

COUNCIL
14 JANUARY 2021**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

1. The following report reviews the work of the Chief Executive over the last year and would normally provide Members with a detailed update on key priorities, actions and achievements in that time. This year the report has been produced differently as it appears on the same agenda as the Leader's report and the report of the Cabinet member for adult social care. In order to prevent duplication and repetition I have not included within this report the many examples, achievements and outcomes that are already detailed in the Leader's and the Cabinet Members' reports. However, I would ask that Members reflect on the details in those reports and take this report in conjunction with that content. I am happy to provide Members with the opportunity to seek further clarification where required on both this report or the examples and detail contained within the Leader's and Cabinet Members reports provided as part of this agenda.

2. I would like to start by thanking all staff working for and on behalf of Worcestershire County Council, striving to ensure residents, businesses and communities receive the services they deem important within a very tightly defined financial envelope. Containing costs and managing demand remains a significant issue which has been further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic over the last year.

3. Clearly this has not been a typical year, and the scale of challenge and the need to move at pace to deal with emerging issues has never been so acute. As Members will recall we started 2020 with very serious and wide scale flooding which required the organisation to operate under our emergency planning procedures. The work to manage the flooding needed to be managed in addition to all day to day service requirements and represented a significant additional effort for all staff involved. I am pleased to report to Members that our emergency planning worked well and working with our partners in the Environment Agency, the Police, Local Resilience Forum and District Councils the flooding situation was contained.

4. What we could not foresee at that stage was both the scale and impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. No sooner had we started to step down our response to flooding, the COVID outbreak began in earnest. This necessitated a further emergency response and one that has continued until today. This level of additional work is unprecedented and a huge challenge. The new council structure, systems and processes introduced previously have made this more manageable and the Council's finances are broadly in line with the budget set at the start of the year, when the costs of COVID and the associated grants are set to one side. Should any use of reserves be required at year end, these will be at a low level and sustainable within the Council's overall financial position.

5. Effective Council leadership requires a strong relationship between the officer core and elected Members. As you will recall this was a key priority for myself and the strategic management team. Over the last year these relationships have been tested in our response to the pandemic and without the strong level of understanding and trust

between officers and Members leading to clear decision making, financial planning, organisational redesign and performance management the organisation would not have met the challenge presented by COVID-19.

Public Health

6. This last year has been dominated by the nation's response to the public health threat of COVID-19. As a Public Health Authority this has placed the County Council at the forefront of the response to the pandemic and has placed additional responsibilities on the Council, on myself, as the Chief Executive, and the Director of Public Health. Some of these responsibilities are placed specifically on the individuals making them personally accountable, however, within Worcestershire County Council, we have continued to operate as a team thereby spreading the burden and ensuring our response met the requirements set by Government.

7. Flexibility has been the key internally and I wish to thank all the members of the Strategic Leadership team, the Chief Officer Group and the members of staff on our gold, silver and bronze emergency planning teams for their hard work, innovation and willingness to take on and resolve issues in rapidly changing times.

8. We did not however do this alone. 2020 has been a year of partnership working. Early discussions with District Council Leaders and Chief Executives led to a one Worcestershire approach, consistent messaging and the ability to work across organisational boundaries as never before. This has been vital to ensuring public services continue to operate in both County and District Council areas. The joint working has led to the integration of teams. Examples of this are the Here2Help service, the distribution of food to shielding residents, work to house the homeless and the joint working between Public Health and Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

9. Outside local government, People services and Children's services have worked in partnership with the NHS, schools and the Clinical Commissioning Group. Again, the levels of joint working, information sharing, and issue resolution has been exceptional. Many historical issues that were often seen as insolvable have been overcome. For example, our ability to work with the Acute hospital to move people out of hospital beds quickly and efficiently has been an incredible achievement and is continuing to operate today.

10. Children's services have worked tirelessly to protect children and young people (CYP) but in addition the support we have provided to our schools has been vital.

11. The Worcestershire County Council Public Health team has responded swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic. Publishing a robust Outbreak Control Plan (OCP) which has a Local Outbreak Response Team (LORT) at its centre, responding to local outbreaks in settings and communities and working with partners such as Public Health England, Herefordshire and Worcestershire CCG and Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to reduce the risk of further transmission of COVID-19 as well as the national Test and Trace service. The LORT is now fully operational 7 days a week from 9am to 6pm.

12. The LORT recognised an increase in volume of enquiries from the first week of September as schools returned which impacted on resource capacity. Additional resource was mobilised immediately to assist the LORT and enable the Public Health professionals to focus on infection prevention and control. Through this period, key

improvements have been made to the process for schools contacting the LORT, including the refining of the school notification form to create a more streamlined experience for schools.

