


Appendix 1: Report of the Leader of the Council – 1 March to 18 July

Leader's Report	 Herefordshire Council
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I wish to open my report by remembering Bob Matthews who sadly passed away in June. Bob was one of our most popular, well known and longest serving councillors having been with Herefordshire Council since its formation in April 1998. I know we all feel a genuine sense of loss, with that loss made all the more poignant as we meet as a council for the first time since his passing.

Bob spoke passionately on a wide range of subject matter in his time as a councillor and through the years welcomed in many positive changes introduced by this council. Whether you agreed with Bob's political views, or not, we can all agree he worked tirelessly for the good of this county, his constituents and for this council. His strong advocacy of local democracy leaves a lasting legacy. Many of us here today stood to be councillors because of Bob's persuasive belief that the development of this county is through representation for and on behalf of our local communities. This council is the richer for it as result.

We will all miss Bob greatly and remember him fondly as a friend, colleague and a true local champion for Herefordshire

*In May Council agreed and adopted the new Council Plan (2024 to 2028). This sets out our strategic vision for the next four years. **Delivering the best for Herefordshire in everything we do.** We build of course on a strong foundation. Herefordshire is already a wonderful county and a great place to live. Better life expectancy, a thriving business base, entrepreneurialism and a growing educational sector are all factors underpinning the positive change we aspire to achieve for the county. In addition to the valued views and contribution offered by scrutiny, I am grateful to the nearly 1000 people who provided their views through the public consultation in helping us to develop this plan.*

In June, Cabinet set out and agreed our immediate priorities to begin the work of turning that vision into delivery. Our 2024/25 Delivery Plan sets out how the council's priorities and objectives will be achieved in the next 12 months. The Delivery Plan will be reviewed annually and progress will be reported on a regular basis. You will also be able to see week to week progress through the decisions we take as Cabinet and Cabinet Members – with clear commentaries setting out how each decision is contributing to strategic goals.

I have promised that I will update council on housing delivery at each meeting. To this end, we have recently gone out to tender to commission consultants to provide a report on affordable housing delivery, best practice and delivery models. This is designed to support the ongoing discussions around intervention options available to the council to address the County's affordable housing need. The tender closed on the 10th July and following evaluation the successful party, Three Dragons, who have previously worked with the council will shortly be appointed to undertake the work. Their final report is due at the end of September 2024.

My congratulations to Ellie, our new MP for North Herefordshire. We also congratulate Jesse Norman who retains his seat in South Herefordshire. We look forward to working with them both in the coming years ahead to achieve the best for Herefordshire

Herefordshire Council Plan – 2024 to 2028

Through the development of the Herefordshire Council Plan, four corporate priorities have been identified. These are:

- I. **People** – We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities who support each other. We want all children to have the best start in life.
- II. **Place** – We will protect and enhance our environment and ensure that Herefordshire is a great place to live. We will support the right housing in the right place, we will support access to green spaces and we will do everything we can to recover the health of our rivers.
- III. **Growth** – We will create the conditions to deliver sustainable growth across the county; attracting inward investment, building business confidence, creating jobs, enabling housing development along with providing the right infrastructure, and
- IV. **Transformation** – We will be an efficient council that embraces best practice, delivers innovation through technology and demonstrates value for money.

The Herefordshire Council Plan, alongside the Medium Term Financial Strategy, provides the overarching policy framework within which decisions will be taken and resources allocated by Herefordshire Council over the next 4 years.

Delivery Plan 2024 to 2025 – turning the strategic vision in to delivery

Central to the realisation of this plan is the Delivery Plan 2024-25, which sets out the deliverables, milestones and progress against our priorities of People, Place, Growth and Transformation. As members of this council you will be able to mark our progress through quarterly reporting into Cabinet and routine financial monitoring against the approved revenue budget and capital programme. Alongside this we are developing annual service plans within each of the directorates which will be reporting progress monthly to the corporate leadership team.

In my report below, I have outlined where the cabinet and cabinet members decisions begin the delivery of those stated objectives.

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Theme 1 - People: We will enable residents to realise their potential, to be healthy and to be part of great communities that support each other.
We want all children to have the best start in life.

