

Chief Executive's report to Full Council 26 July 2024

Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to Councillor Bob Matthews following his sad death in June. Bob was a dedicated public servant who worked tirelessly for his local community. He was a proud representative of the council, and never more so than when his 25 years of public service was recognised. I enjoyed many discussions with him as a group leader. He had a strong sense of what was needed and was never shy of sharing his views and experiences with me. His loss will be felt very widely.

Local arrangements for the general election were exceptionally well-managed thanks to the efforts of our experienced elections team, and dozens of supporting staff and residents. Thank you to everyone involved at every stage. My warm congratulations to Ellie Chowns and Jesse Norman on their election success. I look forward to working with them. I would also like to extend my thanks to Bill Wiggin for his service to the county for more than 20 years.

We were pleased to present a wide-range of council services to parish councillors at the Parish Council Summit earlier this month. It was a great way to bring people together to discuss topics affecting local communities and to build relationships. Feedback is that the event was well-received by all who attended and we look forward to the next event, which is planned for the autumn.

Two members of the corporate leadership team left the council in June. Andrew Lovegrove, Director of Resources and Assurance retired from his position. Andrew's strong stewardship of the council's finances over the past seven years has meant we've been one of very few councils to submit accounts by the required deadlines and we've been able to set balanced budgets during tough financial times. We will not be directly replacing Andrew, but will be looking to appoint a Director of Finance who will be the council's S151 Officer. This position will be filled on an interim basis until a permanent appointment is made.

Matt Pearce, Director of Public Health (DPH) left the council to take up a new role as DPH at Reading and West Berkshire. We will soon be starting the appointment process for a new Director of Public Health for the county. In the interim I'm pleased to confirm that we have appointed Dr Catherine Carmichael who will be with us for the next six months. Cate is an experienced public health consultant having worked across local authorities and Integrated Care Services (ICSs).

I'm delighted that our innovative Luston Wetlands project has received further national recognition, winning two awards - the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Award for environmental services, and the Royal Town Planning Institute West Midlands Awards for planning excellence. It was also highly commended in the Municipal Journal Achievement Awards for leadership in responding to the climate emergency. The project is a world-first in tackling river pollution at its root sources while supporting the delivery of much needed housing development in the county. Congratulations to the built and natural environment team, it's great to see all the hard work being rewarded. Receiving national recognition is a boost for not only the staff involved but for colleagues and the council as a whole. We hope more awards will follow.

We also won two awards as a partner in the River Severn Partnership – an LGC Award for public/public partnership, and Municipal Journal (MJ) award for innovation of partnerships. The awards both recognised the successful partnership work taking place in the Severn catchment to reduce flood risk, secure future water resources and improve shared natural assets.

Good progress continues to be made with improvements to our children's services. Tina Russell joined us as corporate director for children and young people at the start of July and will be with

us until March 2025. Tina brings a wealth of experience as a director of children's services and a strong track record of leading improvement.

In response to ongoing concerns from families, Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) established an independent Commission to provide parents and families with an opportunity to have their concerns heard and responded to, and to ensure that their experiences are used to inform improvements. An update report is being presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee at the end of July. The report will outline the actions that have been taken towards addressing the issues highlighted through the commission process, while recognising that further work is needed to fully address and embed the changes needed. This ongoing work will be included in the children's services phase 2 improvement plan which will be presented to September's Cabinet meeting. The phase 2 improvement plan will also include details of a new Partnership Executive Group (PEG) - a forum made up of myself, the chief executive of the Integrated Care Service (ICS) and the assistant chief constable West Mercia, to unblock partnership issues that are escalated for resolution.

Our role as corporate parents to children in our care is one of the most important we have. Every member of staff and elected member has a responsibility to ensure that every child in care has the best start in life, and to act for them as we would for our own child. To help promote this across the council, all services have been asked to identify opportunities for work shadowing and apprenticeships for care leavers and we have introduced a corporate parenting ambassador scheme. I would encourage all elected members to consider becoming a corporate parenting ambassador and share their experience with a young person. Your support really would make a difference.

More than 50 foster carers joined us for our first Foster Carer Conference during national foster care fortnight. The day provided foster carers with an opportunity to network and learn from each other, and for us to listen to their experiences of being a foster carer. It was also a chance for us to thank them for all that they do to care for children and young people in the county. Our fostering team are always looking for new foster carers for this rewarding and vital role.

In May the Department for Education announced that our bid for a new special school for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Herefordshire was successful. This support means that a new school will be built for pupils 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 the pupils and their families. Further information about the plans for the new school, including details on the proposed location, will be announced in the future.

It is an exciting time for our museum service with plans for the refurbished museum and art gallery in Hereford progressing well. Alongside this, our museum service is looking at a number of ways to make all of its facilities and exhibits more engaging for all visitors. Our museum service is one of eleven across the country working with the Sensational Museum project, which uses multi-sensory ways to engage with visitors. We'll be helping to test and develop multi-sensory museum experiences, with a view to making the exhibits across our museum service more accessible.

Hundreds of new student accommodation places are set to be developed in Hereford, with proposals now being developed for sites at the Edgar Street football ground, which would include the building of a new stand, and at the College Road campus. We will be working with regeneration and development specialist Cityheart who delivered the Station Approach student accommodation. It's important to the county's economy as a whole to encourage young people to study, live and develop their careers here, and high quality student living facilities will support this.

Following the announcement of a change of leadership within West Mercia Police, we will be inviting the newly appointed Temporary Chief Constable, Richard Cooper, to meet with us when he takes up the position at the end of August. We look forward to working with him to address issues in Herefordshire.

As this is the last Full Council before the autumn, I wish you all a restful and relaxing time over the summer break.

Paul Walker, Chief Executive