

## Chief Executive's announcement – May 2023

Firstly, I would like to offer a warm welcome to our new and returning councillors. The initial few weeks following local elections are always an extremely busy time for members and officers alike, as everyone familiarises themselves with new faces and processes. I look forward to working with all elected members over the next four years for the benefit of our residents.

As the Returning Officer, I was very impressed with the support and commitment of everyone involved at each stage of the election process. I must acknowledge the hard work from our elections team and thank them and other staff who took time away from their day jobs to get involved.

It was my pleasure to join the recent service at Hereford Cathedral to celebrate the King's coronation. It was a wonderful event and enjoyed by hundreds of people who came together to mark this historic occasion.

In April, Herefordshire Council marked its 25 year anniversary since became a unitary authority on 1 April 1998, following the split of Hereford and Worcester County Council (which had been in place since 1974) back into two separate counties. 114 members of staff have worked at the council for 25 years or more. I would like to make special mention of Geof Tarring who left the council in May after 65 years' service. Geof had worked in the parks department since 1957. We wish him well for whatever he has planned next.

We're continuing on our children's services improvement journey to ensure that we provide children and their families with the best possible support services. This week we've started the construction of three family-friendly meeting rooms to provide a more suitable environment for meetings with families and other support services.

We've learned that we must be better at listening to families and appointed a Families Commission to speak with those who've had a negative experience of our children's services to help to resolve any outstanding issues. The feedback from this panel of independent people will be published in early June and their insight will help us to work more closely with our families in the future.

Ofsted carried out a routine monitoring visit in March and are expected to publish their feedback in mid-June. Following this the Children's Commissioner will submit her three month review on children's services to the Secretary of State. We know that we must be open to constructive criticism of our services and this feedback will help us to continue to improve.

I'm delighted that the council is now a Fostering Friendly employer. The scheme is designed by The Fostering Network, the UK's leading fostering charity. Foster carers play a vital role in giving the children in their care the safe, stable home, they deserve. Council staff are now offered support to become a foster carer and receive up to five additional days of paid leave per year to attending foster carer training or settling a child into their new home for instance.

At the beginning of this year we launched a competition with schools to design some artwork to be displayed in council buildings. The theme we set was 'My Herefordshire – what does it mean to you?' We had 272 entries, from which we've picked nine winners, three from each age group. The winners haven't yet been told the news, so I won't share further details here. The artwork gives us great insight into what Herefordshire children like best about the county. You'll see some of this wonderful work around our buildings over the coming months.

In March we launched the Big Economic Plan, an ambitious partnership document for the future growth of Herefordshire, up to 2050. The Herefordshire Sustainable Growth Strategy Board (HSGSB) oversaw its development and drafted the first five year delivery plan. HSGSB has now invited others to join a new

Economy and Place Board to progress this work. Our shared vision is for improved infrastructure, a robust economy and greater opportunities in education, training and skills development across the county.

Back in November the council was accredited as a White Ribbon employer, part of a UK-wide campaign to change attitudes, systems and behaviours around masculinity and prevent violence against women and girls. I really want all residents to feel safe at all times in our county. We can only change attitudes by promoting a message of respect and tolerance and leading by example. In the same way as we're supporting this within the council, we're now also asking other employers and organisations to commit to support the aims of the campaign and lead by example across the county.

Thank you for your support