

Title of report: Education Strategy

Meeting:	Cabinet
Meeting date:	Thursday 6 March 2025
Cabinet member:	Cabinet member children and young people;
Report by:	Corporate Director, Childrens and Young People
Report Author:	Service Director, Education, Skills and Learning

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To endorse the Education Strategy 2024/29.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The Education Strategy 2024/29 is endorsed; and**
- b) **Delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director for Children and Young People to take all operational decisions, as set out within this report and appendix.**

Alternative options

1. Not to have an Education Strategy. This is not recommended as the Council has a general duty under section 13 of the Education Act 1996 to secure that efficient education is available to meet the needs of the population of Herefordshire. The Herefordshire Education Strategy 2024/29 sets out how the Council will do this.

Key considerations

2. The education landscape within Herefordshire is both varied and diverse. The county is host to some 100 schools ranging from those that are maintained, selective, stand-alone academy trust, or those that are part of a multi-academy trust. Accountability for these settings is complex, with our Council retaining the responsibility for maintained schools, and academy trusts accountable to the Department for Education (DfE). Irrespective of the governance structures and accountability, when it comes to the provision of Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), School Admissions and Attendance, Children in Care (CiC) and Early Years the Council has a range of statutory responsibilities and a leading role.
3. Herefordshire is typified by high performing schools and education settings. Most are rated positively by the inspectorate Ofsted. Performance data shows that in the majority of measures Herefordshire performs well against statistical neighbours and national averages.
4. Our role in education has changed significantly over the years, and the Council performs a multitude of different functions within an increasingly complex system. We operate as a key delivery partner, facilitator, and system leader. We seek to secure positive and inclusive outcomes for all children and young people.
5. The draft Herefordshire Education Strategy 2024/29 (Appendix 1) has been in development since 2023/24. Once approved, it will operate as the primary strategic driver for the Council's education team over the next five years, providing a foundation for current and future work. At its heart is an ambitious, collaborative and inclusive approach towards addressing the key challenges.
6. It will focus on the delivery of five key priorities which include:
 - a. Priority One: Ensuring access to and availability of high-quality educational places.
 - b. Priority Two: Preparing our children and young people to thrive.
 - c. Priority Three: Promoting collaborative school improvement to raise standards.
 - d. Priority Four: Embedding a climate of inclusion; and
 - e. Priority Five: Supporting the emotional health and wellbeing of all children and young people.
7. The implementation of the Strategy will be supported by a service delivery plan which will be monitored regularly and updated annually. The success of the Strategy will be measured via a range of performance indicators which complement the Council Plan 2024/28.
8. The Herefordshire Education Strategy 2024/29 has been informed, co-produced and developed by wide stakeholder engagement, which has included insight from children, young people, schools, early years settings and Post 16 providers.
9. The purpose of the Strategy is to provide a firm foundation for across the Education Service over the next four years by further strengthening our partnership approach to improvement and firmly placing the Council as a strong, influential leader within the wider Herefordshire Education system.
10. The new Education Strategy replaces the previous version from 2019 and consequently better reflects the current educational landscape and Government Policy so to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

11. The key deliverables from the Strategy are reflected in the Council Delivery Plan. Regular updates will also be provided as requested to the Council's Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The SEND and AP Assurance Board and Roundtable Governance Group will receive regular updates.

Community impact

12. The Council Plan 2024–2028 includes the ambition to support to children and young people to thrive, be safe, and for families to be supported. We believe that children and young people are best supported in their family networks and within highly effective schools and flourishing communities. Our children are the future.

Environmental Impact

13. There is no direct environmental impact as a result of this strategy.

Equality duty

14. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.
15. We believe that every learner, regardless of their background, identity, or ability, has the right to an equitable education that fosters personal growth and academic achievement. Our commitment to inclusivity ensures that all students have access to tailored resources, support, and opportunities, enabling them to reach their full potential.
16. The mandatory equality impact screening checklist has been completed for this strategy and it has been found to have low impact for equality.
17. Due to the potential impact of this strategy being low, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. However, the following equality considerations should be taken into account when making a decision about this strategy:
 - a. Inclusive language: Use of language that is respectful and inclusive of all students, regardless of their background, culture, faith, or identity.
 - b. Accessibility: Ensure that the education strategy promotes accessibility for all, including those children with disabilities, and provides equitable opportunity for participation and engagement.
 - c. Cultural sensitivity: Be aware of the diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences of children and ensure that the education strategy is culturally responsive and sensitive.
 - d. Opportunities for participation: Provide opportunities for all children and young people to be represented in the education strategy, including those who may be marginalised or underrepresented.
 - e. Monitoring and evaluation: Regularly monitor and evaluate the education strategy to ensure that it is effective in promoting equality and addressing any barriers or inequalities that may arise.

