

Leader's Newsletter January 2022

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Welcome to my newsletter covering activity on December and January so far, and looking ahead.



I am sure that you follow the progress of the Covid Omicron variant. As with past variants Herefordshire seems to record lower levels than other areas of the Country for which we are all thankful. Nevertheless the levels are high and I continue to urge you to exercise caution.

Of particular interest this month is the Citizen Assembly (to be held remotely on Zoom) which has its first meeting on Thursday. I look forward to seeing the recommendations from the group.

There is a Council meeting on 28 January which was postponed from December. There has been no relaxation of the regulations for holding these meetings so we must attend in person in order to make the meeting valid. It is disappointing to me that Central Government has not been able to find time to introduce regulations which would have enabled remote or hybrid meetings to take place, this is in spite of lobbying by Local Authority organisations.

You will be aware that construction work has started on the Timber Technology Centre on Rotherwas which is part of NMITE. Below is a link to an article by Professor Robert Hairstans which provides a good explanation of what is being planned for this

<https://www.imeche.org/news/news-article/timber-is-a-missed-opportunity-for-sustainable-construction-we-aim-to-change-that>

There have been some changes of personnel in the Council. The latest senior management structure chart is on the next page.

This newsletter is in a slightly new format. I value any feedback. Does the letter contain too much information or too little? Is the slightly informal style appreciated? Is this an unnecessary or unhelpful duplication of other information you receive? Would you like anything to be added?

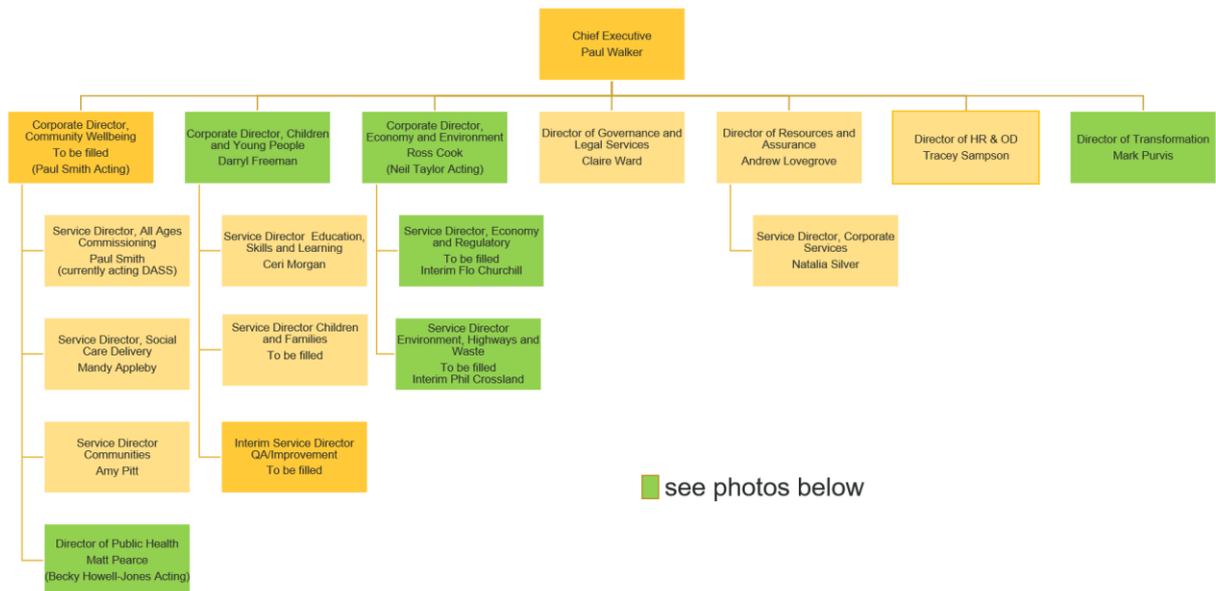
I look forward to welcoming you to the next Parish Summit to be held on **Monday 17th January at 7 pm**. This will be an opportunity, among other things, to explain the consequences of changes to healthcare in the County following the setting up of the Integrated Care System (ICS). If you have not had an invitation please let me know.

I am looking forward to the next Calendar year as the Cabinet and officers look to serve you and the County.

May I wish you all a happy and successful 2022.

David Hitchiner

**Councillor David Hitchiner
Leader of the Council**



Darryl Freeman
Corporate Director Children and Young People



Ross Cook
Corporate Director Economy & Environment



Matt Pearce
Director of Public Health



Mark Purvis
Director of Transformation



Phil Crossland
Interim Service Director Environment, Highways and Waste



Flo Churchill
Interim Service Director Economy and Regulatory



Children and families – Cllr Diana Toyne

Children’s Services and Schools colleagues are focused on ensuring a safe return to school for children and young people across the county and are monitoring very closely the further impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable children and families.



