

COUNCIL
10 SEPTEMBER 2020**REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY**

(a) Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure**Introduction**

1. I am very pleased and privileged to offer this report to Council on the work carried out in the areas of economy and infrastructure over the last two years.

Economic Growth and Investment

2. The work of the growth and investment team directly supports the Open for Business theme of the Corporate Plan and the economic priorities of the County Council which focus on job creation and growth. Worcestershire continues to be identified as an area of significant growth, with the Gross Value Added (GVA) in the county growing every year since 2011, and at a faster rate than the West Midlands and England.

3. This report is written at a very uncertain time as we begin to understand the impact of Covid-19 on our local economy. The full economic impact of Covid-19 is yet to be understood, but from national data provided by ONS and OBR we can see that the projected decline in GVA across Worcestershire ranges from 26% to 41%. Using this same approach our analysis finds that **GVA for Worcestershire is estimated to fall by 36%**, with the largest contribution to the fall from **manufacturing** followed by **wholesale and retail**, other sectors significantly affected in the county include **accommodation, leisure, culture and entertainment**.

4. The **National Business Survey** undertaken by ONS shows that while businesses are beginning to return to operation, currently just **over 20% of businesses are closed temporarily**. Of these they are reporting that **82% of staff have been furloughed** compared to 22% of staff in those businesses that are still trading.

5. Working with partners (WBC and HW Chamber) our **local survey results** paint a similar picture (from approx. 1200 respondents):

- 28% of businesses are either growing or operating at business as usual. 20% are commencing restart, 31% are ticking over, 19% are in survival mode and 2% are in crisis.
- **85% of businesses expect their profits to decrease** this year as a result of Covid-19, with almost 20% expecting profit to decrease by 50% or more
- 24% of businesses responding to the survey have closed temporarily
- Almost **50% of businesses have expressed concerns about cashflow** and lack of sales
- **35% of businesses are facing difficulties in returning to work**

6. Businesses have expressed concern about the **effectiveness of supply chains** in the coming weeks (and months), either supply of materials or services as well as **distributors and sales channels**.

Economic Recovery Plan

7. Worcestershire County Council has co-ordinated a joint response group; The Worcestershire Covid-19 Economic Response, Recovery and Resilience Group (WCERG). The group includes representatives from all Worcestershire LA's, WLEP, Chamber of Commerce, FSB, DWP, Reg Services, NFU, Worcestershire Business Central and Worcestershire Ambassadors.

8. The County Council and our partners will be taking forward activity and interventions under each area, delivered across the One Worcestershire geography. A vital role will be the ongoing communications of Central Government recovery programmes and the delivery of timely and current information through the business support network through the increasingly digital platforms. This will be led by Worcestershire Business Central and fully supported through the excellent work of Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses and the wider business support organisations across the county in a true One Worcestershire approach.

Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP)

9. Worcestershire County Council is a key partner in the WLEP, also performing the role of accountable body. Worcestershire County Council's Corporate Plan is clearly aligned to the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), and is committed to supporting the delivery of an **additional 25,000 jobs and increase in GVA by £2.9 billion by 2025**.

10. The Worcestershire LEP and the County Council continue to co-invest in projects to improve the connectivity of the county.

11. The Development of Worcestershire's Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) sets the strategic direction for skills and enterprise infrastructure which remains a core priority along with a strong focus on key sectors including agri-tech, advanced manufacturing and cyber security, defence and IT; as well as recognising the cornerstone sectors of health and care and construction. The LIS is developed based on five foundations:

- a) Ideas: innovative economy
- b) People: good jobs and greater earning power for all
- c) Infrastructure: upgrading infrastructure
- d) Business Environment: the best place to start and grow a business
- e) Places: prosperous communities across the UK.

Business Support Programmes

12. A number of business support programmes have been developed and expanded over the last 12-24 months to meet the needs of the local economy and the views of local businesses have been key in the design of these programmes which include:

- Here2Help Business – WCC has launched our new Here2Help Business Programme in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. A £3m programme designed to assist local businesses to recover, adapt, develop and support future resilience as lockdown measures reduce

- Worcestershire Innovation (WINN)
- Proof of Concept Grants (Capital and Revenue)
- Innovation Launchpad
- Make It Happen Challenge for Innovators
- WINN Wednesday Innovation Events
- Innovative Platform – WINN has launched a new innovation platform which aims to drive crowd innovation across Worcestershire
- The Kiln – co-working space now fully launched on Copenhagen Street, Worcester
- BetaDen – Worcestershire’s first tech accelerator based at Malvern Hills Science Park
- Enterprising Worcestershire Start Up Programme
- Be Cyber Secure – to improve the cyber security of small and medium sized businesses
- Investing in Growth – this EU funded project ended in September 2019 providing a broad spectrum of support to enable inward investment and business expansion
- Elevate – WCC’s new business growth support programme, launched in January 2020
- LEADER Programme – a programme to support rural business which has successfully supported 85 rural businesses and community groups, investing over £1.7m in ventures worth £4.8m.

Worcestershire Business Central

13. The County Council has worked closely with partners to develop a sustainable partnership for Worcestershire's growth hub - Worcestershire Business Central (WBC). The service is now co-located within Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce. The County Council has allocated three members of staff to the team.

14. The enhanced growth hub has continued to develop a proactive engagement strategy to ensure Worcestershire businesses are aware of the support available to them. This is done predominately through the four Business Engagement Managers, focused on supporting business growth and the three key priority sectors of agri-tech, advanced manufacturing and cyber security, the four telephone-based support staff and social media campaigns. The Government is keen to further enhance the work of WBC and we are working with WLEP and the Chamber of Commerce to ensure the management and operation meets requirements of business and any additional funding. I look forward to seeing these emerging proposals being embedded over the next few months.

15. The website continues to have approx. 6,000 visits per month and over the past 12 months the service provided support to over 1,400 Worcestershire-based businesses and of which almost 300 businesses received in-depth support.

Game Changer Sites

Worcester Six

16. Worcester Six is a 72-hectare (178 acre) site set immediately to the east of the M5 motorway at junction 6, Worcester Six is set to become one of the region’s flagship developments.

17. Targeted at technology rich manufacturing companies that can draw on local skills specialisms in IT, defence and cyber sectors, Worcester Six also provides new floor space for manufacturing, offices, research and development, and logistics. On site 420,500 sq. ft is now let or under construction, creating circa 165 jobs.

18. Current and future Worcester Six occupiers/investors include:

- Kimal
- Spire Healthcare
- Material Solutions (part of Siemens)
- Liberty Property Trust
- Kohler Mira
- Cornelius Drinks

19. If planning, which is being determined by Wychavon District Council, gives the green light to the new development, work to build a nearly 40,000 sq ft data centre with almost half of this space being used for office accommodation, would begin later this year. The development is on behalf of 1&1 IONOS Ltd, which provides web-hosting services and cloud solutions for small to medium enterprise businesses.

Redditch Gateway

20. The Redditch Gateway development is an exciting opportunity to build on the town's wealth of engineering and manufacturing expertise. The new development aims to promote and enhance supply chain links and to further develop the skills of the local labour market. Redditch, Bromsgrove and Stratford upon Avon District and Borough Councils all approved the project in March 2018 with Outline Planning consent granted.

21. The appointed developer at Redditch Gateway has secured one large occupier and now seeking occupiers for the remaining available plots. The overall scheme is set to deliver significant economic value to the area. Achieving an increase in economic growth and productivity, through the development of high-quality headquarters-style manufacturing facilities, the site provides an opportunity to transform the economy in the environs of Redditch and re-position the area as a location of choice for growing local companies and prospective inward investors.

Malvern Hills Science Park and Technology Park

22. Malvern Hills Science and Technology Park describes the combination of the Malvern Hills Science Park and the QinetiQ site. Malvern Hills Science Park (MHSP) has been developed over five phases and is currently accommodating over 30 technology-rich companies employing over 350 people. Phase 5 construction is now complete providing a further 17,000 sq. ft of Technology/R&D workspace for new and existing tenants to expand into, releasing space in Phases 1-3 to accommodate new businesses.

23. Worcestershire County Council, Malvern Hills District Council and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce are all major shareholders of MHSP and oversee its running and strategic direction.

24. Additional employment land adjacent to MHSP has been purchased by the County Council and enabling work is underway to develop up to 300,000 sq. ft of B1 (b) office and ancillary uses, to accommodate HQ, manufacturing, research and development and training facilities. This opportunity provided by this development land

positions the Malvern site as a European Scale Science Park that in partnership with QinetiQ provides the ability to compete with truly international reach.

