

## **Chief Executive's report to full Council 24 May 2024**

As the Council's number one priority we're progressing on our children's services improvement journey to ensure that we provide children and their families with the best possible services. We're grateful for the continued advice and guidance of children's commissioner Eleanor Brazil, and Deborah Mcmillan who is our newly appointed Department for Education (DfE) improvement advisor, as well as Kevin Crompton, Independent Scrutineer. All-member briefings have been held for the past two months to give greater awareness and understanding of key issues, and these have been well received and will continue in June and July.

After two and a half years as corporate director for children and young people services, Darryl Freeman left the council in March. Darryl joined us at a time when children's services were found to be needing improvement, and diligently provided day-to-day leadership while steering significant service transformation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Darryl for his efforts and professionalism during what was an extremely challenging time.

Following Darryl's departure, I'm pleased to confirm that we've appointed Tina Russell as corporate director for children and young people. Tina brings a wealth of experience as a director of children's services and a strong track record of leading improvement. Tina will join the council on 1 July 2024 until the end of March 2025. In the meantime Interim management arrangements have been put in place.

In March, Ofsted published the findings from their fourth monitoring visit, which focused on young people in care aged 16 and 17 and care leavers aged 18 to 25. It was encouraging that the report recognised developments in the service, however it reinforced that there is still much to do. It's clear we must work at increased pace to improve the quality of services and improve outcomes for our children and young people.

Earlier this month the DfE announced that our bid for a new special school for children and young people with SEND was successful. This support means that a new school will be built that is expected to cater for up to 80 pupils, aged 2-16 years with complex autism and severe learning difficulties. We're obviously delighted by this positive news and recognise the significant impact the new school will have on pupils and their families. Further information about the plans for the new school will be announced in the future.

Following a thorough procurement process, in March we announced the award of the Recyclables and Waste Collection Contract to FCC Environment. The new contract which starts in September, will provide continuity of service for residents, while including a number of innovations. This includes two fully electric collection vehicles in the fleet primarily to serve Hereford City Centre, which is a step towards the Council and FCC's Net Zero goals.

In April, Cabinet took the decision to bring the council's Public Realm Services contract with Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) to an end in 2026. This is because the current contract does not allow the council to deliver its longer term requirements and aspirations. A new contract will commence on 1 June 2026, which gives a two year period for a redesign, procurement and planned mobilisation of the new service. This work is now underway. We will continue to work closely with BBLP to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements.

Our Marches Forward partnership arrangement with neighbouring councils in Shropshire, Monmouthshire and Powys continues to strengthen. We recently held a successful stakeholder event that brought together partner organisations from across the region to discuss key priorities that affect us all - Nature, energy and climate; Housing, health and skills; Transport and digital connectivity; Food, development and visitor economy – and how we can broaden collaboration. The all-members session was well attended and received positive feedback. We will now be working to bring together the data and information we each hold, and we will be sharing our Marches Manifesto with the English and Welsh governments.

As a rural county, our transport infrastructure is vital to support the connectivity needs of local people, communities and businesses. In June we're hosting a Transport Summit in collaboration with Midlands Connect, which will bring together MPs and Cabinet members to hear about our vision for transport in Herefordshire and discuss opportunities for development. The summit will also hear from local business leaders about why connectivity is key for businesses in the county and regionally.

We confirmed a new agreement with Hereford Football Club in April that will see the club remain at the Edgar Street ground until 2070. The long term lease provides welcome security as the club seeks to continue its development on and off the field. The council is working closely with Hereford FC to explore options for the Blackfriars End of the stadium. Feasibility work is now underway around a new stand and accommodation.

The council is also working with partners to develop options for student accommodation to be built on the College Road campus in Hereford. The county has a strong and growing offering for people looking to further their education and develop their skills. It's important to the county's economy as a whole to encourage young people to study, live and develop their careers here. New accommodation will enhance the ability to attract students to our county.

Work has started in Leominster to improve streets and pavements in the historic town centre to enhance the town for visitors and retailers. The improvements will see improved paving, wider pavements, resurfaced roads and raised tables at the major junctions to make them safer and more accessible for pedestrians. The improvements are part of the Leominster High Street Heritage Action Zone funded work – a multi-million pound regeneration supported by Historic England, delivered through Herefordshire Council and Leominster Town Council. This major investment has already transformed buildings with improvements to structure and facades to reflect the original detail restoring local historic character and heritage features. This final stage of the improvement work is being funded by Herefordshire Council.

Twelve local charities and community groups have received funding from the new Herefordshire Together Fund to support initiatives which reach families in need, improve emotional wellbeing and community cohesion. The £136,000 fund has made possible by our Public Health service and is part of our community paradigm shift where the focus is on funding community-led prevention projects. The Herefordshire Together grants range from £1,000 to £20,000, and are distributed by Herefordshire Community Foundation and supported by Healthwatch Herefordshire.

We were delighted to receive a £750,000 boost from Arts Council England recently towards the major refurbishment and extension of Hereford's museum and art gallery. Once complete, the

redeveloped museum and art gallery in Broad St, Hereford will significantly enhance the county's cultural offer, support community engagement and attract new visitors to the area.

Our library services were also pleased to receive £57,087 from the government's Libraries Improvement Fund to enhance resident access to the internet. Thanks to this plus additional funding contributions from the Friends of Leominster Library, Ross Library Development Group and Ledbury Library Development Group, 50 tablets are being introduced in Hereford, Leominster, Ross, Ledbury, Colwall and Kington libraries from later this year.

Our new public art trail in Hereford is already proving to be extremely popular with residents and visitors to the city. The two mile walking tour takes in eight eye-catching wall murals and eight contemporary sculptures as well as the established city art works. The new sculptures and wall mural elements have been made possible through the Hereford City Centre Improvement Project, funded jointly by the council and Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. The wall murals were commissioned by Studio Response and produced by leading street artists working nationally and internationally. The sculptures have been created by talented artists from Hereford College of Arts (HCA) and established artists linked to Hereford. There is such a wealth of creative talent in our county and it is great that we can showcase it and celebrate it in this way.

Thank you for your support.

Paul Walker  
Chief Executive  
Herefordshire Council