

### **Leader's newsletter**

Welcome to my Leader's Newsletter. This monthly update provides an overview of the key activity that Cabinet Members and I have been involved in in the last month, and aims to keep you better informed on Cabinet and council activity. It is also intended as an aid to briefing your Parish Councils. I suggest that you highlight particular subjects which might interest your Parish Councils.

The last month has been dominated by the floods we have had, and coronavirus. Each of these have been well communicated by the Council team and you will have received regular updates.

### **Flooding**

The flooding has caused huge disruption across the county. We have had a lot of communications thanking council staff for their efforts, although not everyone can be satisfied. I believe the initiative for staff to help out directly in communities affected has been well received by both staff and members of the public. There remains a lot to do as we enter the recovery phase we are lobbying government for additional help.

Please remind your PC's that compensation is available for householders whose property has been flooded.

### **Coronavirus**

The three key messages Karen Wright would like us to take away, and you may wish to communicate to your PCs, are:

- All necessary actions are being taken to support the national effort
- As leaders we need to provide reassurance and reinforce and basic hand washing and 'catch it, bin it kill it' messages that are the most effective approach in preventing the spread of any infections.
- Refer members of the public to the national websites shown below or through the council website for the latest guidance.

So far as schools are concerned, Herefordshire Council have received a small number of enquiries from schools and colleges in Herefordshire, regarding their staff/pupils returning from Northern Italy.

To assist schools and other educational settings in providing advice to pupils, staff and parents or carers, the following actions have been undertaken –

- Updated national guidance (by Public Health England) being sent to all schools and colleges in Herefordshire today
- All schools and colleges have been provided with the relevant contact details for PHE and the Public Health Team (Herefordshire Council), in case further advice is required
- A list of planned school trips where students are travelling outside of the UK, is being compiled in order to support any future actions, if required

At the present time no school or college has been advised to consider closure.

### **Cabinet and Cabinet support**

Cllr Ellie Chowns has taken over Cllr Trish Marsh's portfolio. A big thank you to Trish and a welcome to Ellie.

I have appointed Cllr Jenny Bartlett as additional cabinet support to work with town councils and parishes to enhance local services and assets, develop a shared service partnership model, and enable parishes to have an active role in delivering or managing local priorities and assets. This is of particular relevance to market towns. Jenny is a Councillor from Leominster where this model has been worked on for a number of years. Jenny will look at what works and what does not, and how it might apply to smaller parishes.

## **Governance Review**

As you know there is a working group looking at the various governance models for the council with a view to the audit and governance committee making recommendations to the council meeting in October 2020. The working group would like to invite councillors to a workshop on 18 March in order to get your views on this matter. There will be two sessions on 18 March 2020 facilitated by the Centre for Public Scrutiny as follows:

2.30 pm to 4.30 pm – The Jim Hopkins Room, HARC

6.30 pm to 8.30 pm – Fownhope and Mordiford Room, Plough Lane

I hope that as many of you as possible will be able to attend this opportunity to influence the constitution.

## **Other roles**

The Herefordshire Cultural Partnership is looking for a new Chair. The role of the HCP is to:

- Champion Herefordshire's cultural strategy and cultural ambition.
- Identify and support initiatives, which attract funding and investment for creative and cultural activity.
- Oversee the development and delivery of the Cultural Strategy 2019-29, producing an annual action plan with specific objectives and targets.
- Support strategic programmes and identify key initiatives to deliver the Cultural Strategy action plan.
- Take collective responsibility for ensuring that cultural funding is allocated properly and against agreed priorities.
- Monitor activity against the Cultural Strategy's Strategic Objectives and Key Actions and publish an annual review.
- Examine and respond to local, regional, national and international environments and policies to ensure that the Cultural Strategy's vision and objectives remain valid.

Do you know anybody who might fit this role?

## **Marches LEP Funding Applications**

The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership previously launched a call for new projects which could be funded through their Growth Deal funding (available until the end of March 2021). Herefordshire Council submitted six Expressions of Interest to the LEP for funding consideration in December 2019. At their Board meeting at the end of January the LEP invited the council to take three projects to the full business case stage, totalling over £12m in possible grant funding. The projects invited to the next stage could support the development of Ross Enterprise Park, further develop infrastructure and sustainable transport provision on the Hereford Enterprise Zone, and convert a current LEP loan to the shell Store to a grant enabling support services to be offered in the business incubator in the future. The full business cases have been submitted, and we should know the outcome by the end of March.

