

Leader's newsletter

Welcome to my newsletter. My apologies it is late this month

Highlights for me include:

- Continued attention to the Children's Services Improvement Plan. We had a six monthly meeting with the DfE last week which seemed to go well. However we know that this is not going to be a short journey.
- This week we are interviewing on three days for the appointment of three Corporate Directors. It is important that we get this right. The panel making the appointment include members from across the political spectrum. There is no need for politics to play a part.
- We have started a series of summits with business leaders the first of which was at the Shell Store followed by others in the market towns over the next few weeks.
- In the context of the Shell Store, I was pleased to attend a West Midlands property awards ceremony in Birmingham at which the Shell Store was the winner in the Commercial Development category. It is great to see Herefordshire being put on the map. It was well worth the trip.
- News of the Citizen's Assembly is below. This is an innovative exercise in democracy.
- Covid continues to be a concern. I've just read some BBC news that rates are higher than they have ever been in Germany and the Netherlands. It is certainly not time to relax.

Children and families – Cllr Diana Toynbee

Schools and Colleges remain heavily focussed on COVID infection control spread – this is partly driven by rapidly rising rates in schools but the secondary phase have all engaged with the 12-15 vaccine programme – each school is hosting a vaccination clinic in partnership with public health and we expect that all pupils from the age of 12 will be vaccinated in the county by mid-December. This equates to around 12000 students. We are also managing so far to avoid the closure of private early years settings (this is partly due to the failure of their business model when families decide not to send their children to nursery for COVID avoidance – these are not compulsory settings). To date however we have seen only one actual closure but we have managed to retain capacity in the local area.

In our special school sector we have recently completed a statutory consultation on the future of the post 16 phase for Westfield School. The decision about that will be taken shortly but the ultimate intention is to improve the facilities for the whole school through a substantial rebuild. In the same vein we are delighted to welcome Beacon College to our family of schools. This is a 16-19 SEND state of the art facility in Hereford City which opened to the first 45 students in September this year. Beacon College is a part of the Accordia Trust which is a multi-academy trust with Barrs Court Special schools. Brookfield SEND school is also making strong progress with an inspection report to come – and negotiations continue to try to find a route to invest in that academy also. There is much to be proud of in all of the SEND sector within the county.

Finally we are delighted to share the Ofsted success by schools in Herefordshire – some of the more recent reports remain embargoed by Ofsted until they are published, but we are optimistic that the county will be able to celebrate some significant success by all of the schools in the very near future. Congratulations to all.

Adults and Communities – Cllr Pauline Crockett

Home first

A new recruitment campaign has commenced for Home first since the recent pay award for Hoople employed workers within Home first to support parity of pay with Home first Council employed workers in the same roles. The award has been received positively by staff in the service and we are beginning to see new applications for posts since the new adverts were externally advertised. Please if you see any of the adverts on social media help us further the message by sharing and retweeting..

Reablement service

The Council recently approved an hourly pay rate increase for reablement workers to £10.11 per hour; this is an increase of 13%.

Home First is the reablement service provided by Herefordshire Council. Staff within the service are employed on both Herefordshire Council or Hoople Limited terms and conditions. However, there was a disparity in the salaries paid for identical roles depending on whether the staff member was on a Council or Hoople Limited contract with some staff on Hoople contracts receiving a lower hourly rate of pay.

The service is important to help people remain at home rather than go into hospital or residential care, for example following a fall or some sort of crisis at home. The reablement part of the service helps people regain skills and confidence in completing everyday tasks and activities

Talk Community

Halo – The free swimming lessons during October half term was again a great success and fully subscribed, during the summer 5521 children enjoyed a free swim, with 1309 families attending and 1115 repeat visits. In addition, over 3000 youths have signed up to the free gym membership for years 11, 12 and 13 and the adult swimming lessons continue to be a great success.

The council has confirmed that Herefordshire will participate in the Afghan refugee resettlement scheme as part of its commitment to resettle approximately 56 refugees in 2022.

The council has offered to support the arrival of 56 refugees in family groups. People will be accommodated in various locations within Herefordshire and the Council is working in collaboration with local housing providers.

A support service for refugees is being arranged rapidly and a wide variety of local agencies have committed to help ensure a warm and comprehensive welcome for families arriving in Herefordshire

Finance and corporate services – Cllr Liz Harvey

Community Renewal Fund

Herefordshire has been successful in being awarded funding from the UK Community Renewal Fund. Projects across the country include skills training and developing low carbon technology and councils will have until 30 June 2022 to deliver each project.

