

As of 1Jan 2021

Leader's newsletter

I hope that you all had the opportunity for a few days off over Christmas and time with friends and family (Covid restriction permitting). What an unusual time it was.

May I wish you all the very best for 2021. It hasn't started well.

Some good news is that Herefordshire schools rated top in the West Midlands by Ofsted.

Jesse Norman has asked me to draw to your attention to Laptops 2 Kids, the charity which has been set up recently to clean up and recycle second-hand laptops to children in Herefordshire who would otherwise be unable to keep up with schoolwork and/or isolated either through the pandemic or deprivation. Having been in operation for just a few weeks, they have a number of laptops ready to distribute and are liaising with local schools, with more promised through their appeals. Further details can be found at <https://laptops2kids.co.uk/>.

Following approval by Cabinet in November, the Delivery Plan for 2021/2022 has now been published on the council website. The Delivery Plan sets out our key work programme along with the lead cabinet member and officer. A link to plan can be found below: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/directory-record/3132/corporate-delivery-plan>

Please participate in the various on line surveys mentioned in this newsletter and encourage parish councillors and members of the public to do the same.

Children and families – Cllr Felicity Norman

A Happier New Year to everyone.

Right Help Right Time

On Wednesday 2nd December the Right Help Right Time Levels of Need document was launched in Herefordshire, which provides clearly defined descriptors of need which are intended to support practitioners in identifying need and appropriate intervention.

Further information can be found on the [Right Help Right Time Levels of Need page](#) on the Herefordshire Safeguarding Board's website. A promotional video shown at the launch is available as a [YouTube link](#).

Vulnerable families to receive free food vouchers

Herefordshire Council has been awarded more than £537,000 under the Government's COVID Winter Grant scheme to ensure vulnerable individuals and families don't go hungry this winter.

The scheme has been set up to provide support to vulnerable individuals and households with children, particularly affected by the pandemic throughout the winter months.

The funding is available from December until the end of March 2021, and a large portion of the money will go towards providing free school meals for vulnerable children. Families with an eligible child will receive a local supermarket voucher for the value of £75 to cover the

cost of food for the two week Christmas holiday period, enabling household funds to be redirected to pay utility bills.

After Christmas the council will be use any remaining funds from the scheme to help struggling families with their household utility costs. The funding will also provide grants to charity organisations who provide a food bank service and those that provide meals for the elderly and veterans.

Rapid testing for schools and colleges returning after the winter break

With the most recent lockdown announcement plans for the reopening of schools have been put in hold. We all appreciate the work that schools do to prepare, which then get dashed at the last minute. Hopefully some plans will be helpful when lockdown is lifted.

Annual Ofsted report rates Herefordshire primary schools as top in the West Midlands region

Ofsted's annual report on children's services and skills has recognised 96% of Herefordshire's primary schools are rated as good or outstanding and found that the county also has the highest rate of improvement in the proportion of good or outstanding secondary schools in the West Midlands region.

The report outlines the national picture of the performance of early years, schools, further education and skills, and social care providers in England for 2019/20.

The significant key findings of the Ofsted report for Herefordshire schools compared to the rest of the West Midlands region are:

- 96% of Herefordshire primary schools were judged as good or outstanding, resulting in Herefordshire topping the ratings table for the region
- 80% of secondary school were rated as good or outstanding, putting Herefordshire in the top three Local Authorities in the West Midlands
- Herefordshire schools came out joint top in the 2018/19 results in the West Midlands for the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in key stage 2 in reading, writing and maths.
- Herefordshire remains well below regional and national levels for fixed period exclusions in secondary schools for 2018/19.

You can view a full copy of the Ofsted annual report 2019/20 for education, children's services and skills on the [Ofsted's website](#).

Finance and corporate services – Cllr Liz Harvey

Budget Consultation Live

In preparation for the 2021/22 a series consultation events have taken place throughout December. This include with representatives of different areas in the county, community champions, housing association and target groups including young people and disabled people.

