

Report from Elissa Swinglehurst MAY 2022

Serving the parishes of Welsh Newton and Llanrothal, Llangarron, Marstow, Peterstow, Bridstow and Sellack.

Children's Services

The big issue this month was the same big issue last month and will be the same next month – children's services. This is a very challenging area of the council's work and it is requiring more and more investment. To give a bit of context in 2019/20 the net budget for children's services was 30.8m, in 20/21 it was 32.5m and in 22/23 it is 41m, the total annual net budget for the council is 175.9m for 22/23. An additional 20million has also been allocated to the improvement of this service. Included in the 41m is 34m for safeguarding and family support work and of that 26.4m is spent on the 330 or so children in care. There has been a tremendous amount of change in the directorate with various interim staff and teams. There is a very serious problem with recruiting permanent staff, including social workers, but it is important that case loads are kept at a reasonable level.

The reason I am taking a bit of time to go into this is that Herefordshire Council's children's services was the focus of a recent Panorama programme. One thing the programme had at it's heart was the 'balancing act' that every local authority faces – Herefordshire was criticised for taking children into care but at the same time the tragic cases of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes remind us that there are sometimes fatal consequences of a local authority not taking a child into care. It is a world of imperfect and I have every sympathy for social workers who are trying to do the best for the child, who are ignored the hundreds of times they get that right and pilloried when they get it wrong.

It is important to understand that the situation is complex and it is not simply a matter of more and more money. We have to improve our recruitment and this is not helped by the negative media coverage.

Children's services are the top priority of the council and there is a clear determination to get it right.

Herefordshire Hoard – treasure trove.

The [Herefordshire Hoard](#) will be available for public viewing for another six dates over the coming weeks. The Herefordshire Hoard Roadshow will be travelling across the county during June and July. Go along, meet Viking re-enactors and learn more about our local treasure. You can see full details as well as information on the on this [news article](#) and on the [Hoard website](#)

Broadband

To those of my residents who were dropped from the Gigaclear contract and who therefore qualify for the household digital grant – I have had an update today that the procurement process is completed and the contract has been awarded. I have been told that all affected households will be contacted by mid June. If you haven't registered for the grant and you think that you qualify the link is www.fastershire.com/digital-household-grant webpage

Introducing the new Mental Health Collaborative

Following on from the Government's drive to integrate care services, The Mental Health Collaborative brings together Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust, partners in Local Government, general practice, the voluntary sector, commissioners, community groups, and crucially, local people with a lived experience – all working together to join up services and improve the mental health support for people who live in Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The Mental Health Collaborative is part of the new Integrated Care System (ICS) which places the duty of all local health and care organisations to work together in partnership on a more formal footing. For our Mental Health Collaborative the ambition is to work together across organisations, to listen to what our communities need and then respond collectively to change the way we design and deliver our services. This way of working enables us to have a more joined up approach to how we plan, fund, deliver and evaluate the quality of what we do, with a particular focus on addressing the inequalities faced by some communities or groups in accessing mental health care.

Parishes

And finally, this has been the month when the parishes have been holding their annual meetings. It is a time for reflection, looking back on the past year and looking forward to the future. I just want to say a big 'thank you' on behalf of the council and residents to all those parish councillors who turn up, month after month, sometimes year after year, they look after the footpaths, report the potholes, consider planning, listen to local issues and support their local community. It's can be thankless task – I know, I've been a parish councillor for a very long time – and that is why I am thanking you all now. Parish councillors past, present and future – thank you for all that you do.

I hope you all had a lovely time marking the Platinum Jubilee this weekend. I was able to attend events in Glewstone, Llangarron, Llangrove and Welsh Newton (of course) – it was so good to see people out and about, enjoying the weather, dancing in the rain, showing off tremendous baking skills and picnicking flair. A community spirit was evident wherever I looked, from the bunting to the icing on the cake. Well done and thank you to all those who have given of their time and talents to bring their community together to mark this very special event.

God Save the Queen.

And finally – as a stop press.

Jesse Norman MP has written to the 1922 committee and to Boris Johnson to explain the reasons that he can no longer support BJ as PM. This cannot have been easy for Jesse so I would like to record my respect for his decision and for the considered way in which he has put his point across. If you would like to see the text of his letter follow the link below

[In full: Herefordshire MP's explosive letter to Boris Johnson | Hereford Times](#)