

As of 1st August 2020

Leader's newsletter

Welcome to my Newsletter. Apologies that it is a little late this month.

You continue to receive weekly briefings on Covid 19 related issues direct from the Chief Executive and once again I do not propose increasing reading matter by repeating what he has said.

Council focus remains to keep as many people as safe as possible and ensuring that our vital front line services are supported. The gradual release of the lock down is to be welcomed, but the Cabinet and Council remain concerned that this does not result in a worsening position. I urge people to continue to comply with the latest guidelines on social distancing.

Children and families – Cllr Felicity Norman

Schools have now closed for the summer holidays, and everyone will be taking an opportunity to relax, following an intense period in which many staff have had little or no opportunity for a break. I think we can acknowledge that life under COVID19 has been extraordinarily demanding, and I thank children, young people, families/carers, schools and settings for their commitment and cooperation.

Planning for the full opening of schools in September continues – school transport now has capacity to meet need in September and are working through safety arrangements for buses that are both school and public vehicles – to avoid mixing of risk. We are collecting a list of pupils who are technically shielded and considering safer transport arrangements for them (numbers are low – fewer than 20)

Early Years settings are now up to 116 settings open and we believe capacity meets demand across the county.

Summer activity provision is now open – all offers are posted on the WISH public website.

A range of staff, school staff, pupils and a young person with care experience took part in Herefordshire's first virtual royal visit. We were able to provide a guided tour of a school and talk about a range of experiences during lockdown, the work done to support children, schools and settings and children and young people got a chance to talk to His Royal Highness directly.

Last week Cabinet gave approval for the expansion of John Kyrle High School to meet growing numbers of pupils. Officers have worked very constructively with the academy to develop a scheme and use the national funding basic need grant to enable the project to go ahead. This project will provide high quality accommodation that will meet the BREEAM excellent or Passivhaus standards that Council expects from all our building projects.

Cabinet also approved the multi-agency transition protocol for children with disabilities moving to adulthood. This is a really important protocol that is now updated to reflect the different roles across a range of services to support a smooth and successful transition to living as independently as possible for our young people with complex needs.

Signs of Safety

This is a strength based approach to working with children and families. As part of our safeguarding and family support improvement work we have adopted Signs of Safety, an internationally renowned framework that places focusing on the child at the centre of work and aims to reduce the need for children to enter into care, recognising and building on the strengths of the child and family whilst also being clear about the risks and what needs to be done to address them. A lot of work has been taking place, including training for staff. This has been paused during the lockdown and is now starting up again, virtually. Cabinet received a briefing on the framework and work is taking place to involve partner agencies so that there is a clear, single approach for children in Herefordshire. The work will be taking place over the next two years so that it embeds in the day to day practice of our

staff and the staff of our partners. An important part to the roll out of Signs of Safety is the leadership pledge, which the director, Chris Baird developed with his assistant directors, Liz Elgar, Andy Gill and Ceri Morgan. This is being used to lead the work in the directorate and I thought you would be interested in it as it illustrates the different ways the strength based approach will make a difference to what our staff do.

ECHO

ECHO (Edge of Care/Home) is a brand new team in Safeguarding and Family Support (Children and Families). The aim of the service provided by ECHO is to support families to stay together, by preventing children from coming into care and reunifying children home from care.

Using a strengths based approach and working with the whole family and professional network, our ECHO workers support families responsively and intensively to achieve their goals. Social workers in any team can refer to ECHO.

All of our ECHO workers are experienced family support workers, but we are also recruiting and commissioning a number of additional roles to form a multi-disciplinary team around the family to include:

- a substance misuse worker from 'We Are With You', with experience of supporting both children and adults;
- a domestic abuse support worker from West Mercia Womens' Aid, able to work with female victims of domestic abuse and children who have experienced domestic abuse;
- a Systemic Family Therapist to work across a range of ECHO cases, working directly with families.

