

Leader's Newsletter April 2022

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Welcome to this, my newsletter reflecting on Cabinet activity in April and looking forward to May.



A significant priority for the Council continues to be making improvements for Children in our County. For some time we have known of the possibility of a Panorama programme being broadcast which may refer to issues we have. This programme has been confirmed for Monday 16th May. We have not had the opportunity to view the programme so do not know the extent to which it will refer to us, or whether instead it will concentrate on the broader national picture. As you can imagine, there has been considerable activity planning for the impact the programme might have. We know that the Council has failed children in our care, however we are working hard to turn things around. It is possible that this will be a difficult time for all in the Council and I ask that you be as supportive as you can be, especially to social workers, whose continued commitment and support is essential if we are to improve.

Last week also saw the publication of an Audit report on the Inner Link Road which relates to activity several years ago and which does not make good reading. The Audit and Governance Committee is due to consider this report next week. The Cabinet is keen to study any recommendations it makes. Weakness in Contract Management were identified early in our administration and as a result much improved controls and monitoring are already in place.

I have mentioned above two priorities that we have – improving Children's Services and improving contract management, and in each case long term change requires a change in culture which I believe is beginning to take place. Another priority is addressing the issue of phosphates in our rivers. Cllr Harrington has further information on this in his piece below. I have written several times to Ministers asking for their help, but regret that little is forthcoming so far. This is not just a Herefordshire issue. There was a headline in one of the papers last week saying that nationally the building of 100,000 homes is being held up. That is one third of the annual housebuilding national target. Surely national government should be paying more regard to this problem.

I was pleased that we had a number of civil servants visit us from DLUHC on 27th April to obtain a better understanding of rural issues. They spent time at the Shell Store, the Cyber Quarter, NMITE and on the Stronger Towns Fund. That may not sound like rural but in our presentations we took the opportunity to raise rural issues. I believe they were impressed with the many innovative things we are doing. I also spent some time this week with two agricultural enterprises in my Ward, also innovating in significant ways. So amidst the not so good news there are some great things happening.

David Hitchiner

**Councillor David Hitchiner
Leader of the Council**

Children and families – Cllr Diana Toynbee



Corporate Parenting

Our 'new look' streamlined corporate parenting board met for the first time last week. The LGA facilitated a discussion about our purpose and direction, and will be providing ongoing support to ensure we're as effective as possible.

Meetings are going to be themed, and the group of members from each political group are:

- Corporate Parents & Safeguarding – Diana Toynbee
- Health, well-being, emotional support – Helen l'Anson
- Education and training – Kath Hey
- Participation and voice of young people – Felicity Norman
- Work opportunities and life skills – Sebastian Bowen
- Housing and accommodation – Polly Andrews

The operational corporate parenting group has also been set up, made up of children's services and partner agencies. It will meet monthly with the purpose of driving our corporate parenting action plan.

National developments in Education

As you know, the Education White Paper was published in March. We wait for more detail, but it will for certain have implications for the relationship between the council and our local schools.

Some key points are that ministers have set targets for higher grades at GCSE, better SATs scores, and revised behaviour guidance. The government is insisting that every school is in or on its way into a multi-academy trust by 2030, and local authorities can establish MATs. It also includes a new "Parent Pledge" that any child who falls behind in English and maths will get the support they need to get back on track, and sets the expectation that mainstream state schools will remain open for at least 32.5 hours per week.

We are organising a conference for school leaders on 14 June which will be an opportunity for discussing this.

Children from Ukraine

Herefordshire is gearing up to take up to 300 Ukrainian residents, some of whom are of school age (around 120). The funding is still unclear from government, but we are supporting schools with this and are organising a webinar for schools welcoming Ukrainian children.

Health and Adult Wellbeing – Cllr Pauline Crockett



Ukraine response

Herefordshire council has continued to support the fantastic response by local communities to the continuing situation in Ukraine. The generosity of local people as led to a huge quantity of essential supplies being transported directly to Ukraine from Hereford. 100 local households have been confirmed as sponsors of a total of 300 Ukrainian guests so far and the council is working with local public sector and voluntary and community partners to ensure both guests and sponsors are supported. A number of families have also arrived locally under the Family Visa scheme. Support is wide ranging, encompassing housing, safeguarding, schools admissions, health and wellbeing support.