The on-line budget consultation for 2021/22 is also now live at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/budgetconsultation. The consultation is based on three areas: Council Tax rates and the Social Care precept; support for vulnerable residents; council budget and savings programme - with specific consultation for organisation / businesses and residents. The consultation is taking place though difficult to anticipate how much funding the council will receive from central government at the current time. We are preparing for a worst case scenario budget gap of up to £16 million in the next financial year, with the Covid-

19 pandemic having an impact on spend - therefore the council must prepare to make savings in some services so that a balanced budget can be delivered for 2021/2022.

The budget for next year assumes a total Council Tax increase of 4.99%. This would be made from an increase of 1.99% to core Council Tax which would contribute £2.2 million towards council services. A social care precept of 3% would contribute a further £3.2 million to be used on social care services. In addition we consulting on two ideas to support vulnerable residents. Firstly, whether residents would be willing to pay more Council Tax if the increase helped residents on low incomes; secondly, whether residents would support the introduction of a voluntary Community Contribution Scheme to provide additional funding to support vulnerable residents.

Infrastructure and transport – Cllr John Harrington

Since the last newsletter, a Technical Advisory Group met on 18th November for phosphates, which recognised that the Nutrient Management Action Plan still required further revision to make it strong enough to protect our rivers. A Board meeting is planned for January when this will be received and discussed.

We have also had news on 17th December that our planning colleagues in Wales will be dealt with in the same way as in England by Natural Resources Wales (the equivalent of our Environment Agency and Natural England combined). This is indeed good news for the rivers Wye and Lugg, whose waters will now be protected to the same level as in England. Officers were instrumental in achieving this through the lobbying they continually applied to our Welsh colleagues through the Nutrient Management Board meetings and are now assisting the local planning authorities in Powys and the Brecon Beacons on how they can move this forward in a way that development will be mitigated for phosphate impact.

I was also pleased to receive the feedback from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) peer review of the planning teams that commenced at the end of November. We are yet to receive the formal report from them on their findings, although early indications are that this has proved to be an invaluable exercise for the service.

Housing, regulatory services and community safety – Cllr Ange Tyler

'Tis the time to rest and recharge our batteries as we come to the close of 2020. Not only have your officers worked tirelessly through Covid, they have kept smiling and delivered services against the most difficult times we have ever seen. As we reflect and remember loved ones missing this Christmas, I wish everyone a peaceful and brighter future for 2021.

Since the last newsletter, things have remained incredibly busy for the regulatory teams in the council. The animal health team had to continue in their response to an avian influenza outbreak in Knapton, which required many of our enforcement officers to be pulled off their Covid response work let alone their day jobs. Likewise, fly tipping and rogue trader prosecutions have continued as did much of the day to day environmental health work which keeps us all safe and the county clean. I was particularly pleased to obtain the support of colleague members at the Full Council meeting on 11th December in getting the Statement of Licensing Policy reissued for the period 2020-2025. This will significantly help keep our night time economy safe whilst also allow our businesses to recover in the aftermath of Covid.

As for Covid-19, on the 5th November we entered into a new lockdown that lasted until 2nd December. This required our regulatory officers to step up enforcement, both through our proactive evening patrols with the police and in answering the hundreds of enquiries received from both the public and business alike. Officers have also assisted the public

health team in their continual response to outbreaks, whether large or small. I have no doubt that this invaluable work has saved lives.

Some of these cases have become of interest to the local media, but what is clear to me is that there is an overwhelming level of support from both the public and business for this proactive service, as it keeps us all safe and ensures a level playing field for business.

I am so proud of our regulatory officers and I know a number of them continued to work out-of-hours with the police over Christmas to keep our businesses and licensed trade safe for us all to enjoy. I can only offer my heartfelt thanks to these teams, who I feel go largely unnoticed by the government and by national media – I hope that you will join me in thanking them.

Herefordshire CCTV is continuing to support the Covid patrols and enforcement throughout the county as well as dealing with any day to day incidents that are continuing to happen regardless of the lockdown. Some of the day to day incidents have involved looking for vulnerable people, retail thieves, dealing with anti-social behaviour.

The operational hours have been reduced slightly but are based on when there are no longer people on the streets.

