

Report of Cllr. Elissa Swinglehurst September 2022

Ward Member for Llangarron Ward serving the parishes of Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, Llangarron, Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow and Sellack.

Queen Elizabeth II

I would like to begin this report by recording my sadness at the death of Queen Elizabeth II. It was only a few months ago that I was attending jubilee events celebrating her many years of service. There were community get togethers and tea parties and we lit a beacon which burnt late into the night.

I found the lying in wait so moving, all those people just wanting to pay their respects, the ex service men and women stopping to snap to attention by the catafalque, people bowing, curtsying, genuflecting, waving and blowing kisses; it all felt simultaneously ceremonial and intensely personal. The funeral itself had some deeply poignant moments – the sound of a lone piper's slow march into the distance and amidst all the pomp and circumstance the two corgis waiting for their mistress.

I attended the proclamation in Hereford to represent the ward. The ceremony was held in front of the Cathedral, a crowd gathered to hear the announcement of the succession and to sing God Save the King!

Children's Services.

Herefordshire Council has been found to be inadequate across the board by Ofsted in their review of Children's Services. This is a very serious challenge to the council and will require a steady, focussed and proportionate response. For the first time Ofsted's report included the view that children are not protected from harm and are being failed by the local authority. It is a deeply upsetting document and we will be holding an extraordinary full council meeting to discuss the response of the current administration.

The opening paragraph of the report gives a flavour of the entire document:

Children and young people in Herefordshire are not protected from harm. Protective responses are too often delayed and are not sufficiently robust. Fundamental areas of social work practice are weak. Assessments across the service are poor. They fail to identify children's needs or effectively assess carers' abilities to provide safe and secure homes. Plans do not ensure children are safer or have their needs met, and for too many children the security of permanence is not achieved soon enough. Drift and delays are endemic, compounded by continuous staff turnover, weak guidance and a lack of management grip. Senior leaders were aware of many, but not all, of the inadequacies and the impact on children until this inspection.

[Herefordshire Council responds to outcome of Ofsted inspection – Herefordshire Council](#)

Environment and Sustainability Scrutiny Committee

I am a member of this new committee and our first full meeting was held this month. The local plan was the principle agenda item. The meeting can be viewed on the Herefordshire Council Youtube channel.

The committee was particularly keen to challenge the rural settlement hierarchy and underpinning evidence base which is of concern to rural parishes. It is apparent from the agenda that the council is planning to re-consult on rural settlement hierarchy in the autumn and I asked that parishes be notified as soon as possible so they can marshal their own evidence base. It is important to recognise that different services need to be weighted appropriately – for instance, a milk vending machine does not offset an absence of choices of ways to travel. I tried to make the point that people sometimes do not cycle because it is not a practical choice – narrow lanes, hilly terrain and an aging population are all realities that need to be considered. I also followed up on a question from a member of the public asking about the robustness of the housing needs assessment which, like the rural hierarchy, must meet the exigencies of examination in terms of ‘soundness’ with a justifiable and evidenced background.

There are potential issues around the phasing of the new plan as the council seeks to avoid abortive work whilst the new government brings forward its policies. It is not inconceivable that there may be some major changes due to the stated intention to do away with housing targets. I suggested that it would be useful to work up specific detail around things like windfall development or carbon neutrality whilst the place shaping details await government changes but the timetable is still set to try to get a draft in place by Feb 2023.

Another likely government change of direction is the removal of ‘European red tape’ or ‘the Habitats Directive’ as I like to call it. This is a bit of EU legislation that has been brought into UK law and which is part of the legislative framework that protects the natural world, specifically the Wye SAC. I suggested that the council develop policy to ensure that this doesn’t leave us with a regulatory gap.

The other item on the agenda was about a flooding strategy. I suggested we needed to include drought as well as triangulation with natural flood management, the Lugg Internal Drainage Board and explore any potential around ELMS to support winter storage reservoirs which might also provide other benefits ranging from bio diversity to amenity use.

The ESSC board also discussed the councils suggested Cabinet Commission to look at the problem of phosphate and the River Wye. I raised some uncertainty around what authority the council has to rewrite the phosphate action plan of the Nutrient Management Board or to rewrite the terms of reference of the Board. It seems to me that there is some very worthwhile potential to the cabinet commission but it would be an error to duplicate the existing board.