Town and City Centre Regeneration

25. Working with District Partners we have major initiatives underway in Redditch and Worcester City. In Redditch under the Town Centre Regeneration Board we are helping shape key development activity in the Town particularly focusing on the redevelopment opportunity associated with the Railway Station, and the potential a new rail transport interchange could deliver for ambitious plans for a revitalised Town centre.

26. In Worcester City, taking the City Centre masterplan lead, we are developing clear plans for the Shrub Hill quarter and particularly the role Shrub Hill station can play in the sustainable economic growth of the City. We look forward to working with district colleagues on how these projects can play a key part in their respective emerging Towns Fund proposals.

27. Given the Covid-19 situation the work to identify development activity and major sites continues, particularly where the combination of co-ordinated local public sector resources in partnership with the market can provide a focus that delivers external investment and the economic growth to support the county. This pipeline of game changers is critical to the Worcestershire economy; together with the WLEP we have just secured the 'Getting Building Fund'. Not only will it provide an essential piece of infrastructure in the form of a spine road at Malvern Hills Technology Park but it will also provide a much-needed boost to the construction and infrastructure sector, in turn, benefitting the wider economy of Worcestershire.

Major Infrastructure Projects

Covid-19

28. Following the lockdown announcement on 23 March 2020, the majority of construction work on Major Infrastructure Projects was temporarily suspended and sites safely closed down. This was due to supply chain matters, resourcing, being able to socially distance, and confidence to be able to safely finish work started.

29. Where possible on-site work continued, including; Worcestershire Parkway Platform 2 works and snagging, and Kidderminster Station internal and external works, seasonal and critical survey works and inspections. Non-construction work on infrastructure projects continued throughout the period e.g. design works, business case development, planning development.

30. Further advice was received at the end of April from Transport Minister, Baroness Vere, regarding Highway maintenance and improvements together with guidance from Highways Sector Council. On receipt of this, contractors worked through plans for how to restart construction works. This required; establishing new practices regarding social distancing, preparing Risk Assessments and Method Statements, mobilising the supply chain and workforce (some furloughed), re-establishing sites, confirming and agreeing plans.

31. Following this, work progressively resumed on the major infrastructure schemes, in line with the guidance. The initial focus being to get the schemes up and running and to then understand the impact of Covid-19.

Worcestershire Parkway

32. In 2017 Worcestershire County Council appointed Buckingham Group Contracting Limited to undertake the design and construction works for Worcestershire Parkway. Following a successful and stakeholder integrated design and installation period, the station opened to the public on the 23 February 2020. The facility offers improved accessibility between Worcestershire and London, Nottingham and Cardiff. Whilst the station has opened and is fully operational – being operated by GWR – some final finishing touches will be completed over the Autumn.

Pershore Infrastructure Improvements

33. The Pershore Infrastructure Improvement Scheme is progressing, consisting of:

- The provision of a northern link road that connects the employment sites of the Keytec Business Park with the A44
- The provision of capacity enhancements at Pinvin crossroads to alleviate existing and projected congestion in the area
- Upgrading of the Wyre Road / Station Road Junction
- Upgrading of the B4083 Wyre Road to A road status.

34. Construction is well underway on the Pinvin crossroads element of the scheme; however, Covid-19 has had an impact on progress. Work on site re-commenced in May and it is envisaged the main construction works should be completed this year. The Link Road and Wyre Road elements are scheduled to commence construction in Winter 2020/21.

35. The benefits of the scheme include supporting growth in employment and the economy, improving access from Keytec Business Park to the A44 and reduction in congestion.

Churchfields Urban Village Highways Infrastructure Improvements

36. This c£5.7m scheme seeks to deliver improved access to the Churchfields Masterplan area in order to unlock significant housing-led development. The purpose of the scheme is to increase capacity on the highway network to enable the redevelopment of the Churchfields area and to provide an improvement scheme for Blackwell Street that improves the air quality within the Air Quality Management Area.

37. Construction is well underway on all elements of the highway improvement scheme. The suspension of works due to Covid-19 affected the programme although measures were undertaken to mitigate this as much as possible and the scheme is expected to complete Winter 2020/21.

A38 Bromsgrove

38. The A38 Major Scheme will support the growth of Bromsgrove, Redditch and South Birmingham by enhancing the A38 corridor Bromsgrove and targeting locations where delay and congestion are currently experienced and where conditions are predicted to deteriorate further without intervention.

39. Package 1 comprised of three junction improvements, as follows:

- M42 Junction 1;
- M5 Junction 4; and
- Barley Mow Lane junction.

40. The Barley Mow Lane Scheme was completed in July 2019. Work is well underway on the remaining two schemes i.e. M5 J4 and M42 J1. Work on M5 J4 started in June and is due to be completed later this year. Work on J1 M42 is due for completion in 2021. The schemes are funded by Highways England, WLEP, GBSLEP and S106 contributions.

A38 BREP

41. The development of the A38 Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme (BREP) is ongoing. The scheme involves a series of link and junction capacity enhancements coupled with active travel improvements within the A38 highway corridor through the main Bromsgrove conurbation.

42. A strategic outline business case (SOBC) was submitted to Department for Transport (DfT) in summer 2019 as part of the Midlands Connect priority set of schemes for funding as part of the Major Route Network (MRN) initiative. This SOBC has been well received by the DfT. The scheme is currently being further developed and a public engagement exercise was undertaken earlier this year. The feedback from this exercise coupled with further safety work has fed into the development and refinement of the scheme which will form the basis of an outline business case (OBC) that will be submitted to DfT next year. The scheme will be funded through a number of sources including WLEP, S106 contributions and DfT monies.

43. Once the OBC is submitted it is intended to begin detailed scheme design and work towards submission of the Full Business Case (FBC) to DfT for final funding approval. Should this prove successful it would be intended that the delivery of the scheme will run from 2022 to 2025. A small number of schemes within the overall programme may be brought forward to take advantage of available funding.

Southern Link Road - Junction 7 of the M5 – the Ketch Roundabout (Phases 1-3)

44. Dualling has been completed between Junction 7 of the M5 and the Ketch Roundabout. A replacement farm accommodation bridge has been installed over Crookbarrow Way along with the Crookbarrow Way Footbridge. The footbridge, which is suitable for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders, is located immediately to the west of the railway bridge and links the communities of St Peter's and Brockhill Village, providing a vital link on National Cycle Route 45 which connects Worcester City and Pershore via Norton. Feedback from users is very positive and it is extremely popular with walkers, cyclists, and joggers.

45. Work has begun on the Broomhall Way Footbridge to the west of the Norton Roundabout linking St Peter's and the proposed St. Modwen development to the south. Works are anticipated to be complete in the first half of 2021.

Southern Link Road Phase 4 (SLR4)

46. This phase of work between the Ketch and Powick roundabouts entails the construction of a wholly new 1.2-mile section of dual carriageway to the south of the existing infrastructure including a new river bridge and viaduct. There will be further improvements to the Ketch and Powick Roundabouts, the creation of a (wider) 3m pedestrian/cycleway on the northern side of the carriageway, a pedestrian/cycle bridge over Hams Way immediately to the west of the Powick Roundabout and a pedestrian/cycleway underneath the river bridges immediately to the west of the Ketch Roundabout.

47. Work is now well underway on the new structures including the piers for the new river bridge and viaduct. The main beams for the viaduct have also been installed.

48. Recent flooding events and the Covid-19 outbreak have affected the programme and this is currently under review. Work on site recommenced in May with good progress since then. Forthcoming work includes lifting of the main bridge beams into place, installation of the Hams Way Footbridge and a number of approach/exit enhancements on the Ketch and Powick Roundabouts.

49. The Southern Link Road Phase 4 Community Liaison Group (SLR4 CLG) was established in September 2018 to ensure that stakeholders are kept informed of progress with the scheme, particularly regarding any matters that might have an impact on the local community, e.g. Traffic Management arrangements. Membership of the group consists of Councillors representing the three County Divisions, three District Wards and three Parish Councils together with County Council Officers and members of the Contractor's Project Team. The group meets approximately every three months although during the Covid-19 lockdown an update has been emailed to members. A video conference call is planned for the October meeting.

Kidderminster Rail Station

50. Following completion of construction works and the rigorous entry into service processes with rail industry partners, the new station was made operational on 7 June 2020. A formal opening ceremony will take place when passenger numbers begin to return to normal levels.

Sabrina Bridge

51. As an essential crossing point for students at the University of Worcester directly linking the three-main campuses which are on opposite banks of the River Severn, Sabrina Bridge is a dedicated route for pedestrians and cyclists (part of National Cycle Network) and crosses the Severn between Pitchcroft and the west side of Worcester. It is not just the students that benefit from Sabrina Bridge. The strategic location of the structure also encourages others to walk or cycle into the City centre. Works are anticipated to be completed this year.

