

Title of report: Leaders report to Council

Meeting: Council

Meeting date: Friday 3 March 2023

Report by: 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 9 December, 2022.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **That the report be noted**

Alternative options

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

Key considerations

1. 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. In my report I include a summary of the matters decided by the cabinet and the cabinet members, any decisions taken under the urgency provisions and those subject to call in.
2. 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 calendar days' notice) and one was taken under the urgency provisions (less than five days' notice).

3. 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. I have presented a summary of some of the more noteworthy decisions, I and my cabinet have made since my last report.

Cabinet Commission

4. The Council has continued to lobby government through the Cabinet Commission. The Commission continues to gain strength and momentum as we develop closer working with Powys County Council (PCC), Monmouthshire County Council (MCC), Forest of Dean District Council (FoDDC), Natural England (NE), Environment Agency (EA) and Natural Resource Wales (NRW).
5. Following its inception the chair of the Cabinet Commission and the Chief Executive have been undertaking a wide ranging engagement strategy with key national and local stakeholders in both England and Wales. This work continues. Under shared agreement, our terms of reference have directed focus in the following areas;
 - a. **Governance arrangements** needed to drive the new high level strategy forward, its accountability, structure, remit, membership and terms of reference. An assessment of the Wye catchment area has been undertaken. This assessment identified that current steps and measures are incapable of bringing the Wye Catchment in to compliancy with regulation 6.2 of the Habitats directive whose objective is to protect biodiversity through the conservation of natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora. Further steps and measures must now urgently be taken.
 - b. **Farming Agriculture** work is now proceeding with sector leads from the Farming and Agricultural sector, in particular NFU, CLA and Farm Herefordshire. Through this engagement, the commission has identified further steps and measures . A plan will be prepared with a view to drawing up options to include a legally binding, properly resourced, well executed and targeted plan with agreed milestones and dates for progress to be monitored.

It is the view of the Commission that the impact of the deposition of legacy phosphate is so great that there is no swift route to river recovery. Realistic assessments suggest progress in managing out legacy phosphate will be measured in years and potentially decades. Therefore, work needs to commence immediately and at pace to develop a rapid restoration programme. The Commission has concluded that Farming Rules for Water and the Nutrient Management Guide RB209¹ are insufficient when combined only with voluntary measures, to prevent the further deterioration of the protected sites.

6. The Commission is very mindful that these conclusions will have far reaching and profound consequences for our farming communities, many of whom already take significant steps to protect the environment, in Wales and England. Over the next three months each of the Councils represented on the Commission will work closely together with their farming communities to identify the consequences of these conclusions and to secure consensus on how to move forward. The conclusions reached by the Commission will also need to be discussed carefully with DEFRA, Welsh Government and of course there will also need to be discussions with Natural Resources Wales, Natural England and the Environment Agency.
 7. The Commission will reconvene again in June 2023 to review a draft submission to DEFRA and Welsh Government which it will then recommend to the Cabinet of each of the four
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Commission Councils seeking approval to send a joint submission, of all four Councils, to DEFRA and Welsh Government.

Children's Improvement plan

8. Following consideration by the Improvement Board, Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, the Children's Improvement Plan was finalised, endorsed and shared with Ofsted on 20th December 2022. There is a 'next steps' meeting now scheduled with Ofsted and this will help us to plan and prepare for the first Ofsted monitoring visit which we anticipate will be in March 2023.
9. Driving the improvement activity and supporting the reporting to the Improvement Board is the Transformation Programme which consists of seven Delivery Boards including a focus on:
 - a) Workforce,
 - b) Service and Practice Development,
 - c) Performance and Quality Assurance,
 - d) Commissioning Resources,
 - e) Early Help and Partnerships,
 - f) Corporate Parenting and
 - g) Special Educational Needs and / or Disabilities (SEND).

Members of the Corporate Leadership Team chair the Delivery Boards and are working with identified Service Leads to drive forward the agreed priorities. A number of corporate enablers, including support from the project management office (PMO), provide additional resources to strengthen the improvement infrastructure. The Improvement Board is chaired by Gladys Rhodes White, DfE Improvement Advisor, and a regular newsletter is published following each Board meeting to share the details of what has been discussed.

10. At the time of preparation of this report, the Department for Education (DfE) had not published the report prepared by the Children's Commissioner (Eleanor Brazil), nor had they communicated the Minister's decision following consideration of the report and the recommendations contained within it.