Three projects agreed for Herefordshire:

From sparklers to brilliances

Herefordshire Council: Digital Skills Transformation for the High Street

People with Disabilities Employability and Enterprise Project

Winter messaging

With winter approaching and with it the chance of severe weather incidents – these links and information will be useful to share with your residents

When a severe weather event takes place the following will occur -

A homepage will be created

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/flooding

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/snow

These homepages will pull all the relevant information together for residents in one place. They can see any interruptions to any council services, road information, safety information and utility contacts.

We take control of the BBLP social media account (@HfdsStreets) as well, and embed this into the homepage for latest transport updates

The homepage banner on the website will also signpost through to this page, a latest information newsroom item detailing any major disruptions or information – such as public transport, this page will be updated live throughout the event, (this operates out of hours as well as the Comms team operate a 24/7 emergency cover rota) again this signposts to the emergency homepage and vice versa

We also have a school closures page www.herefordshire.gov.uk/schoolclosures

Here we also encourage parents and carers to sign up to school closure alerts

Christmas bin collection and late night shopping

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/Christmas - Bin information will appear here though luckily this year there should be no change for residents due to Christmas falling on the weekend

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/christmasopening - Information on late night shopping, service opening hours, bus services, road updates and cold weather messaging will appear here

Please note these pages are not active yet but will be activated over the coming weeks

Please follow and share our information on social media – especially during extreme events – so we can reach as many people as possible

@HfdsCouncil (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok)

@HfdsStreets (Facebook and Twitter)

Housing, regulatory services and community safety – Cllr Ange Tyler

Welcoming a new Registered Provider into Herefordshire

Legal and General (L&G) are famous for their financial expertise, particularly with pensions. In the past 18 months, they have added to their portfolio and become a Registered Provider. They work in many parts of the country and have added Herefordshire to one of their chosen areas.

They have allowed pension fund investment from within L&G and grants from Homes England to flow into the Legal and General Affordable Housing (LGAH) business allowing LGAH to continue to grow at the pace. It has established and delivered over 3,000 new rented and shared ownership homes annually whilst successfully delivering services to residents and homes across the portfolio. They have recently acquired the affordable properties as part of a large planning gain site in Ross On Wye, consisting of over 250 properties, of which 40% are affordable housing. L&G have forged a relationship with a local Registered Provider to provide all maintenance and management service to their tenants. L&G want all of their tenants to move into the properties and make them their homes from day one, to achieve this they provide all homes with carpets and curtains.

Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF)

Herefordshire Council have recently been successful in securing £2m under the Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF) from the DLUHC. The purpose of BLRF grant funding is to accelerate or enable the release at pace of small, local authority-owned sites that would otherwise not come forward for housing or would do so in much slower time. The bid was made to secure funds for flood mitigations works on Merton Meadow and the surrounding area. The money will enable:

Works - The proposed flood alleviation scheme will reduce flood risk to the area by restoring parts of the natural floodplain and creating wetlands. Surface water drainage will be improved by using Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to prevent the flooding and assist in enhancing amenity and biodiversity on the site. A hydro modelling report has been commissioned.

Outcome – release of land for the development

- 190 mixed affordable tenure homes to be delivered including 30 supported housing units
- 80 bed all age care facility

Herefordshire Council secured one of the highest bids made.

Commissioning, procurement and assets – Cllr Gemma Davies

Waste

As you will have seen from the forward plan, the decision paper for disposal and collection will be coming to Cabinet on the 25th November. As the decision for disposal affects the relationship with Worcestershire, Worcestershire will be taking their decision on the same day. I am extremely grateful to the work of the waste team and in particular Rachael Joy, for their work on getting to a decision making point. You will be aware from the all members briefing that the decision recommendation is that we go to a twin stream recycling model for collection. This option received the most support from the public and also achieves the highest rate of recycling. This is also the option preferred by the waste task and finish group. I am currently finalising papers for another all member's briefing to cover the collection, disposal and pilot schemes for the next few years. We are also starting our news comms strategy for the transformational change required for the new requirements of the Environment Bill (now an Act). The focus, as per the hierarchy of waste, will be focussed on the prevention of waste entering the waste stream in the first place.

