

## **COUNCIL**

### **17 FEBRUARY 2022**

## **REPORTS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH RESPONSIBILITY – CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENVIRONMENT**

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### **Introduction**

1. 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 ensures that Worcestershire remains a great place to live, work and visit.

### **Waste Management**

2. 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. The Government recently conducted a number of consultations around waste. Worcestershire County Council has responded to these in conjunction with our district council partners. A number of the proposals have been incorporated into the Environment Bill e.g. providing weekly food waste collections, however we still wait for clarity in some areas.

3. In December 2021, the Cabinet agreed to extend the Waste Management Service Contract for 5 years (to 2029).

4. EnviroSort, our Materials Reclamation Facility, processed more than 87,000 tonnes of recyclables last year. We continue to explore advances in technology to expand the range of materials for recycling. Our contractor, who runs the facility on behalf of the Council, recommenced hosting numerous visits for schools, residents, councillors and MPs. We continue to recover value from more than 71% of the waste deposited at our Household Recycling Centres, and more than 5,800 tonnes of road sweeper waste has also been recycled.

5. 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.

6. The Waste Management Service has continued to operate throughout the Covid-19 response period with the key waste facilities 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.

7. Following the initial “lockdown” in March 2020, 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. Between May - July 2020 all sites were progressively re-opened with additional safety measures in place. All sites have continued to be fully operational.

## **Waste Prevention**

8. The One Waste Worcestershire group, made up of representatives from all the district councils and Worcestershire County Council, works to ensure consistency in branding and messages across the county with targeted activity at times where waste traditionally increases, e.g. Christmas.

9. Food waste continues to be a priority for Worcestershire County Council, as it makes up such a significant part of residual waste. Targeted communications and social media are used to promote the role of composting, ideas to reduce food waste and volunteers.

## **Flood Risk Management**

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

11. The early part of 2021 was dominated by continued recovery from the severe 2019 and 2020 flood events and multi-agency response to, and recovery from, further flood events in January and June 2021.

12. A number of flood mitigation schemes have been advanced over the last 12 months. They include the following schemes managed by the Environment Agency (EA) with support from WCC:

- Tenbury Flood Defence Scheme – delivery of the scheme is being fast tracked by the EA having received significant funding from the Government and local partners. The scheme design is almost complete and engagement carried out with the community and stakeholders. Works on the ground are due to start this year and the scheme is due to be completed in late 2023.
- Beale’s Corner, Bewdley Flood Defence Scheme – delivery of this scheme is also being fast tracked by the EA having had a significant funding allocation from the Government, matched by local partner contributions including from the County Council. Completion of the scheme is currently forecast to be in late 2023.
- Severn Stoke Flood Defence Scheme – This community / EA led scheme has received re-confirmed planning permission and is due to commence this year.
- Toronto Close Flood Defence Scheme, Worcester – this EA led scheme is due to commence this year.

13. The Natural Flood Management (NFM) Project continued through 2021 with a continued focus and positive progress on the River Avon tributaries (River Isbourne and Merry Brook), the Barbourne Brook and the Dowles Brook.

14. Significant County Council investment has seen a large number of small scale highway adaptation, flooding and drainage schemes being completed or further developed. Many are focussed on key flood spots which arose or were re-enforced during recent flood events including 'Wetspot' locations where there is water on the highway for large parts of the year causing a particular hazard in the winter months.

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

- review and further development of flood emergency preparedness and response processes – learning lessons from recent flood events;
- completion and publishing of the s19 flood event investigation report for Hagley;
- contribution to the re-drafted River Severn catchment Flood Risk Management Plan;
- further development and implementation of local Flood Risk Management Plans at locations including Wythall, Hagley, Redditch and Bromsgrove;
- maintenance of flooding and drainage assets and infrastructure;
- scrutiny of planning applications to reduce the risk of future flooding on, and downstream of, new developments;
- discharge of powers and duties under the Flood & Water Management Act and the Land Drainage Act;
- further engagement with flood impacted communities and development of local resilience;
- further development of close partnership working with Risk Management Authorities and other organisations within Worcestershire and with neighbouring local authorities and relevant regional and national organisations; and
- taking an active role within the River Severn Partnership and Adaptive Planning.

## **Natural Environment**

16. The Environment Act brings new requirements for biodiversity including Nature Recovery Strategies, monitoring and biodiversity net gain, with new requirements for the County Council.

17. We continue to work with district councils to contribute to the review of Local Plans providing data such as the habitat inventory to inform the plans and to assist in the development of biodiversity and landscape policy

18. Further to this, we have been awarded a grant of £83 000 from the Natural Environment Readiness Fund in preparation for biodiversity net gain requirements, primarily to develop an approach to securing contributions from developers and to deliver net gains in the county. The aim is to link with wider environmental initiatives such as nature-based solutions and the new Environmental Stewardship scheme to create, protect and enhance our most valuable habitats and biodiversity.

19. The refresh of the Worcestershire Habitat Inventory has been completed and is now on the County Council website. This maps our key biodiversity assets, networks and corridors using satellite data and artificial intelligence.

20. The ancient woodland wetland habitat on the former site of the gravel pit near Hallow is particularly important since it is one of only three in the country.

21. We continue to act as a lead member of the Local Nature Partnership and to provide the secretariat function. We also act as a key contributor to the sub-groups on green infrastructure / biodiversity and climate change.