We're very excited about ECHO and what this signifies for children and families in Herefordshire! We're currently contacting teams to come to your team meetings to talk more about what the service has to offer. If you'd like to know more or make a referral, you can contact Katleen Vanderstraete on (01432) 383219.

Early Help Hub

This is part of our development to enable children and families to have the right support at the right time. It is being set up to provide signposting and support at an early stage, rather than needing to be considered by social care through our Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. We aim for the hub to be fully functioning from mid September and we are currently in the process of recruitment.

Environment, economy and skills – Cllr Ellie Chowns

Market Town Economic Development Investment Plans

On the 22nd July several cabinet colleagues and I had a very positive and constructive meeting with the market town councils. The market towns play a critical role in the Herefordshire's economy in terms of jobs, access to services, connectivity, and interface with the more rural areas. We want to support the market towns to come up with Economic Development Investment Plans to shape the vision for their town, and identify priority projects required to deliver this. This will identify how we can best utilise the £13.6m the council has allocated in its capital programme for market town business space and employment land, and also will be a strong basis to seek additional funds from government to aid Covid-19 recovery.

Leominster Heritage Action Zone

As a really good example of a market town council, local stakeholders and Herefordshire Council working collaboratively together, I was really pleased that at the cabinet meeting on the 23rd July the project was approved. Earlier in the year Heritage England approved a £1.8m contribution to the project, matched by the councils own capital investment, to support the development of Leominster Town Centre through the restoration of the significant range of heritage buildings, improving the quality of life for local residents, and enhancing the cultural offer available to attract visitors.

Covid 19 Discretionary Grant Scheme

The second round of the fund launched on the 20th July, including a revision to the criteria to enable a wider range of businesses to apply. Details of the scheme can be found at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/covid19business. We only have until the end of August to commit the funds, so I would be grateful if you can flag the scheme to any businesses in your areas that may be eligible.

Hereford Town Deal Board

As I reported last month, the private-sector-led is now starting to meet regularly. I'm really pleased that the Board is strongly committed to wide public consultation, so please look out for opportunities to feed into this in the coming weeks and months.

Fastershire is cracking on. Gigaclear have started in Devereaux Wooton, Kings Acre, Mansel Lacy and Pembridge this month, and Airband have completed their works all the way down the A417.

The **Visitor Economy Recovery project** is currently recruiting marketing and PR specialists to design and deliver a major campaign to attract more visitors to experience the delights of Herefordshire!

2020 Climate Challenge

I'm delighted that the project has kicked off properly now, with the first set of meetings held for both council and county groups. The **2020 County Team** is up and running and have had two meetings. There's already a really good group dynamic and great range of backgrounds, experience, ages. Sub-groups/areas of interest are already forming around communications/social media, youth and education and buildings. The group are busy sharing ideas, articles, information on projects elsewhere. The **2020 Council Team** have met and are recording their personal carbon footprints using an online calculator. They're meeting again on 4th August to start looking at the Council's carbon footprint.

We held a very informative **all-councillor briefing on environmental building standards** on 21st July – following up on this is a high priority for me, and it was great to see how much enthusiasm there was for this from members across the whole council. I believe we need an SPD on environmental building standards, and I would also like to see us adopt a policy on our own buildings.

A revised governance report format has now been put in place, meaning that **every decision report now has to explicitly consider the climate and ecological impacts** of the decision. This will help ensure that all our decision-making takes into account the need to tackle the climate and ecological emergency.

I have asked officers from all my three portfolio areas (environment economy and skills) to work together to develop an **ambitious energy efficiency retrofit programme** to improve the quality of the housing stock, reduce emissions, and reduce fuel poverty.

Work has also started on developing a **biodiversity strategy** for the council (including a Tree Strategy, as per the decision of Council last week). I'm really pleased that there is such strong support for measures to plant and protect trees, and increase biodiversity more generally.

Finance and corporate services – Cllr Liz Harvey

Covid Costs

The cabinet's budget working group continues to examine every and all options to close the widening gap between the costs of responding responsibly to Covid locally and the funds provided from central government to reimburse this council for its exceptional costs. To remind members, the hole in the council's finances currently sits at approx. £10m and will widen if the expected second wave occurs.