Resource implications

18. The Council has several funding sources available to support the implementation of the Education Strategy and the associated Service Delivery Plan. These include the core funding allocated to the Education Service, the commitment in the capital budget to support a programme of capital investment across the school estate, and the strategies outlined in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit management plan which aim to reduce the pressure on the DSG High Needs block. Also, funding allocated from a variety of DFE educational grants including the Special Educational Needs (SEND) and Alternative Provision Change Programme to support the SEND and Inclusion Change Programme.

Legal implications

19. The Education Act 1996 imposes a duty on local authorities to ensure the provision of efficient primary, secondary, and further education to meet the needs of their population. Specifically, the Act mandates local authorities to:
 - Exercise their functions with a view to promoting high standards, ensuring fair access to educational opportunities and training, and fostering the fulfilment of learning potential for children and young people within its local area.
 - Secure sufficient schools to provide appropriate education based on age, ability, and aptitude, while ensuring diversity of provision.
20. Local authorities are also obligated to promote and support the wellbeing and learning of all children in accordance with various statutory duties, including those outlined in the Education Act 1996, the Children Act 2004, and the Childcare Act 2006. These overarching duties apply irrespective of whether schools are maintained by the local authority or operate independently.
21. As the admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools, the local authority is required under The School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Coordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Admissions Code 2021 (updated 11 March 2022) to determine the admissions arrangements.
22. The Children and Families Act 2014, along with The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014, outlines the requirements for the provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including those who require Education, Health, and Care Plan
23. Furthermore, the public sector equality duty, as stipulated in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, applies to the decisions made by the Cabinet Member in this report. This duty requires decision-makers to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity for individuals with protected characteristics, foster good relations between such groups, and eliminate any unlawful discrimination. This duty ensures that the local authority's education strategy is compliant with the local authority's statutory duties but also promotes inclusivity and fairness in its decision-making processes.

Risk management

24. Regular monitoring of impact measures by the Service will give assurance on the effectiveness of actions, highlight any key risks and identify mitigation strategies.
25. Consideration has been given to the risks to the council if the recommendation(s) are agreed and how these will be managed in the table below;

Risk	Mitigation
Insufficient School Places	Forward planning and regular meetings with place planning teaming at the Department for Education includes accountability for future projections and forward planning. The Dedicated Schools Grant includes a growth fund that supports increase in school places where necessary.
Insufficient specialist school places in Herefordshire	Capital investment from Department for Education in new build bid rounds (intermittent and occasional). Support from stakeholders to invest in special school expansion programme in Herefordshire and thus manage the high needs deficit.
Insufficient alternative provision places in Herefordshire	Business cases prepared to mitigate shortfall.
Poor condition to school estate	Government grant for capital maintenance received by local authorities. If insufficient, monitor and prepare business case for additional resource.

26. Working on the assumption that the recommendation(s) will be approved, the relevant risks will be managed at a directorate level and appear in the children's and young people risk register.

Consultees

- During consultation, the Education Strategy was presented to and discussed with the Headteacher Representative Forum, Primary Headteachers Forum and the Herefordshire Association of Secondary Headteachers (HASH). These groups include representatives from early years, primary and secondary schools and Post 16 providers. In capturing the voice of children and young people the service have used Parent Carer Voice Feedback and participation work findings as a guide.
- Headteachers provided useful feedback and agreed unanimously with the key priorities. Comments from our headteacher groups fed into the development of this strategy and were taken on board,

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Education Strategy 2024/29

Background papers

None identified

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	John Coleman	Date 25/02/2025
Finance	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Legal	Pooja Nahar	Date 26/02/2025
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 14/02/2025
Equality Duty	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Procurement	Claire Powell	Date 15/02/2025
Risk	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date Click or tap to enter a date.
Approved by	Tina Russell	26/02/2025