

Chief Executive's report to Full Council 9 February 2024

Once again our communities have been recovering from widespread flooding following heavy rainfall and high river levels in the county during early January. I'd like to acknowledge the efforts of council staff, many of who worked long hours during the response and recovery to keep residents safe and roads clear. I would also like to thank our partners who worked alongside us during this time and helped to keep the county moving. The council website was once again a trusted source of information with more than 44,000 visits to our flooding webpages over the period.

To help us to better understand which areas are affected by flooding across the county, and to help us to minimise flooding problems there in the future, we're requesting that people let us know if their property was internally flooded by [completing a form on the council website](#).

The six monthly review report from the children's commissioner Eleanor Brazil was published in December 2023, following approval from the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, David Johnston OBE. While we're pleased the report on improvements in our children's services recommended for the service to remain under council control, we accept that the pace of change needs to quicken. There's still much work to do to deliver the service that we all want to see. You can read the Children's Commissioner's report in full on the [Government's website](#). We're expecting Ofsted to carry out their fourth Monitoring Visit for our children's services in February with the focus on support for care leavers. Our staff are working hard to prepare for the inspectors' arrival.

On 7 March we will welcome the Department for Education Permanent Secretary, Susan Acland-Hood. During her visit she will be looking at the progress we've made with children's services and discuss how the DfE can support us with our improvement journey.

The improvement of children's services remains the top priority for the council. We are determined to continue working with Ofsted and partners to ensure progress is continued to be made. Recognising the rapid pace in which these improvement need to be implemented I am keen that members are fully briefed and have opportunities to ask questions as we take the necessary decisions to move us from an inadequate position to an authority delivering excellent children's service and corporate parenting. We have arranged some quarterly briefing and update sessions for all members. The dates for members diaries are:

- 28 March 2024, 1pm to 2pm
- 16 July 2024, 3pm to 5pm
- 5 November 2024, 3pm to 5pm
- 25 March 2025, 3pm to 5pm
- 24 June 2025, 3pm to 5pm

We started our 25 year celebrations in March 2023, with staff who had been with the authority for 25 years and over, receiving a certificate as an of acknowledgement their dedication and long-service. Since then we have held a special all staff briefing that celebrated key milestones and we heard from staff who shared stories of their time with the organisation. We have created an archive of staff photos, and launched moments that matter with our internal appreciation and recognition scheme, which includes celebrating length of service milestones. December brought a close our celebrations when our councillors were joined by their family members at a special 25

year anniversary reception hosted by the Chairman, Councillor Roger Phillips. Councillors Roger Phillips, Polly Andrews, Bob Matthews and Terry James were recognised for their long-and dedicated service over this time.

I would like to pass on my congratulations to Lady Darnley who was admitted as honorary Freewoman of the County of Herefordshire. This lifetime title is the greatest honour Herefordshire Council has in its power to bestow on any individual resident. Many councillors and residents will have had the pleasure of meeting Lady Darnley, including through her work as the Lord-Lieutenant, Her Majesty's representative in Herefordshire.

Congratulations also go to our Building Control team who won an award at the LABC Building Excellence Awards on 19 January. More than 900 leading construction industry figures attended the ceremony at the Grosvenor House in London, to celebrate best practice, quality, and exemplary standards in construction. Our Building Control team scooped the [Best Purpose-Built Accommodation award](#) for the Eign Gate project, working with Lola Property Investment to convert the historic building into student accommodation comprising 71 individual en-suite units.

We ended 2023 having secured a grant of up to £1.76million from the local nutrient mitigation fund. This is excellent news for house builders, affordable housing and the rural economy. The ecological health of our rivers and countryside is an essential part of maintaining and growing a sustainable, prosperous rural economy that enhances the quality of life and wellbeing of Herefordshire's residents. This funding is recognition of the council's excellent work to date in leading the way in finding solutions towards restoring river health. It will allow the council to accelerate work towards river betterment, but we still need others to play their part.

It was a positive start to the new year, with agreement from Stronger Hereford to support the council's proposal to relocate Hereford Library to Shirehall. This decision gives the go-ahead for £3million from the Stronger Towns Fund to be invested in creating a vibrant and modern library and learning centre in one of our city's most historic buildings. We look forward to work starting in the near future.

In mid-January we were informed by the Home Office that they will cease using the Three Counties Hotel as contingency asylum accommodation before the end of March 2024. We had already been informed that their arrangement with the Talbot Hotel in Leominster would cease by the end of February. The Home Office is currently arranging to move residents. The council will continue to work closely with Serco, local partners and the community and voluntary sector to ensure appropriate help and wellbeing support is in place over this period. A big thank you to all the community and voluntary sector groups which have supported the asylum seekers during their stay in the county. There were so many of them, including all of the community effort in Leominster co-ordinated by the Leominster Priory to support families at the Talbot. For the Three Counties, support was provided through Herefordshire City of Sanctuary, the Kindle Centre, Hvoss, South Wye Boxing Gym, St Martin's Church, Herefordshire Football Association and HALO as well as the Diocese of Hereford. The generosity of these organisations was reflective of the local communities who have supported the residents of the two hotels during their time in Herefordshire, together with local schools and health services. We have received positive feedback that asylum seekers felt safe and welcomed during their stay in Herefordshire. It's regrettable that these families and individuals will experience further disruption as they move on, especially for the children who had settled in at our schools.

Our County Plan consultation closed on 8 February. The County Plan is the key strategic document for the council that outlines our ambitions and objectives over the next four years and highlights how those ambitions will be delivered. Thank you to the groups and individuals who have taken the time to take part in the consultation and provide us with their views. We will review

all of the responses and these will help us to shape and refine the County and Delivery Plan. There will then be a further opportunity for people to feedback on the draft Plan in March, and we will be announcing the dates for this shortly.

Our partners, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) recently launched a [public consultation](#) on their [Resource Review proposals](#) and welcome your views. The consultation closes on 4 March 2024, and results and recommendations will be reported to the Fire Authority in June.

Finally, it's really important that we protect the vulnerable people in our communities, so I'd like to draw your attention to a telephone scam targeting users of telecare services, where callers are pretending to be from the council. Telecare offers remote care for older people and those who are less mobile. The system links equipment at home with a 24/7 monitoring service. We've written to all our customers to let them know about the digital switchover, that's taking place gradually all over the UK. The scammers are taking advantage of the digital switchover to tell telecare users that they need to pay to keep their service running. We would never cold-call customers and ask for their bank details, nor would any other legitimate telecare provider. If you know any telecare users, please make them aware of the scam and remind them not to share their bank details over the phone.