Our response, support and containment of the outbreak on Rook Row farm at Mathon has cost £50k to-date, with no indication from government that any of this will be covered from central funds.

Flood Damage

Disappointingly the assurances from Mr Wiggin that govt funds were available and forthcoming for the exceptional flood repair costs at Fownhope and Whitney-on-Wye have come to nothing. MHCLG and Dept of Transport Ministers have suggested we divert funds provided for county-wide road maintenance to cover this second tranche of flood repairs.

We have inherited a strategy for the managed decline of the county's road network, which we are determined to turn around. Consequently, Cabinet do not want to plunder the road maintenance budget or to hold back on the urgent programme of transformational investments approved by council in the existing capital programme.

An extraordinary full council meeting is now called for 4 August at which all members will be asked to support Cabinet's proposal that the funds allocated to road maintenance are, indeed, invested in maintaining the county-wide road network, and that the exceptional flood repair costs (£4.027m) be covered by borrowing.

LEP Funding ups and downs

The Marches LEP has supported projects proposed by Herefordshire to deliver reed filtration beds to address phosphate pollution in our river systems from unsustainable sewage treatment and intensive agricultural practices, funding for the development of Hereford City and NMiTE. These projects are now with MHCLG Minister, Robert Jenrick, for further consideration.

Unfortunately, the LEP has taken more than 4 months to issue contract offers for projects it approved back in February reallocating South Wye Transport Package funding. This funding must be spent and projects completed by the end of March 2021. Whilst it remains feasible for us to attempt to complete the project at the Shell Store site on the Enterprise Zone, it is no longer possible to complete the work necessary to spend the funds allocated to bring forward the Ross Enterprise Park at Model Farm on the A40.

Cabinet members have already met with Ross ward members and the town Mayor to assure them that the £7m of Herefordshire funds allocated in our capital programme to the enterprise park will continue to be set aside to invest in economic growth and development in Ross. We shall continue to work hard to find projects which meet the LEP's requirements and which can be delivered in the eight months that remain.

A letter has recently been received from the LEP cataloguing what they consider to be a litany of council failures to deliver on the progress promised for the South Wye Transport Package prior to the pause and review decision taken in October 2019. The letter requests the return of £3.8m of funds provided to the previous administration. The view of our Monitoring and Section 151 Officers is that the funds have been spent in accordance with the agreement signed with the LEP and the challenge from the LEP will be robustly rebutted.

Infrastructure and transport – Cllr John Harrington

Hereford Transport Strategy Review: The Hereford Transport Strategy Review is progressing well with public consultation and stakeholder engagement helping inform our technical work. The restrictions resulting from Covid required a rethink on how we originally planned to engage with stakeholders and we allowed for more time to ensure that representative groups were able to engage with the cabinet member and project team through video conferencing. The Review is moving into its final stage now and has followed a number of briefing sessions with the cabinet team. Again we have taken a little more time to ensure that we move forward with a sensible range of packages to test and inform our strategy development. Whilst originally we envisaged concluding the technical work at the end of July this will now conclude at the end of September after which point we will consider recommendations and next steps.

Emergency Active Travel Measures: The Department for Transport (DfT) announced in May funding for local authorities to implement a programme emergency active travel measures to respond to the Covid 19 pandemic. These measures were to provide increased space for social distancing, allow for reduced use of public transport and encourage the public to maintain the increase in walking and cycling that occurred during the lockdown period. Tranche 1 measures have been developed and consulted on with local members, town and city councils and local businesses and organisations. These measures cover Hereford and the Market Towns and include footway widening, 20mph zones, cycle lanes, road closures and supplementary signage. These measures will have started to be implemented and roll out over a three week period, which began from the 27 July. We're quickly sourcing planters, delayed because of a supply issue, to replace the BBLP blue barriers and some cones so it doesn't look like the utility companies are having a free for all in our City and town's streets. All measures can be reviewed as time passes so we can get the best balance. Development of possible measures for tranche 2 of the funding is now underway. The DfT require local authorities for tranche 2 to show real ambition in their plans and require them to make a meaningful reallocation of road space for walking and cycling with segregation from traffic. Initial submissions for the funding are to be made at the beginning of August with the measures to be completed by the end of March 2021.