## **Children and families – Cllr Felicity Norman**

### **West Midlands Regional Foster Care Framework**

£1.6 million has been saved since 2016 against spot purchasing independent foster care placements using the framework. There will be a decision to be made mid-February to enter into a new framework agreement from April 2020.

### **Ofsted Focused Visit Report**

Following on from the Ofsted focused visit in December, and the publication of the report in January, a number of actions have been identified in order to respond to the findings of the report.

- Frequency and quality of supervision for staff – Heads of Service will sit in on 2 supervisions a quarter to understand and support the quality of supervision. A new Head of Service has started with the CP Court teams from January 2020.

- Prioritisation of family support work – we have agreed a new model of family support for children that are open to children’s social care. The family support service will be integrated into the assessment teams and the CP Court teams and this will enable family support to work with more families sooner.
- Child protection plans – changes are being made to make them more child focused before the significant changes that will take place later in the year as part of the Signs of Safety practice model implementation.
- Assisted Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) social workers – the service is confirming arrangements so that newly qualified social workers are supported in their work, including ensuring they do not have high caseloads. This will be disseminated to all staff to ensure everyone is clear what the expectations are. ASYEs are being supported by the social work academy which has been fully recruited to since December 2019.
- Timeliness of actions in audit activity – the assistant director safeguarding and family support now receives a weekly reports and is following up with the relevant head of service regarding action to be taken and completed.

### **Third assessment team and edge of care service**

Recruitment has begun for both areas, as agreed by cabinet. Some management posts for the edge of care service have been filled.

### **Staunton Primary School**

Staunton-on-Wye Endowed Primary School received a letter earlier this month from Nick Gibbs MP, Minister of State for School Standards, congratulating them on their progress levels. Staunton’s results in reading, writing and mathematics from Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2 place them in the top 3% of schools in the country. Congratulations to all the staff and pupils on their hard work and achievement.

### **Investing in Herefordshire’s children and young people’s future**

Reflecting on 2019 the council undertook approximately £1.5m of maintenance works at 17 schools across the county to improve the facilities for pupils and staff. A further £67k of improvement works will take place over the next few months.

### **Education achievement**

Strong performance in Primary education; top quartile performance in majority of measures for all pupils from early years to KS2.

### **Environment, economy and skills – Cllr Trish Marsh**

#### **Next stage for Broadband**

The revised Fastershire Broadband Strategy has now been agreed and whilst the project continues the fibre deployment through Gigaclear, Airband and Openreach, the strategy outlines a new approach to reach the final set of premises. Whilst the current contracts will see 97% of premises able to access a superfast or ultra-fibre broadband service that does mean there are remaining premises that tend to be isolated group of premises dotted across the county. Therefore the approach is the offer grants to communities to commission broadband from a registered list of providers. Doing it this way means that a bespoke programme can be set against the needs of an area and means a lengthy procurement does not need to take place as each community will choose a provider offering the best value for money. On 6<sup>th</sup> February a supplier’s day took place to explain the scheme to the potential providers. This was attended by over 50 delegates which shows how broadband market has grown from a single supplier in 2012.

For residents needing to know where they are in the delivery programme please visit [www.fastershire.com](http://www.fastershire.com) or email [info@fasteshire.com](mailto:info@fasteshire.com).