Recycling

Cllr Toynbee and I visited Hereford Recycling and Reuse Group's new accommodation down on the Rotherwas Industrial Estate, sorted by the property team upon my request some months ago. It was utterly amazing to see the incredible work that Andrew, Annie and the team of volunteers are doing preventing items that would have ordinarily going to landfill. Andrew was able to share with Diana and I a story of a foster carer who brought down their two foster children the day after our visit who took away toys which gave them so much joy. Diana and I have committed to working with the group to find them a single point of contact within the council for our social workers to request access to their toys, bikes, furniture and clothes.

Property – the new Strategic Asset Management Policy (StAMP) is working its way through management board and through the governance journey. As you are aware I commissioned a full asset management review of the council portfolio, this StAMP is the first part of this process.

Hereford Town Hall and the Shirehall

The decision to dispose or transfer the Town Hall is currently on pause. This is due to the scrutiny recommendation to take the Shire Hall and Town Hall decision together so that a comparison of the two heritage buildings can happen. The Shire Hall decision is being tabled to come to full council in July after Cllr Harvey and I approved the next phase of decision. Ward members and interested bodies will be contacted shortly. The property team have been working closely with the Her Majesty's Court Service (HMCS) to find a suitable alternative for them until the work is complete and they are just finalising the agreement on this.

Community Asset Transfers

I am delighted to confirm that the application from Leominster Town Council for the asset transfer of the Old Priory has commenced to the second stage after an incredible submission. The community asset transfer procedure has been radically overhauled and LTC have put so much work into their proposal which, if it continues in this positive way, will be transformational for the community. I want to thank LTC, especially their clerk Julie, for their hard work under tight deadlines to get this done, an example to us all.

I am always happy to discuss asset transfers with community groups and town/city and parish councils. The asset register is available online for anyone to view and I am currently in discussions with a number of the town councils and city council regarding such transfers.

Environment, economy and skills – Cllr Ellie Chowns

Environment

As I write this update, the COP26 conference is taking place in Glasgow and the eyes of the world are on the UK and the negotiators gathered here to see whether they can collectively live up to the requirements of the moment and make sufficient progress towards tackling climate change – sufficient to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees. As I'm sure you don't need me to remind you, we are currently heading towards 2.7 degrees... Transitioning to a net zero carbon world is both essential and perfectly doable – it just takes political will. And as Professor Nicolas Stern said more than a decade ago, the earlier we make the transition the cheaper and easier it will be...

Here in Herefordshire we're making sure we connect with the public interest in COP26 with communications through all our channels about a whole range of climate-related action we're taking, from sustainable transport (e.g. free buses and bikes, community car pools) to sustainable buildings (including our new Herefordshire Future Homes standard). You can find more info about all our climate-related work here:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/climate-2>. The website banner is also now signposting our climate emergency work every day. Here I'll just focus on 3 things briefly – more info on all of these is in the latest Chief Exec's update:

We're currently running a community climate and nature grants scheme

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/climate-2/climate-change/7> which offers grants of up to £15,000 to community projects under 4 themes: community buildings, sustainable transport, nature, and other. Please do encourage your local community groups to take a look and consider applying. Final closing date is 15 December but early application is advised!

We're about to launch the Herefordshire Climate and Nature Partnership Board

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/climate-2/climate-change/6> following an open application process that's generated a great group of people from the Community, Expert, Enabler and Big Emitter sectors. The first meeting of the Board will be held next week and I am really looking forward to working with them – I hope they can help drive forward the action needed across the whole county (not just in the council) to help Herefordshire become a Zero Carbon, Nature Rich county in line with our action plans:

<https://zerocarbon.herefordshire.gov.uk/>

Finally and very excitingly, we are going to be holding a Citizens Climate Assembly in January. A letter is being sent to 14,400 households in the county this week inviting them to register their interest. The independent Sortition Foundation will then construct a demographically representative sample of at least 48 people from across the whole county who will meet in January to hear from expert speakers, discuss the issues involved and decide together what steps should be taken. Recommendations from the assembly will be used to influence council policy and spending priorities to help Herefordshire become a zero-carbon nature-rich county by 2030.

It's often said that the best time to plant a tree is ten years ago, and the same applies to cutting carbon. But the second-best time is NOW and so that is our task as councillors, to work together to tackle this slow-burning but very real crisis with the urgency it deserves, regardless of political affiliation. I very much hope that COP26 will be a success but whatever comes out of Glasgow we can and must do everything we can, together, locally.

