

Birch Ward Cllr Report 2019

Budget 2020/21 and Corporate Plan consultation continues until 4 December.

October flooding - Herefordshire Council staff and Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP), together with the emergency services and voluntary sector organisations, dealt with a large number of road closures, flooded properties, stranded people and abandoned vehicles. BBLP increased their working crews from the usual two (weekend working) to ten crews working 24 hours. The council's emergency website pages were implemented and the Communications Team managed the 24-hour live blog and social media coverage, to allow live information for the general public and public sector emergency response partners. It is likely that the total costs we incurred dealing with the aftermath of this emergency to be in excess of £1.5m, and we are actively seeking Bellwin support from government. We hope to be able to provide a package of business and community grants to help meet the immediate recovery needs of communities and businesses, hopefully grant-funded from government.

Herefordshire Council's policy on sandbags for residents is to refer people to their parish council, as we need to reserve our provision for vulnerable residents and key strategic sites.

Herefordshire is the county with the **most adopted NDP's** in the county- there are currently 67 adopted NDP in Herefordshire, with a further 5 awaiting referendum. A successful event for Parish Councils was held on 6 November to update parish councils on the Core Strategy review and the potential review of any Neighbourhood Plans. 109 parish councillors attended from 56 parish councils. The event was fully booked and so a further event is being arranged for any parish council who were unable to attend.

New University - 5.66m of Growth Deal Funding been allocated which will allow NMiTE to develop a Centre for Advanced Timber Technology, Centre for Automated Manufacturing, and a Centre for Future Skills on the Hereford Enterprise Zone. The complication is that the LEP require NMiTE to provide an indemnity (being considered by Herefordshire Council) – they have until 31 March 2021 so a quick decision is required so they can get on with designing and construction. NMiTE have been granted a tenancy of Gardner Hall, College Campus for office and student use.

Herefordshire's **Veteran Support Centre (VSC)** opened its doors on Monday 11th November, ahead of an official launch in the New Year. Located in the city centre, it offers a friendly one-stop shop for anyone in the armed forces community needing guidance, with flexible and accessible spaces for meetings and group workshops, along with employment and volunteering opportunities. The VSC has been established thanks to a successful grant application by Herefordshire Council to the Ministry of Defence to pilot a veteran hub project. Herefordshire's Armed Forces Covenant Partnership will continue to oversee the centre for the next year whilst a new team of trustees forms and achieves its own independent charitable status.

HC has been able to recruit to all advanced practitioner posts in the **Social Work Academy**. The recruitment has come from staff currently working in Herefordshire,

both agency and permanent staff. This will allow for more support for newly qualified social workers into the authority as they will have the full support of a fully-staffed social work academy. There are interviews over November for new social workers.

Safeguarding and Family Support Improvement Plan – the Improvement Plan has been completed and will be circulated to Children and Families Scrutiny Committee. Scrutiny will receive quarterly updates on the plan and a self-evaluation that will comprise of input from each head of service. Essex Council visited at the start of November for a 3-day diagnostic visit. They were impressed with the openness and planning from staff and found no need to escalate any cases. They are an authority which went from 'Inadequate' to 'Outstanding' in about 5 years, and are willing to share their learning of how they got where they are now. They will feed back their findings in a session on November 26th for all Child Protection Court staff, and will be providing feedback to the Department for Education.

Coverage of fibre broadband in Herefordshire has reached over [90% of premises with superfast or ultrafast broadband](#) Also, whilst nationally the figure of ultrafast broadband is at 9.6% (1000Mbps and above) for Herefordshire it is 20.61%. To check availability and which phase a property is in, visit: www.fastershire.com

Gigaclear plan more premises - Members have been consulted on a key decision to extend the Gigaclear coverage with an additional 1,123 premises (on top of the 30,279 scheduled) planned as a combination of Gigaclear using its own investment and the council's existing capital programme to reach premises that receive less than 30Mbps. This means coverage in Herefordshire will reach 97% fibre broadband by 2022. The new broadband strategy has introduced a new phase that looks to allocate grants for communities to address the final coverage. Gigaclear has a dedicated team to manage queries or complaints from residents during the build phase - they are contactable on 01865 591137 or email: networkbuildcare@gigaclear.com.

Following an announcement in August that Hereford has been selected for '**Towns Funding**' (up to £25m), government has now published the [Towns Fund prospectus](#) which sets out what can be supported and the required next steps. The objective of the Fund is to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long term economic and productivity growth through; Urban regeneration; planning and land use; skills; and enterprise infrastructure and connectivity.

Earlier this year the council successfully applied for **Heritage Action Zone funding for Leominster** (£2m). Once detailed proposals are finalised the project should commence delivery from April 2021.

Cllr Marsh attended the Local Environment and Sustainability Conference in London on 7th November as a speaker, showcasing the excellent work we are doing in Herefordshire to embrace our **climate change emergency**. Herefordshire Council were seen as a leading council in this field and an authority to follow.

The council reports annually to the audit and governance committee on its processes for **information access** (formal complaints, and a range of requests for information made under legislation including the Freedom of Information Act, Environmental

Information Regulations and the access to your own information under the data protection legislation) and information governance (compliance with data protection requirements, and information security).

Processes for complaints, information requests and data incidents are working well and monitoring is in place to anticipate emerging issues and to ensure that learning is embedded within the council

Adults and Communities continue to maintain their strong financial position, reporting an underspend of just over £1m at October 2019. This is enabling the Directorate to bring forward savings initiatives and investment programmes in order to achieve a full year saving from April 2020.

There are currently two options for **Hillside**- the original, complex beds proposal and the new GP Super Hub proposal. Current view is a preference to pursue the GP hub.

Care Quality Commission visited **Shared Lives** on Thursday 31st October. Shared lives (a scheme that supports adults with learning difficulties) have received a rating of 'Good' in all areas.

Hereford Enterprise Zone Local Development Order (LDO) which grants planning permission for certain types of development at the Enterprise Zone was approved on 17 Oct, simplifying planning procedures within the area, saving time and reducing costs for businesses.

Work has commenced on the review of the **Herefordshire Local Plan Core Strategy**, with the existing policies are being assessed for their effectiveness and compliance with national planning policy. In addition, significant areas of evidence required to support the plan are being identified.

The position on **phosphate pollution** in the River Lugg has moved on, following a meeting with the Wye & Usk Foundation on 14 November with a further meeting being arranged with the Wye & Usk Foundation and Welsh Water on 2 December. We are still hopeful that a way forward can be found soon.

Bereavement Services are progressing a programme of memorial safety inspections across the cemeteries and closed churchyards dealing with memorials between 1 and 2 metres. **The Coroners Service** has introduced an arrangement with funeral directors to carry out removals on behalf of the coroner. This will ensure that a consistent standard of service is being delivered by funeral directors on behalf of the coroner service.

Property Services have auctioned freehold/long leasehold land interests at Rotherwas delivering a capital receipt of £337.5k.

A request for a task and finish group will be raised at General Scrutiny Committee on 29 November, to assist the executive with the various options open to them in relation to both **the waste collection and disposal contracts which both expire at the end of 2023 / beginning of 2024.**

Herefordshire Now - The latest edition of our residents' magazine, has the theme 'Stay well this winter' and has been distributed across council and partner sites.