#### **Faster Tourism**

Fastershire has launched, *Faster Tourism*, a series of six free training sessions delivered in partnership between Visit Herefordshire, Marches Growth Hub and Fastershire to help support the tourism and leisure based businesses. The workshops include;

1. Marketing Fundamentals
2. Social Media Essentials
3. Website Essentials

4. Photography and video Essential
5. Email marketing, CRM, Networking and Promotion
6. How to protect your business and personal data

For more information, visit [www.fastershire.com/tourism](http://www.fastershire.com/tourism)

### **Faster Farmers**

Fastershire is continuing to offer training to agricultural and land-based businesses to help them exploit the benefits of faster broadband to grow their businesses. These Faster Farmers workshops are free to attend and are delivered in partnership with Herefordshire Rural Hub. Recent topics have included digital VAT, marketing online, and cyber security. On 24<sup>th</sup> February a workshop took place in Hereford on 'Farming Apps and Social Media' with local farmers who are successfully using these technologies sharing their experiences and offering advice on how apps and social media can help promote and support farming businesses. For more info visit the Fastershire website

### **Town Board**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> February over 25 public and private stakeholders attended a meeting regarding the Stronger Towns funding allocation of up to £25m to Hereford. The event was well attended with positive discussions held about the wide range of opportunities there are to support the growth of the city. We are now seeking volunteers to form the Hereford City Board and will look to commission the external support required to develop a Town Investment Plan, which needs to be submitted to government by the end of the summer 2020.

### **Station Approach Student Accommodation**

Working with Hereford College of Arts and a range of private sector partners and investors, the Council has enabled the development of a £19 million 178 bedroom student accommodation development in Hereford. The construction reaches a significant stage in February as modular units, that have been constructed offsite over the winter months, are delivered to site and craned into place. The development will quickly take shape over the next six weeks, and is due to open in September for the new academic year.

I am pleased to confirm Ben Boswell in post as our new Head of Environment, Climate Emergency and Waste. He is making good progress on the revision of the council's Carbon Management Plan and has already set up a countywide steering group that is working with the public, community and private sector to help effect change across Herefordshire on climate emergency. A task and finish group also continues to meet, chaired by Cllr Wilding and including Cllrs Swinglehurst, Fagan, Hewitt and Stark. Cllr Chowns will now be making a significant input into our county response to the climate and ecological emergencies in a new Cabinet support role.

I am pleased to confirm that a climate reserve of £200k was also agreed at Full Council on the 14 February. This will be put to good use in supporting the many projects things that we need to move forward to meet our goal of net carbon neutrality by 2030.

### **Finance and corporate services – Cllr Liz Harvey**

**Cyber Awareness Sessions for Schools** Fastershire is working with Herefordshire Council's Information Governance and Resilience and Business Continuity Teams to provide free Cyber Awareness sessions for Herefordshire Schools on 3<sup>rd</sup> March. The sessions will be led by a Fastershire Advisor who specialises in data and cyber security, and will help Head Teachers, Senior Leaders Managers, Governors and In-House IT Leads understand the current cyber threats and the essential controls schools must have in place. It will give practical measures they can take to become more secure, explore what technology can do to help and what to do if the worst happens.

### **Understanding the diversity of our workforce**

Each year we publish a document which analyses the diversity make-up of our workforce. This is a requirement of the Equality Act 2010 for all public organisations with more than 150 employees. Legislation prompts us to look at the make-up of our workforce and see if it reflects the community that we serve. By analysing the data, we can see if there any anomalies that we can address.

Here in Herefordshire, we use this document to also publish:

1. The statutory gender pay gap report. As at March 2019 (the snapshot date), the council's median pay gap was 9.8% (i.e. women's hourly pay is 9.8% lower than men's).
2. An analysis of the diversity make-up of our elected councillors. Diversity information was received from the vast majority of successful councillors. The data shows:
  - the percentage of female councillors has increased from 28.3% in 2015 to 39.6% in 2019
  - there is a slightly more diverse range of ethnicities and sexual orientation
  - our councillors are generally within older age groups than our work force

As a result of drawing up this report, there are some areas for further work:

1. The percentage of employees who have identified as disabled is 3.2% which is low compared to disabled people of working age in the general population. Work needs to be undertaken to understand why this is. We are a Disability Confident employer, so we have made a commitment to employing and retaining disabled staff.
2. It is notable that we still have a significant number of employees opting not to disclose their personal information, or the system is not capturing the data. Over the next 12 months we will be working to improve this. Currently we have collected 83.1% of the voluntary diversity data from our employees, and have set ourselves a target of 95%.