2023/24 Budget

11. As members will know, Council approved the 2023/24 budget on 10 February. This approval unlocks and paves the way to take forward a number of exciting projects within the capital programme. These projects, I believe, bring a tangible contribution to our broader objective to improve the sustainability, connectivity and wellbeing of our county. To highlight just a few examples:

a) City Masterplan:

A key role of the masterplan is to ensure that the transport interventions are informed by and reflect how the city functions now and how it may change over the long term. We are taking a place making /design approach to underpin the thrust of the work - creating urban renewal to create a more vibrant and attractive city to enhance and enable an increase in walking and cycling.

Building on its strong cultural and heritage assets, including the Cathedral and The Courtyard, Hereford will have a vibrant historic core and new high-quality housing and employment space in the city centre, alongside a renewed retail, leisure and culture offer. It will address challenges around congestion and poor connectivity within Hereford and to other places in the county through transport improvements and modal shift.

This is an ambitious vision for the future with big ideas which will help to reduce the dominating effect of motor vehicles of city streets and to encourage more sustainable modes of travel. The Masterplan at its heart will seek to ensure that all the individual parcels of natural space within our urban spaces deliver quality of life and environmental benefits for communities both living and visiting the city.

b) Hereford Museum and Art Gallery

Work is about to get underway on the development of our flagship £18m project to develop Hereford Museum and Art Gallery. The development is a key project in the Hereford Town Investment Plan, will play a critical role in the regeneration of the city centre as part of a new cultural quarter, and create a new significant visitor attraction in the county forecast to attract 75,000 visitors per annum.

The council is currently preparing an application for the final stage of National Heritage Lottery Funding, seeking the £5m required to complete the funding package. It is intended that the council application is submitted in the next available window in March 2023, with outcomes due to be known in June 2023.

Locally, a priority of the council's County Plan 2020-2024 is 'Use council land to create economic opportunities and bring higher paid jobs to the county', and to 'Invest in education and the skills needed by employers'. These projects support the ambitions as detailed within Herefordshire Council's Delivery Plan priorities, specifically community (CO0.1), economy (EC2.1, EC5.1) and environment (EN5.1, EN5.2)

c) The Eastern River Crossing

The Eastern River Crossing and Link Road (ERiC), formerly known as the Eastern Access Road, was identified in the Hereford Transport Strategy Review (HTSR) as essential to provide an alternative route for vehicular traffic to address the resilience issues around the A49 in the city centre. By providing an alternative route for traffic into and around the city, ERiC is vital to bring about the reductions in traffic levels in the city and enable our wider objectives of the Hereford City Masterplan (HCMP).

A strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) is expected to be completed by late spring 2023. The report will consider the scheme's strategic, economic, financial, commercial, and management dimensions in line with DfT guidance to outline a long-list of possible options and a short-list of options recommended for further investigation.

d) Peterchurch Primary School

In October 2022, Cabinet approval was given for the re-building of the school, subject to planning approval, on the playing fields of the existing site. The project will comprise a new 5 class school with hall, nursery and ancillary accommodation.

In addition, a Nurture Hub classroom is to be included with the building designed to Net Zero Carbon. The project budget is £10.583m inclusive of construction costs, professional fees and contingency. The new school will be constructed with the external

works, car park and demolition of the existing building following on once the new building is occupied.

Procurement is underway for the appointment of a multi-disciplinary team and it is anticipated that a Design & Build contractor will be appointed during the summer of 2023 with the new school ready for occupation by September 2025.

e) Brookfield School

In June 2022, Cabinet approval was given to proceed with improvements to the Brookfield School. The project, in conjunction with the Department for Education, comprises of a new build sports hall, stand-alone 2 classroom teaching block and internal modifications to the existing secondary school building to create additional girls toilets, two classrooms and an external fire escape.

The project budget is £5m, including construction costs, professional fees and contingency and is funded between the DFE and Herefordshire Council. Planning permission has been granted with the construction works tender to be issued in spring 2023.

It is anticipated that works will commence on site in September 2023 with completion by January 2025.

Statutory Accounts.

12. I am very pleased to report that the council's 2021/22 statutory accounts received a clean, unqualified opinion from our external auditors at the start of February. In a year of continuing delays across the audit sector, with many local authority 2019/20 and 2020/21 audits still outstanding, as well as increased audit challenge, this represents a significant achievement for the council and provides external assurance of the council's financial position, performance and resilience. I would like to thank the officers involved in achieving this result.

Q3 Budget and Performance.

13. The Quarter 3 Budget and Performance Report was published with the papers for Cabinet held on 23 February. The most significant element is the £1.9 million increase in forecast overspend for Children's and Family Services and Young People's Attainment, which comprises additional costs for Residential Placements of £1.2 million and Agency Fostering of £0.5 million, £0.2 million to support the ongoing care needs of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) and £0.2 million in Supported Accommodation costs offset by smaller variations across the Directorate.