Kepax Bridge

52. Building on the success of the Diglis Bridge scheme, County Council officers are working closely with colleagues at Worcester City Council on a proposed new pedestrian/cycle bridge over the River Severn between Gheluvelt Park to the east and the Kepax former landfill site to the west. Provision of the bridge would significantly enhance the city's walking and cycling network. An initial feasibility study has been completed and funding has been allocated to progress the scheme to planning stage. Significant additional funding will need to be secured for the scheme to progress beyond the planning phase, however the recent award of monies from MHCLG (Getting Building Fund) has provided a boost to the project. A pre-planning public engagement exercise regarding the scheme was recently completed and the majority of responses were very supportive.

Town Centre Improvements

53. Further schemes have been completed in the Shambles in Worcester, Stourport and Worcester Street Kidderminster. Work started on Pump Street in Worcester in June and is due for completion within the next few weeks. Design work is well underway for further schemes in Redditch and Evesham that are due to start on site next year.

Strategic Planning, Development Control and Waste & Minerals Plans

Minerals Local Plan

54. The plan was submitted to the Secretary of State on 17 December 2019 and will now be examined by an independent Inspector. Originally the date for this was to be in May 2020 but this has been postponed by the Planning Inspectorate. Unconfirmed new dates are in November 2020.

55. We are also developing a Minerals Sites Development Plan Document which, once adopted will sit alongside the Minerals Local Plan and will allocate specific sites and preferred areas for minerals working. Sites which have been submitted to us by landowners and the industry / operators are currently being assessed prior to be included in the preferred options of the plan.

56. 2019 saw an increase in significant planning applications for minerals extraction, with planning applications submitted for a total of approximately 5 million tonnes of sand and gravel extraction at three sites which are:

- Bow Farm near Ripple;
- Lea Castle near Kidderminster; and
- Pinches near Bromsgrove.

57. All three applications are yet to progress to Planning and Regulatory Committee for a decision.

58. We are also in the initial stages of reviewing the Waste Core Strategy in line with the Local Development Framework, assessing the performance of the policies and new policy and waste requirements which have emerged since the Core Strategy was adopted in 2012 including an assessment of facilities and capacity for waste management in the county.

Green Infrastructure Strategy

59. In partnership with the Green Infrastructure Partnership for Worcestershire, Worcestershire County Council is leading on the review of the evidence bases for the Green Infrastructure Strategy, prior to a review of the strategy itself to align with the Environment Bill.

Strategic Planning and Development Control

60. We have continued to progress planning applications and post planning approvals for significant infrastructure projects in the county including:

- **Pershore Link Road**; granted planning permission and is now progressing with condition discharge
- **Broomhall Way Active Travel Bridge**, granted planning permission
- **Pinvin Crossroads**; condition discharge
- **Southern Link Road**; phase 4 which was granted planning permission in March 2018, monitoring progress and condition discharge through the implementation phase
- **Worcestershire Parkway**; discharge of final conditions
- Determining a number of applications for **smaller waste operations** and **schools' extensions** and retention of mobile classroom facilities.

61. We are working extensively with the district councils as they review and update their local plans. This workstream is joint between transport policy and strategy and planning policy, and current areas of focus include:

- South Worcestershire Development Plan review. Preferred options consultation 2019;
- Bromsgrove Local Plan review. Issues and options consultation in 2018;
- Wyre Forest Local Plan; submission consultation 2019

62. We will continue to collaborate with the districts during the next year as their plans progress and to assist in developing evidence bases and the infrastructure delivery plans.

Worcestershire Local Transport Plan 4 (2018-2030)

63. The Local Transport Plan is a statutory document, which all Local Transport Authorities are required to produce, deliver and maintain under the Transport Act 2000 and the Local Transport Act (2008). The current LTP4 was adopted on 9 December, 2017 and the compendium of documents that make up this plan can be viewed here: www.worcestershire.gov.uk/LTP. Significant work has been underway since then to develop the proposed schemes included within the report from concept to delivery.

64. Indeed, progress so far has been excellent, showcasing Worcestershire County Council's prowess as a credible authority for transport scheme delivery. There are over 150 proposed schemes listed in the LTP4, of which:

- 18 schemes are now fully completed;
- 24 schemes are in the delivery phase;
- 44 schemes in the feasibility phase (concept planning and scoping).

Worcestershire Rail Investment Strategy (WRIS)

65. The Council has adopted a comprehensive rail investment strategy for the county. This Strategy sets out an ambitious investment plan for Worcestershire's rail infrastructure and services providing additional capacity to support change in travel demand essential to support Worcestershire's growth aspirations.

66. The adopted Strategy, supported by an impressive business case, provides a valuable lobbying tool to stimulate investment in Worcestershire's rail infrastructure and services. This Strategy has been shared widely with partners in the rail industry and will help influence wider regional and national strategy and underpin future planned rail industry investment.

67. The Strategy focuses on four overarching 'conditional outputs' for rail service development, which collectively have the potential to deliver up to £55.2 million additional GVA per annum and 1,269 jobs across Worcestershire by 2043. Specifically:

- Two trains per hour Worcester to Paddington
- One train per hour Kidderminster/Droitwich Spa/Worcester/Paddington
- Additional calls at Worcestershire Parkway for Bristol/Manchester and Plymouth/Newcastle services
- Regional service between Kidderminster and Bromsgrove, Worcester and Cheltenham Spa, Gloucester and Bristol.

68. This is supported by key aspirational infrastructure schemes, essential to facilitate this new connectivity, including:

- North Cotswold Line dualling and wider capacity upgrade
- Worcester Area and Droitwich Spa to Stoke Works capacity upgrade

- Worcester Shrub Hill station regeneration
- Electrification of both the Bristol to Birmingham and Snow Hill lines
- New car park capacity and/or new stations if demand requires it.

69. Worcestershire County Council continues to work closely with partners to deliver the aims and ambitions of this economically vital strategy, and is playing a leading role in the North Cotswold Line Taskforce, which aims to lobby Government, the rail industry and funding bodies to invest in this critical corridor to enable Worcestershire to achieve its aim of two trains per hour between Worcester and London Paddington. Business case development work is at an advanced stage and will be reported in the coming months.

70. Additionally, Worcestershire has also supported the creation of a Birmingham to Bristol Task Force, which will perform a similar role to the North Cotswold Line Taskforce, enabling effecting lobbying of Government, the rail industry and partners to invest in improvements to the operational capacity and service provision on the Birmingham to Bristol Main Line.

71. As mentioned previously (paragraph 25), we are exploring options for upgrading the rail infrastructure at Redditch rail station as part of wider proposals for the town centre.

Strategic Active Travel Network Development Programme

72. The County Council has continued to invest in Active Travel and has submitted a number of bids for funding which are outlined below:

- **Worcester to Malvern Active Travel Corridor** – DfT's Local Pinch Point Fund bid submitted January 2020. The DfT's decision on the expression of interest is expected in autumn 2020.
- **Worcester to Kempsey Active Travel Corridor** – This corridor was included in the Local Pinch Point fund outlined above.
- A number of schemes have also been submitted to the DfT as part of the **Emergency Active Travel Fund** phases 1 and 2. The outcome of the phase 2 bid is not yet known. Schemes included in the phase 2 bid include:
 - **Wyre Forest Churchfields to Stourport** using canal towpath
 - **Redditch enhancements** to National Cycle Network, linking to the Redditch to Bromsgrove route. Proposals should also benefit the Redditch e-scooter bid
 - **Worcester Sixways to Diglis** enhancements to widening existing canal route and linking to the proposed Highways England enhancements from Sixways to Tibberton
 - **Pershore Active Travel** – forms part of the current infrastructure works and contributes to the cost of the active travel provision

73. Feasibility work on the **Worcester to Worcestershire Parkway Active Travel Corridor** is complete and the first phase of minor improvements have been delivered to create a cycling link from Worcester to the Parkway station.

74. The **Bewdley to Wyre Forest Active Travel Corridor** scheme is currently in early feasibility to identify a suitable route. More work is planned on this during autumn/winter 2020.

Evesham Transport Strategy (Phase 1 & 2)

75. The Strategy's first phase of works is now complete. The works that have been delivered in this phase ensure that the absolute maximum capacity has been squeezed from the town's existing road network. A second expression of interest has been submitted to the DfT's Local Pinch Point Fund. This second phase seeks to:

- Create a walking and cycling network in Evesham
- Improve the capacity of a key junctions of the A46, and
- Install traffic monitoring to Evesham.

Evesham Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

76. Worcestershire's first Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan is being written as part of the Evesham Transport Strategy to set out proposals for an active travel network in the town focusing on the proposed Hampton Bridge.