Children and young people’s quality of life survey

A key recommendation of the [2019 Children's Integrated Needs Assessment](#) was to better understand the experiences of children and young people growing up in Herefordshire. Accordingly, this summer a children and young people’s quality of life survey was carried out by the School Health Education Unit (SHEU) on behalf of the council. Around 4,900 children and young people aged 8 to 18 years from across the county took part in the survey.

This survey has provided comprehensive information on a range of topics including lifestyles and behaviour, physical and emotional health and wellbeing, feeling about belonging to school and home community, feeling safe, and things children and young people are worried

about. The summary report is now available on the [Growing Up section of the Understanding Herefordshire website](#).

None of us can have missed the heart-breaking news concerning the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson late last year. Such cases are rare and extreme but when we do hear of them we, all of us, stop reconsider risk and children in our communities and it is inevitable that across the country, referrals to children's services rise, as they have done recently in Herefordshire. This has put additional pressure onto our MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and our Assessment Teams who are working even harder than usual at this time, and I'm grateful for their hard work.

Finally, holidays can be an especially difficult time for some families and I want to thank those colleagues who provided out-of-hours cover over the Christmas and new year period in the Emergency Duty Team and through 24hr on-call rotas to ensure that there was always a response if it were needed for our most vulnerable children.

Adults and Communities – Cllr Pauline Crockett

Talk Community:

Talk Community hubs – there are now 32 live Talk Community Hubs with LwB Well-being Hub, Lugwardine being the most recent hubs to become part of the network. www.talkcommunity.org/hubs



Holiday Activity Fund – The Christmas HAF programme is well under way and we've received some fantastic additional goodies from Morrisons and Tesco.

QWELL - A digital mental health service available through the directory for all adults in Herefordshire Available 24 hours a day 365 days a year. There are no waiting lists or referrals needed, so people can easily access support, at a time that is convenient for them. www.talkcommunitydirectory.org/qwell

Commissioning:

Proposals are being finalised to enable the council to passport all of the Government's recent allocations of Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund to paying bonuses for all frontline workers in the adult social care sector. The payments are subject to a key decision to be made in January and would be made through the payroll of care sector employers. The bonuses are intended to help retain essential local workers in the care sector during the winter period.

The first Afghan refugees have arrived in Herefordshire during December and are settling in to their new homes and lives, with the support of the council's commissioned provider and local agencies. Around 50 refugees will arrive in total during December and January, with further families expected in June 2022

Finance, Corporate & Planning– Cllr Liz Harvey

Finance:

Progress with the budget: The government's funding settlement statement was provided to Local Government just before Christmas and officers have worked over Christmas and the New Year to build a balanced budget for 2022/23 based around these confirmed funding sources. Unfortunately the settlement is, once again, for one year only which makes it very



difficult to plan and implement changes to service delivery in the most cost effective manner so as to remain within budget constraints.

As I write, the administration's draft budget proposals are going through the scrutiny process and will come to Cabinet and then to Council in February. We have taken account of the feedback received from the public during the budget consultation period and are proposing no more than a 1.99% uplift in general council tax in addition to the government's already ring-fenced 1% towards the persistently increasing cost of Adult Social Care

Counter fraud update: At Herefordshire Council we recognise that every pound lost to fraud reduces our ability to provide services to our residents who really need them. The Council is committed to a zero tolerance policy in relation to fraud and corruption. Behind the scenes, our Counter Fraud Department has continued to work tirelessly throughout the Pandemic to identify fraud attempts at the earliest opportunity and to stamp it out. Impersonation fraud is one current trend where council safeguards have prevented funds being paid to fraudsters. Increased training, data analysis and risk assessment work for all council departments is strengthening our skills and is broadening the front across which we continue to fight against this crime.

At the back end of last year, the Council participated in International Fraud Awareness Week and this was fully endorsed throughout the organisation. I am pleased to say that one of our own counter fraud specialists was announced as a finalist for the title: "Outstanding Young Professional of 2021" at the Tackling Economic Crime Awards. This award is for young specialists who have best demonstrated commitment and outstanding performance in tackling all areas of economic crime. It's great to have the work of our staff recognised on a national level and reflects the quality and standing of the whole team.

Corporate Services:

Website snippets: We have launched the [Play your part campaign](#) for the new year, on this page residents can find details of how to access testing, test kits and vaccinations and information on keeping themselves and others safe from Covid-19.



As a summary residents can access -

Test kits: 3 ways to access testing/test kits

- Ordering online on the [government portal](#);
- Picking them up from [participating pharmacies](#);
- Or collecting them up from our [pop up sites](#).

