

Chief Executive's report to Full Council 8 March 2024

The fourth Ofsted monitoring visit of our children's services took place in February. The visit focused on children in care and care leavers. We greatly appreciated the input from a number of young people who shared their experiences with the inspection team. Informal feedback is that we've strengthened our quality assurance activity and that again there were signs of improvement and stronger practice for some children and families, but not yet for all. We await Ofsted's official feedback in a few weeks and we'll use this to continue to make improvements towards where we need to be - a service where all children, young people and families receive a good or outstanding service.

I'm sorry to report that Gladys Rhodes White has decided not to continue as our Department for Education improvement advisor when her contract ends on 31 March. This is for personal reasons. I want to thank Gladys for the invaluable help, support and direction she has provided to us since May 2021. She has been a great source of sound advice and guidance, and we're extremely grateful for all of her input. Her experience and support was particularly helpful in the aftermath of the High Court Judgement in 2021 and the transition to a new Director as well as in chairing our Improvement Board throughout. The Department for Education is working to appoint a new improvement advisor.

It continues to be a tough time financially for families and the school holidays add extra pressure. I'm delighted that this Easter our Talk Community Team will once again be offering free activities to approximately 4,600 Herefordshire children through the DfE funded Here for Herefordshire Holidays Programme. Parents of children from reception age to year 11, who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals can book up to 16 hours of free activities for their child between 23 March and 5 April. Every child that attends the scheme will receive a free healthy meal. Information about the Here for Herefordshire Holidays Programme is available on the [Talk Community Directory](#).

I'm delighted that we've been successful in securing a grant of £1.76 million from the government's local nutrient mitigation fund. This funding is in 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 purchase and commission further wetland sites, which will act as a natural solution to keeping additional phosphates out of water courses from new development. In turn, this will provide mitigation for new development through the council's innovative credit trading scheme for developers, releasing additional credits for more than a thousand new homes. This is excellent news for house builders, affordable housing and the rural economy. The council will also continue to set aside a fifth of the offset achieved for improving river quality.

If you've been in Hereford recently you will not have failed to notice the wonderful new artworks being painted on the side of prominent buildings. The artworks are part of a public art programme, and a creative and vibrant element of the council's investment in the streetscape, landscaping and public spaces in the city. The project has been years in the making, bringing together local people, students, businesses and stakeholders. When completed, there will be eight artworks on buildings, underpasses and passageways and eight small sculptures created to celebrate the 170th Anniversary of Hereford College of Arts, alongside a new Hereford public art trail which is set to launch in April.