Midlands Connect

77. Midlands Connect is a £5 million collaboration with central government that brings together 28 local authorities and 11 Local Enterprise Partnerships from across the Midlands. Together, the Midlands Connect Partnership and the Department for Transport have developed a transport strategy that identifies the major infrastructure projects needed to improve the connectivity of our region's key locations to help drive economic growth and power the 'Midlands Engine'. The strategy is available to view here: www.midlandsconnect.uk, this includes proposals for investment in the A46 corridor and regionally significant rail corridors which pass through Worcestershire.

78. Worcestershire County Council continues to play an active role in Midlands Connect, to ensure that the County benefits fully from the regionally significant investment proposals and plans as they are developed and brought forward for delivery.

Major Road Network Development Programme

79. Following its development during 2017-2018, the Major Road Network (MRN) now forms the middle tier of the country's busiest and most economically important local authority 'A' roads, sitting between the national Strategic Road Network (SRN) and the rest of the local road network. The MRN is critically important for supporting local, regional and national economic growth, as well as supporting new housing and employment development.

80. The Government has announced a National Roads Fund, which will be made available in 2020/2021, which will be a new, specific funding stream dedicated to improvements on MRN roads with an aim to reduce congestion and improve journey times for all users, including freight, pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

81. Worcestershire's MRN includes sections of the key A-road network along the A38, A44, A435, A441, A448, A449, A450, A491 and A456. The funding bid process is currently underway and is being managed through our local sub-regional transport body (STB), Midlands Connect.

82. The A38 Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme (BREP), as previously detailed, is a key component of the MRN scheme development programme, and we are also working on proposals for the next round of MRN funding on the following corridors:

- A44 Corridor – This covers the corridor from Worcester to Evesham
- A450 Corridor – From the A450/A449 Black Bridge junction to the A450/A456 West Hagley junction
- A456/B4195 Corridor – A456 Bewdley Bypass towards M5 J3 (to the County boundary) and the A491 from A456/A491 to M5 J4.

Digital Connectivity

Broadband

83. Superfast Worcestershire continues the multi-million-pound investment in partnership with Openreach to reach as many Worcestershire premises, which will help make the county 'superfit' for the 21st century, in line with Government's ambition to provide Gigabit capable connectivity for all in the coming years. Currently, approaching 97% of premises can access superfast broadband (24Mbps+) in Worcestershire, a significant improvement compared to the 69% coverage for residential and 44% for business premises when the programme commenced in 2013; with the programme enabling improved infrastructure to an additional 80,000 premises. Work continues to address the remaining 3% without superfast speeds and to bring greater full fibre and gigabit capable coverage across the county through several approaches. Whilst significant progress has been made, Worcestershire's full fibre coverage in August was at 7.7%, just over half of the 14.4% national figure with both numbers increasing monthly.

84. Worcestershire residents and businesses have already secured significant financial support to access full fibre broadband, just under £2m to date, with more in the pipeline, through the Gigabit Business and Rural Voucher Schemes. In the last year, announcements by several infrastructure providers including Openreach, Virgin Media, City Fibre and Airband have either commenced or are expected to soon, which will see full fibre connectivity increase across Worcestershire in the next two years.

85. 'Demand Stimulation' activities remain one of the key programme activities to encourage take-up and ensure residents and businesses are aware of the service availability and sign up to realise benefits improved connectivity can offer to them. Current take-up remains above the national average and significantly above the initial take up expectation of just 20%, with contract one 'take up' already exceeding 73.5% and contract two 'take up' not far behind with 68%. Higher than anticipated 'take up' ensures benefits are realised across the county and provides an opportunity for re-investment into the programme through the 'claw-back' mechanisms within the contract as previously agreed by Worcestershire County Council Cabinet. Following feedback from the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Panel in June, the team will re-commence sending communications direct to premises where we have made improved connections.

5G

86. The Worcestershire 5G consortium, led by the County Council and Worcestershire LEP and initially funded in Spring 2018 by DCMS has continued to explore the potential of 5G connectivity in improving productivity across Industry 4.0 and Advanced Manufacturing. The original yearlong funding agreement was added to and extended for an additional year by DCMS to continue with the positive research and development activities and will conclude on 30 June 2020. Key achievements have

included a 5G Skills Report for the UK, the first deployment of 5G in a factory in the UK, learning outcomes from building two 4G and 5G networks that support our Use cases, evidence that 5G can improve productivity in Advanced Manufacturing, stimulated new ways of thinking and the development of new services for the Worcestershire based companies. This project has picked up accolades at national and international awards, including 'Most Commercially Viable Use case' at the inaugural 5G Realised ceremony in London during 2019.

87. On 1 April 2020, a new two-year project 'West Mercia Rural Connected Communities' commenced, again having secured funding from DCMS and led by Worcestershire County Council but involving new public and private sector partners. The project will operate in Tenbury, Worcestershire and Ludlow, Shropshire as well as parts of surrounding areas. It will explore how new operating models to deploy 5G in rural areas may work in practice, as well as investigating how developing 5G technology may support new products, services and models in health and social care applications across rural areas. The partnership consists of local authorities, local NHS bodies, academic institutions and private sector companies.

88. The opportunities created by these projects to be working with partners at the forefront of innovative new technologies should not be underestimated, whether that is potential productivity growth in Industry 4.0 or new health and social care models that can support the current delivery challenges, not least COVID-19 related. It should also be noted the team has been exploring new models for delivery, including over the summer months entering applications into '5G Create' and working with partners on how Worcestershire can continue to drive forward and lead in this field.

Existing Mobile Communications Coverage

89. In regard to the existing commercial coverage and quality of 2G, 3G and 4G mobile phone services across the county, in autumn 2019 the County Council and WLEP worked with AWTG to undertake a series of assessments of mobile coverage and quality of service on the main road and rail networks and key locations across the county. This follows on from the initial benchmarking assessments that were undertaken in 2017. Positively, improvements across each technology have been seen since the 2017 assessment. In particular, there was an 8% to 10% improvement in outdoor 4G coverage footprint since 2017, the data collected on quality of voice calls over 4G has also improved.

90. It is acknowledged there remain areas of concern, 'not spots' and some areas where there is coverage, but quality can be an issue. Following the benchmarking in 2017, we engaged with each of the main mobile network operators (EE, O2, Three and Vodafone) individually and each took proactive steps to address these. Follow up meetings are planned to take place in 2020 with the operators to discuss the results of the 2019 assessments and any areas of concern or opportunities for improvements highlighted.

91. Recent months have seen the first Shared Rural Network (SRN) infrastructure going live in the UK. The SRN is a project developed by the UK's four mobile network operators (MNOs) with support from Government to focus on improving rural 4G coverage. District Councils are also seeing applications for the first commercial 5G masts being submitted in Worcestershire. It is vital colleagues understand the social and economic benefits that improved connectivity bring when considering telecommunications infrastructure.

Conclusion

92. In conclusion, I must reiterate my grateful thanks to the dedicated team of officers who have carried out the hard work of the whole Economy and Infrastructure Directorate detailed here. I must also place on record my thanks to those who have helped in the preparation of this report.

Ken Pollock

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Economy and Infrastructure

(b) Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment

Introduction

93. It is my pleasure as Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Environment to submit my report to Council on work that has taken place across my portfolio of responsibility over the last year. The role of CMR for Environment is cross-cutting, covering a number of service areas. The Environment remains one of the Council's Corporate Priorities, it underpins the character of the county and I continue to believe it is an essential resource for economic prosperity and social well-being of residents and visitors alike.

Waste Management

94. We continue to work closely with our partners to reduce the amount of waste produced by our residents and minimise the cost and environmental impact of that waste. Nationally, the waste strategy for England is changing and along with our partners in the Borough, City and Districts we are lobbying Government to ensure those changes are for the better.

95. EnviroSort, our Materials Reclamation Facility, processed more than 78,000 tonnes of recyclables last year and our contractor, who runs the facility on behalf of the council, hosted numerous visits for schools, residents, Councillors and MPs. We continue to recover value from more than 73% of the waste deposited at our Household Recycling Centres, and more than 6,000 tonnes of road sweeper waste has also been recycled.

96. We also extract value from waste that is not reused or recycled. EnviRecover, our Energy from Waste (EfW) plant, continues to perform well exporting electricity to the grid. Air Pollution Control residues resulting from the processing of waste and metals that have passed through EnviRecover are all being recycled. Our contractor is also actively working with partners to find a solution for recycling the Incinerator Bottom Ash left after the process is complete. This is awaiting approval from the Environment Agency to be licensed to use all three grades of Bottom Ash to be used in the Construction Industry.

97. The Pollution Control Team monitors closed landfill sites and nearby ground and surface waters across Worcestershire and, last year, under a contract with Warwickshire County Council provided a similar service for their closed landfill sites.