Vaccinations: 3 ways to book/get vaccinations in the county

- Details of all [walk-ins in Herefordshire](#) are available on the Taurus Healthcare website.
- [Book 1st dose, 2nd dose or booster vaccination online](#)
- Check the national walk-in finder

We are also promoting the [Money on Your Mind](#) Talk Community Pages through our corporate and Talk Community digital channels.



This service provides support if people are finding it difficult to cope with money or debt problems, due to events such as job loss or reduced hours, and signposting to local and national support available.

Planning:

Core Strategy 2021-2041: The first major round of public consultation on the Core Strategy Update will be open from 17 January – 28 February. This consultation will be conducted primarily online due to the large amount of inter-related documentation which is involved. However I have requested that hard copies are provided for public access in all our county libraries and can be provided elsewhere upon request.

This is a public consultation on the overarching policy options for the county's planning policy framework out to 2041 and clearly needs to address the issues communities have experienced in operating over the last 6 years within the 2015 policy framework.

I encourage all ward members and parish councils to participate in shaping how this policy update proceeds and to publicise the consultation widely within your communities and amongst the many dedicated participants in your Neighbourhood Planning activities.

Performance Improvement:

Many of you will be aware that there is a significant backlog of planning applications in the council's systems due to a number of factors including a shortage of specialist advisors (which is a national issue), officer vacancies (which are being filled) and the dreaded Covid. Additional support has now been secured specifically to address the case backlog and I am advised that officers anticipate the backlog being cleared by the end of the financial year (end of March).

I would like to thank everyone involved for their patience while this issue has been being addressed and for your support during the clearance process.

I recognise there is more work to be done to improve understanding and communication of planning related issues and, specifically in relation to the end-to-end process to bring forward community infrastructure and secure S106 monies, I have requested that a briefing note and presentation be provided on how members, parishes and the public can input to and influence this process which I hope to be able to share with you shortly.

Housing, Regulatory Services and Community Safety **– Cllr Ange Tyler**



Winter Provision:

Since 13 December the Rough Sleeping Outreach team has been operating a winter night shelter in Hereford for those who would otherwise be sleeping rough.

The shelter is open from 9pm-7.45am, for up to 14 guests per night, men and women, allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis. Each night, guests will take a Covid-19 lateral flow test, before entering the shelter and an alternative accommodation has been secured for anyone who presents at the shelter with a positive Covid test, so that they are able to self-isolate.

Council staff and volunteer wardens are on duty each night and members of the Council Outreach Team are on hand in the mornings to give guests advice on accommodation and support services. Should the shelter ever be full, a supplementary service operates including the provision of insulated survival bags and advice and support from the outreach team.

18 separate individuals, who would otherwise be sleeping rough, have made use of this service since it opened.

Public Protection:

Our Trading Standards Service had a very successful case in late December, resulting in a Birmingham company and its two directors being prosecuted for fly tipping on the Bromyard Downs. The three defendants were ordered to each pay a total of £3,360 in fines and costs, giving a total penalty for the incident of £10,080. We continue to maintain a zero tolerance of fly tipping in the county and this case just goes to show what our officers can achieve in the way of high fines and results.

Our Animal Health Team were also busy in December, successfully tackling the second avian influenza outbreak, this time near Hay-on-Wye at Clifford. Again, their speed, effectiveness and diligence was commended by Defra.

I am also pleased to report that our Bereavement Services Team has been able to donate to 'Herefordshire MIND' a significant £15,000 sum arising from recycled metal from the crematorium.

Environment, economy and skills – Cllr Ellie Chowns



Environment:

Herefordshire Council launched the new **Climate and Nature Partnership Board** in November which will help support our ambition for Herefordshire to be a thriving zero-carbon and nature rich county by 2030. The Board is part of a long term push by the county to lead by example in taking climate action and bring about positive change for everyone to benefit from.

After inviting applicants from across the county, the Council appointed 16 candidates to help drive implementation of a countywide Climate and Nature Action Plan, which has been co-developed with people and organisations across Herefordshire. It covers the key topics of transport, energy, housing and buildings, waste, land use and farming, and food. The selected Board members bring a wealth of expertise and knowledge through their roles in conservation, wildlife, architecture, farming, the media, community energy, research, land management, agricultural policy and running businesses.

After two successful meetings, the Board is currently developing a countywide Communications Programme to encourage everyone in the county – individuals, groups, businesses – to get involved in taking action on climate and nature. The Board have also formed themselves into sub-groups to steer the Climate and Nature Action Plan, commission projects to help deliver it, and monitor progress. Members of the public and organisations can find out more by visiting the [Herefordshire Zero Carbon and Nature Rich website](#).