13. A key role of the LORT is to support schools in the event of a positive case. Upon notification of a symptomatic or a confirmed positive CYP or staff case, the LORT undertake a risk assessment, support testing, provide infection prevention control and self-isolation advice, contact tracing and public health action to prevent any further transmission within the setting or wider community. Again, this has been achieved and is detailed later in the report.

14. Each area of the Council's services has adapted to and contributed to the need to control COVID-19; however, this has necessitated the need for co-ordination, data collection and analysis, partnership working and both regional and national working. The control and co-ordination have been achieved in two ways, the first was via the Council's emergency planning system of Bronze, Silver and Gold teams, the second through the Director of Public Health and her team. Ultimately our strategy, objectives and implementation have all been channelled through the Public Health team and the Bronze, Silver and Gold groups thereby bringing the maximum level of resources, capacity and resilience whilst still maintaining control.

15. There are far too many examples to list in how Public Health has responded to the pandemic however their work has been outstanding as has the leadership, management and technical advice of the Director of Public Health.

Financial Management

16. Strengthening financial management remains a key strand of the Strategic Leadership team and the wider management team's agenda. I am pleased to report back today several improvements over the last 12 months, most notably:

- Our 2018/19 Statement of Accounts were one of the first in the country to be produced, and our External Auditors signed them off unqualified and on time. This included a clean, unqualified opinion on our value for money assessment. Nationally less than 50% of audits were signed off on time and given the year we have had in responding to COVID together with an enhanced level of audit scrutiny this was a tremendous achievement.
- We set a balanced budget for 2020/21 and despite everything that has happened we are forecasting to deliver a balanced budget at year end.
- We brought responsibility for the General Ledger back in-house during 2020 and have made significant improvements in the use and operation of the finance system. At the same time, we have continued to work closely with Liberata on performance improvements, including reviewing payment terms which has been vital in ensuring our key providers responding to COVID to ensure their cashflow.
- Our Pension Fund valuation has remained broadly unchanged despite the impact of COVID on the global economy due to high performance on our asset management, with the Fund now standing at circa 90%. We are also investing resources into responsible investment and working with the Pension Committee to develop our Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) policy.

- We continue to strengthen the governance of our Pension Fund in light of national recommendations from the Pension Regulator and the Scheme Advisory Board.
- The Internal Audit service has continued to develop over the year, with a combined focus on high level assurance audits and service and school-based audits. Our audit approach has enabled us to switch focus to assure the governance of the response to the COVID pandemic whilst also providing assurance to financial and asset management.
- Internal Audit have supported operational managers by certifying 10 grants with a value of over £30 million, with a further 5 due before the end of the year.
- Our focus on Risk management has seen a challenge and improvement to our processes and we have introduced separate reporting to support the COVID and EU Exit positions.
- Our Appointees and Deputies team have worked with our most vulnerable clients in very different ways to give them access to their money and ensure they are financially protected.
- We have worked with our commissioning colleagues to ensure the social care grants for providers are sent out quickly and accurately resulting in over 1000 additional payments, whilst changing core systems and reporting, to ensure we can quickly and accurately provide the returns required by Central Government.
- The social care payments and receipts system (Controcc) alongside the Social Care data system (LiquidLogic) has been in operation now for 12 months for Adults and 10 months for Children's. The new payments portal for our providers has helped ensure over 600 paper invoices per month have been replaced with automation and ensure providers are paid within days of submitting. This has been well received by our providers.
- We have strengthened our Finance function with a restructure that not only delivered on the savings target but saw the introduction of 11 apprentices, including one graduate from Worcester University and 9 from our local colleges.

17. There is still more to do, and we are not resting on our laurels with several key projects ongoing, including:

- Centralising and improving the efficiency of the way we pay and collect monies. This is being monitored by the Audit and Governance Committee.
- Strengthening our Internal Audit function further, building on peer reviews and adopting new ways of working, again monitored by the Audit and Governance Committee.
- We are reviewing the Financial Regulations, schemes of delegation and procedure manuals. This will extend to continued training of budget holders, and a workforce plan for our Finance Team that will include bringing in more apprentices and I am pleased to say we are focused on recruiting from our Worcestershire schools, colleges and university and from our care leavers.

Organisational Redesign and Human Resource Management

18. Organisational redesign has been a major feature of our work this year involving all departments at all levels. The fundamentals behind the programmed redesign were to remove operational silos, drive performance and productivity, reform processes to be more efficient and cost effective, and to use digital technology where appropriate to its full potential. The response to COVID-19 has accelerated the transformation programme and fundamentally changed the way in which the organisation works.