98. The Waste Management Service has continued to operate throughout the Covid-19 response period with the key waste facilities of EnviroSort, EnviRecover and the Landfill site remaining fully operational. Throughout the period there has been regular dialogue with the Waste Collection Authorities in Worcestershire, including discussion and support to maintain collection rounds.

99. Following the introduction of the "lockdown" on 23 March, all Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) in Worcestershire were closed reflecting the overall position of "Stay at Home" other than for food, health or work reasons. In April, Defra reviewed the "non-statutory guidance" and in advance of receipt of that the Waste Service team worked with the Council's contractor and partners to consider what matters,

circumstances and considerations could enable the opening of HRCs. Seven of the eleven HRCs re-opened on 11 May, operating to strict safety arrangements which needed higher levels of resourcing, including traffic management.

100. Following the opening of those seven HRCs, we continued to work with our contractor to reopen more Household Recycling Centres (HRCs), thereby increasing the total capacity available for residents to dispose of their household waste. Two further HRCs opened on 28 May, a further one on 6 June and the final site, with a booking system, on 27 July and we constantly monitor and react to the changes necessary to maintain these facilities. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have worked with the Waste Service team to get these sites open and continue to keep them operating in these unprecedented times.

Waste Prevention

101. Communications and engagement play a major part in reducing waste in the County. The Let's Waste Less volunteer programme, managed on the Council's behalf by Garden Organic, is going from strength to strength, with a total of 45 volunteers, who have undertaken over 1,300 hours of engagement since the programme started and spoken to over 6,000 residents about all aspects of waste prevention. The volunteers have changed their operating model due to the current situation and are blogging and running online workshops, as well as writing articles for newsletters etc. Recruitment and training of new volunteers continues online.

102. The One Waste Worcestershire group, made up of representatives from all the district councils and Worcestershire County Council, is bringing waste messaging together for consistency across the whole county. The Let's Waste Less branding is used on all communication to help residents identify with all waste and recycling messages. At key times in the year all the councils share the same social media messages and campaigns.

103. Food waste continues to be a priority for Worcestershire County Council, as it makes up such a significant part of residual waste. One of the most exciting projects that has been set up to tackle the issue is the Community Fridge initiative. This is a food redistribution project with shops and individuals donating unwanted food, which anybody can then take for themselves. The first community fridge was opened in November 2019 at Upton-upon-Severn Baptist church. Thanks to the enthusiasm and energy of the Minister at the church, the fridge is diverting over half a tonne of food a month from the waste stream. The plan is to open more community fridges across the County as the year progresses. They will operate in line with COVID-19 requirements.

104. The sale of subsidised compost bins has slowed down significantly over the years as the keen gardeners have purchased them. However, a number of "flash sales", where the bins were reduced to just £5 proved incredibly popular and boosted sales significantly. With each compost bin reducing the householder's food and garden waste by 140kg per year, over the years these bins have contributed to reductions in household waste. Sales of compost bins increased significantly during the COVID-19 lockdown as residents were unable to access household recycling sites or green waste collections. Subsidised compost bins will continue, although free delivery has stopped.

Flood Risk Management

105. The Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, continues to work extremely closely with its partner Risk Management Authorities, other organisations and vulnerable communities to deliver a wide range of crucial flood risk management activities.

106. The last year has been dominated by two of the most significant flood events ever experienced in Worcestershire. In the Autumn of 2019 successive storms and extremely heavy rainfall led first to widespread surface water and smaller watercourse flooding and then to flooding of all the bigger rivers. 124 residential properties and businesses were flooded or significantly impacted, there was widespread impact on the highway network and many schools were temporarily closed.

107. February 2020 was the wettest February on record in the UK and the 5th wettest month since records began in 1862 and, following a wet autumn and early winter, this led to widespread and very significant flooding, particularly along the Rivers Severn and Teme, both reaching or nearly reaching their highest recorded levels. 682 residential properties and 258 businesses in Worcestershire were flooded or seriously impacted and a number of sections of the highway network were seriously impacted or closed.

108. Both of these flood events were met with a huge multi-agency response and recovery effort and Worcestershire County Council's crucial role within this was extremely significant and very well received. Nonetheless, while support for community recovery is ongoing through, for example, the innovative roll out of virtual community support sessions, the Council is working closely with its partners to thoroughly investigate the flooding, learn lessons and improve future resilience, response and recovery still further.

109. A number of large flood mitigation schemes have been completed over the last couple of years; the EA-led attenuation scheme at Broadway and the highway flood adaptation schemes at Upton and New Road in Worcester. Each of these performed extremely well during the flood events. Along with the numerous other flooding and drainage schemes implemented over the last 15 years, the potential impact on residents, businesses and the transport network was significantly reduced.

110. Other flood mitigation schemes have also been significantly further developed. They include:

- Tenbury – funding from (significant) Government and partner allocations, the scheme is being fast tracked by the EA, although it still needs to undergo appropriate community consultation and planning processes.
- Severn Stoke – currently going through the planning process and work expected to begin later this year.
- Toronto Close – detailed design and build contract is due to be commissioned shortly with works due to take place in 2021-22. Funding secured pending final detailed costings.
- Powick – a potential two phased approach to road raising is being developed for business case assessment in very close partnership with the EA's development of a business case for enhancement of the village flood defences. Funding yet to be secured.
- Beale's Corner, Bewdley – business case for potential permanent defences currently being fast tracked by the EA. Funding yet to be secured.

111. In addition, investigations and business cases have been further developed for locations including Hagley, Hollywood and Hanley Road in Upton upon Severn.

112. Following the reduction in COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, works in relation to a large number of smaller scale highway adaptation and flood and drainage schemes have resumed, within social distancing protocols being followed. Many are focussed on key flood spots which arose or were re-enforced during the 2019/20 flood events.

113. Other key, and in all cases ongoing, flood risk management activity over the last 12 months includes:

- scrutiny of planning applications to reduce the risk of future flooding.
- implementation of the Natural Flood Management Project to slow the flow and reduce flooding.
- discharge of powers and duties under the Flood & Water Management Act and the Land Drainage Act.
- continued roll out of the programme of smaller scale Highway / surface water flooding and drainage schemes.
- further development of community resilience.
- engagement with the emerging River Severn Partnership.

Natural Environment

114. Throughout 2019/20 we have continued to develop our commitment to be a pollinator friendly county and have prepared a Pollinators' Strategy designed to help raise awareness and secure opportunities to help pollinators thrive across Worcestershire. The Strategy is underpinned by a landscape-scale network of 'corridors' identified using our Worcestershire Habitat Inventory data by the national conservation charity Buglife. These corridors will connect Worcestershire's best opportunities for pollinators into a national network of 'bee-lines'. A targeted consultation of the strategy was completed in March 2020; the final document has been published and is on the website at:

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20252/environmental_policy/2270/worcestershire_pollinator_strategy

115. We have begun to update the Worcestershire Habitat Inventory. Originally based on 2005 aerial photos the updated version will be based on satellite imagery and will provide a robust evidence base for grant applications, local and neighbourhood plans, ecological surveys, infrastructure projects and natural flood management.

116. The revised and fully updated Biodiversity Action Plan was published in 2019 which sets out the Biodiversity Partnerships' priorities over the coming decade for both halting the decline and enhancing biodiversity in Worcestershire.

117. We have continued updating the Worcestershire Green Infrastructure evidence base to align with the national 25-Year Environment Plan and revised National Planning Policy Framework with the final document Access and Informal Recreation framework being completed in February 2020.

118. Worcestershire has been showcased by the Local Government Association and the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management as a national exemplar in delivery of Green Infrastructure.

119. We have secured a Natural Networks grant for additional pollinators areas in the grounds of County Hall, the ground has been prepared and the new habitat will establish from spring 2020. Interpretation signs have been installed to inform people about the work and explain the benefits of pollinators.

120. During 2019 the innovation 'bat highway', a UK first, received a huge amount of publicity believed to be worth a value of £3.5million of advertising equivalence. The Warndon Woods bat lighting scheme garnered international praise and demonstrates our commitment to protecting highway users and wildlife corridors. We are working with developers to roll out this approach where appropriate.

121. Forthcoming work during the next business year will be to respond to the requirements of the Environment Bill working with the Worcestershire Local Nature Partnership. We have commenced some early work on the Nature Recovery Network and will continue working on this throughout the year. We are also working with partners on approaches to tree planting for carbon sequestration, alongside the benefits of other habitats and the WCC commitment to plant 150,000 trees over the next three years to bring multi-functional green infrastructure benefits (further detail in next paragraph).