Herefordshire Cares

Herefordshire Cares supported the Herefordshire Networking Event & Jobs Fair at the Shell Store - Rotherwas, yesterday. A great opportunity to network with other employers, promote the Herefordshire Cares brand, signpost potential recruits to employment opportunities and current vacancies and most importantly to raise the profile of a career in care from being the person who makes a difference to someone's day to the behind the scenes organisation in care administration and management.

Herefordshire Physical Activity Strategy

In March, the Health & Wellbeing Board approved our local physical activity strategy. The strategy will support cross-departmental working and closer, wider collaborative working around physical activity. A steering group led by public health will bring together partners and colleagues from a variety of local organisations and local authority departments. Some of the first actions from the strategy include 'creating a multi-agency steering group and developing a physical activity communications plan'. The action plan will further evolve over the coming months.

The full strategy will be hosted [here](#)

Herefordshire Healthy mums

"Healthy Mums" new courses are starting across the county during May. Healthy Mums is a community weight management programme for mums: it includes nutritional advice and physical activity each week for 12 weeks to support an active, healthy family lifestyle. Children are welcome to attend and join in activities. Please do promote this amongst your networks.

More information on the groups can be found [here](#)

Sustainable Food Places

Following the support received at the Health & Wellbeing Board in December, our Sustainable Food Places programme of work continues to progress, led by our local multi-agency Food Alliance. We aim to apply for bronze award status later in the year. Some of our latest developments include; the development of a local food charter; the continued expansion in our Food Alliance membership; delivering actions within the Zero Carbon and Nature Rich county plan; and submitting a funding bid to the Dixon Foundation in collaboration with colleagues across the Marches area to implement dynamic food procurement.

For more information contact: kristan.pritchard@herefordshire.gov.uk

Finance, Corporate & Planning– Cllr Liz Harvey



Website snippets:



Herefordshire Now

Herefordshire Now is arriving through residents letterboxes this week.

To see the online version visit

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/herefordshirenow

Some great articles including how council Tax is spent, Climate assembly and the new Getting it right recycling and reducing waste campaign, investment in Herefordshire, scam info and a cut out and keep recycling guide.



Herefordshire Hoard

Fundraising is progressing with the current total from public donations around £7k (total is 20k)

There are some new events coming up

Come and meet costumed reenactors who will be on hand to tell you more about life as a Viking, and take part in hands on activities. There will also be a pop up display giving more information about the hoard and how you can help bring it home to Herefordshire.

Events confirmed so far at:

[Leintwardine Community Centre](#), Saturday May 21, 11am to 3pm

[Leominster Community Centre](#), Saturday July 2, 11am to 3pm

[The Hub @ St Peter's \(Peterchurch\)](#), Saturday July 23, 11am to 3pm

Visit the [Herefordshire Hoard site](#) to discover more about the story behind this fascinating treasure trove - and how you can help bring it home to Herefordshire.

Business Briefings

The next round of face to face meetings in the market towns will be starting in May. Please find the dates and links to booking below:

[Ledbury 21 June 5pm to 6pm](#)

[Leominster 7 June 5pm to 6pm](#)

[Bromyard 14 June 5.30pm to 6.30pm](#)

[Ross on Wye 28 June 5pm to 6pm \(to be changed to 20 July\)](#)



Housing, Regulatory Services and Community – Cllr Ange Tyler



Housing Delivery in the County 21/22

248 additional dwellings were delivered in the County last year providing much needed affordable housing. There was a mixture of bed size and tenures catering for all needs in the County with a small number delivered as supported accommodation. And over 60 homes delivered in rural areas. Click the links for more information including the completed breakdown on properties:

[Herefordshire Affordable housing delivered in 2021-22](#)

[Affordable housing – Herefordshire Council](#)

Trauma Informed Training Program for Herefordshire

Herefordshire Council has secured funding from Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to deliver a multi-agency Trauma Informed Training Program across the county. The training is CPD accredited and being delivered by The Nelson Trust and is free for anyone to attend.