Accommodation for the Homeless

Cabinet member approval was granted on 3rd December to convert two existing properties owned by the Council, numbers 4 & 5 Blackfriars Street in Hereford. The properties will be refurbished to provide 6 self-contained flats for Homeless applicants helping to the councils objective as part of Project Brave. Works for the build will go out to tender in early January 2021, with an anticipated completion in Spring 2021.

Veterans Self Build, Leominster

As already reported the self-build properties are complete. Tenancies were issued by Stonewater on the 17th December to enable the veteran families to be housed in time for Christmas. Due to Covid restrictions the official opening has been delayed until spring.



Commissioning, procurement and assets – Cllr Gemma Davies

Waste – the waste survey is live and we have had an incredible response from the public and businesses. It will run until the 7th February although if people wish to do it on the phone

or via a postal survey then please apply the week before. Our residents and businesses can either complete the survey online at <https://melresearch.co.uk/herefordshirewastesurvey> or to request a postal survey or to take part in a survey over the phone please email toni.hogg@melresearch.co.uk or call the FREEPHONE number 0800 0730 348 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm). Please could we all try and publicise this in our communities as we need to know which of the two options recommended by scrutiny are taken forward.

Cultural services – we have submitted a Stronger Towns bid for a redevelopment of the 31 Broad Street museum and library in Hereford city centre. The essence of the bid is to remove the library from 31 Broad Street to a new home in Maylords Orchards, as part of the skills and culture hub. We will then increase the capacity of the museum so that we can (finally) get our Herefordshire treasures from out of storage and on display. It is likely that we will be working closely with Hereford Cathedral and colleagues in the Marches to show the unique border history of our county. The bid also maintains the current gothic façade with plans to redevelop the rest of the building to EnerPHit standards. The project has generated a lot of interest nationally already and I am hopeful that it will make it through the bid process as I truly do believe it would be a unique building. It would also house the Herefordshire Hoard which has gathered international interest <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/11/16/the-curse-of-the-buried-treasure> and has been nominated for Rescue Project of the Year for the 2021 Archaeology Awards, you can vote for it here www.archaeology.co.uk/vote. DCMS has taken over the valuation process of the hoard and I will update you in the new year as to the valuation. We are setting up fundraising campaigns now to purchase the hoard so I will keep you up to date on that

Better Ways of Working – we are due to enter the next phase of BWOW which fully incorporates the increased shift to home working for our staff. BWOW will reduce the need for council assets, focussing primarily on Plough Lane and MAO's for those staff who wish to come into an office. We are looking at a shared atrium space including confidential working spaces, collaboration rooms and using the best technology to provide hybrid meetings where people can attend either in person or online. Hoople are currently moving out of Plough Lane into Nelson House however they will keep some presence at Plough Lane. There will be weekly team days where teams can meet and those who are unable to work from home or are best placed in team/supervision environment i.e. social workers will have dedicated spaces. As soon as plans are finalised I will happily share them with you.

Environment, economy and skills – Cllr Ellie Chowns

I'm really delighted that on Friday 11th December the Council voted by an overwhelming majority to update and expand our declaration of a climate emergency to declare a "**Climate and Ecological Emergency**", recognising the importance of protecting and enhancing Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.

We're currently preparing hard to launch a new countywide **Climate and Nature Partnership**, Board and Action Plan in the new year – keep your eyes peeled for updates on this in January!

As part of the Towns Fund work is ongoing to a) develop a grant scheme for an **eCargo bike scheme** and to introduce **eBikes into the Beryl fleet**, and b) **increase tree coverage** in the City Centre where we are proposing to offer free trees to businesses, organisations and Hereford City residents.

Our **Warm Homes Fund** project has so far installed 15 first time central heating systems so far for households previously living in fuel, with a further 48 expected in the first half of 2021 – this is in addition to the 65 installed so far through the Park Homes project.

Our **Sustainable Energy in Public Buildings** project now has 22 buildings in the phase 2 project pipeline.

Through the **Green Homes Grant project** we've identified 69 suitable properties across Hfds and Shropshire; installation will commence in Jan/Feb.

Building on this great work by the team, one of my personal key New Year resolutions for 2021 is to try to kickstart a major **countywide retrofit programme** to tackle the serious problems of leaky homes we have in the county – and tackle fuel poverty and carbon emissions at the same time.