Diamond Leaf

122. The Council's flagship commitment to plant 150,000 trees over the next five years in partnership with The Woodland Trust has been accepted as one of a series of countrywide projects to be publicised as part of the Queen's Platinum anniversary celebrations. The two initial sites, one at Norton near Evesham and the other at Bewdley are intended to see planting commencing this coming winter. Covid-19 restrictions may impact the level of volunteer and community involvement possible this coming season, but contractors will be used for the bulk of the large-scale planting. Over the duration of the project we will work with partners to bring in other planting sites including community areas and greenspaces not necessarily owned by WCC. The project is very much intended to embody the notion of 'trees for the people of Worcestershire' and be a long lasting and wonderful WCC legacy.

Energy and Carbon Savings

123. The Sustainability Team co-ordinated the development of the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Energy Strategy. Launched in 2019, the Strategy's aims are to:

- halve the county's carbon emissions by 2030
- double the size of Worcestershire's £1.1bn low carbon and environmental sector
- treble the amount of renewable energy generated in the county.

124. The Council is a major contributor to the delivery of this Strategy and the Sustainability Team are working closely with Worcestershire LEP to identify challenges and solutions for businesses and communities which struggle with power, heat and transport, including grid capacity.

125. County emissions have been cut by 32% since 2005 and c 12% of electricity demand is now generated from renewables.

126. In the last 4 years the Sustainability Team has bought in over £15m European, central Government and private sector funding in order to support businesses and

communities across the county to save energy, save money, cut carbon emissions, enhance the natural environment and grow our low carbon economy. Initiatives run by the Sustainability Team include:

Warmer Worcestershire

127. The Team co-ordinate this network of local partner organisations overseeing the County's Fuel Poverty Plan. The network helps the 10% of Worcestershire households in fuel poverty, giving practical help through access to home energy efficiency grants and free advice. Projects include the Warm Homes Fund First Time Gas Central Heating, and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Flexible Eligibility schemes. These have provided energy efficient heating and insulation measures for vulnerable and fuel poor households in the County. Over the last year, more than 80 installations have been completed, with further in the pipeline. The schemes are funded by National Grid Affordable Warmth Solutions, the Energy Company Obligation and the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme. Applications are still being accepted (contact Act on Energy 0800 988 2881). Installations will be taking place in line with COVID-19 guidance. We continue to offer these schemes in 2020/21.

Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP)

128. This £2m joint European-funded initiative with local councils and the Chamber of Commerce has to date supported 254 Worcestershire businesses through energy assessments identifying £1.8m annual savings and 4,384 tonnes of greenhouse gas reduction. 104 grants, totalling £664,000, have been awarded to install lighting, efficient heating, insulation, faster warehouse doors, solar panels and energy storage, leveraging c£1.1m of private sector investment.

Low Carbon Opportunities Programme (LOCOP)

129. This £2.4m ERDF funded programme has been providing advice and grant support for SMEs to install renewable energy and develop innovative low carbon goods and services. It has so far provided support to 88 local businesses and approved grants of c.£850,000, enabled the installation of c.1.1MWp renewable energy generation capacity, saved over 1,126 tonnes of GHG and leveraged c.£1m + private sector investment.

130. LOCOP has also helped many Worcestershire companies in the development of low carbon goods and services. One such local product is the HERU (Home Energy Resources Unit) which takes domestic waste and turns it into heat for use in the home and is now being scaled up in partnership with Siemens.

131. European funding for BEEP and LOCOP has been extended until at least 2022.

Natural Networks

132. This £1.2m ERDF funded programme, in partnership with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, has been offering free advice and grants to improve the biodiversity of publicly accessible land across the County. The County Council itself has already benefited from this programme obtaining funding to grow its own wildflower meadow around County Hall and install bee bricks and posts around campus. Key statistics include:

- Over 85 organisations from across the County have applied to the scheme.
- More than 77 organisations have already received free Biodiversity Enhancement Assessments

- 20 organisations have so far been awarded grants, with a total grant value of £107,000
- 40.25 hectares of land improved, ahead of target

133. Funding for the project has recently been extended to the end of 2022.

Public Sector Energy Efficiency Programme

134. The Team will be launching a £1.5m European Regional Development funded programme offering free energy efficiency and renewable energy advice and grants to Worcestershire's public sector organisations, including the County Council.

Electric Vehicle Chargepoints

135. The Team have obtained funding from OLEV to install a number of 7kW electric vehicle chargepoints in Worcester and Wyre Forest car parks during 2020/21.

County Council Carbon Reduction

136. Last year the County Council committed to reducing its own operational Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions to net zero by 2050. The Sustainability Team are co-ordinating work aimed at achieving this goal, establishing a Zero Carbon Board, which I and Cllr M E Jenkins attend.

137. The Council's GHG emissions have reduced by 40% from 2009/10 to 2019/20. The Council reports on emissions covering the Council's estate and operations, including contractors such as Ringway, Severn Waste and contracted fleet, and also GHG emissions from household waste disposal (which comprise 2/3 of accounted emissions).

138. Opportunities for investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy on the Council's estate have been developed, and the Council's Energy Efficiency Spend to Save Fund is available to support these measures. The Council has overseen many energy efficiency projects, including major street lighting upgrades, installation of solar panels, improvement in the energy efficiency of buildings, and the introduction of electric vehicles, and now two electric bikes, into the Council's fleet. Projects supported by the Spend to Save fund to date are saving the Council approximately £200,000 every year.

139. From April this year the Council began procuring 100% renewable electricity for its buildings, streetlights and schools.

140. Further capital funding has been committed by the Council to continue the transition to LED street lighting, cutting both carbon emissions and electricity costs.

141. £1.3m further capital funding has also been earmarked to continue to improve the energy efficiency of Council buildings and install further renewable energy systems, as well as support other carbon reduction programmes across the County.

142. The Council will also be taking part in an Innovate UK funded EV vehicle to grid pilot using the electric pool cars at County Hall over the next year.

Joint Impact Assessment (JIA)

143. The Council has developed a new online JIA screening tool for all projects which combines previously separate screenings for environmental sustainability, data protection, equality and health into one place. The JIA process identifies whether Project Managers need to complete full impact assessments (FIA) for each of these discrete areas. Project Managers have their own online dashboard where they can submit project details and complete full FIAs where necessary. Completed JIAs and FIAs can be downloaded as a pdf and appended to business cases, reports and Committee/Cabinet papers.

Acknowledgements

144. I would like to place on record my thanks to the Strategic Director of Economy and Infrastructure and the relevant Assistant Directors, heads of service, managers and staff across the Council for their commitment and work over the past two years.

Tony Miller

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment

(c) Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning

Introduction

145. The Transformation and Commissioning portfolio has faced some of its biggest challenges this year. Supporting the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent response programme has been a huge undertaking and not without its difficulties. This Council is committed to continually looking for the best ways to deliver our services. I am proud of the work that is being carried out by staff within my portfolio to support our commitment to improve the lives of Worcestershire residents. I look forward to working with the team, including three new Assistant Directors, to continue to deliver high quality support and enabling services to the wider Council.

Human Resources, Organisational Development and Engagement

146. Our number one asset is our workforce, and nothing has a bigger influence on the quality of service delivery and overall impact, than our culture and employee practices. HR OD and Engagement are developing an ambitious three-year workforce strategy which is designed to build a workforce with the personal and collective resilience to drive us forward in these challenging times.

HR Operations

147. HR Operations has continued to provide a comprehensive, high demand, advisory service on all HR policies including Grievance, Conduct, Performance, Probation, Bullying and Harassment and Whistleblowing. The team have supported over 250 cases, 193 of these being performance demonstrating a strong focus on this area.

148. The advisory team have applied a strong focus on attendance management and have provided comprehensive advice and support on policy application. The team have supported over 500 short term cases and over 300 long term cases. We have continued to see a trend of improved attendance between 7.8 - 8.2 average days per person throughout 2019/20.

149. The advisory team also continue to provide comprehensive advice on restructuring and change. The team have supported consultation with over 1000 employees within WCC including the setting up of Worcestershire Children First where c.800 employees were successfully TUPE transferred to the new organisation.

150. Throughout 2019/20 the recruitment team continued to provide dedicated, specialised end to end support for WCF and the People Directorate for recruitment to social work and social care roles. In August 2019 all recruitment services came back in to WCC from Liberata. Within 2019/20, the team processed 1891 applications and 568 people were appointed.

151. HR also led on the highly successful recruitment campaigns for 6 Chief Officer roles rather than the previous approach of using an external recruitment agency. Following a full recruitment process all 6 posts were recruited to successfully, 4 being external appointments and 2 internal.

Communication and Engagement

152. Engaging with our staff continues to be a priority, more of our staff than ever before completed the annual Staff Survey. There were 2,083 responses from Council staff and from colleagues from Worcestershire Children First which equates to 70% of our combined workforce.

