

County Councillor's Report for Malvern Wells Parish Council on Wednesday 31st October 2018 2018

Progress continues to be made, according to Ofsted

The latest monitoring visit to Worcestershire children's services, by Ofsted Inspectors, has found that the Council continues to make progress in improving services for children and young people.

Almost two years on from an Ofsted report that found that Children's Services in Worcestershire were inadequate; inspectors have now found evidence of improvement in each of their last five monitoring visits.

Earlier this month inspectors reviewed arrangements for Worcestershire's children in care up to the age of sixteen years old.

In a letter published today by Ofsted, inspectors describe how the quality of support offered to children in care has improved. Inspectors went on to describe how social work practice has got better and that legal processes and care proceedings are being used effectively.

Inspectors recognised that the Council is taking steps to improve its edge of care service which is currently under-developed.

A new edge of care service is now being developed which will support our children and families to stay together. By investing more into preventing our children from coming into the care system, families can be kept together where it is safe to do so and improve the lives of our children and young people."

The report goes on to say that "children in Worcestershire are safe and are placed appropriately". Children's care plans are reviewed and updated regularly leading to positive change for many children.

Inspectors report that the Council has worked hard and successfully to recruit and retain more social workers which is improving continuity for children.

Under direction from the Department for Education a wholly owned council company, Worcestershire Children First, is currently being developed to deliver Children's Social Care Services. The company is due to be launched in October of next year.

Funding boost for flood risk management in Worcestershire

Flood risk management in the county has received a £500,000 funding boost from the Government. Worcestershire is one of 26 Catchment Scale projects in England to be funded by a recent £15m DEFRA allocation for Natural Flood Management (NFM) projects.

The aim of the project is to hold back water in upstream areas by applying natural methods in order to 'slow the flow' and reduce the risk of flooding downstream. NFM includes coppicing riverside trees to create leaky structures in the watercourse, tree planting on steep slopes to intercept surface water, diversion of high flows into natural floodplain areas and fencing to exclude livestock from rivers and streams.

The funding, which runs up to March 2021, will also allow the benefits of different natural flood management techniques to be evaluated. The project will focus on three core areas which are known to suffer from flood risk and water quality issues and where it is thought that natural flood management techniques will be effective; the Dowles Brook in the Wyre Forest, Barbourne Brook in Worcester City and a cluster of River Avon tributaries which includes the Badsey Brook, Merry Brook and the River Isbourne.

The project is an exciting multi-agency community focused partnership initiative involving Worcestershire County Council, Wychavon District Council, Gloucestershire County Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England and local community and environmental organisations.

The funding has also allowed the County Council to employ a Natural Flood Management Project Officer who will engage with communities and landowners to identify potential work areas and implement natural flood management techniques within the county.

Transforming libraries in Worcestershire

Communities from across Worcestershire are to be given the opportunity to play an increasingly important role in how their local libraries are run.

Traditional services of book borrowing, computer access and family activities and events are now delivered alongside a comprehensive adult learning programme, targeted reading and

literacy schemes, job clubs, job fairs, health and wellbeing services and a varied volunteering programme.

However, as the financial pressures grow on the County Council, libraries must continue to evolve in order to provide modern services for residents and ensure value for money. Services will be modernised including the introduction of Open Libraries which use self-service machines, meaning people can still access all services at their local library and they can stay open for longer.

To shape the proposals, background work has gone into looking closely at each library in Worcestershire to see what services are currently provided and exactly who is using them. Following the approval by Cabinet a 90-day public consultation was launched on the 29th of October to seek the views of residents and engage with key partner organisations and community groups before a final decision is made in spring 2019.

Work is ahead of schedule on Southern Link Road Dualling

Work to complete the dualling of the section of the Worcester Southern Link Road between Whittington and Norton roundabouts is progressing well and is ahead of schedule.

Since the railway bridge extension was moved into place earlier this year and the final checks on the bridge were completed, Worcestershire County Council's contractors have been constructing two completely new west bound lanes that will run under the bridge.

This work has included completion of earthworks to make way for the new road, relocation of electricity poles, laying foundations and installing of a new drainage system and kerbs. All of which needed to be completed before the road surfacing could begin.

To enable the next phase of works, a number of lane restrictions and overnight closures are needed to carry out surfacing and road marking works ahead of opening this stretch of road to traffic.

On The evenings of 29 October to 2 November, Crookbarrow Way will be closed to downhill traffic only from Whittington to Norton overnight from 9pm to 6am the following morning.

There will be a diversion in place that takes traffic down London Road and up Bath Road to the Ketch Roundabout. A separate diversion will be signposted for high-sided vehicles.

