

Welcome to Herefordshire Council's Annual Performance Report, a summary of the progress made by the council in 2017/18. This report also identifies our priorities in 2018/19; we hope that you find this feedback for our county's residents both accessible and informative. That is the aim of the report.

In 2017/18, your council continued to deal with the extraordinary era of reduced funding from central government, in common with councils across the country. A number of large councils have come forward with concerns of being unable to balance their budget, with an increasing number proposing draconian cuts to services. Herefordshire Council however remained on target to deliver another balanced budget and to sustain effective and extensive services across our county. We are doing so with around £90 million less direct grant from government per annum. We have achieved this by ensuring that our priorities are clear, focussed on our key services to residents, whilst developing new and innovative ways to deliver our services, with much less cost. For example:

- reducing the number of buildings that we work from, with staff becoming more mobile – which reduces costs considerably.
- using more digital technology to support and deliver our services enabling more council staff to work closer to where it is needed across the county.
- developing our website and digital access to services for residents – which enables residents to access services when it suits them, often 24/7.
- bringing separate parts of the public sector together to simplify services to residents – which improves access for residents and also reduces costs.
- investing in the roll out of superfast broadband, creating a county-wide platform for residents, and for businesses wherever they are located in the county.

Your council has remained focussed on the services that we deliver to residents every day across the county, and delivering major projects that will enable the county to move forward with confidence in the future. Throughout the year we continued to look after around 3,000 vulnerable older people, providing them with support that is critical to helping them remain well and independent. This has increasingly focussed on assistive care technology, which not only assists us in early help when it is needed, but provides older vulnerable residents and their families with reassurance.

We continue to directly support around 500 children and young people who are vulnerable. Many of these young people face challenging personal or home circumstances, and your council is consistently there to keep them safe, and to ensure among many things that they can achieve their potential through education.

Educational attainment in the county's maintained schools and academies continued to improve. This is pleasing to see, and absolutely essential for all our pupils, to ensure that they can fully achieve their potential. As the performance of our schools improves, so do the opportunities for our county's pupils. The county received special praise from the minister of state for education, for the improved phonics performance of Herefordshire children, one of the largest increases in England.

2017/18 also saw:

- The council continued to support the development of the new university, NMiTE, and also the existing successful higher education establishment at the Hereford College for Arts. We are working with leaders of both organizations to consider how the council can assist their continued progress.
- Our newly constructed EnviRecover Energy from Waste Plant receive a formal royal opening: this plant now processes 200k tonnes of residual household waste.
- The council make a policy decision to dispose of the smallholdings estate, in order to develop capital source for investment in future economic growth.
- Our economic vision successfully launched at Eastnor Castle, providing a platform to progress further inward investment to deliver the vision.
- Our new Home First service launched, bringing together existing rapid response home care service with the re-ablement services. Working closely with colleagues in the NHS community services, Home First provides a managed discharge for people leaving hospital, ensuring they receive support that helps them regain the maximum level of independence.
- Herefordshire Council become the leading council in the country for adoption of neighbourhood development plans.
- Cabinet's decision in January to continue developing a scheme for the much needed bypass for Hereford, enabled consultation regarding options for the route of the bypass to proceed.
- Your council secure the maximum available from Government for the maintenance of our county roads, which combined with the councils own capital investment of £3 million and a successful bid for £5 million additional funding through the Local Highways Maintenance Challenge Fund, enabled us to proceed with over 25 miles of carriageway resurfacing and 12 miles of surface dressing to some of the county's most important routes, making this one of the largest highway maintenance scheme in the country.
- In Children's Social Care, the council commission more peer review work in 2017 and in spring 2018. A Local Government Association (LGA) Peer review was conducted in November, looking at the culture of improvement in children's wellbeing services. This provided many useful points, with good evidence of a strong culture.
- Our focus on continuous improvement lead to our commissioning in February, the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. The external experts leading the Peer Challenge reported positively on the council overall, recognising the sound overall financial position, and significant progress and successes achieved by the council, along with helpful advice on how we can continue to improve.
- In early 2018 our announcement of the arrival of the Poppies: Weeping Window to be displayed at the Cathedral from 14th March. This followed an initiative by the council, followed by a successful joint bid and close working with key partners, including Hereford Cathedral itself. The display proved to exceed expectations as a visitor attraction for Hereford.
- Our new website design attracting 2,059,271 visits to and 806,271 individuals in its first year, helping Herefordshire Council win 2 National 'Better Connected' awards.

Every day, Herefordshire Council's councillors and staff are working to improve the county. Each day we support thousands of people in the county – be they older vulnerable residents, children and young people at risk or residents with learning disabilities – those residents remain our priority.

With many significant economic development projects progressing well, we remain optimistic about the county's prospects, looking ahead. We look forward to updating you on progress throughout the year ahead and in this report, next year.