Final preparations are underway for **Herefordshire's Citizens' Climate Assembly** which starts on Thursday 13th January. An independently selected and representative group of 48 people from across Herefordshire will learn about climate-related issues, discuss them with one another, and then make recommendations about what should happen and how things should change. The assembly will support a range of voices from different walks of life to be heard, to contribute to decision making and in turn contribute to democracy. The recommendations of the Assembly will be used to help set principles and priorities for action by the council and others. A wide range of 'expert witnesses' will present to the assembly, and all these presentations and the Q&A sessions will be recorded and posted online on the website. To find out more and to follow the progress and recorded sessions from the Climate Assembly please visit: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/citizensassembly>

The **Marches Renewable Energy scheme**, supported by the European Regional Development Fund, allocated all of the available funds for organisations to install renewable

energy at their premises in Herefordshire a few months ago. The latest installations completed in Herefordshire include:

Mayglothing Waste Ltd, Kington who received a grant of £24,756 towards an 80 kWp solar installation making an annual carbon saving of 18 tonnes and;

Blue Sky Botanics, Ross-on-Wye who received a grant of £27,813 towards a 99 kWp solar installation making an annual carbon saving of 24 tonnes.

Finally, here's something to help if your New Year resolution is to walk more: Join [Get Walking's](#) latest virtual walking tour and you'll soon be strolling through the spectacular winter wonderland of the Harz Mountains in Germany on our new route that takes you from Hanover to Kassel.

Get Walking is Herefordshire's free and easy to use website and app that allows you to record your walking, track your progress and achievements and turn your everyday steps into progress along our inspiring virtual walking tours. As you record your walking, you'll make progress along the route, reaching milestones that tell you more about the history and culture of the area and give you a great incentive to keep walking!

To sign up for free visit www.herefordwalk.org and you can start recording your walking straight away. If you prefer to use an app, then visit the website and follow the links to the apps.

Economy:

Herefordshire County Destination Business Improvement District – I was really pleased to find out in early December that eligible tourism and independent retail businesses had voted to support the development of the Herefordshire County Business Improvement District through the ballot that closed at the end of November. Ballot results released by the independent scrutineer, Civica Election Services, revealed that 83% of all those who voted are in favour of the BID. For the BID to be successful, a second trigger 'majority by rateable value' was also required and this was achieved with 89% of those who voted.

As I have mentioned in these updates over the last 18 months or so, there has been real progress in how public and private sector have worked together to support the development and promotion of the visitor economy for the first time in over 10 years, a really important local sector.

The Herefordshire County BID, working alongside the existing Hereford city BID, is a great opportunity to take this partnership working forward, generating circa £2.3m of funds to implement the [business plan](#) led by a private sector led board and independent company. The BID Task Group has written to all tourism and independent retail businesses across the county inviting them to a meeting on the 21st January to discuss next steps in taking the BID forward, and to seek interest in who would like to join the Board. If you know of any businesses who would like to be involved, please do let me know so that I can ensure they've received the invitation.

Additional Covid 19 Support for Businesses – On Tuesday 21st December the government announced an additional £1 billion in support for businesses most impacted by Omicron across the UK. Businesses in the hospitality and leisure sectors who pay business rates (have a rateable value) in England will be eligible for a one-off grant of up to £6,000, with [further guidance](#) from government published on the 30th December. The government also announced a £100m top up to the Additional Restrictions Grant allocations to Local Authorities for discretionary schemes, primarily to help those not supported through the nationally defined hospitality and leisure grant. [ARG government guidance](#) was also published on the 30th December. Finance and Economic Development officers are working to get both of the new schemes up and running as soon as possible. Separately to provide continued support to the cultural sector, the government has also allocated a further £30 million to the Culture Recovery Fund to support organisations such as theatres, orchestras and museums through the winter to March 2022.

Virtual Business Briefing 12th January – We are due to hold the first of our regular business briefing meetings on the 12th January (5.30 to 6.30). As I have mentioned in these monthly updates, we held a successful business summit in Hereford in September and through October to December we held ‘mini summits’ in each of the five market towns. The meetings have been invaluable in identifying current issues and opportunities, as well as a very positive willingness to work together to develop a longer term vision to realise the truly great potential of our fantastic county. The meetings identified that we can better improve our day to day communication with businesses, the virtual (due to current Covid 19 guidance) meeting on the 12th January will be the first of a series of briefings which we will hold in Hereford in the market towns (every 6 months) going forward.

Fastershire:

Feature on Holly - <https://youtu.be/wY8osmp2E9M>

See feature on Holly whose works for Herefordshire Council is enabled by superfast broadband to her village in rural Gloucestershire, with the council’s Fastershire project working across the two counties. Her works is to provide new technology to help people live independently at home making the most of the superfast and full fibre network.

Residents can find out if they can access broadband network by using the address checker at: www.fastershire.com
