

## Chief Executive's report to Full Council 10 February 2023

Once again, in January, residents and businesses across the county were affected by serious flooding, with very high river levels causing building damage and road closures. I'm proud of the way we responded to these challenges alongside our partners in BBLP, the emergency services and volunteers from our communities, and would like to thank everyone involved in minimising the impact on those living in or travelling through the affected areas. There is financial support available for people affected by the flooding from [Herefordshire Community Foundation](#) and this helped some residents with the cost of temporary accommodation or dehumidifiers to allow people stay in their own homes.

We received some excellent news in mid-January when it was confirmed that we had been successful in our bid for £19.9million funding from the government's Levelling Up Fund to help deliver a package of transport and active travel measures in Hereford. These will include the transport hub at Hereford railway station, new cycle lanes and other infrastructure to support more active travel, improve safety and reduce journey times in the City. All the schemes need to be implemented by March 2025, and it is credit to our staff that we had a number of projects well-developed enough to progress immediately now that funding is available.

Unfortunately our bids for Ross Enterprise Park and public realm enhancements in Ledbury and Leominster were unsuccessful this time. No Local Authority received funding for more than one bid in this round. However, we are well placed to look at how we take forward these projects by other means.

We started the New Year with four Market Town Business Summits in as many weeks at Kington, Ledbury, Leominster and Bromyard. We'll continue the series in Ross on Thursday 9 February and after that, our next summit will be in the Golden Valley (Ewyas Harold) on Thursday 9 March. These sessions are really important for hearing first hand the challenges and suggestions from businesses in the market town communities around the county. The output from these sessions is a key input to our evolving plans for how we can support businesses across the county and help build our longer-term economic plans.

While Herefordshire faces some significant long term economic challenges, we also have fantastic opportunities, with excellent quality of life and environment, strengths in further and higher education, a thriving Enterprise Zone, and strengths in areas such as food and drink, tourism, creative industries and cyber security. The recently approved Herefordshire Big Economic Plan will enable the county, through collaborative working, to meet a shared vision, to address the challenges and rise to these opportunities. It's been developed through extensive engagement and consultation with partners across the county and overseen by the Herefordshire Sustainable Growth Strategy Board.

Our Children's Services Improvement journey is continuing, and I'm pleased to say that through the work and commitment of everyone working in children's services we are starting to see very early signs of improvements. The impact of our progress has been recognised by the Children's Commissioner, the Improvement Board and the Corporate Leadership team. We must build on this progress and continue to focus on the immediate priorities and tackle the challenges and issues we face. We held our second partnership summit with key partners from across the county including NHS, West Mercia Police, Healthwatch and HVOSS. The partnership commitment continues for improving the lives of children and young people across Herefordshire.

The Children's Commissioner, Eleanor Brazil submitted her report outlining recommendations on the ways forward for our children's services to Claire Coutinho, Parliamentary Under Secretary of

State (Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing) on 19 January. At the time of writing, we haven't received a response however this is expected imminently.

Our efforts to recruit good quality permanent staff continue against a national backdrop of recruiting challenges, particularly in social services. In our Children and Young People directorate we've launched several initiatives including a 'recommend a friend scheme' and an invitation to locum staff who've been with us for a while to discuss becoming permanent. The great majority of new employees are on permanent contracts.

Supporting our staff is key to retention and encouraging people to come and work with us, and we have made a commitment to listen to our workforce and improve engagement. Following a staff survey last year, we now have an action plan for 2023/24 with seven key themes to address the feedback received. It includes actions supporting health and wellbeing, developing leadership capability and capacity, workforce engagement, appreciation and recognition, learning and development, support around personal growth, performance potential to support retention, change and transformation around how we work and doing more to narrate the council vision and priorities. We've also established a new employee engagement group - the Employee VOICE Network. With representatives from across all services, the group will act as champions to contribute ideas, to shape new initiatives, policies and processes.

We'll be seeing the first tangible steps in the coming months for our two big cultural projects made possible by £22.4m from the government's Stronger Towns Fund. With the new Hereford Library and Learning Resource Centre due to open in Maylord Orchards in 2024, and the new landmark Museum and Art Gallery due to open in 2025, the existing Hereford Library and Museum will be closing its doors to the public in early spring. While the building transformation work takes place, library and museum services will be relocating – further details will be available nearer the time. Over the next few weeks, visitors to Hereford library will start to notice a few changes as preparations are made for the move.

With the Cost of Living crisis affecting an increasing number of households across the county, we've provided additional support and guidance for residents through our '[Money on your mind](#)' pages on the [Talk Community website](#). It covers important areas such as food, energy, utilities, housing and other essential costs.

Avian Flu has continued to be a major issue across the country. Following recent outbreaks near Ross and near Leominster, as well as the specific protection measures being carried out those area, we've reminded bird keepers in the county of the need to follow the latest government requirements. The whole country is in an Avian Influenza Protection Zone (AIPZ), so all bird keepers are legally obliged to follow the [strict biosecurity rules](#) to prevent bird flu and stop it spreading.

Finally, with local ward and parish elections in our county in May, the Electoral Commission recently launched its [Voter ID public awareness campaign](#). Voters will need to show photo ID when voting at polling stations from May 2023 and for those without passports or driving licences, voters can apply for a new Voter Authority Certificate. Full details of how to apply are available on the [government website](#).