Health, Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

I chair this committee and we had the interesting and complex subject of obesity to get our teeth into (so to speak). There was a strong case to develop a ‘whole systems’ approach in a strategy to support healthy weight and good nutrition and a recommendation was made to the executive to implement. The county plan and delivery plan have healthy living as an overall goal but there is no detail about how to get there – a healthy weight strategy, developed with the NHS and voluntary sector could contribute meaningfully to achieving this outcome.

I was a bit surprised to discover that Llangarron is on the NCMP map as having higher than average levels of overweight/obese 4-5 year olds. I understand it is something to do with the way the statistics interpret school data.

The difficulty of access to public rights of way was also raised by me. As a council we want to promote healthy living and remaining active but we place (literally) barriers in the way. Climbing over stiles is a real obstacle to the more senior or sedentary members of our community and the

council needs to consider ways in which public access to public rights of way (the clue is in the title) can be improved. It is particularly galling when the £850,000 from government to encourage activity was not spent in the rural areas because we have no services to start with, no leisure centres, no cycle ways and we have footpaths that are overgrown or hard to access.

I also asked for a recommendation to include a health impact assessment on planning applications so, for instance, if a burger bar was applied for next to a school we would be able to consider health as a material consideration.

The second agenda item was about the migration of stroke services to Gloucester or Worcester. I asked about how this would impact Herefordshire residents who access their healthcare via the Welsh GPs. The basic principle seemed to be nearest hospital but no one was certain how that would apply on the Monmouthshire border. I asked for clarification and made it a recommendation.

We were able to ask a clinical specialist for reassurance about outcomes but it was generally agreed that the change was a pragmatic response of making the best of what we have rather than an ideal 'perfect world' solution.

The NHS are consulting on this currently if you wish to respond.

[Issues Paper September 2022 FINAL.pdf \(hwics.org.uk\)](#)

River Wye

I had the great pleasure of chairing a panel discussion on the risks to our rivers at the Abergavenny Food Festival. The guests were: Simon Evans of the Wye Usk Foundation, investigative journalist Nicola Cutcher, Martin Williams NFU/farmer and John Reed (director of Avara, the poultry processing firm). The event was very well attended which speaks to the level of public concern about the state of the rivers. There were some impassioned contributions from the floor, particularly around an alleged impact on the Amazon and a general anger around the supply chain's role in the problems the river faces. The panellists were all well informed and contributed their own take on the issues. There were some disagreements and well-articulated challenges that explored the relationship of the poultry industry to the problem. Sadly the time constraints and a degree of commercial sensitivity limited exploration of potential solutions being brought forward by the supply chain.

The Nutrient Management Board has just met. Progress is being made with all partners. A challenge was raised by the chair as to the fitness of the regulations known as 'farming rules for water' since they are guidance led and the guidance has severely disabled the regulations in this catchment. It will be a subject that the technical advisory group will pick up on along with the cabinet commission who will be revisiting the case for a water protection zone.

Of local interest was a paper presented to the board by the Wye Salmon Association which looked at soil testing in the Garron and Gamber catchment.

The agenda is available on the council website and the whole meeting is on the council's you tube.

Stop Press – the cabinet agenda for 29th Sept included the following under the item of allocation of earmarked reserves – both speeding and TROs are often a problem for parishes so I hope this will help.

The implementation of program to introduce area wide 20mph speed limit zones in towns and villages, including all schools is designed to reduce injuries, fatalities and improves air quality it will also address increasing demand for speed reductions in residential areas. (1.2m)

The reduction in the backlog of Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO) and signing and lining will address a maintenance backlog of signs and lines to affect public perception and council reputation. It will ensure that signs and lines are compliant with TRO's and any anomalies are eliminated and illegal parking is reduced and reduce the number of outstanding applications for TRO's. (.66m)

Budget

You might have picked up on a story in the Hereford Times about the budget outturn overspend of 9m – just to explain, this is a part of a routine budget examination part way through the year which extrapolates to arrive at the likely outturn if nothing happens to change the trajectory.

Anyway – I just thought it was worth taking a moment to summarise where we are so you can all see where the money gets spent (and it's not on potholes)

	Gross bdgt	working bdgt	outturn	variance in £000
Adults Wellbeing	102,865	62,684	64,662	1,978
Childrens	55,315	48,403	54,673	6,270
Commissioning etc	24,598	17,705	17,818	113
Environment etc	3,734	2,640	3,007	367
Housing etc	4,816	1,467	1,652	190
Infrastructure	19,432	9,456	9,349	(107)
Finance etc	22,772	13,237	14,244	1,007
Corporate	1,689	894	752	(267)