

As of 1st February 2021

Leader's newsletter

Welcome to my newsletter. The main news this month is the result of the Council debate yesterday. In due course I am hopeful that all residents of Herefordshire will realise the sound reasoning behind this decision, that it was the right decision, and that future generations will appreciate the huge and positive impact on our County.

Closely behind this decision in importance is the appointment of a new Chief Executive (Paul Walker) who I, and the Employment Panel, trust will bring the skills needed to realise our ambitions as set out in the County Plan. Since his appointment I have spoken to Paul a number of times using zoom. I have found him already to be very engaged. I am confident that he will hit the ground running.

Paul is well equipped to help us to recover from Covid having co designed the West London Economic Recovery plan – a £74bn economy. He also leads the West London Green recovery delivery plan across 6 London Boroughs. He was CEX of Copeland Borough Council from 2010 to 2015 so is familiar with the issues which face a rural county. Among many contributions I am hoping that he will bring his skills to the Environmental and Ecological Emergency agenda in Marches LEP area.

At the Planning Committee meeting this morning Kevin Bishop gave us some good news on the Housing Supply figure which is now above 4. I am sure that he will be sending out an explanation.

Children and families – Cllr Felicity Norman

Signs of safety roll out; the Signs of Safety workflow is live on MOSAIC, the case management system used for social care. This is a significant milestone on our implementation journey it is also ground-breaking as we are the first authority in the country to go live with this new suite of forms. So far staff have been embracing the new workflows and coping admirably with the changes. Staff are being supported with regular Webex drop in sessions, and Andy Gill, Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding Quality & Improvement is providing daily blog updates to staff on progress of the rollout.

Schools' capital investment; the Cabinet have approved a major investment in capital premises improvements. This is a two year programme of around £3m to improve, upgrade and develop the schools premises around the county. This will allow for upgrades to fire alarms, asbestos removal, roofing and heating repairs and improvements to ventilation systems. The main intention is to plan our maintenance programme rather than be reactive to problems which are much more expensive to deal with.

Launch of First Steps; a new addition to our Early Help offer is the launch of the First Steps service. Young people aged 21 or under who are expecting a baby can be offered a mentor for up to 2 years and more regular contact with their midwife and health visitor.

The First Steps offer will include:

- access to the ante-natal Solihull online course
- Young Parents to Be course
- the gift of a Moses basket with items for your new baby, at 36 weeks
- baby massage classes
- information and advice
- regular health visitor contact – every month for the first 6 months,
- then every 2 months until 1yr and then quarterly until 2yrs

Free school meals decision; Over 3,200 Herefordshire children are set to benefit from free school meals support during the February and Easter half term holidays, through a council funded scheme.

The scheme was originally introduced at Christmas to provide support to vulnerable individuals and households with children, particularly affected by the pandemic during the winter months.

The council's decision to continue to support the free school meals provision throughout the holidays will help to ensure that vulnerable Herefordshire families don't go hungry.

Under the extended scheme primary and secondary school pupils who are entitled to benefits related free school meals will receive meal provision up to the value of £15 to cover the cost of food for the week of the February half term holidays and up to £33 to cover meals for the longer Easter break through their schools.

Parents and carers of primary and secondary school age children that are already in receipt of benefits related free school meals will be contacted by their school prior to the holidays.

Supporting schools and settings with working under lockdown; Schools are now involved in regular COVID testing with plans to extend this to Early Years settings. Advice and guidance is issued weekly on dealing with the pandemic and also strengthening the on line offer in schools. We are also supporting the offer of Free School Meals via a range of vouchers and parcels for the half term break.

Adults and Communities – Cllr Pauline Crockett

Direct Payments; over recent months the team has been working closely with 3 organisations that support people with managing their direct payment funds to enable those providers to manage funds using an online card system. This provides the council with more timely oversight of customer spend and removes the burden on the organisations that manage the money to provide detailed income and expenditure accounts for monitoring purposes. All new managed accounts are now opened on a card account and the majority of funds have been transferred to the card accounts. It is anticipated that all funds will have been transferred across by the end of this month.

This month the team has also supported the vaccination programme for front line health and social care workers by identifying people who receive direct payments and employ their own personal assistants. This included working collaboratively with other organisations that provide direct payment support so employees who are eligible could be identified and provided with information about how to get appointments through WVT. Letters are going out this week.

The team continues to keep abreast on any developments in advice provided by gov.uk and updating direct payment recipients through key messages sent with payment information and updating the council coronavirus website content.