1: Children's Services – Improvement Update

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Support all children to have the best start in life

This year we will: Develop a revised Children's Improvement Plan

Tina Russell has now formally started in her new role as Corporate Director of Children and Young People (as of 1 July 2024) on a fixed term contract until the end of March 2025. Tina is responsible for driving forward the Children's Services Improvement Programme at an increased pace. She brings extensive experience in both front line and leadership roles and a strong track record of delivering quality children's safeguarding taking Worcestershire from an Ofsted rating of Inadequate to Good.

We want all children to have the best start in life. We know that sometimes children and families need our help and we are committed to improving our children's services and providing support to families who need it. We are developing a Phase 2 Service Improvement Plan and this will be presented to cabinet in the Autumn. The plan recognises that a significant amount of work has already taken place and will guide our children's service improvement programme over the next 2 years.

Gladys Rhodes White stepped back from her role as the Improvement Advisor and we have welcomed Deborah McMillan as her replacement and are working with her to increase the pace of our improvement programme across the breadth of our children's services. The Children's Commissioner, Eleanor Brazil, has taken on the role as the Improvement Board chair. Our partnership with Leeds City Council is continuing.

2: Herefordshire and Worcestershire All-Age Autism Strategy

Contributes to Delivery Plan Objective: Support all children to have the best start in life

This year we will: Increase capacity of specialist Special Educational Needs (SEN) school places so that children and young people can attend a local provision that meets their needs

In March Cabinet approved the Herefordshire & Worcestershire All-Age Autism Strategy (2024-29). The strategy is ambitious, and sets out the priorities, high level aims and actions in around seven core priorities – these are:

- I. Improving understanding and acceptance of autism within society
- II. Improving autistic children and young people's access into education and support positive transitions into adulthood
- III. Supporting more autistic people into employment

- IV. Tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people
- V. Building the right support in the community
- VI. Improving support in criminal and youth justice systems, and
- VII. Keeping Safe

Work commenced in April with each priority lead working with stakeholders to co-produce an annual implementation plan based on the high level aims and actions identified within the strategy document. Implementation plans will identify any future resource implications for each of the organisations across the Integrated Care System (ICS) and business cases will be developed where appropriate.

In addition to the ICS wide governance, there will be additional oversight within Herefordshire, with regular progress updates reported into the Herefordshire Autism Partnership Board and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Assurance Board.

3: Hereford All Ages Carers Strategy

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Enable people to support themselves and each other by providing the right help at the right time

This year we will: Improve services for carers of all ages

In July, Cabinet approved the All Ages Carers Strategy. The previous Carers Strategy ended in 2021 the delay in developing the new strategy was due to the pandemic and its aftermath and other competing priorities. At the beginning of September 2023, work commenced on the revised Strategy. In the development of the new strategy it has been important to ensure that it is co-produced with a wide range of organisations and people who have experience of being an unpaid carer. We have also spoken with representatives of organisations that help to support unpaid carers of all ages.

A working group was set up to help develop the strategy and identify key areas to focus on. Membership of the working group was broad with representation from Children and adults social care, Talk Community, Integrated Care System (ICS), National Health Service (NHS) and primary care, along with Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations who work directly supporting unpaid carers. In addition, some of the membership were also carers themselves.

The aim of this new strategy is very much to focus attention on the incredibly valuable work that unpaid carers undertake, often without being fully appreciated. We intend to raise the profile of carers of all ages and do our best to ensure appropriate support, information and guidance is available and easy to access. The strategy identifies six key priorities:

- a) Value and Recognition: unpaid carers feel recognised and valued,
- b) Board Young Carers: Young carers should have the same opportunities to enjoy a childhood that aligns with their peers.
- c) Technology-Enabled Care (TEC): New technology that can help to support, not only the cared-for person, but provide additional reassurance for carers.
- d) Carers Assessments and Support: the process of accessing carers' assessments should be straightforward and stress-free.

