

Report of Cllr Elissa Swinglehurst

Llangarron Ward

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

June/July 2025

Flood risk management and drainage

I am pleased to share with you that we have a new cabinet member for flooding – Cllr Dan Hurcomb, as well as some changes to the flood risk management and drainage team.

Team Leader

- **Steve Hodges** – has been actively involved in flood risk management since joining the council in 2007. In his current role, he supports the council in meeting its statutory responsibilities as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), while also identifying and securing investment to support local flood risk initiatives. He manages internal council teams and works in close partnership with colleagues at Balfour Beatty Living Places. Prior to 2019, Steve led the council's performance and risk management reporting function.

Principal Flood Risk Management & Drainage Officers

- **Tom Barratt** – joined the council in April, having previously worked at Stroud District Council. His career has focused on flood risk management within local authorities, with experience in planning, consenting and enforcement, flood response, and post-incident investigations. He supports Steve in delivering LLFA functions.
- **Henry Snell** – joined the council in May, bringing with him twelve years of experience in flood risk management. A Chartered Civil Engineer, he previously worked for a private consultancy, delivering flood alleviation schemes for the Environment Agency, local authorities, and other clients. He supports Steve in developing and delivering solutions to help reduce flood risk for communities across Herefordshire.

Flood Risk Management & Drainage Assistant

- **Zara Preece** – joined Herefordshire Council in June and serves as the first point of contact for the team. In addition to directing queries and concerns to the appropriate place, she plays a key role in coordinating responses to ensure enquiries are handled efficiently and consistently.

Contacting the Team

Now that the team is fully staffed, please **direct all general enquiries to the team's shared inbox at floodrisk@herefordshire.gov.uk**. This inbox is monitored daily to ensure your query reaches the right team member promptly.

To help the team manage resources efficiently and respond in a timely manner, please:

- **Use the shared inbox for all general enquiries, unless you are already in contact with a specific team member regarding an ongoing matter.**
- **Avoid copying individual team members into emails sent to the shared inbox, as this can lead to confusion and duplication of effort.**

Natural Flood Management (NFM) Project

In addition to the team's core responsibilities, the council also leads the **Herefordshire Natural Flood Management (NFM) project**, which aims to reduce flood risk across seven priority sub-catchments. Two dedicated officers are delivering this work, collaborating with landowners, communities, and partners to implement natural solutions that slow the flow of water.

NFM Project Officer

- **Beth Lewis** – has overseen the council's work on NFM since joining the council in 2018. She ensures the project is delivered on time and within budget, working closely with stakeholders to implement effective NFM measures.

Graduate NFM Officer

- **Lottie Abbott** – joined the council in October 2024 after graduating with a BSc in Geography from the University of Nottingham. She works alongside Beth to support the delivery of the NFM project.

For NFM-related enquiries, please contact NFM@herefordshire.gov.uk. You can also find further information about the project on our [website](#).

As a reminder, if you are handling a flooding enquiry this can be [reported via the council's website](#), where you'll also find [general flood advice and guidance](#). This includes the contact details below:

Reporting Flooding

To report a flood, please use the following contact numbers to ensure your report reaches the appropriate agency:

- **Emergency (danger to life/property):** Call **999**
- **Flooding on roads or footpaths:** Call **01432 261800**
- **Burst water main or sewer flooding:**
 - Welsh Water: **0800 085 3968**
 - Severn Trent Water: **0800 783 4444**
- **Flooding from rivers or groundwater:**
 - Environment Agency Floodline: **0345 988 1188**
- **Flooding from ordinary watercourses (e.g. streams, ditches):**
 - Call **01432 261800**

Cabinet meeting.

We have just had a cabinet meeting where a number of important decisions were made.

1. The Procurement Strategy for the bypass phase one was agreed. It is another step closer to delivering a bypass for Hereford. The arguments for this piece of road infrastructure are well rehearsed = it will provide some resilience to the local road network – anyone who has had to suffer through the gas works on the A49 can only say 'amen' to that. An alternative route to that over Greyfriars Bridge has to be built if we are to ensure a degree of choice, reduce congestion, improve air quality in the city and improve the road space for active travel in the city. One of the other important elements of the proposed infrastructure around the west of Hereford is that it will open up a 'growth corridor' – you are probably aware that the government has set Herefordshire a housing target of 27,260 (which will have to increase to 30,000 to allow for flex to

delivery) – the council will not be building the houses but we do have to plan for them. It seems to me that a sensible place for many of these houses has to be proximal to the city, where there is a hospital, schools, shops, employment and infrastructure.

2. **The Childrens and Young People's Improvement Plan 3.** I always think that when you are looking at the next phase of an improvement plan it is worth taking stock of the efficacy of the previous iteration. The best way of judging the success, or otherwise, of a plan is to triangulate your own Key performance indicators with external scrutiny. As luck would have it, this cabinet meeting coincided with the publication of the seventh Ofsted focussed visit letter, so we had a great opportunity to do that cross referencing.

If you remember where we were in 2022, under the previous administration, Ofsted declared the council inadequate across the board and, for the first time, said that children were at risk. It was a low point and after spending millions on 'improvement' not enough progress had been made by early 2024. At that point the new administration made a bold decision to appoint a new director. Since her appointment, Tina Russell has worked with Cllr Ivan Powell to grip and improve the service. Over the past several months I have seen six other focussed reports and with each one the feeling has been more and more positive and confident.

