunity for us to continue to pressurise government for additional funding to support our revenue budgets and the programme of improvements that we have. There will also need to be some hard decisions over the next few months and we will look for opportunities for where we might make savings corporately across the council and in individual directorates.

Finally, as we approach winter, I would like to remind everybody to get their winter vaccinations. As I write this report, Covid cases are rising locally. The council still leads the local Covid-19 response through the Outbreak Control Hub, but now with a reduced team as we learn to live with Covid in the community. I would like to thank all staff who have worked tirelessly as part of the Covid response. Remember that you can protect yourself and those vulnerable around you by getting your flu and Covid booster jabs this winter.

Thank you for your support.

Paul Walker, Chief Executive