Economy

Community Renewal Fund – I was very pleased to hear on Wednesday 4th November that three of the Herefordshire projects the council put forward for Community Renewal Fund consideration have been selected by Government.

- Herefordshire Voluntary Organisations Support Service's (HVOSS) project 'From Sparklers to Brilliances' has been awarded £640,788; the project will work in communities to identify and support people to build motivation to engage with existing Plan for Jobs initiatives.
- The 'Digital Skills Transformation for the High St' project led by Maybe Solutions Ltd has been awarded £756,560 and will deliver accelerated digital learning for High Street businesses and their staff through a program of digital skills training, social media grants and a comprehensive digital platform.
- The People with Disabilities Employability and Enterprise project led by Walsingham Support has been awarded £140,787 and will involve developing existing craft,

woodworking and kitchen activities to support a Community Café and shop at The Barn, Ledbury to offer internship and job taster work experience.

Herefordshire County Business Improvement District (BID) – I have mentioned in previous updates that we have been working closely with the county's tourism and retail businesses to develop proposals for a Herefordshire County BID which is out to ballot during November (closing the 30th November). A BID is developed and run by businesses and is an arrangement where they and other contributing partners get together, and decide what improvements they want to make in their destination. This goes into a business plan which is voted on by all those who would have to pay a contribution to the delivery of the business plan (business rate paying business over an identified threshold defined in the plan). The Herefordshire County BID, complementing the existing Hereford City BID, would last for a maximum of five years and must be able to demonstrate how it benefits the businesses that have funded it. The BID business plan can be found here: [HerefordshireCountyBID-BusinessPlan.pdf](#) . Over the last 12 months the council and private sector have worked together to proactively promote the county, and help support recovery from Covid-19. The BID is a means to continuing this collaborative working, which could generate £2.1m over 5 years. If you are in contact with tourism or retail businesses in your respective areas over the next couple of weeks I would be very grateful if you could please encourage them to vote in favour of creating the BID, which I do believe will be of significant value to their business and the wider economy.

Fastershire

Complete Utilities have ceased trading. They were a supplier for Gigaclear who are providing full fibre broadband for the Fastershire project in areas of the county. Gigaclear's immediate priority has been to ensure that sites are made safe ahead of transferring outstanding commitments to their other contractors.

Parish councils in areas affected have been directly contacted by Gigaclear who have requested at this time that any enquiries regarding current build schedule be directed to their Network Build Care team on: Networkbuildcare@gigaclear.com. All equipment should remain in place and if there are any concerns related to the safety of sites please contact them via the email.

Fastershire have released a statement on the website <https://www.fastershire.com/news/article/157/2021/11/02/complete-utilities-ceases-trading> – and as the project also covers Gloucestershire (and Complete Utilities are based in that county) Gigaclear and the councils are keen to support former employees impacted.

Digital connectivity for Wendy's silver surfers - In a recent film produced by Fastershire, Wendy, a 'silver surfer', explains the benefit of being online: connecting with friends and family, doing the weekly shop and booking appointments with her GP. To watch Wendy's film visit www.fastershire.com/wendy.

A lack of digital skills is one of the biggest hurdles to people getting online and Fastershire runs free workshops for beginners covering topics like using tablets or smartphones and social media basics. The regular beginner's workshops held in Herefordshire Libraries offer a warm welcome to people wanting to develop their skills so they can do more online. If someone you know would like to find out more about the workshops, visit fastershire.com.

Gigabit Connectivity Comes to Alton Road Business Park – Full Fibre Limited have switched on their Fibre to the Property (FTTP) network serving the Alton Road Business Park in Ross-on-Wye. The project began earlier this year as a result of Fastershire's Marches & Gloucestershire Business Broadband Grant Scheme, part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Airband's rollout continues – Airband's network build to connect properties in Stoke Edith, Trumpet, Ashperton, Much Marcle and Woolhope is nearing completion. The Worcestershire based company, Airband, have installed over 56km of fibre optic cabling and are working to install the final 4km. The rollout in the area is part of Fastershire's stage 4 contract with Airband, who is deploying a brand new Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) gigabit capable connection to over 3000 properties in hard-to-reach areas of the county.