- e) Advice and Guidance: ensuring information is clear and easily available from different sources.
- f) Staying Healthy: help to maintain good health while balancing their caregiving and other life demands

4: Holiday Activity and Food Programme – free school meals

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Tackle inequality and facilitate social mobility by focussing on early intervention and prevention activities that enable people to live independent and fulfilling lives.

This year we will: Deliver schemes to tackle inequality and support our most vulnerable residents

Thousands of Herefordshire children and young people in nurseries, schools and colleges, will continue to receive free school meals support over the summer break. There are over 4,700 children primary and secondary school pupils who are entitled to benefits related free school meals will receive a free food voucher up to the value of £90 or equivalent directly through their schools, to cover the cost of a lunchtime meal during the school holidays.

Children who are eligible for the early year's pupil premium and are not in a school setting, will receive a voucher posted direct from the council. Primary and secondary schools will be contacting parents and carers before the summer holidays to let them know that they are entitled to the free school meal vouchers, and how to receive them.

Parents can check their eligibility and apply for free school meals on the [council's website](#).

***Theme 2: Place:** We will protect and enhance our environment and ensure that Herefordshire is a great place to live. We will support the right housing in the right place, and do everything we can to improve the health of our rivers.*

5: Local Transport Plan – New Objectives

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive.

This year we will: Deliver a new Local Transport Plan

Herefordshire's Local Transport Plan (LTP) is a policy framework and statutory document that sets out how the council intends to plan, manage and deliver transport across the county. Under current Department for Transport direction, all local authorities are required to ensure they have an up to date LTP. Our current strategy adopted in 2016, has not been reviewed since its adoption.

The new objectives of the LTP will cover the whole of Herefordshire, linking in with neighbouring authorities' and partner's networks, and is comprised of an overarching strategy document and an implementation plan. The implementation plan will include short, medium and long-term costed programmes which could include a wide range of transport improvements, from new highway infrastructure to support growth and tackle congestion or safety problems, to improvements to local bus services and enhancing rail facilities.

The new LTP comes at an opportune time for the Council to support wider ambitions such as the Big Economic Plan and the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy. In particular, the LTP is intrinsically linked to the council's emerging Local Plan (also referred to as the Core Strategy). For example, investment in transport is required when planning for new housing development and land use, and the location and design of these will have an impact on travel patterns and the new infrastructure needed to support them.

Once adopted, the strategy will enable the council to access future transport funding for the county. While we await future policy direction being given by Department for Transport (DfT), following the change in government, we continue to expect that future local transport settlements will need to continue to demonstrate reductions in transport carbon emissions, progress in the areas of active travel (walking and cycling), increased use of public transport and the roll out of infrastructure to support electric vehicles (EV).

It is essential that our LTP objectives are an all-encompassing covering all aspects of Herefordshire's transport ambitions, from major infrastructure proposals through to local accessibility improvement plans. We are therefore positioning Herefordshire LTP as a positive, ambitious plan to include growth, a high level of partnership working to set out our plans and achieve our objectives.

6: New Road Strategy for Herefordshire

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive.

This year we will: Deliver the New Road Strategy

In March Cabinet agreed to recommence progress, within the existing policy frameworks, of the Hereford Western Bypass linking the A49 north and south of the city. This also consists of the Southern Link Road as Phase 1 and the Western Bypass as Phase 2 to realise the county's strategic housing and employment land growth critical to the Herefordshire economy. In taking this decision, Cabinet agreed to draw down and spend £10.3m of approved capital funding for Phase 1 of the Hereford Western Bypass (HWB) and £760,000 of revenue funding for Phase 2

Plans for a bypass to the west of Hereford had been in development for many years and two schemes – the South Wye Transport Package and the Hereford Transport Package – were part of the council's capital programme. The new roads at the heart of each package were known, as the Southern Link Road and the Western Bypass, and included a wider programme of transport measures for walking and cycling infrastructure improvements intended to realise the local benefits and opportunities from the resulting change in traffic patterns.

The two schemes formed, and still form, a critical part of existing Council policy being integral to the Council's current Local Transport Plan (LTP) and Core Strategy. Planning permission for the Southern Link Road scheme remains in place and a preferred route had been selected for the Western Bypass.