19. Synergies and benefits from our new design for the top three tiers of the organisation are already being seen. We have introduced our new Chief Officer Group who are responsible for operationally delivering the strategic vision of the Strategic Leadership Team and our Corporate Strategic Plan. This group, made up of all our Assistant Directors, has already started to make a difference, setting specific service plans (2021-22) for every functional area and setting out success measures and objectives which can be used in our annual performance plans creating a golden thread throughout the organisation.

20. Our Workforce Strategy for 2021 – 2024 is being developed to ensure we have a workforce with the personal and collective resilience to drive us forward in these challenging times. We are focused on building a high performance and productivity culture and the right working conditions, where employees are valued and supported to perform at their best. Our workforce strategy sets out clear pillars of success and an employee's promise focusing on wellbeing, leadership, recruitment, workforce transformation and culture ensuring we have the capacity and capability to meet the needs of our communities and to benefit local people and our economy.

21. As a result of COVID-19 many of our programmed transformations have already been implemented however going forward we will now need to assess what has been successful and therefore should be retained, what needs to improve further, and what has not worked as expected and needs to change. This will be the focus over the next few months as we look to the future following COVID-19.

Worcestershire Children's First

22. 2020 was a positive year in the new relationship between the Council and Worcestershire Children's First our wholly owned company. Clearly the pandemic has placed significant additional pressures on both the Council and the company. We did, however, make an early decision in full consultation with the Chairman of the Company and the Board to ensure that any contractual bureaucracy did not get in the way of providing services to children and young people. This has been an extremely successful approach and has not only ensured that services have been maintained but has also allowed for service improvement to continue and to improve outcomes for children and families. Alongside this focus was embedding the company governance and monitoring arrangements required for both the Council and DfE to monitor performance of Worcestershire Children First.

23. There are strong working relationships between WCC and WCF which go far beyond the formal contractual monitoring arrangements. The working relationship with our Strategic Director of People who has the lead commissioning role of WCF within the

Council has further strengthened the strategic system leadership required to improve outcomes for the county's children and young people.

24. Further details of the service achievements and outcomes are contained in the Leader's report on this agenda and are therefore not repeated here.

The People Directorate

25. The People Directorate is now established, with the appointment of the Strategic Director for People, who joined the Strategic Leadership Team in May 2020. This is important in strengthening relationships across Worcestershire Children First, Community Services, Public Health and wider partners, including the NHS.

26. These relationships underpin the delivery of the vision and strategy for Worcestershire's People and Communities: to modernise council services to best meet peoples' needs; to shape the care market so that services and support maximise the way in which people live their lives; all underpinned with an ethos of a person centred approach – focused on enabling and improving people's health, wellbeing and independence.

27. Partnerships with health and care organisations are being explored under the national policy direction of Integrated Care Systems, where all partners work closer together for the improved health and wellbeing of all residents.

28. Budget pressures remain a concern as demand continues to rise due to the needs and complexity of those requiring support. It remains the priority of Adult Social Care that the most vulnerable individuals are protected and supported. The full implementation of the 3 Conversation model has seen significant benefits in relation to promoting self-reliance and demand management.

29. We have seen an Acute Hospital System under increasing pressure which has had a significant impact on the level and type of services we provide to support people following a hospital admission. A key objective in 2021 will be to maximise opportunities to actively work with our citizens to avoid hospital admission and promote access to reablement.

30. Following the creation of Worcestershire Children First our 'Community' Services are now located with the new People Directorate. Much of the focus of these services over the past year has been on implementing our response to COVID-19 with staff moving from their permanent roles to work in new areas responding to the needs of the community and the organisation. A clear example of this was the creation of the new Here2Help service early in the year where many of our library staff took on these roles and provided a vital and excellent service to our communities.

31. Further details of the service achievements and outcomes are contained in the Cabinet Members report on this agenda and are therefore not repeated here.

Commercial and Change Directorate

32. The One Worcestershire strategy to raise the profile of the county goes from strength to strength. The Council is working with a growing network of private and public sector partners from all parts of Worcestershire to promote the county as an excellent place to live, work and invest.

33. The One Worcestershire brand has also been used across the County in the COVID-19 response providing a coherent brand for key messages and communications. It has also been embraced by all our District Council partners as a single source of quality information for the public regarding the COVID-19 response.