This training is over two days:

Day One – Trauma Informed Approaches to working with people – what is trauma, recognising it, how it affects people, cumulative effect of trauma and how to work with people affected by trauma.

Day Two – Well Being, Resilience and Self-Care – helping people who work in an environment where they see trauma or work with people affected by trauma to develop the

skills to manage their own physical and mental health and thus reduce the impact that the trauma may affect them.

There are a number of spaces available to attend the training. Dates for training run through to the 12th June. For more information about the training, the dates available or to book a space please contact Bob Barnett via email at robert.barnett@herefordshire.gov.uk

Environment and Economy – Cllr Ellie Chowns



Economy

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Government launched its prospectus for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund ([UK Shared Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/91234/UK_Shared_Prosperty_Fund_prospectus_-_GOV.UK.pdf)) prior to Easter, confirming that £7.45 million will be allocated to Herefordshire. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) replaces the previous EU funding programmes, providing a mixture of capital and revenue support focussed on three themes: community and place, people and skills and supporting business. Of the £7.45m, £0.9m is specifically for improving adult numeracy as part of the Department for Education ‘Multiply’ programme. In order to access this funding we need to establish an investment plan for the Multiply funding by the end of June, and the remaining funds by the end of July. Whilst I welcome the funding allocation to Herefordshire, it is considerably lower than the levels of funding we have previously received through the previous EU schemes.

Quarterly Business Summit and Market Town Meetings – We held our second quarterly business briefing at the Shell Store on Tuesday evening, over 40 businesses attended. It was great to see so many people there. I presented county’s [Greener Footprints](#) scheme, Ross Cook our new Corporate Director for Economy and Environment provided an update on the Local Plan Review, David Ubaka gave an overview on the Hereford City Masterplan work, and Roger Allonby covered the next steps with the development of the Big Economic Plan and Levelling up. We are also due to hold the next round of market town meetings on the following dates;

- [Ledbury 21st June 5.00pm to 6.00pm \(date changed\)](#)
- [Leominster 7th June 5.00pm to 6.00pm](#)
- [Bromyard 14th June 5.30pm to 6.30pm](#)
- [Ross on Wye 28th June 5.00pm to 6.00pm \(likely to be changed to 20th July\)](#)

The Levelling Up Taskforce – the Taskforce visited Hereford on the 27th April. The ‘Taskforce’ are a range of Civil Service officers who worked on drafting the Levelling Up white paper and are now visiting some parts of the county to understand how it might be implemented. Officers from the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities, the Cities and Local Growth Team, Number 10, and Treasury visited the Hereford Enterprise Zone including the Shell Store and Midlands Centre for Cyber Security, as well as meeting NMITE and the Chair of the Hereford Stronger Towns Board.

Environment

On 28th April Cabinet approved a decision paper setting out the next steps for allocation of funding from the **Climate Reserve** to a range of projects which directly respond to some of the recommendations made by the Citizens’ Climate Assembly. Key elements include an Affordable Warmth project to help tackle the problem of homes that leak heat (including skills training for installers of insulation measures, and free home energy audits to help residents identify how they can save money and reduce heat loss); decarbonisation of council buildings; a schools transport project that will support school travel plans and

decarbonisation of the school transport fleet; work to support the transition to electric vehicles; nature recovery strategy and mapping; tree management and planting; and further support for the Greener Footprints communications campaign. Officers will now draw up full business cases for these high priority projects and implementation will start as soon as possible.

Earlier this month the UN published its latest scientific report on climate change, with a stark warning: 'it's now or never'. This BBC report provides a good summary: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBjabNusoKM>. It's clear that we need to do everything we can to tackle climate change, urgently, ASAP. And what's good for the planet is good for people too: as the fuel price crisis demonstrates, saving energy saves money. I'm really pleased that together as a council we are putting funding and effort into these initiatives which will help residents reduce costs as well as improving wellbeing and reducing emissions.