Herefordshire's economy faces a number of significant long term challenges. Long journey times for road freight, with major bottlenecks around Hereford, lead to increased costs for businesses and discourages investment. These infrastructure challenges make it harder for people, especially younger and older residents, to access training, work, leisure and services. They are a significant contributor to lower business productivity, competitiveness and growth

The recently formed Marches Forward Partnership recognises a bypass for Hereford to tackle congestion and delay as a priority project benefitting Shropshire, Monmouthshire, and Powys as well as Herefordshire. We hope that the previous governments commitment to DfT and the Council continuing to work closely together to discuss proposals to address the critical need for additional highway infrastructure will be ongoing. Infrastructure that can help unlock growth, jobs, new housing whilst also alleviating, delays and congestion in the County.

7: Marches Forward Partnership

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Expand and maintain the transport infrastructure network in a sustainable way and improve connectivity across the county.

This year we will: Work with partners across the recently launched Marches Forward Partnership

You will recall from my March report the setting up of the Marches Forward Partnership. Since its launch in 2023, the partnership has been looking at ways to unlock new investment into the English and Welsh border region that is home to 750,000 people. On 14 May partnership members met to begin shaping a Marches Manifesto. The four founding councils - Herefordshire, Monmouthshire County, Powys County and Shropshire – have consulted with representatives from government, business, farming and food producers, land managers, transport experts and environmentalists. Areas where their views were sought centre around four key themes:

- a) **Nature, Energy & Climate Adaptation** – Looking at opportunities based around the natural environment, and current and future challenges to the climate, energy and nature.
- b) **Transport & Digital Connectivity** - Improving infrastructure and connectivity across the Marches to give better access to jobs, education and opportunities.
- c) **Health, Housing & Skills** - Focusing on the sustainability and well-being of communities, skills development in response to employers needs and accelerated housing delivery.
- d) **Food, Development & Visitor Economy**- Encouraging economic growth of our economy, developing and promoting the region's unique offer.

While detail on how the new Labour Government will seek to engage with the emerging regional geographies the draft "Marches Manifesto" provides a clear starting point to shape discussions with both Cardiff and Westminster. There are significant economic benefits – as we see it - by us joining forces and working with our neighbouring and cross border

authorities. Herefordshire is well positioned to provide a strong voice in the development of this initiative. With the adoption of our Council and Delivery Plans, we are able to state our positions clearly and coherently on behalf of Herefordshire.

8: Public Realm Services

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive.

This year we will: Deliver the Public Realm Services

In March, the Cabinet considered the Public Realm Services contract which delivers highways, traffic management, public rights of way, parks and open spaces, street cleaning and street lighting. The current contract model is heavily outsourced with the Council retaining a small client and contract management function. Public rights of way and traffic management services were brought back in house in 2021.

The current contract term runs through to 31 August 2026 and the council is not seeking to extend the current arrangements, with Balfour Beatty Living Places beyond 31 May, 2026. Ahead of this Cabinet is seeking to set out new and enhanced contract to improve control and performance within new the council's new contractual arrangements.

9: Public Realm Contract

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Develop Herefordshire as a place for growth, prosperity and communities to thrive.

This year we will: Deliver the Public Realm Services

In June, Cabinet considered the Public Realm Contract. The vision for new contractual arrangements that embrace technology, automation and digital innovation. We wish to see a transition to electric plant and vehicles, using materials to meet carbon reduction ambitions. Investment in people to ensure our public realm services continually improve to best meet the needs of local residents and communities. We are investigating current trends and best practice in the sector with a view to developing new contractual arrangements to include these objectives.

The 'model' we are considering includes services proposed to be transferred to the council, the services proposed to be delivered in a new Public Realm Services Contract. We will be undertaking market engagement during summer 2024, where contractors will be invited to engage with the council to give their expert opinions on the proposed model and contracting arrangements. This will provide the council valuable insight to refine our preferred model and give a clear indication of the level of likely interest for competitive procurement. A further report will be presented to Cabinet in autumn, 2024 highlighting the outputs from the market testing and seeking final approval of the model.