22. The Council continues to review and improve management of some 8,000 km highway verges in Worcester. We have over 40 Roadside Verge Nature Reserves which are recognised for their high biodiversity value and managed accordingly.

23. The County Council's own developments, schemes such as Hoobrook Link Road in Kidderminster, Pershore Link Road, Worcestershire Parkway and A4440 Southern Link Road, deliver significant benefit for biodiversity. The Southern Link Road dualling (A4440) has created approximately 4 hectares of floodplain wetland (a national and local priority habitat) to benefit rare wildflowers, invertebrates and nationally scarce passage and waterfowl. Our routine maintenance projects, such as Public Rights of Way repair and bridge maintenance, also include enhancements for biodiversity.

## **Energy and Carbon Savings**

24. In July 2021, the County Council declared a Climate Emergency, reconfirming its commitment to work with partners across Worcestershire to tackle the challenge of climate change and to reduce Council's operational carbon emissions to net zero by 2050. The Sustainability Team is co-ordinating work aimed at achieving this goal. There is a corporate Board in place to oversee this programme.

25. In September 2021 the Council was Highly Commended in the West Midlands Energy Efficiency Awards for its wide-ranging work, some of which is outlined below.

26. The Sustainability Team is working with Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership to deliver the LEP Energy Strategy. 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; and
- treble the amount of renewable energy generated in the county.

27. County carbon emissions have been cut by 34% since 2005 (latest figures are for 2019) and circa 12% of county electricity demand is generated from renewables.

28. In the last four years, over £18m European, central Government and private sector funding, has been secured, supporting businesses and communities across the county to save energy, save money, cut carbon emissions, enhance the natural environment and grow our low carbon economy. The following initiatives have been managed by the Sustainability Team.

29. **Warmer Worcestershire:** Co-ordination of a network of local partner organisations overseeing the County's Fuel Poverty Plan. The network helps the 14% of Worcestershire households in fuel poverty, giving practical help through access to home energy efficiency grants and free advice.

30. **Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP):** This joint European-funded initiative with local councils and the Chamber of Commerce has, to date, supported 342 Worcestershire businesses through energy assessments identifying annual savings and

5,700 tonnes of greenhouse gas reduction since 2016. 161 grants, totalling over £1m have been awarded to install lighting, efficient heating, insulation, faster warehouse doors, solar panels and energy storage, leveraging circa £2.1m of private sector investment. As well as saving energy there have been improvements to the working environment and production output.

31. **Low Carbon Opportunities Programme (LOCOP):** This European Regional Development (ERDF) funded programme has provided advice and grant support for SMEs to install renewable energy and develop innovative low carbon goods and services.

32. European funding for BEEP and LOCOP has been extended until June 2023.

33. **Natural Networks:** This £1.2m ERDF funded programme, in partnership with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, has offered free advice and grants to local organisations to improve the biodiversity of publicly accessible land across the County. The County Council itself has already benefited from this programme, obtaining funding for the wildflower meadow and biodiversity improvements at County Hall campus, and is looking at future funding bids for other WCC sites. The County Council has applied to extend the project beyond the end of 2022 to June 2023.

34. **Public-Sector Energy Efficiency Programme (PEEP):** This ERDF funded programme launched in October 2019 and aims to reduce the energy consumption of public buildings within Worcestershire. PEEP provides free energy assessments and grant funding to support energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. The project ends June 2023.

## **Community Renewal Fund**

35. The Sustainability Team has recently secured funding via the UK Government Community Renewal Fund to run a pilot project - Zero Carbon Ready Worcestershire - building on the successes of the above programmes. This will mainly focus on providing decarbonisation advice to local businesses and organisations not eligible for ERDF funding and is intended to run until 30 June 2022.

## **County Council Carbon Reduction**

36. Cabinet approved the County Council's Net Zero Carbon Plan in October 2020. The County Council's carbon emissions reduced by 42% from 2009/10 to 2020/21. The purchase of green electricity for all the Council's buildings and street lighting brings this reduction to 49%.

37. Last year the County Council committed to reducing its own operational Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions to net zero by 2050. The Sustainability Team is co-ordinating work aimed at achieving this goal and a Net Zero Carbon Board has been established.

38. Opportunities for investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy on the Council's estate have been developed. The Council has overseen many energy efficiency projects, including; major street lighting upgrades, installation of solar panels, improving the energy efficiency of buildings and the introduction of electric vehicles into the Council's fleet.

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

40. Further capital funding has been committed by the Council in recent years to continue the transition to LED street lighting, contributing towards cutting both energy costs and carbon emissions.

41. Over the past 18 months the Council has been taking part in an Innovate UK funded EV vehicle to grid pilot using the electric pool cars at County Hall, Worcester.

### **Joint Impact Assessment (JIA)**

42. The Council operates an online JIA screening tool for all projects which combines screenings for environmental sustainability, data protection, equality and health into one place. The JIA process identifies whether full impact assessments (FIA) are required for each of these discrete areas.

### **Summary**

43. We have gone through extraordinary times throughout the past 2 years and I would like to thank all officers who have worked with me and our partners. We have had officers who have suffered personal loss and illness and have yet continued to carry out their duties and deliver, winning national awards and negotiating complex contracts. My personal thanks to you all.

**Councillor Tony Miller**  
**Cabinet Member for the Environment**