

Chief Executive's report to Full Council 3 March 2023

The Children's Commissioner and Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) are planning to hold a Commission to hear directly from families about their experience of children's services in Herefordshire. The Commission will be an independent review involving a Panel of three very experienced independent children's safeguarding individuals. Information is being shared with families who have asked for a review and the Commission is expected to begin its work in March.

The Herefordshire Big Economic Plan has been officially launched, in partnership with the Herefordshire Sustainable Growth Strategy Board. Its development was led by the Strategy Board, following a wide ranging consultation. The Big Economic Plan is a partnership document, setting a collective vision for the future growth of the county. It aims to address the long-term economic challenges and to make the most of fantastic opportunities such as our excellent quality of life, a thriving Enterprise Zone and specific strengths in areas such as defence, food and drink, tourism and cyber security.

I'm very pleased to report that we're sponsoring this year's Herefordshire & Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce annual Awards, which will celebrate the amazing businesses across the two counties. Sponsoring the awards is one way of letting businesses know how much we value them and the positive contribution they make to our economy. We're delighted to be the main sponsor of the 2023 business awards, which helps to raise awareness of the many local successes businesses demonstrate throughout the year from 'excellence in customer service' and 'employer of the year' through to 'commitment to the community' and 'most promising new business'. These are just some of the categories that businesses can enter and we look forward to sharing, and celebrating the successes of the all the winners and everything they've achieved throughout the year. The Awards Ceremony will take place on Thursday 15 June 2023 in Worcester.

We recently met with Minette Batters, the president of the National Farmers' Union (NFU) during her visit to the county. The visit was important to us, as a largely rural county with a significant agricultural community, and the discussions valuable. Minette talked about how the NFU can support and help grow our farming community in the context of these challenging times. As she said, it's not just about surviving, but building a sustainable industry that thrives, feeding the nation and being fairly rewarded for its efforts.

A report to Cabinet on 2 March acknowledges the progress achieved to date by the Cabinet Commission to progress river restoration, and recommends that additional expenditure of £250k from the £480,000 allocation be authorised so that the Commission can continue its work. This will include the development of an Outline Business Case for submission to Defra and Welsh Government for an innovative Phosphate Trading Scheme and the exploration of other alternative options.

At the time of writing, I can confirm that the council has received a letter from the Home Office regarding the use of the Three Counties Hotel as a site to accommodate a number of people seeking asylum. We'll be meeting with Government Officials and local multi-agency partners in the coming days when we will find out more.

We celebrated National Apprenticeship Week in February, running events to inform staff about recruiting apprentices and using this as a development pathway. Apprenticeships have come a long way in recent years and certainly aren't what many of us think they are, so do take a look at the [National Apprenticeship Week](#) website to find out more.

In a change to election arrangements nationally, the Electoral Commission launched its [Voter ID public awareness campaign](#) informing voters of the need to show photo ID when voting at polling stations from May 2023. Voters who don't already possess suitable photo ID can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate to use at election time. Residents can [read more on the council website](#).