Permission will also be sought to commence the procurement in early 2025. This will provide sufficient time to carry out the procurement and allow for mobilisation to ensure the new model and contracting arrangements are fully operational from 1 June 2026. Until the new model and new contracting arrangement come into effect on 1 June 2026, the council and Balfour Beatty

Living Places will continue to work together to deliver the public realm services under the current contracting arrangements, and are committed to work together to support a smooth transition to the new arrangements.

10: Wetland Development and Phosphate Credit Scheme

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Value nature and uphold environmental standards to minimise pollution and maximise biodiversity.

This year we will: Deliver Phase 2 Strategic Mitigation for Phosphate Credits

Herefordshire Council's Planning team has won the 2024 West Midlands Planning Excellence Award by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). The award is the second time the council's ground-breaking Luston Wetlands project has been held up as leading in example in tackling and mitigating the effect of pollution in our waterways.

High levels of Phosphate have long been known to damage our rivers including the Wye and Lugg. By 2019 Natural England advised Herefordshire Council that the levels of phosphate in the Lugg sub catchment meant that in order to protect the river, any new housing development must fully offset its phosphate load.

Herefordshire Council has responded to this issue by developing the Luston Wetland to capture and remove phosphate and trade Phosphate Credits with developers to enable housing growth in the north of the county. The scheme ensures that more phosphate is removed from the river system than is returned to it through any form of development. The creation of the wetlands have the added benefit of boosting local biodiversity and wildlife.

The Luston Wetland is partly funded by developers, and the remainder through New Homes Bonus and historical funding from the now abolished Marches Local Enterprise Partnership. The Council also recoups costs through planning contributions which in turn allow for further investment in additional wetland sites.

Since commencing the trading of phosphate credits from Luston in July 2022, the council has received £1,159,354.52 phosphate income to manage and invest in future wetland projects and released planning permissions for 620 dwellings.

The Council have secured planning permission (P230655/CD3) for the creation of a second integrated constructed wetland in Tarrington and are about to start trading credits with developers resulting in the release of further land for housing.

Theme 3 - Growth: We will create the conditions to deliver sustainable growth across the county; attracting inward investment, building business confidence, creating jobs, enabling housing development along with providing the right infrastructure

11: Acquisition of Housing and land

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Work with partners to provide high quality and affordable housing to meet all needs

This year we will: Enable the delivery of affordable properties in the county, including council owned land, through registered providers and developers, and, secure accommodation for vulnerable people at risk of homelessness

In July, Cabinet approved the addition of £5million to the capital budget to provide and enable the cabinet to take decisions quickly if and when properties or land become available. We wish to use that funding to take up opportunities to buy land or suitable housing, for example, for those requiring temporary accommodation without delay. The market is such that suitable land or housing sites are often quickly sold.

The £5million is being added on the basis that any rental income will cover the running costs and provide a surplus to repay the cost of borrowing over the useful life of the asset. Homes England grants will be also be applied for where possible to reduce the overall borrowing costs and be added to the capital programme by the S151 delegated powers.

Inclusion in the capital programme is not approval to proceed. Each project will be subject to its own governance, a full business case will be presented for approval where required and compliance with the council's contract procedure rules as applicable. The overall aim of capital expenditure is to benefit the community through improved facilities and by promoting economic growth.

12: Wye Valley Trust – Investment Partner

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Support residents to access skills development, training and employment opportunities.

This Year we will: Work in partnership with Wye Valley Trust with a view to developing a new Education Centre at Hereford County Hospital

Work towards achieving this objective began in March, Cabinet agreed to an increase in value offered as an investment to Wye Valley Trust to enable the development of an Education Centre at Hereford County Hospital subject to a business case being brought back to cabinet for approval in autumn, 2024. Wye Valley Trust produced a cost plan in July 2023 which has been uplifted to reflect an estimate of price increases applicable to the scheme in order to arrive at a realistic assessment of total costs. Based on these costs Wye Valley Trust have anticipated they would require a loan of £15million from Herefordshire Council.