Economy:

Covid 19 Business Support Grants – As I mentioned in the last monthly update, government provided funding for a number of additional grant schemes to support businesses during the November national lockdown and further support to assist those impacted by the current restrictions. This support includes the Local Restrictions Grant Scheme for businesses [closed](#) in November, and those that were [open](#) again in Tier 2 but continue to encounter difficulties. The [Wet Led Pub scheme](#) will provide a further £1,000 of support where appropriate. The council has also utilised some of the allocated Additional Restrictions Grant funds to launch the [Discretionary Grant Scheme 2](#). The council's Finance and Economic Development teams are contacting businesses and seeking to make grant payments as soon as possible. We are also reviewing what additional support measures will be required in helping the economy to recovery, building back better, in 2021.

Kickstart Youth Employment Scheme – I'm delighted that our application to be part of this was accepted on 14th December. You may remember I mentioned this a couple of months ago - the council applied to be a gateway applicant to the government [Kickstart scheme](#), providing 6 month placement opportunities for 16 to 24 year olds to gain critical work experience. As a 'gateway' applicant, the council and Hoople will help smaller employers to offer placements, ensuring as many people as possible are supported. Great news for kickstarting our local recovery in 2021.

We are now reaching the critical stage of the development of the **Hereford Town Investment Plan** for submission to government in January 2021, setting out a vision for the future of the city and the up to £25m of projects we will put forward for consideration. During December a very wide range (30+) of varied and exciting project ideas have been put forward (totalling over £58m) from people across the local community. The Hereford Town Board have had the difficult job of short listing those to be considered in the final plan against the government criteria. Although not all the project can be funded through the Towns Funding, the process has generated a wide range of community led ideas that we will do our best to signpost to alternative support wherever possible in the months ahead. From the start I've championed the idea that the Towns Fund work should reach out as widely as possible and I'm really pleased that Govt has recognised that our level of community engagement has been exceptional. I'm just sorry there isn't enough funding to support all of the excellent ideas - but it does mean there's a great set of potential ideas that can be pitched for future funding opportunities.

The **Market Town Investment Plans** work also continues apace. In one week in December we had half-day site visits in Bromyard and Ledbury, plus four evening Zoom meetings with local stakeholders! Lots of positive input and good ideas emerging. Rose Regen is helping each of the towns to pull these ideas together into a suite of prioritised projects with the aim of having finalised plans ready by end May 2021.

The very exciting Marches Local Enterprise Partnership funded **visitor economy project** continues to generate significant national publicity for Herefordshire. The following link includes a number of the articles featuring our fantastic county <https://fionareecepr.coveragebook.com/b/9530926efb12bae2>. Over the last month we have also procured support to develop a new, modern destination website for Herefordshire and media advertising support to help us promote domestic staycation opportunities in the county in 2021, including potentially radio, TV, and social media advertising. This will be the largest campaign promoting our great tourism offer in over 10 years. The latest theme is 'Winter Welcomes' and the new Roasts & Rambles pages are now live on the Winter Welcomes

website <https://winterwelcomes.co.uk/walks/> - please do help spread the word - like/follow/share @VisitHfds on social media! J

Skills

I've already mentioned the exciting **Kickstart** youth skills & employment project above. Work is also cracking on to develop a **Youth Opportunity Hub** to bring together services to help support young people who've been particularly hard hit by the economic impact of Covid. Also, there are lots of exciting skills-related components to the emerging Hereford Town Investment Plan bid. Very positive to see this emphasis on 'levelling-up' for our young people.

Finally, a quick update on Fastershire:

- Monkhide will be live with Full Fibre Access in time for Christmas
- The first 3 suppliers have been accepted on to the Fastershire Community Grant Panel and Birley will be the first community to be published for Fastershire Community Grant suppliers to develop bids this week
- ZZOOMM have been given access across the Wye enabling build to start in January, and work has also started on cabinets which will enable superfast broadband along parts of Broad St, King St and Bridge St in Hereford for the first time.

As always, please do drop me a line if you have any questions, comments or suggestions on any of the above – or anything else in my portfolio.

And I wish you all a very best for 2021. Ellie x