This movement in the forecast overspend reflects increased demand for services as well as focused work by the Directorate to ensure that records of children's placements are complete and accurate and that the financial consequences are accounted for.

2050 Big Economic Plan

14. Our Big Economic Plan was presented to cabinet colleagues on Thursday 26th January. The Plan identifies a 2050 vision for Herefordshire, and the draft first 5 year delivery plan which will take the first steps to taking the county there.
15. This plan has been built up over many months. At its foundations are the local views, knowledge and aspirations of a wide range of local partners, led by the Herefordshire

Sustainable Growth Strategy Board. Importantly, while a central and underpinning member, Herefordshire Council is just one of the many partners who are invested in this plan. We are bound together in seeking to address the county's economic challenges, unlocking its potential and creating new opportunities for those who live here now as well as those who aspire to live here in the future.

16. I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those that have taken the time to contribute to the Plan's development, the many hours they have committed and the many voices that have been listened to as we now move to implementation. I hope you will agree, regardless of our differing political views, that this is a plan that is right for the county, right for the people and businesses in Herefordshire and the right long term vision for this county.

Housing, Regulatory Services and Community

17. Trading Standards, supported by our legal services team, have had a successful start to the year. So often their work goes un-noticed so I believe it is right to recognise the important work that they do by highlighting just some of their recent successes:
 - i. Following a rogue trader prosecution of a Bournemouth roofing company who deceived two elderly residents into having unnecessary roofing work done. The company director received a 12 month suspended prison sentence with 200 hours unpaid work and also had to pay over £3000 in direct compensation. The salesman was also required to give 140 hours unpaid work and ordered to pay £3000 in compensation and costs.
 - ii. Community Protection have had two successful fly tipping prosecutions for offences in Hereford. The first case concerned ten large bags of waste tipped from the old railway bridge off Hunderton Lane. This offender was given a 12 month community order, ordered to carry out 150 hours of unpaid work and pay fines and costs of over £1000.
 - iii. A person was fined over £2000 for fly tipping six black bin bags of waste in Tidnor Lane which was found by one of our Balfour Beatty operatives.
 - iv. Our Animal Health Officers who, along with colleagues from Trading Standards and Environmental Health, responded to our second avian flu outbreak of the season concerning an area just north of Leominster. The officers worked closely with Defra and had to visit over 3000 properties within the vicinity.
 - v. Our Trading Standards team who undertake enforcement for non-attendance at our local schools, have, so far this year, prosecuted four parents for unauthorised absence in term time. This largely unseen work is so important to ensuring that our children are not harmed or disadvantaged in their education as a result of not being able to attend school.

Homelessness Strategy

18. The council's statutory Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a multi-agency approach to ensure that homelessness prevention, intervention and recovery is at the very centre of all work practice.
19. Under Project Brave (Building Resilience Against Enduring Vulnerabilities) the overall aims to greatly improving outcomes for vulnerable individuals. It seeks to provide new homes and sustainable support models for homeless people and empowering people with multiple complex vulnerability to direct their own lives. It also seeks to reduce demands on health, housing, social care and police systems by making high risk homelessness largely a thing of the past.

20. It is evident that Project Brave has had significant impact on the lives of vulnerable homeless people in particular, both in positive outcomes for individuals and in the overall numbers of those assisted. Since March 2020, 252 households have been accommodated, 157 households have moved into transitional or long term housing, and 62 units of new accommodation have been created or brought into use for homeless people. The Rough Sleeper Outreach Team is continuing to support 82 people at risk of rough sleeping and around 16 actual rough sleepers.
21. Central to Project Brave is finding long term homes for homeless people and providing the support they need. This requires a pipeline of self-contained homes to be developed, along with additional transitional accommodation. Accommodation has been acquired using council capital and grants, existing council properties have been converted and housing has been secured from local Registered Providers, Private Landlords and voluntary organisations.
22. To date 45 units have been secured for transitional accommodation with the creation of a homeless hub, with 29 units being used as long term accommodation. A further 28 units of accommodation are in the pipeline to supplement the existing transitional accommodation.