Herefordshire Council has a strong interest in the positive success of this project as we want to maximise learning opportunities for all learners across all sectors and services. We believe that by enabling Wye Valley Trust to achieve the building of this centre through a loan agreement we will contribute towards state of the art teaching facilities, increased capacity for multi-professional education, equitable training and development opportunities and space and facilities for community wellbeing programmes.

The Education Centre is set to fulfil the following aims:

- a. Deliver high quality multi professional education, supported by one integrated team
- b. Make education accessible to all staff, from our most junior students across all sectors and services
- c. Provide access to equitable, high quality support for all learners, aligned with current education programmes. Plus, ensuring adequate preparation for the future healthcare careers
- d. Maximise the passion, expertise, strengths and commitment of the education infrastructure and wider partnership networks
- e. Provide essential education, training, support and services to benefit the whole of the Hereford Community.

The total cost for the scheme is £17.5m, this is proposed to be made up from £15m from Herefordshire Council, £2.5m from Charitable Funding. This is subject to potential changes if more funding becomes available to WVT through other sources of funding.

Theme 4 - Transformation: We will be an efficient council that embraces best practice, delivers innovation through technology and demonstrates value for money.

13: Digital Strategy

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Adopt the digital strategy to embed improved technology across the council

This year we will: Develop and implement an updated Digital Strategy for improved customer experience, communication and connectivity

Digital transformation plays a key role in creating a local authority of the future. Increased and improved use of technology can help evolve public services and meet the needs of communities more effectively and efficiently. The 2024 to 2028 digital strategy outlines how the council will make the most of digital, data and technology to deliver services.

The new strategy reflects that digital, data and technology services are critically important organisational assets, which need proactive management to maximise value for residents and operation of the council. Digital services operate in a fast-paced environment. Advances in technology help create efficient services and respond to growing customer expectation in accessing services through technology. With this increased utilisation comes heightened risk of abuse through cyber-attacks and IT data breaches that the Council needs to mitigate against.

The strategy identifies what successful outcomes will look like for Herefordshire Council by 2028. The strategy will act as an enabler for digital, data and technology 'business as usual', and for projects within the council, which are managed and overseen as part of the Information Technology and Partnership Transformation Board.

14: A new workforce strategy

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Attract and retain an excellent workforce through effective approaches to recruitment and retention.

This year we will: Implement the Workforce Strategy

In May, the cabinet member for finance and corporate services approved the Council's workforce strategy which covers the years 2021 – 2024. The strategy was written before the pandemic and although the strategy is current and reflects many of the aims and ambitions for our workforce, the strategy is silent on some important aspects of working in the council such as children's improvement, our agile working programme which is called 'Flexible Futures' and our transformation and culture change programme called THRIVE as well as our emerging recruitment identity the 'Spirit of Herefordshire'

The workforce strategy, has been shaped in response to a range of drivers which will create change within the council, including external factors and trends, themes within our key strategic plans, and internal and external challenges we face. It has been developed using feedback from employee engagement via a number of employee surveys, reviews, network group meetings and facilitated focus groups.

Workforce drivers from children's services improvement has also influenced the Workforce Strategy themes - if we are to build strong, trusting relationships with families and partners, we need a skilled and motivated workforce. We are reducing our use of agency staff, and investing in a clear focus on permanent recruitment and developing staff internally. Although recruitment in a number of our services is a challenge, both regionally and nationally the inter-connected themes within the strategy will support retention of staff and seek to attract new talent to the council.

15: Parish Summit, 9 July

Stated Delivery Plan Objective: Work collaboratively with our residents, communities and businesses to achieve the best results together

This year we will: Ensure improved working with Town and Parish Councils

On Tuesday 9 July, 90 Parish Councillors attended the first of our newly reinstated Parish Summits. It was an excellent opportunity to exchange information and ideas with our first tier of local government partners. The Marketplace included planning services, housing, Talk Community, Transport and Waste, and Early Help, amongst other valued services. It was invaluable to be able to explore our shared interests and gain their insights from our differing perspectives.

This type of engagement is so important in turning strategies, like the council plan, into delivery. Our continued work with residents, the voluntary, community, public sector partners and with businesses will continue. We all have vested interests and vital roles to play in Herefordshire's success.