Update for market position statement; the market position statement is due to go to cabinet shortly for approval. This document is aimed at care and support providers across Herefordshire to inform them of future demand and growth and what the council's commissioning intentions will be over the next 5 years. The information is based upon research and data on previous year's trends as well as predicted numbers based on demographic changes to inform need. This document covers all ages and the formal as well as community services. Its aim is to support the market to grow and develop, ensuring it provides choice, quality, sustainable and cost effective services to meet the needs of the residents across the county. It is an impressive document.

Independent advocacy service; Commissioners will be going to the open market in February 2021 to seek bids from providers who can deliver a new Independent Advocacy

Service for Adults from the 1 August 2021, as the current contract is due to expire. It is the role of an independent advocacy service to support and enable people to express their views and wishes, and ensure their rights are upheld. The council has a statutory duty to provide independent advocacy, which must be independent of the local authority. There are anticipated to be significant changes to the Mental Capacity Act (implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards) and Mental Health Act during the contract period, any required changes to the service arising from these will be dealt with at the appropriate time.

Infection Prevention and Control Grant; Government funding to reduce infection transmission between and by care staff and safer visiting in care homes. £3.58m of government funding has been distributed to Herefordshire care homes and community care providers with another £1.47m to be distributed in the next two weeks. New Adult Social Care Rapid Testing Grant of a further £0.68m to be distributed to care home providers to enable rapid testing of staff and visitors and £0.44m has been allocated to Herefordshire Council to assist with staffing capacity in social care provision.

Finance and corporate services – Cllr Liz Harvey

All change in the office of the Leader and Chairman; we will be seeing a change of personnel in Civic Liaison next week with this team supporting the leader, chairman and Lord Lieutenant. Vicky Harris has left the council to follow a new career in education, whilst Michelle Price will be joining the new Programmes Team using her effective organisational skills to ensure the delivery of projects on a six month secondment. Both Vicky and Michelle will be greatly missed but the services will be in very capable hands of Ceri Charnick who some of you may know through working in Facilities Management. We have slightly changed the line management with Ceri reporting to Max David who is the manager for executive support and provides support to the CE.

Published Employee Analysis; this week we will be publishing the Employment Analysis as part of the requirement of the Equality Act 2010. This gives information about the protected characteristics of Herefordshire Council's workforce, the diversity profile of councillors, statutory gender pay gap report, and ethnicity pay gap report. Where possible this is profiled across different years to see progression.

Some areas of note:

- Relatively low number of employees identifying as disabled (3.1% compared to approximately 7.8% of the county's working age population).
- The March 2020 gender pay gap is 8.2%, which is an improvement on the 2019 figure of 9.8%.
- This is the first time we will publish workforce pay information by ethnicity – it is currently not a requirement but best practice.
- As noted in last year's report, the percentage of female Councillors has increased from 28.3% in 2015 to 39.6% in 2019.

A new way of delivering project management; to address identified concerns over the way projects have been previously managed, the council has committed to making improvements to the way it identifies key areas of work, develops those ideas and delivers them. Key projects that are brought forward should help make the Delivery Plan a reality and if approved, be efficiently managed to optimise all aspects of resource and be able to demonstrate the difference made to our residents and businesses. A new, ambitious project management system, managed by the Programme Management Office (PMO) is therefore currently being rolled out to ensure a robust and auditable process that supports the ambitions and priorities of the County Plan and makes efficient use of resources.

Infrastructure and transport – Cllr John Harrington

Significant work is ongoing with partners through the Nutrient Management Board which met on 19th January and is seeking to reduce phosphate levels in the River Lugg catchment area. Here the Council is making good progress with our own integrated wetland project and we will shortly be sharing a first draft of our new phosphate calculator for comment and input from partners.

A draft of the independent review of planning by LGA's Planning and Advisory Service (PAS) was received just before Christmas and this has now been agreed. We are currently awaiting their final draft so that we may consider how we can improve the planning service, so that it can operate even more effectively.

Following the retirement of Richard Gabb at the end of January, the Forward Planning and Neighbourhood Development Teams will now be reporting to Marc Willimont via Kevin Bishop.

[Cllr Harrington has been pretty preoccupied with preparing for the Council Meeting on 2nd Feb]

Housing, regulatory services and community safety – Cllr Ange Tyler

The Communications Team have been working tirelessly on community messaging as we move through the pandemic. The Christmas 'Celebrate Safely' campaign was well received by both local residents and businesses and was delivered together with local agency Pinstone - the commissioned agency providing additional capacity to the Communications Team. The campaign included online and offline promotion and encouraged local residents to 'Celebrate Safely' during a time when restrictions were changing locally from Tier 2, to Tier 1, with Christmas bubbles (revised late in the day) and ultimately national lockdown. The team did a fantastic job in a changing environment, with very little time to plan and deliver. You can see examples of the work and its impact in the campaign report attached. They are taking learning from this campaign forward in to the forthcoming campaigns.