Levelling Up Funding grant

23. In January, Cabinet accepted and approved the expenditure of the Levelling Up Funding allocated to the Hereford transport bids submitted to government in August 2022. The number of bids that a local authority could submit was based on the number of MPs in their area. Local authorities could submit one bid of up to £20m for every MP whose constituency lies wholly within their boundary, plus one further transport focused bid. A requirement of the funding is that 'shovel ready' projects can commence in 2022/23.
24. The council were successful in its bid for £19.9m of funding to help deliver a package of transport and active travel measures.
25. The most notable element of the bid is the development of a new integrated Transport Hub, which will link cycling, walking, bus and rail transport in the City. The £10m Hub, in which the Council has already agreed to invest £3m, will encourage a shift away from reliance on cars, providing an easy-to-use, reliable link to alternative modes of transport. As well as covered cycle facilities and lockers to encourage commuter cycle parking, the Hub will provide new bus stands and layovers, taxi and car parking areas, including commuter and short term parking, and welfare facilities.
26. The package also includes Active Travel Measures both North and South of the River Wye. Areas North of the River will benefit from a cycle scheme from Aylestone Hill along the A465 and Commercial Road, linking the north and east of the county to the Transport Hub, the city centre, and routes south of the river. Enhancements to St Owen Street one-way cycle scheme will improve access to the Town Centre and links to Rotherwas, Blueschool Street and Newmarket Street will see new bus priority measures; and there will be improvements to the Great Western Way off-road walking & cycling path.
27. Meanwhile, work will be carried out South of the River to introduce or improve a number of informal 'Quiet Routes' to the Hereford Enterprise Zone to encourage more of the people who work there and who live in neighbouring housing to walk or cycle to work. To complement this work, there will be a series of improvements along the Holme Lacy Cycleway to encourage more and safer active travel to work and local services.
28. There will also be Safer Routes to School initiatives, and new 20mph speed limits in appropriate areas across the City, to increase safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
29. Regrettably the bids for the North and South Herefordshire constituencies were unsuccessful. However it should be noted that no County was successful with more than one element of their bids and, in proportion to population size, Herefordshire did very well with their one bid.

30. As far as the Ross Enterprise Zone is concerned work is continuing to see how this project, which is so important to the County economy, can be delivered.

The Cost of Living Crisis

31. The council declared a cost of living emergency in December 2022 which recognised the financial strain on households and businesses due to inflation and fuel costs and particularly the disproportionate effect of the crisis on the county's poorest residents. The council has been working proactively with partners to offer support to residents including:
- vi. Alongside the established 69 Talk Community hubs, a group of 34 warm spaces has been established where Herefordshire residents can go to get warm and enjoy some company. Where appropriate, residents are helped to access food, financial and wellbeing advice and support through the Talk Community directory
 - vii. The Money on Your Mind web resource offers local, online money advice with the number of people visiting the page increasing by nearly 70% from the same period last year.
 - viii. Community money management and debt advice centres have been established in the city and the market towns, augmented by Citizens Advice outreach.
 - ix. The Household Support Fund has enabled the council to provide food vouchers for children entitled to free school meals through the school holidays as well as supporting third party organisations to offer help to residents with food, energy costs, essential household items and essentials linked to energy.
 - x. Additional support through the Household Support Fund has provided support for care-leavers with energy and heating costs, 'families in need' food vouchers have been allocated through schools to those families that don't qualify for free school meals but who are struggling and an open application process for emergency food and heating vouchers has been established via Paypoint
 - xi. A cost of living summit was held with partners in early January and on the back of that, there was agreement to run a series of roadshows across Herefordshire during March taking advice to residents concerned about the rising cost of living. Free professional advice on dealing with rising fuel costs, money saving, benefits and debt management will be offered alongside a free school uniform table, book bank and toiletries bank.
32. A further cost of living summit is planned for March.

In Conclusion

33. This is my last report to Council for the period of this administration. I would like to place on record my thanks to all the members of cabinet who have worked long hours within their portfolios, and for the cabinet generally, to deliver the best that they could for the County. The last four years have not been without their challenges including flooding, the Covid crisis, the YY judgement and the subsequent realisation of the extent of the improvements necessary Children's Services, and the increasing pressure on finances, but as you can see from the report above we finish this administration with many exciting projects which are in progress. My thanks too for the support from Councillors within the administration. I would also like to thank officers for their support and in particular the work of the current Chief Executive and his Senior Leadership Team
34. I would also place on file my thanks to all Councillors for their work over the past four years. Most debates have been carried out in a manner which is respectful of the views of all Councillors, something which cannot be said for all Councils, but which is good for democracy.

Community impact

35. 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

36. 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

37. 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.

38. 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

39. 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

40. 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.
41. 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

42. 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:** List of executive decisions taken since 10 December to 23 February
- **Appendix B:** Herefordshire Council: Respecting our past, shaping our future. Delivery Plan for 2022/23

Background papers

None Identified