Broomhall Way will be open in both directions between the Ketch and Norton Roundabouts as normal and traffic going uphill from Norton Roundabout to Whittington will not be affected as this side of the road will remain open during this period.

On Wednesday 14 November it is planned to fully close Crookbarrow Way to traffic in both directions from 9pm to 6am the following morning, subject to weather conditions. A diversion will be in place that takes traffic down London Road and up Bath Road and vice versa. Again, Broomhall Way will be open in both directions between the Ketch and Norton Roundabouts as normal.

Once work on the new road nears completion and the usual checks have been made, arrangements for opening the road to two lanes of traffic in both directions (two westbound/downhill lanes under the railway bridge extension and two eastbound/uphill lanes under the old railway bridge) will be announced.

To keep fully up to date with progress, news and confirmation of the overnight closures scheduled for the evenings of 29 October and 14 November, visit the webpage at www.worcestershire.gov.uk/slr and follow us on twitter @worcstravel.

Gritting teams on standby to tackle whatever winter throws at us

The checks are over and the County Council's gritting teams are ready to swing into action for another winter.

Gritting crews officially went on standby last Monday (October 15) but, temperatures have remained comfortably above zero.

In preparation for the colder months, Worcestershire County Council's six highways depots have been stocked up with more than 14,000 tonnes of rock salt to be spread on the roads when the temperature gauge drops below zero.

The 30 gritting lorries are equipped with brine to mix with the salt when temperatures drop even lower to help keep the roads safe and open to traffic.

Snow ploughs are fitted to the gritters with a rubber blade to clear the road of snow while protecting manhole covers and cats eyes on the surface of the road. Final checks are also being made on the county's 1,250 grit bins to ensure they are full and ready for use on the county's public paths and highway.

During a typical run, the gritting team will clock up around 1,500 miles of designated roads. To find out if the teams are going out, residents, businesses and other road users can get the latest information through the County Council's travel Twitter account @WorcsTravel. We've recently gone into Gritter Twitter mode, where the day's information about Travel, weather and road conditions is given out first.

There's also a host of other information on the gritting operations, included interactive maps showing designated routes, which residents can use to pinpoint the location of their nearest grit bin, on www.worcestershire.gov.uk/gritting. People are also being encouraged to report any issues on the roads or with the grit bins via www.worcestershire.gov.uk/reportit

Other Council News

Environment

Worcestershire County Council has been named the top council in England at this year's National Energy Efficiency Awards.

The recognition highlights the work that has been undertaken by the Council over the last year and the financial and carbon savings that have been achieved.

In the last year, the Council has overseen several energy efficiency projects, including major street lighting upgrades that will see the remaining high pressure sodium lights across the county replaced with LEDs.

Worcestershire County Council's Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP) has helped over 145 businesses in the County so far. It has provided support for an energy assessment of business premises and options for grants towards the cost of measures to improve energy efficiency.

Children Services

Following the recent Local Area SEND Inspection, a full written statement of action has been prepared in collaboration with parents and carers, and young people.

The final version of the Written Statement of Action has been approved by Ofsted. The Department for Education and NHS England will now monitor progress every three months. Applications for school admissions in Worcestershire in 2019 opened on September 1. The applications are for a place at all schools, for intake in September 2019.

For this September, 91.4% of children in Worcestershire were offered a place at their first choice secondary school and 92.5% were given a spot at their first choice primary school.

Health and Well Being.

A birthday card celebrating the 70th anniversary of the creation of Adult Social Care has been signed by councillors.

The National Assistance Act was passed in 1948 and has allowed social workers and social care assistants to help many thousands of people in Worcestershire to lead independent, dignified lives. The signing of the card is one of the events being organised to celebrate the contribution that is made by carers in Worcestershire and to inform residents about the services that the Council provides for vulnerable adults.

The Warmer Worcestershire Network has received funding from the National Grid Warm Homes Fund to provide 150 first time gas central heating systems. Private landlords can apply for 50% funding towards the cost of a first time gas central heating system. Local energy charity Act on Energy is available to support applicants with any customer enquiries, eligibility checks and submitting their applications and can be reached via email on advice@actonenergy.org.uk

Council

The Council is facing a net budget overspend of more than £5 million as financial pressures on local government increase. Demand for social care is the major factor that has led to increased budget pressure.

Actions already taken in year, which include tighter recruitment controls, a review of all non-contracted spend, management of long term borrowing and capitalising the costs of highways maintenance, have reduced the projected overspend by more than £12.5 million