

Report of Elissa Swinglehurst – Ward member Llangarron Ward

July 2018

Ofsted judgement of Children Social Care Services

In June, Ofsted, the national body that inspects and regulates services which care for children and young people, conducted a routine inspection as part of a new, more challenging inspection framework to check whether Herefordshire Council's services do protect and support children and young people and their families and improve the quality of their lives and futures.

Herefordshire Council's services for children in need of help and protection have maintained their current overall rating of 'requires improvement', according to the findings of the latest Ofsted inspection.

The Ofsted report highlighted a number of significant strengths in the service, including:

- No children seen were found to be at risk of immediate harm
- Children who need immediate help or protection receive appropriate interventions
- Early help family support services received by families are responsive and an intense package of support is provided.
- Children in care live in good placements, where their outcomes improve, including their education and health

There was also praise for a range of areas and the improvements made since the last inspection, including for children with disabilities, the council's fostering and adoption work, the work with care leavers, the work that takes place to safeguard children and young people at risk of child sexual exploitation, or those that go missing, and the work with unaccompanied asylum seekers.

There are areas where we still need to improve, however the overall judgement from this latest inspection remains a positive position to where we were back in 2012, when the council received a rating of inadequate.

We are fully committed to working towards an Ofsted rating of good, but this will take time. We have taken immediate action by allocating more resource to underpin our improvement work, including additional support for social workers to relieve their caseloads and will be putting in place measures to aid the retention of staff and recruitment. We are also taking a clearer and more consistent approach to management, as well as expanding the staffing to provide social workers with managerial support.

'Improvement' is not a destination, it is a voyage. Sometimes the wind fills your sails and progress is swift, sometimes the sea is becalmed and the sails are slack and sometimes there is a storm that blows you off course. We have an able crew, a decent map and compass and although, at times, it can get a bit choppy, we are making headway.

The Hereford Transport Package

I know this decision will feel a bit remote for most of my constituents but it has nevertheless been an important feature of my work as a Cabinet Member this month and therefore I thought I'd give an account of the decision making process.

First of all, to any of you who imagine that such decisions are simple, binary and thoughtless – they are not. I have looked at all the reports that detail the impact of the various potential routes will have on the environment, ecology, communities, noise, air quality, heritage, veteran trees, ancient woodland, the River Wye, the community farm and on and on. There is not one route that does not have an impact, in places severe, on one or all of these areas; the task at hand is the selection of the route that will be the best choice overall. There is no option at this point of not having a road or of substituting a road that goes to the east of the city – those decisions have already been taken and form part of the Core Strategy that was adopted in 2015. Having said that, there is some merit in trying to answer those basic questions – at least in general terms.

The decision to build a relief road is inextricably linked in my mind with a number of other things. First of all – and this is often referenced in debate about the road – there is a plan to build at least 16,500 houses in the county up to 2031. Many of these houses will be built on strategic sites around Hereford and the market towns. Due to the environmental constraints of the Lugg Meadow (a rare and wonderful Lammas meadow) the majority of the housing in Hereford will be built to the west. People ask why we have to build houses, reasoning that if we didn't build houses we wouldn't need a road. In 2020 the revenue support grant from the Government will totally disappear and, the current plan is, it will be replaced by 100% retention of business rates. Superdooper if you are the London Borough of Westminster – less good for Herefordshire where many of our businesses are small (and get business rate relief) or agricultural (business rate relief) and overall we don't have a huge number. So, not many businesses but we do have above average numbers of older people, children in care, children with special educational needs and more miles of road per head of population than anywhere else in the country. We also have one of the least densely populated counties in the country and therefore a low council tax income. The sensible – indeed, in my view the only thing to do is grow the population, increase the council tax receipt and grow the economy to increase the business rate receipts.....one of the constraints to doing this is the odd and anomalous circumstance of a trunked, strategic A road going through the middle of Hereford. There has been talk of a relief road for over 50 years – seriously – it's time to get on with it and this administration is determined to deliver.

It isn't easy though. I love the Herefordshire landscape, I do not want to see one tree cut down, I do not want to see a modern bridge spanning the mighty Wye and I do not want to have on my conscience the people who are going to lose their homes or whose enjoyment of their homes will be impacted by this change to the world around them. All I can do, the best I can do, is satisfy myself that the route is the one that will cause the least harm and that the benefits of the scheme, including the sustainable travel options, outweigh the harm.

It is important to remember that this is more than just a road building scheme. It is a 'transport plan' with a substantial element supporting sustainable, active travel plans as well as the 8km of tarmac. It is also an enabler for the new University, economic growth and housing development which, in turn, will support public services and support for vulnerable children and adults.

Cabinet went to look at the various route options 'on the ground' – we all looked at the perfectly lovely parkland landscape between Belmont Abbey and Belmont House, we walked through the Pippin Trust orchard and considered the impact of all the routes on the houses that will be impacted.

The technical route assessment had recommended the 'red' route as being the option that will cause the least damage overall – due either to a lower impact or a greater chance for successful mitigation. Not surprisingly, after an examination of the merits and demerits of the options, Cabinet agreed with the technical analysis, recommendations made by the scrutiny committee were accepted and an additional recommendation was included to investigate the ways in which we can lessen the impact on householders. A fully detailed analysis of the red route will be forthcoming in the following months before a final decision is taken and planning permission sought.

As always, if you have any questions or issues you would like to raise with me please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Cllr. Elissa Swinglehurst

Cabinet Member Young People and Children's Wellbeing

Ward Member for Llangarron Ward.