The document can be found on the council's diversity web page. Further information is available from the Equality Officer, Harriet Yellin on x0216 or [hyellin@herefordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hyellin@herefordshire.gov.uk)

### **Q3 Outturn**

The quarter 3 outturn report was presented to cabinet last week at its meeting in Ewyas Harold. Currently the council is forecasting an over-spend of £51k on a total budget of £386m which equates to +0.01%. A very good position to be in at this point in the year. Congratulations to everyone involved in delivering so closely to the overall budget.

<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/s50076452/Quarter%203%20201920%20corporate%20budget%20and%20performance%20report.pdf>

### **Council Tax Setting**

The Council Tax for Herefordshire Council was set at a marathon full council meeting held on 14 February. The council resolved to apply a 3.9% increase to the council tax, which equates to an increase of £4.92 per month for a band D property. This rise comprises 2% dedicated to supporting the increasing cost of adult social care and 1.9% to cover cost increases in all other areas of the council's operation.

### **Health and adult wellbeing – Cllr Pauline Crockett**

#### **Re-commissioning projects**

A contract has now been awarded to Nottingham Rehabilitation Services (NRS) for the Integrated Community Equipment Services (ICS) from 1 April 2020. NRS has been providing local equipment services for some years, but the new service will feature a number of changes and improvements. A contract has also been awarded to Caring for Communities and People (CCP) for provision of a new accommodation based support service for care leavers with complex needs. The service will be mobilised to launch towards the end of April in newly converted premises in the City. Proposals for the re-commissioning and design of further housing related support services for care leavers and vulnerable young people will be considered by cabinet in the Spring for mobilisation in November 2020.

#### **Finance**

Adults and Communities continue to maintain their strong financial position, reporting an underspend of just under £2m as at December 2019. This is both supporting the overall council financial position during 2019/20 and also enabling the Adults to bring forward savings initiatives and investment programmes to support their own financial position in 2020/21.

### **DPH report**

The Director of Public Health Annual Report this year has focussed on the impact on health and wellbeing of living in a sparsely populated rural county. The report sets out how overall people living in rural Herefordshire have better health than those in the urban areas, and indeed have slightly higher life expectancy. However, while overall health outcomes are more favourable, these averages mask significant pockets of deprivation and poor health outcomes which can be made worse by living in a rural location. Rural deprivation looks very different from urban deprivation. In rural areas, the most common types of deprivation relate to housing and physical access to services, which are significant areas of challenge in Herefordshire. Populations experiencing the poorest health outcomes are gypsy traveller communities. The findings of the report are influencing the priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board and will support the councils approach in determining how best to tackle rural health inequalities.

### **The Rough Sleeper Initiative Programme**

The Housing Solutions Service has made a successful bid to MHCLG for additional funding in 2020-21 to assist with the Rough Sleeper Initiative programme championed by MHCLG. The bid's aims and objectives are around the provision of services tailored to identified needs specific to rough sleepers; including the deployment of a specialist mental health worker, a substance use worker, a supported lettings worker, a 'service navigator' and a health professional who will specialise in podiatry issues. MHCLG have confirmed we will receive £400,022

### **Infrastructure and transport – Cllr John Harrington**

The councils Contract Management Team and BBLP ran a Drop in Session on the 24 February at BBLP offices at Thorn, Rotherwas from 9.30am to 4.30pm, giving all members an opportunity to view the current version of the draft annual plan and to discuss and comment on the draft plan. The Annual Planning cycle is a continuous process and further briefing sessions are being planned for April/May. These sessions are an opportunity for members to influence and shape where possible the delivery programme.

I am grateful that Full Council agreed access to the £2.2m New Homes Bonus to help us tackle the issue of phosphates in the River Lugg. A briefing note was circulated on 14 February to all members on the current situation with phosphates and the public release of a revised technical position statement is also imminent, being delayed only because of Natural England. An all member briefing has been arranged for the afternoon of 19 March and confirmation of this will be forwarded shortly, if not already.

We have also secured an additional £500k from the government's 'Access Fund' initiative which will enable us to continue our campaign to change behaviour on walking and cycling to encourage modal shift from cars. This will benefit local air quality, the health & wellbeing of our residents and also lower our county's carbon footprint.

Beryl Bikes continue to be incredibly successful, leading to an increase in the number of bikes as well as new bays in the City.