I'm really pleased that a wide range of businesses have already signed up to be part of the '30 for 2030' initiative that is working with employers to support their journeys to zero carbon. There's still time to join, so if you know a business who would like to get involved, please point them here: <https://zerocarbon.herefordshire.gov.uk/get-your-business-to-net-zero/>

This is part of the ongoing countywide **Greener Footprints** campaign. Please do share the link (<https://greenerfootprints.co.uk/>) far and wide within your communities to encourage everyone to sign up and help the county's journey to becoming zero-carbon and nature-rich.

Infrastructure and Transport – Cllr John Harrington



Natural Flood Management

Herefordshire Council has secured £1,273,600 in funding from the Environment Agency to deliver natural flood management (NFM) in seven areas over the period 2022/23 to 2026/27. This will be used to continue and expand our previously successful NFM Pilot Project, during which we engaged with numerous landowners and delivered a wide variety of NFM measures within the following areas:

- Bodenham Brooks (above Bodenham);
- Brimfield Brook (above Brimfield and Orleton);
- Cheaton / Cogwell / Ridgemoor Brook system (above Leominster and Frome);
- Dulas Brook (above Ewyas Harold);
- Pentaloë Brook (above Mordiford);
- Red, Norton and Twyford Brook system (above Rotherwas, Hereford); and
- Tedstone Brook (above Bromyard).

We feel that there is still huge potential to continue the good work and deliver more NFM in Herefordshire and so hope that the continuation of this project will enable us to build on the contacts and relationships that have already been made with communities and partners. It will focus on the use of natural processes and land management measures to both slow the flow of water and store the water within upland areas. Any further opportunities for NFM within other areas of Herefordshire will be identified and considered for future inclusions, subject to being able to secure additional funding.

Wetlands Project/Phosphate Trading

Work continues at pace with our partners, the Wye and Usk Foundation (WUF) to bring forward the first ever Constructed Integrated Wetland used to trade phosphate credits at Luston. A dual peer review process has been used to support WUF with both the Norfolk

River Trust and Ricardo Consulting reviewing the design to help provide the necessary technical assurance of nutrient certainty. As this is the first time such a complex scheme has been brought forward a leading QC has been commissioned to review the process to confirm nutrient certainty from a legal perspective. It is pleasing to note that Natural England have provided positive endorsement for the approach being taken by the project team to overcome the many obstacles to get the north of the county building again.

The project team have worked hard over the last month to incorporate new guidance provided at short notice by Natural England and deserve huge credit and thanks for meeting obstacle after obstacle put forward by our statutory agencies who are, quite frankly, not able to do their own job in monitoring and protecting the rivers that they, not us, are responsible for – in fact they are piggy backing to some extent on the work we are doing as a Council (and I can't entirely blame them when they have lost over half their operational budgets in less than a decade). The number of credits available and pricing is being finalised and Cabinet will receive proposals for a first come first served policy hopefully in May 2022. Full details of how developers will be able to access the credits through a section 106 agreement will be released at that time (or hopefully, in advance).

Whilst the trading will produce approximately a 20% betterment per credit (rather than just like for like) regards phosphates and is directly related to the environment it is allocated to (unlike carbon trading) it is important to remember that this is mitigation to allow housebuilding to resume and not a panacea for the perilous health of our rivers. We therefore continue to lobby our MPs and the ministers responsible to adequately resource agencies, such as the Environment Agency and Natural England to make sure they have the capacity to address the problem of river pollution across the country more comprehensively and holistically.

PROW and Traffic Management (including TROs)

Public Rights of Way and traffic management now sits back with Herefordshire Council but we know there have been some teething issues, particularly regards communications (finding contact numbers, email addresses). The preferred way to report PROW issues is through the website, link for PROW page <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/public-rights-way>. The preferred way to request TROs is through ward Cllrs <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/public-rights-way>

We will be providing an update shortly to Local Access Forum members and parish councils but in the meantime if anyone is struggling to get through or to get timely responses please tell them to get in touch directly with me 07792882136 john.harrington@herefordshire.gov.uk