153. Communications have been provided to support the opening of the county's first new railway station for more than a hundred years. Local, regional and national media all provided coverage of the opening of the new Worcestershire Parkway station. As rail user numbers begin to increase more communications are planned to promote the improved rail links that the station provides.

154. We continue to follow a One Worcestershire approach to communications and to resident engagement. We work closely with our district council colleagues, our NHS partners and with stakeholders from the private and public sector.

155. Together with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Chamber of Commerce and the District Councils we continue to promote Worcestershire regionally and nationally whilst providing communications support for initiatives to attract inward investment.

Consumer relations

156. Our Consumer Relations Unit continues to reduce response times for complaints received by the Council. A new IT system for the logging and tracking of complaints is to be introduced shortly which will further improve our ability to effectively handle complaints and comments.

Learning and Development

157. We continue to invest in our employees, developing our online learning offer and supporting the workforce to develop the skills they need. In 2019, we have developed our Apprenticeship Strategy, proactively promoting opportunities from level 3 to level 7 including senior leader, chartered manager, project management, improvement specialists and business administration. We have also developed our mandatory learning strategy, to be launched this Autumn ensuring all employees are up to date with necessary compliance related learning as required by the organisation.

158. We have been proactively focusing on the continuing professional development of our social workers. 67 Social Worker University Students were supported through placements and development to achieve full qualification over the last 12 months. 27 newly qualified Social Workers completed their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) as part of the development programme.

Health and Safety

159. Over the last 12 months, Health & Safety have been collaborating with the property team including undertaking significant fire safety works at County Hall.

160. There continues to be good buy back of Health & Safety Services from schools with 99+% of maintained schools and 70 academies including some out of area in Herefordshire and Leicestershire.

IT and Digital

161. IT and Digital plays a key role in strategically enabling the authority to deliver better services through use of technology. This includes the provision of developmental support to the council's key projects and strategic priorities.

162. Digital is transforming everyday lives on a global scale and will continue to do so at an ever-increasing pace. The need to be better connected is changing what people want and need from Worcestershire County Council. People want and expect transactional services and information to be available through their own devices, 24/7 – mirroring their experiences with on-line retail and banking. IT and Digital has enabled over 50% of transactions with council customers to be undertaken on-line with high levels of satisfaction, making services more accessible and often improving the speed and efficiency of service delivery.

163. In recognition of the progress that we have achieved in this area, WCC have been shortlisted for an MJ Local government Achievement Award. The entry we submitted outlined “Our journey to Sustainable digital transformation” and has been shortlisted in the Digital Transformation category.

164. The ‘Digital Transformation Programme (DTP)’ is the vehicle for delivering the Digital and Customer Strategy and digital transformation across all services. It identifies and achieves cost savings, service improvements and better outcomes for staff, members and citizens. The Council has also established a core capacity and a robust methodology for delivering digital transformation through the establishment of the:

- Digital Transformation Team – specialists in analysing business requirements, business process redesign and delivering Agile projects.
- Digital Delivery Team – A team of experienced Developers, Web Designers and User Experience specialists who deliver digital solutions.
- Agile Delivery – We have created a robust Digital Delivery Methodology utilising the principles of Agile project delivery that is followed for all digital projects.

165. IT and Digital have introduced the SCULPT web accessibility guidelines, and work has been undertaken to ensure our websites are compliant with the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations Act 2018 which comes into force on the 23rd September this year. Meeting web accessibility standards ensures that everyone can read what we publish and have equal access to the important services that we provide, including people with additional needs who use screen readers or other assistive tech.

166. Key digital developments since the last report include:

- a) **Foster Care Website and Application**
- b) **Pensions Galaxy Site**
- c) **SharePoint migration:** Site migration from 2010 to SharePoint online.
- d) **LiquidLogic Integration:** Deprivation of Liberty, Safeguarding, and MASH
- e) **Digital Worcestershire Website** – Moving us forward as a digital first council

167. In addition, some key infrastructure projects have been completed including:

- a) **Windows 10:** deployment to over 3,200 staff and councillors
- b) **Office 365:** deployment to all staff
- c) **Exchange online:** Access to WCC Outlook/email on any device online
- d) **Migration / upgrade of 2008 windows servers**
- e) **Public Sector Network (PSN) compliance accreditation 2019**

168. Several major system upgrades and implementations have been undertaken including:

- a) **LiquidLogic:** for Adults and Children Social Care Case Management Services, as well as Controcc financial systems
- b) **Symphony by Sirsi Dynex:** Library Management system
- c) **Exor:** Migration of the Highways System to cloud hosted service
- d) **Yotta:** Migration of Streetworks to new Yotta system
- e) **Capita ONE and Synergy Tribal:** Education system and Early Years system upgraded to keep up to date with government requirements

169. At the start of the pandemic, the need for video conferencing capability increased dramatically to enable the workforce to work from home. As an interim measure, a decision was made to implement Zoom including integration with Outlook and Lync and deploy this to all Council devices within very short timescales. The original MS Teams project is now well underway to deploy MS teams in line with the council's original strategy for video conferencing.

The Corporate Information Management Unit (CIMU) and Records Management

170. The team provides advice and guidance to Council staff on the appropriate management of information and records, including the compliance with, and application of, information legislation including Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulations, and Data Protection.

171. In January 2020 CIMU and Records Management transferred across to IT and Digital as part of the Organisational Redesign structure changes that were being implemented. The transfer to IT and Digital has realised synergies and improved the cross-working that is required between CIMU and the wider IT and Digital Service.

Customer Contact Centre

172. The council's main Customer Contact Centre, previously provided by Civica, was brought back-in-house to Worcestershire County Council on the 1st April 2020 and is now part of IT and Digital. The performance of the Contact Centre has remained strong following the transfer with all KPIs being met across the reporting period of the first 3 months.

173. One of the core principles for the Contact Centre is to provide a first point of contact for Worcestershire residents' enquiries meeting customers' needs by offering a channel of choice – Telephony, Webchat, Email and Online Applications. The aim is to make things simple, clear, easy to use and accessible for our residents whilst supporting them at the same time.

174. Work is currently underway to develop the council's customer services strategy "Recommissioning Customer Services in a digital world: our re-imagined front doors" to meet the needs of Worcestershire's residents and businesses in a digital world by adopting agreed principles for effective customer service and digital delivery and integrating them in the council's overall transformation programme.

Programme and Project Management Teams (Transformation Programme)

175. The Transformation and Change team oversee and manage the Council's transformation and change agenda, ensuring our programmes are delivered in a robust, efficient and coordinated manner. During the course of the last 12 months, the team has reviewed and refreshed its process operating model, looking to streamline the approach to programme delivery whilst maintaining appropriate levels of transparency, visibility and control. Alongside this change, the team has progressed with the creation of a centralised function for programme and project management, bringing the People Directorate, Commercial and Change, and Worcestershire Children First project support teams under one function. We continue to review the remaining programme teams across the Authority.

176. Since March this year, the previously agreed transformation and change programme has been held in abeyance as a result of our COVID-19 response activities. Since that time, we have had an opportunity to reassess priorities, and have begun to develop a series of new strategic initiatives, better tailored to deliver our corporate objectives in the new post Covid-19 environment. These initiatives are being drawn together into comprehensively defined cases for change, and delivery of these initiatives will continue to be supported through a robust programme management function.

177. The corporate programmes team have been largely dedicated to Covid-19 work since the commencement of lockdown (85% of team capacity), providing the support and coordination to much of the Authority's response activities. Despite these challenges, notable transformation and change activity supported by the programme and projects teams has included:

- Supporting other transformation programmes such as centralisation, property and commercial as referenced below
- Supporting Organisation Redesign and associated governance forums such as the newly established Chief Officers Group (COG)
- Supporting Worcestershire Children First on the successful insourcing of Babcock Education Services
- Supported the development and deployment of the new Liquid Logic Social Care case management system, with colleagues from IT, Finance, Adults and Children's Social care
- Supporting pre and post go live WCF company set up and post go live transition activities
- Ongoing transformation of our libraries service with significant enhancements to our digital offer, during the pandemic,
- Roll out of assistive technology in Adults Social Care that has enabled service users to live at home independently for longer

- Successful establishment of Worcestershire's Business Rates Retention Pilot programme that has seen significant investment in areas to reduce demand into social care
- Completing reablement service business case which secured funding from the Business Rates Retention Pilot and designed a new structure and service ready for go live in October

178. In the coming months, the revised structure across the centralised programmes team will be implemented, providing a more integrated and specialist service that leverages category expertise and recognises more formally the value of effective change management and enablement. The team will then be best placed to support the remaining change programmes for 2020/21, as well as the new programme under development for 2021/22 and beyond.