There are now three corporate campaigns underway during lockdown and beyond, these include:

'Stay Home, Stay Safe'

Localised advice for the general population during lockdown, with Government advice replicated locally. Includes practical advice and guidance on accessing educational resources, services and goods from home, including:

- Infection prevention and hygiene messages- hands, face, space and fresh air
- Mental health- promoting help available on WISH website to 9 highlighted issues (and link and promote NHS messages) including support for children
- Physical health (to include local walking/cycling safety) and healthy eating
- Promotion of Love Local map – to the public as a place that click and collect or delivery can be arranged in adherence with lockdown regulation
- Promotion of Love Local map – to Herefordshire businesses as a way for customers to access their services during lockdown
- Financial support (personal and business)
- Addressing misinformation and promoting vaccination take-up
- Information and signposting for home learning support and children's activities
- Targeted communications for specific at risk groups e.g. shielding

'Act like you've got it' Prevention messaging to encourage compliance and prevent household transmission targeting the working population on keeping safe while travelling to and from work, whilst working, and whilst leaving the house for permitted activity.

'Play your part'- Encouraging local compliance, specifically targeting 18-30 age group to raise awareness, using local students artwork (shortlisted and selected by members of the Engagement Working Group) and a local film developed and commissioned by the Communications team.

Please look out for any messages to share with your local community and do get involved with any social media activity you feel would benefit your ward members. If you have any questions or comments regarding any of the campaigns, or if you would like to know more, please do contact our Head of Communications:
Alexandra.floyd@herefordshire.gov.uk

Technical Services, Markets, Registration, Coroners and Bereavement Services; as with most businesses Covid has affected the extent of CCTV activity, nonetheless, it is a vital service to protect our communities and support Hereford Police where necessary. Hereford City Markets have suffered massively with only essential traders being able to trade due to this third lockdown, as have the three street traders. Drop in footfall due to Covid restrictions have for most, meant that trading was not viable.

New video conferencing system is to be installed along with an upgrade of the Wifi to support the new Coroners system. This will go live in the next two weeks to support the work of the Coroner. The Registration team are working extremely hard in supporting the frontline service for families. Registration of Births have been put on hold until 8th February 2021, to focus on deaths for the County.

Bereavement services recently received a Gold award for the Charter of the Bereaved for their services provided to the community. Excellent news for the County. They have also donated a further £10,000 to a local charity "Way Widowed and Young – Bereavement support". Bereavement service are a member of the ICCM Recycling Metals. Funerals being held are Covid compliant and it is pleasing to know that life stream of funerals are taking place which helps family and friends who can't attend to watch from home, no doubt helping to be part of this important process in saying goodbye to their loved ones.

Regulatory Services; the teams are still actively involved working alongside Hereford Police through various work and Covid patrol measures to keep our communities safe. Through such dedication from Officers, Police and businesses to be compliant, this helped Herefordshire move into Tier 1, albeit for a short time. As of 4th January 2021, Herefordshire moved into Tier 4 where teams continue their active patrols and other regulatory services where it is deemed possible due to constraints of Covid working. Again, I thank them for their hard work over Christmas and the New Year.

Environment, economy and skills – Cllr Ellie Chowns

Economy

Covid 19 Business Support Grants – In the last update I mentioned the grant support being offered to businesses for the November lockdown period. Since then the county has experienced a few changes, briefly in Tiers 1 and then 3 in December, and then back in national lockdown again as of the 5th January. The council has continued to make the monthly Local Restrictions Support Grant payment to affected businesses with a rateable value (levels of payments varied depending on which tier the county was in at the time), and on the 5th January government announced a Retail Hospitality and Leisure 'top up' grant for those businesses in these sectors that have been adversely affected for a number of

months. To help those businesses that these nationally defined schemes can't support, the council launched on Wednesday 27th January a Discretionary Grant Scheme and an Exceptional Circumstances hardship scheme. Details of all of the grant support can be found at <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/coronavirus-3/herefordshire-coronavirus-discretionary-grant-fund>. We are contacting those that successfully applied for the November lockdown support to explain they will be automatically considered for this scheme (they don't need to re-apply). I realise this is an incredibly difficult time for business owners and their employees, and we will continue to make regular grant payments for the period of the lockdown period.

Kickstart Youth Employment Scheme – You may recall that in December I mentioned the great news that our 'gateway' application to the government [Kickstart scheme](#) has been approved, providing an opportunity for 16 to 24 year olds receiving universal credit to access paid-for work placements for 6 months. The Department for Work and Pensions has approved 105 placements in 22 organisations through our gateway application, this includes 20 in the council itself and 10 in Hoople Ltd. I am due to take an urgent governance decision on the 3rd February to enable us now deliver this scheme, which we hope to get up and running as soon as possible.