34. In terms of the Council's transformation programme at the onset of the first lockdown, we implemented a short term pause to allow the Authority to focus its attentions on COVID response activities. As part of a gradual scaling up of activities, we have completed senior officer recruitment, and commenced transformation programmes across number of the critical support service areas, including commercial, HR and Programmes. We will continue to deliver this important programme in the coming months, and review opportunities for further transformation in-light of our new ways of working.

35. In March this year, the Authority gave notice to Place Partnership Limited of its intention to migrate all property management services for our corporate estates back in-house. Subsequently, all partners have chosen to withdraw from Place Partnership, and options are being considered on how to draw the company to an effective close on or near the 31st March 2021. A new team will be established under the direct control of the Authority, allowing us to focus on delivering an improved and commercially optimised service in the 12 months that follows.

IT Services

36. Over the last year we have completed the deployment of Windows 10 devices to all Members and staff, rolled out Microsoft Teams as a new collaboration tool for the Council and migrated to Office 365 and new cloud-based services for greater access to data on the go. As part of the Council's mobilisation of the workforce to work remotely during the pandemic, staff have been provided with appropriate IT equipment and tools to work from home, as well as scaling up the Council's IT infrastructure and systems to support a remote workforce. In addition, many new digital services were launched during the lockdown to support staff and our communities.

37. Major investment has been made in a new social work case management system, with migration from Frameworki to Liquidlogic completed. The new system enables staff to better access and update case files, enhances productivity and supports mobile and flexible working.

38. Digital is transforming everyday lives on a global scale and will continue to do so at an ever-increasing pace. Having access to the internet is now often described as the fourth utility and this drive to be better connected is also changing what people want and need from the Council. Our new Digital Strategy defines the Council's digital ambition, its approach to the use of technology, and the digital skills required.

39. I also want to take this opportunity to pay my thanks to the Council's IT teams as their work over the past year has been invaluable to the Council in enabling flexible working during the pandemic. The move to online working, remote meetings and even Full Council being online has been efficient, effective and reliable. We are all users of their services and as a consumer it has been the core of our ability to react and successfully continue delivering services to our communities.

Projects and Programme Management

40. The team have assisted with an incredible variety of emergency response, change and savings projects including the purchase and supply of personal protective equipment, the move to online working and the establishment of the Here2Help service.

41. The support to front line and back office service delivery has been excellent, finding new ways to organise, purchase and deliver key resources I know has been a challenge often against almost impossible deadlines, yet our staff have once again risen to the challenge and delivered time and time again.

Economy and Infrastructure Directorate

42. The impact of COVID-19 on E&I Services and the role of E&I services and staff in the response has been detailed in recent COVID-19 Cabinet reports, in addition many of the service achievements have also been included in the Leader's report which is also part of this agenda. I have therefore not repeated the information here, however I am happy to respond to any question's Members may have about the E&I work over the last year as detailed in the Leader's report.

43. In addition to the above the E&I Directorate have been the lead in respect of the Council's emergency response. The Strategic Director took on the role of Gold Commander and organised the emergency response on behalf of the Council. This began at the start of the year with our response to flooding and then continued throughout the year with regard to COVID-19. This is a huge undertaking involving both internal management and organisation combined with being the primary contact point and liaison with partners. To provide an insight this has involved attending the Local Resilience Forum, the local Strategic Coordination Group with partners, arranging, chairing and managing a twice weekly internal gold meeting as well as chairing a weekly meeting with our District Council colleagues.

44. Further support from the Directorate came from their management team, one of whom also took on the role of chairing the silver group, again a very busy and intensive role where strategic decisions are formed into operational delivery plans which the bronze group then enacts.

45. All of this has been delivered from within existing resources and is work in addition to the normal day job and under circumstances where the use of remote working and digital technology were the only solutions available.

46. The individuals and teams involved have gone above and beyond anything that could reasonably be expected and have also shown real leadership and accountability in the work they have done. This is incredibly satisfying to see and was a key part of the

organisational restructure we implemented which aimed to release capacity, give greater authority to managers and to let them then get on with the job. Our response to COVID-19 has shown that this was the right way to progress and that staff have responded in a positive way to the opportunities the restructure has provided.

47. It has been a busy and productive year despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the above are only a small fraction of the services and outputs the County Council has achieved. It has been a year of new challenges, new ways of working, transformation and working in partnership however the Council and our partners have risen to that challenge and delivered not only against our service plans but also in response to the pandemic. I would therefore like to conclude this report as I started by expressing my thanks to all the staff, managers, Councillors and our partners who have made this all possible.

Paul Robinson
Chief Executive
January 2021

Contact Points

Specific Contact Points for this report

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Chief Executive) there are no background papers relating to the subject matter of this report.