### **Rural Access Grant**

We will shortly be launching the Rural Access Grant which is seeking to target funding for schemes which will improve access for rural residents and in particular limited access to private transport. The fund total £275K and will be available for projects and initiatives which can start providing better access during 2020/21. We have listened to our community transport partners and have sought to ensure that they can bid for funding for a broad range of activities noting that we are keen to support great local solutions and respond to the needs of specific communities. This means that the fund can support new vehicles, activities which will encourage more volunteers – particularly drivers, and innovative approaches which might improve access and reduce carbon emissions. We are really keen to see what works well so that we can share best practice between communities and inform how we might target resources in future.

## **Housing, regulatory services and community safety – Cllr Ange Tyler**

### **Accommodation for young adults**

The council's first residential property purchased in Widemarsh Street, Hereford is due to complete its refurbishment in April. The property will be used as transitional accommodation and provides four self-contained apartments and an emergency studio apartment for young adults with complex needs. A 24 hour support service will operate out of the property providing support to the individuals to enable them to become tenancy ready and follow a pathway in to general needs accommodation.

### **Affordable Housing Target**

The delivery of affordable housing will exceed the target set for 19/20. A target of 210 new affordable dwellings provided through the planning gain process, delivered by housing associations or the refurbishment of council owned dwellings was set for the year 2019/ 20, 189 dwellings have been delivered with a further 29 in the pipeline which will exceed the target by 8 dwellings. The properties provide a mixture of property types and tenures for general needs accommodation, supported accommodation for young adults and physical disabilities.

### **Empty Properties**

Following the appointment of an Empty Property Officer in late November, three properties have successfully been brought back in to use through advice or assistance. 287 properties are recorded as long term, however, this includes properties that have been advertised for sales for more than 6 months, properties in the process of probate, a small number of properties where the owners are detained at Her Majesty's prisons along with a number of properties empty due to the owners moving in to residential or nursing care. The EP Officer is also actively talking to a further eight households to find a solution to bring their properties back in to use. A mail merge has just been posted out to shop owners in the market towns to encourage them to discuss with Strategic Housing the possibilities of bringing the accommodation above their shops or even empty shops in to use for residential accommodation.

Hannah McSherry has been newly appointed as a Housing Strategy Officer, Hannah will primarily be focusing on the Homeless and Rough Sleepers taking forward the action plan in the new adopted Strategy on Homeless Prevention and Rough Sleeping and working closely with volunteer organisations who compliment the service the council offers.

### **Veterans Self Build**

The veteran's self-build scheme in Leominster is progressing well with completion due late summer, partnership working between Herefordshire Council and Stonewater will see the delivery of a mixed scheme of 19 dwellings. Nine will be allocated to the veterans who were recommended by the Community Self Build Association and the Royal British Legion. The scheme has made it possible to provide much needed accommodation and life skills for veterans, this is especially important as Herefordshire Council have signed up to the Military Covenant. The Veterans will receive ongoing daily support from SSAFA, The British Legion and Stonewater. The remaining dwellings will be allocated to those with a local connection to Leominster with ex service personnel having priority.

<https://selfbuildportal.org.uk/news/19-home-veterans-self-build-scheme-starts-on-site/>

<https://www.herefordtimes.com/news/18172854.artwork-display-self-build-project-veterans/>

### **Trading Standards**

The trading standards team has just successfully prosecuted a nationally renowned rogue trader from Glasgow, an engineer who was exploiting the elderly in the pricing of TV aerial installations. This rogue company, Aerial Express, is the largest aerial firm in the UK and having been featured on Esther Rantzen's Channel 5 rogue trader programme, Herefordshire Council are the first local authority to take court action relating to the company. This was so serious that it has been passed from the Magistrates to the Crown Court for sentencing. Trading standards have also successfully prosecuted a company from Bournemouth who exploited an 89 year old retiree from Bartestree for unnecessary building repairs.

Our Sustainability and Climate Action Team has also secured additional grant funding from the government's 'Warm Homes Fund' which will help us support first time central heating systems and insulation measures in the housing of the most vulnerable.

**Commissioning, procurement and assets – Cllr Gemma Davies**  
To follow