Hereford Town Investment Plan – On the 21st January the cabinet took a decision to endorse the Hereford Town Investment Plan (<http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=7529>), and agreed to be the accountable body for the delivery of future projects. The plan is due to be submitted on the 28th January for government consideration, seeking up to £25m to transform the city. I am delighted to have been part of the Towns Fund Board over the last few months, where a wide range of private, public and community representatives have worked together, including extensive wider stakeholder and public engagement, to develop a plan which will make a significant difference to both Hereford and the wider County. The plan includes a number of great project ideas, from creating a world class museum, re-purposing the city centre, establishing electric buses services and improving the Hereford as a one of the greenest and fairest cities in the country to live, work, study and visit. The Town Investment Plan will be available at the following website when launched: <https://strongerhereford.co.uk/>

Visitor Economy – The fantastic visitor economy project (funded by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership) continues to successfully promote the county as a place for staycations as people plan for their domestic holidays later in the year when the current restrictions end. Through the PR work the project is delivering, Herefordshire was named by the Telegraph Media Group in their top ten best tucked-away spots in Britain to escape the crowds this summer in an article which ran online <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/lists/hidden-corners-britain-escape-crowds-summer/>. Earlier Conde Nast Traveller tipped the county as one of the ten best places to visit in 2021 in the UK, describing the region as '*The bucolic borderlands championing wholehearted fun*' <https://www.cntraveller.com/gallery/places-to-visit-uk> Also, there has been recognition by Forbes, one of the world's largest global business media brands with Herefordshire included in an 'Essential Travel Forecast Report' as one of the regions of the UK worth considering for a staycation. Writer Angela Villa Clarke describes the county as '*home to some of the UK's most stunning rural landscapes, which has in turn inspired a thriving community of entrepreneurs, with home-grown brands such as Bulmers, Tyrells, Chase, Willy's Apple Cider Vinegar and Westons Cider, to name just a few*'. The project steering group – formed of a wide range of visitor economy businesses from across the county who freely give up their time to help lead this fantastic initiative – are finalising plans for a wide ranging media advertising campaign as lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Environment

Following a successful bid to the Towns Fund by the Economic Development team, the **Hereford Business E-Bike Grant** opened on 6th January. Businesses in Hereford can

apply for an e-bike or an e-cargo bike to use in place of car or van journeys or to enable the development of a new business. To date there have been 63 applications. More info: www.herefordshire.gov.uk/ebikegrant

On Monday 25th January I was delighted to attend General Scrutiny Committee to hear the report of the **Climate and Ecological Emergency task and finish group**. The full report is available [here](#). It has lots of very interesting & useful proposals and I look forward to exploring how we can further develop these proposals to achieve our commitment to become carbon neutral and nature rich by 2030.

We're seeking to significantly expand the county's **electric vehicle charging infrastructure**. This week we've published a call for expressions of interest from companies that wish to partner with the council to deliver this ASAP. Expanding the EV charger network will help encourage residents and visitors to make the change to zero-emission vehicles. (As a user of a car-pool EV myself I know how important it is to expand this infrastructure.)

Significant work is ongoing with partners through the **Nutrient Management Board** which is seeking to reduce phosphate levels in the River Lugg catchment area.

- Natural Resources Wales recently issued a statement on the condition of the River Wye. The statement differs from Natural England's guidance, so the two bodies are therefore reviewing their comments to provide a coordinated approach.
- The Nutrient Management Plan has been commented on by the technical advisory group and is now being reviewed and updated by the regulatory bodies Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, and the Environment Agency.

Fastershire; Great news on the Fastershire front this month for places across the county:

- In Ross on Wye, the whole town will now get an upgrade to full fibre broadband thanks to the council's partnership with Full Fibre Ltd.
- Shobdon Airfield has been awarded a grant of £195k. This will extend Gigaclear's full fibre network by 5km to connect over 20 businesses across the airfield site
- The last 2 BT cabinets have been completed in Hereford city centre connecting over 1,000 previously non-superfast lines
- We're on the brink of awarding the first community grant applications – to reach those communities that are hardest-to-reach
- Airband are now building in the Brockhampton area
- ZZOOMM is starting its full fibre build in Hereford City.

Skills; in addition to the great news on the Kickstart programme noted above, January has also seen the submission of the Town Investment Plan (which has a big skills development component). We will also shortly be establishing a new Herefordshire Skills Board to bring together representatives of providers, learners, businesses and other key stakeholders to help coordinate work to boost skills levels in the county – particularly crucial in these economically challenging times.