Property

PPL Contract

179. The Council's Property team have managed the Place Partnership contract well over the last couple of years but with the Cabinet decision to exit arrangements on 31st March 2021, the emphasis is now to develop and action a structured exit plan whilst still managing continuation of service until transfer.

Compliance

180. The Council's Property team supported by the Health and Safety manager has been the driving force to improve our compliance position and the reporting of that position, working with PPL to achieve this. Work continues to build on the progress of last year when updated risk assessments were completed for Asbestos, fire and water across the corporate estate with all remedial works completed other than 3 small areas of work, delayed due to Covid-19, which are due for completion as soon as possible. We are continuing work to improve compliance auditing and reporting which also includes our maintained schools.

Capital Receipts

181. 2019/20 saw the successful disposal of 16 surplus property assets consisting of a mix of land and building of which nearly 14 acres of land over 4 sites was sold for housing with approved planning permissions for some 170 homes to support local district planning housing needs. These sales grossed a capital receipt of £9.65million to support the Council capital program and provided revenue savings in reduced running costs.

Rural Estate

182. The Council manages a Worcestershire wide rural estate consisting of some 2800 acres which is let under 75 separate tenancy/license agreements for agricultural purposes. Through a robust review of the estate and strategic approach, the last 12 months has seen the benefits of identifying irregularities, reviewing existing tenancy agreements with new agreements being granted and full market values implemented where possible. The result has been a 14% increase in income with a subsequent increase in value of the estate.

Commercial Team

183. The team is responsible for all the Council's and WCF procurement activities, ensuring that the strategies being deployed will deliver best value contracts and that both organisations comply with the Council's Procurement Code, the Local Government Transparency Code and procurement legislation.

Managing Spend

184. The Commercial Team has developed a real time performance tool, using PowerBI, to be able to track contractual and commercial spend by the Council. This was necessary as the Council uses 7 systems to manage spend with the supply base. Each system specialises on a specific service area. Spend is analysed from different aspects to be able to identify opportunities for efficiency improvements.

Commercial Spend

185. The Council's gross expenditure with third party suppliers and providers increased from by £80M in 2019/20 to £640M, mainly due to WCF now being a supplier.

Invoice Payment Performance

186. The Council's invoice payment performance was:

	2018/19	2019/20
No. Invoices Processed	214,000	168,665
Invoices paid on time	99.14%*	99.41%*

* percentage of invoices paid within 30 days from acceptance

Savings

187. The Commercial Team is involved in all initiatives that impact the cost and price of services provided by the third-party supply base. Since beginning of the 2019/20 year over 80 savings initiatives have been identified to date. The results have been:

	2019/20
Savings Secured and Cost Avoidance Secured	£1,218,000*

*excludes savings claimed directly by directorates

Key Contracts

188. Over 120 contracts have been let since April 2018, with a total contract value of £188M. Significant contracts include:

Service	Supplier	Contract Value
Prevention & Early Intervention	Worcestershire Health & Care Trust	£47M
Temporary Staff	Matrix CRM	£24M
Drug & Alcohol	Cranstoun Services Ltd	£19M
Traffic Light Maintenance (3 yr. contract in Feb 2018)	Telent Technology Ltd	£10M
Long term care beds	Sanctuary Care Ltd	£6M

During the next 12 months, the key areas of spend that will require new contract arrangements include:

Service	Current Supplier	Contract Value
Domiciliary Care	Various	£140M
Nursing Care Block Contract	Various	£100M
Civil Engineering Professional Services	Jacobs	£30M
Property Management	Place Partnership	£30M
Temporary Staff	Matrix CRM	£24M
Traffic Light Maintenance (due in 2021)	Telent Technology Ltd	£10M

Supplier Financial Risk Management

189. Given the current economic climate that has been impacted by Covid-19, a new financial resilience programme has been initiated. The objective is to protect both the Council's and WCF services that are reliant on suppliers and providers for delivery. The key activities are to monitor and survey the supply base, report on trends and changes in supply base and to act.

190. The Council and WCF together buy from over 2,500 suppliers, 1,000 of which are of interest, as there is an annual spend of over £25k per supplier. Risk associated with these suppliers is assessed and managed through reference to Companies House, financial reporting results and credit ratings.

191. Currently approximately 20 suppliers are at a high financial risk and 18 suppliers have a high credit risk. The Commercial Team is working with the service areas to undertake an impact assessment and agree mitigation activities should any of the suppliers cease trading.

Management Information, Analytics and Research (MIAR)

192. The Management Information, Analytics and Research (MIAR) team delivers a wide range of business intelligence products across the County Council, including corporate and directorate performance reports, the County economic assessment and summaries, residents and business viewpoint surveys, Your Voice (staff survey), and statutory reports for Adult Social Care, Education and Workforce.

193. Since 2018, the team has continued to develop new products including workforce dashboards, a consistent set of management information reports for scrutiny committees, a consultation toolkit, and development of reports from Liquid Logic (the new adult social care case management system). In 2019, the team won the nation Local Area Research and Intelligence (LARIA) award for best use of data to support health and social care, for developing a predictive model to stratify residents who currently pay for their own social care who are most at risk of requiring council funded care in the future (self-funder pickups).

194. The team has a track record of income generation and leveraging additional funding from partner agencies and grant giving organisations including the LGA and NHS Digital. The Corporate and Directorate MIA team have developed a sold service to schools based on education data, and the Corporate Research team provides the research management function for Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) as well as a bespoke primary research / consultation service for other public sector agencies.

195. MIAR is committed to developing analytic skills within the council and has recently contributed to the LGA Predictive Analytics programme, as well as championing and promoting the use of Power BI across the organisation.

196. New areas of development for 2020/21 include development of the People Directorate Outcomes framework, and review of corporate performance approach.

Legal and Governance

197. Democratic Services has continued the delivery of its core function to arrange and support formal and informal Councillor Meetings whilst developing the use of technology to streamline processes.

198. Members are now very familiar with meetings being conducted remotely via Zoom technology because of the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing requirements. Regulations require all meetings open to the public to be broadcast; previously the Council has webcasted a limited number and members of the public had to come to County Hall to watch others. Whilst the resources needed to arrange and run meetings in this way are more than for one in County Hall, Democratic Services have worked with chairmen to enable meetings to proceed with minimal changes to procedures. Public participation has continued in this new environment. The temporary legislation that enables meetings to be held in this way lasts until next May.

199. The Service has helped support the Council's main priorities with ongoing scrutiny work and members have considered the work programme for Scrutiny elsewhere on today's agenda. There is a challenging workload to complete before the end of the current term of office for members. The service is now preparing to arrange the elections next May and the subsequent welcome and induction of the new Council.

200. The service through Member Support continues to administer the Councillors' Divisional Fund Scheme. This has proven to be a very popular successful initiative for the improvement of community well-being - in 2019/20 703 payments were processed, and 109 in 2020/21 so far.

201. Legal Services has been at the heart of supporting delivery of the Council's corporate priorities. This includes commissioning, Academy conversions and infrastructure projects. Major projects in the past year include Worcestershire Parkway station, Southern Link Road improvements, Place Partnership exit, E5 novation.

202. Legal Services play a major role in safeguarding children through pursuing care proceedings in court and pre-proceedings cases (which try to divert cases away from statutory court intervention) for the Children, Families and Communities Directorate. The pressure volume of demand has plateaued at a high rate– 139 sets of care proceedings were issued in 2019/20. And for the same period Pre-proceedings cases remain at a very high level – 169 cases commenced – and are being driven hard to avoid the need for care proceedings if possible. The team has advised on several regulations and guidance issued and the resultant protocols developed during the Coronavirus pandemic.

203. Much support is provided for the People Directorate in relation to adults lacking mental capacity, and as a result of case law the number of court cases Legal have

commenced or defended in the Court of Protection continues to increase. The number of applications is projected to continue to rise significantly each year. In addition to our Court of Protection work, Legal has made significant progress in its debt recovery work for Adult Services. Over the last 2 years c£1m was recovered in unpaid care fees. The team has advised on several regulations and guidance issued and the potential for use “easements” if necessary, from the legal regime during the Coronavirus pandemic.

204. Legal Services continues to support a wide range of corporate business – e.g. processing permanent and temporary traffic orders (such as for road maintenance/repairs), unlawful encampments, s.106 agreements, land sales and purchases, and commons searches

Conclusion

205. I would like to thank all those working in my portfolio for their hard work and support. We have continued to provide many of our core services, despite also being largely committed to supporting the county-wide Covid-19 response work. Until recently, this consumed up to 65% of the resource capacity from across the teams within my portfolio, and has required the teams to go above and beyond in order to maintain service continuity and the high-levels of support the wider organisation has come to expect. Thank you for all of your efforts in supporting workforce and residents during this time.

Karen May

Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning