

## **Report of Elissa Swinglehurst      October/November 2021**

### **Ward member serving Llangarron, Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow and Sellack.**

COP 26 has brought climate change and the environment to the fore. In Herefordshire we have been doing our bit to highlight the challenges and opportunities presented by the climate and ecological emergency. I attended a briefing today which showed how far your council has already come in reducing its carbon footprint – since 2008 there has been a reduction of nearly 60% and this sets us well on the way to our ambitious target of net zero by 2030. There is a new website with news and ideas that we hope will encourage the county to follow the council and reduce its carbon footprint – [zerocarbon.herefordshire.gov.uk](http://zerocarbon.herefordshire.gov.uk)

Also on the environment – there was a good deal of concern around the Environment Bill Lords amendment debate and specifically amendment 45 which was tabled by the Duke of Wellington. It's not as simple as many would have you believe – no one was voting to put sewage in the rivers – the fact is that we have old and outdated infrastructure which has combined foul and surface water pipework. When there is heavy rainfall the system is overwhelmed by the surface water and, in order to prevent sewage being spilt back up into people's bathrooms, the water companies are allowed to discharge into the rivers. This is known as a CSO or combined sewer overflow and it should only be used as described. It would seem that some water companies are using it as a convenient way of increasing capacity and reducing the need to invest in the infrastructure. The amendment was asking that water companies take all reasonable steps to avoid discharging to rivers. This is a vague and unenforceable ambition, for that reason it was not supported. The government has brought in a raft of measures and the promise of legislative action to resolve the issue for the long term. The amendment was ping ponged back to the lords and a new amendment was passed which called for 'action as soon as was reasonable' which is also somewhat vague but was passed and the hue and cry seems to have died down somewhat.

An examination of the autumn spending review does not reveal any funding for the Wye specifically and our MP Jesse Norman has raised that in the house. This is disappointing as we had the support of all the MPs (Jesse Norman, Bill Wiggin, Mark Harper, Fay Jones, David Davies) who were asking for 10-15m to support work to reduce phosphate in the river. It is deeply unfair that the Hampshire has benefitted from nearly 4m of govt funding to assist in tackling the pollution in the Solent but we haven't seen any financial help at all. Having said that, there is increasing resource for the environment agency to monitor and take action against agricultural diffuse pollution and increasing resource for catchment sensitive farming.

### **Adults Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee**

I chaired the AWSC response to the draft strategy on Domestic Abuse. Take a moment to think about what it meant by 'domestic abuse' – it is not just physical abuse but also emotional, psychological, coercive behaviour, online abuse, verbal abuse....victims are still predominantly women (97%) but can also be men. It was heartening to hear from West Mercia Women's Aid that Herefordshire refuges are the best they have seen and we are well provided for but there is still work to do around a holistic 'wrap around' approach where refuge accommodation is not the right

or only solution. The overall message was that the service is exemplary but even so we are looking for opportunities to improve it still further. One of the particular issues that I wanted to see addressed in the plan is the one of rurality – as it happens the meeting was addressed by a survivor of abuse who is now working for WMWA and she gave some valuable insight into the specific risk factors of rural settings for those who are suffering from abuse. This phenomenon is also recognised by the Rural Crime Network in their report ‘Captive and Controlled’. I feel that there is a role for Talk Community, the Diocesan networks, Parish councils and others in supporting this agenda and ensuring that no one is suffering in silence.

### **Cabinet meeting.**

I attended cabinet as a scrutiny chair – the main business items were the adoption of the improvement plan for children’s services and a scheme to invest in the adult social care market. Broadly both items had cross party support although there was a testy exchange between the leader and Terry James (Lib Dem) regarding the council’s long standing problems with children’s services. There is no doubt that the new CEO and the administration are straining every sinew to bring improvement to the service but there is, as I have said previously, a balance between change and continuity in any organisation. At the end of the day, as Cllr James might say, time will tell.

The direct investment into adult care is an extension of work that has been underway for some time but there are good reasons for proceeding with a degree of caution so the private market, which we rely on, is not negatively impacted. I think there are good reasons to make sure that the provision can also accommodate adults with learning disabilities and perhaps young people with complex needs as well.

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On a more personal note – I was pleased to attend the Conservative Association dinner with guest speaker Dame Kate Bingham. She gave a very interesting talk about her work heading the vaccine task force and one insight in particular has resonated with me. Dame Kate is a very bright, confident woman but her first instinct when BJ asked her to head the task force was to say no, she wasn’t qualified, couldn’t do it etc. It was her own daughter who reminded her of her own good advice – if you are asked to do something don’t doubt yourself – it is a tendency that women have and whilst a degree of self doubt is better than too much self confidence we do need to be reminded from time to time that we are capable. I mention this because there may be a woman reading this who has thought about being a councillor – or a parish councillor – I think both roles are rewarding and worthwhile (and I have been a parish councillor for about 16 years) so, if you are interested, get involved.