B4224 Fownhope Works: Work is continuing at a pace to repair the two locations on the B4224 at Fownhope damaged during Storm Dennis. Works to repair the first damage site at Lechmere Lay will be completed later this week. The repair of the second damage site at Stone Cottage will follow this as soon as possible, subject to consideration of the necessary funding for this and the other remaining storm damage work by Cabinet this week. Given the lack of funds from central government this Council will have to make some difficult choices to find funds from within its own capital programme, the Pothole and Challenge Fund or borrowing.

Update on Phosphate levels in the Lugg and Wye Catchment: The council is continuing to liaise and apply pressure on Natural England, The Environment Agency, Welsh Water and to work with the National Farmers Union and Powys CC, through the Nutrient Management Board and its assigned technical working party. All parties are working to find an effective solution which will both seek to reduce phosphate levels within the River Lugg and River Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and allow development to proceed in the north of the county.

It is envisaged that in the long term the solution will be provided through the revision of the Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) which will reflect the measures implemented by Welsh Water through their Asset Management Programme. In combination with more stringent requirements placed upon land owners to minimise diffuse pollution through appropriate infrastructure and updated environmentally friendly farming techniques.

Following consideration of a number of options to further reduce phosphate levels the council is allocating the approved £2m allocation in the Council's 2020/21 capital programme from the New Homes Bonus Scheme.

The council is seeking to:

- Design, construct and manage up to 8 integrated wetland sites set in strategic locations in order to provide tertiary treatment to waste water treatment works within the Lugg catchment.
- Allocate £30,000 from the approved capital programme to commission an interim plan setting out a phosphate calculator and a suite of recommended mitigation measures appropriate to the River Lugg. This will enable developers to calculate the phosphate load of their proposals and therefore agree measures independently with landowners to mitigate or offset the identified phosphate load. This has the potential to be further developed as a trading platform for offsetting identified loads in future developments.
- To appoint an environment officer to lead on reductions in levels of diffuse pollution. To liaise with the regulatory bodies and carry out an audit in the Lugg catchment, identifying through mapping and farm visits where risk of pollution occurs and working with the farming community to introduce improvements to infrastructure and farming techniques.
- Acquire existing agricultural land that can be repurposed as a complementary solution for reducing phosphate pollution in the river catchment

- Additional funding is also being sought from central government through the Marches LEP.

A concern is the level of nutrients in rivers coming into our county. In this connection a meeting took place on Friday 30th July with MPs and MSs (Members of the Senedd - previously Assembly Members) to impress upon government ministers and statutory agencies the need for concrete action, resource and certainty - for environmental organisations and our construction industry

Housing, regulatory services and community safety – Cllr Ange Tyler

It has been another busy month for Officers as the relaxation of lockdown measures from Government have come swiftly in order for all businesses to start opening again. It is a new normal that we all have to adapt too and I am not alone in my reservations of being slightly worried of coming out of my comfort zone of home. I am grateful to your officers who have relentlessly continued to work through tough challenges, without complaint, determined to keep our communities safe as we move forward.

Regulatory Services

The opening of the hospitality sector on the 4th July was seen as a success due to the commitment of HBID, Hereford City Council, the Police and Council Regulatory Officers. We are awaiting legislation from Government regarding pavement licences to support the hospitality section to sit outside to serve food and beverages. We are anticipating such changes to come into effect by 1st August.

Over the last two weeks EH Officers have responded to the outbreak of Covid on the farm with colleagues from PHE and the Police. They have worked endlessly to ensure the safety of the seasonal workers and staff as well as maintaining their role in supporting businesses and premises during the easing of lockdown, along with other matters of licensing and environmental issues. I am thankful of their work ethics to maintain the services as required, however, I must stress that officers must take time for leave as we move into the Winter months.

Strategic Housing:

Government's Summer Statement announced a £12 Billion affordable homes programme to support 180,000 new affordable homes for ownership and rent over the next 8 years, including a pilot of 1,500 "first homes" that will be sold to first time buyers - 30% remains in perpetuity, keeping them affordable for generations of families to own. This is welcomed as the Council are committed to increase the delivery of Affordable Homes for Herefordshire. The Council has commissioned Engie to evaluate a suitable model for delivery of Affordable Housing. We have engaged with Engie to save time because they are already a development and regeneration partner to the Council supporting strategic economic delivery for Herefordshire. It is necessary to understand the disparate housing need across the County and Engie are experienced in delivering affordable housing and work closely with Homes England whom are keen to support delivery in Herefordshire. During August the consultants will investigate the pro's & con's of different housing models upon which the outcomes will be presented to Cabinet at September's meeting. In September the Council will expand on the opportunity to agree a suitable model as to how we commence Phase 2 to deliver Affordable Housing. Strategic Housing are also engaging with residential and commercial landlords, calling for empty properties to support our housing delivery. The new housing we deliver will be designed to achieve sustainable elements to support our green recovery for Herefordshire.

Affordable Housing SPD

Strategic Housing have produced an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which is currently out for consultation, ending 5th August 20. The document is intended to update and replace the current affordable housing section in the existing SPD dated 2008. Numerous legislation changes have been implemented and the breath of options available to deliver affordable housing is not documented in the existing document which is obstructing negotiations with developers when securing affordable housing. The AHSPD will provide more choice to developers and housing associations to enable sustainable developments to be created.

Housing Market Area Needs Assessment (HMANA)

ICENI have been commissioned to deliver a county wide assessment on housing need, the HMANA will replace the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA) which is the current evidence base for the Core Strategy. The new assessment will examine housing need in all tenures of affordable housing, open market rent and sale. This will assist in the mapping out of need and affordability in the county. The first draft is due early Aug with the full report by the end of September.

The first self build veteran scheme delivered in the county is due for completion in September, Alabare one of the many partners have commissioned a short video where a young veteran is interviewed, he explains how the build has helped him with skills and improved his relationship with his family. Please view this link <https://youtu.be/aghdedk9vUY>

We are also delighted to hear that Hope Scott House was awarded £10,000 from Herefordshire Community Foundation from the National Emergency Trust. I had the pleasure of visiting Hope Scott House with Cllr Crockett to view the new extension and changes to the building, which has completely enhanced the accommodation to support our homeless in Herefordshire”.

Widemarsh Street, Hereford

The council's first housing development is now complete. The scheme will provide supported accommodation for challenging young adults who moved in last week.

Bereavement, Registrars & Coroners

The teams have been working very hard since the easing of lockdown. The Registrar's Office opened up having implemented safety measures to protect staff and members of the public. The opening has meant that families can now attend to register the birth of their baby and the service is working through the backlog of births since Covid-19 lock down. The latest guidance permits weddings to be held for up to 30 people as well as attending wedding receptions. However, this number is considerably less in reality when social distancing measures are applied in conjunction with the ceremony room size).

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 introduced by the Government, which required that crematoria be closed except for funerals was amended on 3rd July 2020. This means that crematoria can continue to provide funeral services as well as open their buildings for non-funeral purposes. In light of this, Hereford Crematorium will shortly open the office and the Book of Remembrance once the corporate risk assessment has been signed off. Amended guidance now allows up to 30 people to attend funerals, however once social distancing measures are applied the number is lightly less with Hereford Crematorium having 24 seats which are covid secure for bereaved families. The Coroner and Coroners Officers continue to work from home as much as possible, with the Coroners Clerk working from the office. Inquests are able to take place within the Council Chamber as required observing social distancing.