The letter details the results of Herefordshire's seventh and final monitoring visit that took place on 17 and 18 June 2025. The focus of the inspection centred around the quality of matching, placement and decision-making for children in care and the experiences and progress of children in care.

The inspection is part of a series of visits put in place following the service being judged inadequate in July 2022.

Headlines from the report noted that **'The quality of practice for children in care in Herefordshire has improved at pace since the last monitoring visit' and 'The appointment of a new Interim Director of Children's Services, leaders and senior managers have worked with a fresh momentum and conviction to create the conditions for social work to flourish. This is having a positive impact for children in care' and 'consistently stronger child focused practice is improving the experience and outcomes for children in care in Herefordshire.'**

Inspectors found that social workers demonstrate thoughtful and purposeful direct work with children to understand their experiences and views. They take time to build trusting relationships with children, which enables them to make progress.

Inspectors also found that, regular looked after children reviews and updated assessments help practitioners to understand and meet children's needs. Children are made aware of their right to an advocate, and they are supported to take up this offer.

The report noted, when there are concerns about children's wellbeing or safety, timely and effective action is taken to address this and that multi-agency threshold decision-making and agreements result in effective action to safeguard these children.

The placement and care of children who are separated from their families and seeking asylum has improved and children receive a sensitive and timely response.

Children's health needs are well met, and children and young people receive medical support

when needed. The emotional wellbeing of children is well considered and children in care are supported to improve their educational attainment. In short, the report recognised “children in care make progress.”

Children benefit from stable placements and carers who meet their needs. Careful consideration is given to find the right placement, including keeping brothers and sisters together when it is in their best interest. Also, when in their best interests, early consideration and effective support is provided to enable potential family members to care for children. This means many children are well cared for within their family or wider network.

Performance management reporting systems and quality assurance are increasingly robust, with work continuing to strengthen them further. Quality assurance activity is now well embedded, which enables stronger oversight and timely intervention.

Inspectors found that workforce stability has improved. There is now a much higher proportion of permanent social workers, which means most children in care have had the same social worker over the last year.

Ofsted also noted that, social workers consistently speak well of senior managers and are positive about the changes made to improve the service with an increasingly strong learning culture embedded across the organisation.

The report identifies a few areas where focused work is needed, and this feedback will be used proactively to help guide Herefordshire children’s services improvement programme. We will continue to work at pace to achieve our ambition of providing ‘Outstanding’ children’s social care services in Herefordshire.

You can read a full copy of the Ofsted letter [here](#).

It is worth noting that Tina Russell is not only overseeing improvement to the service but also delivering the agreed budget savings.

Full Council

Cllr David Davies and Cllr Rob Williams brought a notice of motion to the council to ask the executive to write to government to protest the withdrawal of funding from Neighbourhood Development Plans. I was happy to support this motion. Herefordshire parishes were in the vanguard of this element of the localism act and they delivered more NDPs than any other area. Many local communities want to make a meaningful contribution to the planning of development in their area, and it is a shame that the withdrawal of funding will make this very difficult indeed. Coupled with the proposed changes to the way that planning committees work (planning and infrastructure bill) and the sudden loss of the 5-year housing land supply the government is loading the dice to ensure the delivery of the 1.5m houses they have promised.

There was also a notice of motion to ask the executive to look for ways to reduce our housing targets. I was happy to support this, but it is worth noting that I also spent many hours making the argument to government in the consultation response and the result was that they reduced our target from 27,500 to 27,260! Officers have also had meetings with MHCLG to explore ways in which Herefordshire might argue for exceptionality (due to phosphates, areas of National Landscape, SSSI, poor infrastructure – including roads) but we have been told that the likelihood of success in

deploying any of these arguments to the inspector is vanishingly slim. Having said that, the council was in support of the motion and expressed their dismay at the government's top-down approach to targets.

Roads

As you may have noticed, Herefordshire Council is continuing to improve the condition of the county's roads. Hardly a day goes by without one or several road closures. At the moment the Mordiford Bridge is being repaired and so please bear that in mind if you are travelling in that direction and check before you leave. Locally we also have some of the U class roads being surface dressed. You might have seen a story in the Hereford Times about some residents who are 'mystified' as to why the council surface dresses roads that are in good condition and therefore, in the minds of the residents 'doesn't need it'. The decisions around road investment are made as part of a planned programme of maintenance (if it is good, keep it that way) and repair (get it to good). The idea with surface dressing is to deliver the former, and not the latter. By looking after the roads that we have got into good condition we extend the life of the road. The cost of surface dressing is about 80% less than the cost of resurfacing.

The culvert under the A40 at the end of Boat Lane is being cleared by National Highways so the perennial lake should be less of an issue there. We also have drainage works on Marstow Lane in the first week of August.

Litter

The issue of litter on the A40 has been a long-standing aggravation. Finally, I have secured some agreement that Herefordshire Council will fund litter collection where it is particularly bad. I have highlighted the area around Pencraig, especially the central reservation.

I was filming down by the Wye at Ross (downstream of the Wilton Bridge) the other day and the amount of litter was, frankly, disgusting. Someone had clearly thought that they would take themselves and their mates to a beautiful place to drink a few tins of Carlsberg and Fruit pop, smoke some Lambert and Butler and then walk away leaving all their empties behind. What is the matter with some people?? I collected as much as I could carry but couldn't carry it all.

Consultations

If you get a chance please take a look at the Merton Meadow consultation – it is a project I have been closely involved with and have pushed for the nature-based solution to flooding that is proposed.

[Latest consultations – Herefordshire Consultations](#)