CCTV

For the first time CCTV has now been installed at the entrance and top floor of the multi-storey carpark. Registration numbers are able to be recorded as vehicles enter the car park should there be a need for any investigations. A new camera is also installed on Edgar Street and in the Merton Meadow car park. The digital definition is outstanding which will greatly enhance the work of the team to support the community and Police. Highway's England have asked the CCTV service to take on their cameras at Tesco and Belmont roundabouts and the authority's Highways' section have asked for options for BBLP to be able to see CCTV at Thorn. By the end of August the market towns will have new cameras and new wifi links that has been secured through Prudential Borrowing. Long term SLAs have been entered into with the City and Market Towns to secure all new equipment and agreed income for their operation. It is hoped that PCC funding will be procured for longer than 1 year from 2021 to maintain the commitment from PCC to secure CCTV coverage for Herefordshire.

Commissioning, procurement and assets – Cllr Gemma Davies

Waste

As you are aware the cross party scrutiny review on waste, chaired by Cllr Paul Symonds have been meeting to identify ways in which collection and disposal of waste within Herefordshire can be managed. Despite Covid the group have still been meeting and are now finalising the recommendations and report to present at scrutiny on 28th September. I am excited to see the recommendations and thank all members of the group for their dedication to keep going when we have all been under so much pressure with Covid and the floods. I am hopeful that not only will there be longer term strategies for the waste contracts but quick, small wins that we can get going asap. All recycling centres are now open and I am asking the team to review the numbers to see if they could be operated with the current booking system. To be fair I have received no complaints from any of the market towns using the booking system but I promised that we would review and I will let you know as and when the system is removed.

Cultural services

Herefordshire is slowly reopening its cultural services in a phased approach. Hereford, Leominster, Ledbury and Ross on Wye libraries are now open for click and collect which has proven extremely popular. Kington is hoping to start click and collect mid-August and soon after that Colwall are hoping to open for click and collect. The remaining five libraries throughout the county are slightly more complicated due to them either being in closed buildings or entirely volunteer-ran. We are hopeful that Bromyard could be opened by mid-August but this is dependent upon Halo. The team are working hard with all groups to formulate plans for re-opening and I will keep you updated. In addition, we are hoping to deliver our service

Museums are currently formulating plans for reopening, the added difficulty is that all visitors will be under the track and trace regulations so the team are working with relevant officers including information governance at the council in how to best do this. Both the Black and White House and Hereford museum have been signed off as Covid secure so I'm really hopeful that we will be able to open before the end of August at the latest.

Archives are also working hard on formulating plans to reopen, these are compounded by the fact that people will want access to artefacts and objects that cannot be sanitised so they are working on the best ways to provide the service.

Maylord Orchards

Our management company, Montagu Evans have been working hard with local and neighbouring organisations to start filling some of the empty shops in the area. We have exciting developments coming soon especially within the cultural/experience sector. We have had a number of companies contacting us to ask for opportunities to trade in the vicinity and these range from virtual reality gaming to hospitality. There has recently been a change in guidance for changing places for severely disabled people in public buildings <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/changing-places-toilets-for-severely-disabled-people-to-be-compulsory-in-new-public-buildings>. I have asked the team to look at making the disabled toilet in Maylord Orchards to be compliant with these new standards. It's the first step to showing that we will be disability friendly for all people in Hereford city centre.

Health and adult wellbeing – Cllr Pauline Crockett

Talk Community:

Shielding for the most vulnerable has now been paused and we have been contacting all those matched with a shield buddy to understand any future needs for support. The council have 1200 weekly supermarket slots, split between Tesco and Iceland, available for vulnerable people if individuals need to transition from shielding or need to isolate. The Talk Community contact number remains open and is now fully supported as business as usual within the customer services team in Blueschool House.

BT has started another consultation on telephone boxes and are engaging with communities consultation who may be affected, if you need any further information please contact the Local Enterprise and Resource Team.