

District Councillor report for WDPC January 2025

Staff returning - The first tranche of staff from Publica began working as FoDDC employees on 1st November last year – they all appear very happy to be working here, feeling that they are more rooted in the area they serve. The next group is due to move around May this year. These will include more senior staff and those who are working across all Publica member authorities.

Five Acres - The Levelling Up funding availability has been extended until March 2026; this will enable contracting arrangements to be made and the commencement of the first phase of the development.

Devolution and local government reorganisation - WDPC will no doubt be aware of the current government white paper about local government reorganisation. Gloucestershire County Council Cabinet Members have taken a decision to send a letter to the government to postpone the County Council elections that are currently scheduled for May. FoDDC council leader, Adrian Birch, has, together with several other Gloucestershire district council leaders, written to the minister to tell him that they do not agree with the election postponement. Although they are keen to see devolution of powers, functions and resources from Westminster, they voice their concern over the lack of adequate engagement with residents to inform them of developments.

Market Town Regeneration and strategy - FoDDC Market Towns Officer – Two towns have signed up and we're waiting for the other two to confirm their support and contribution. A report will come to informal cabinet next week.

Local Development Scheme - timetable has been prepared in response to the Govt's revisions to the NPPF and standard housing figures. The revised LDS also responds to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government request for an updated timetable. A paper will go to Cabinet in February.

Budget – Full Council on 20th February.

Active Travel Strategy – Goes to cabinet in February and then out to Consultation.

Leisure and Active Wellbeing Strategy has gone live – please encourage people to have their say.

Shared Prosperity Fund - £327k has been awarded to FoDDC to be spent over one year.

These are the criteria:

Communities and Place

Business Support

People and Skills

Financial Inclusion Group – convened by FoDDC and led by Lena Maller and Lizzie Dyer. This group meets every few months bringing together key organisations such as Citizens Advice, Forest Food Network, Job Centre, Salvation Army, FVAF, 2 Rivers and Christians Against Poverty. The group is about sharing good practice, information and aims to support our communities to become more inclusive and resilient in the face of multiple crises.

Updates:

Forest Food Network using GIS to asset map food provision and growing around the Forest.

New IFAN (worrying about money) leaflet will go out in April with the Council Tax Bills.

Working with CA on the Advice First Aid project. This project provides signposting support to people within community settings.

Job Centre – name change coming. Multiple barriers to getting into work with increasing complexity of needs including physical and mental health.

Events coming up:

GL1 Building Futures event, 13th Feb for people who have settled in this country.

Cinderford Forest Rd Centre, 20th Feb – jobs, skills and advice event.

Job Centre in collaboration with FVAF are offering outreach in the Forest with bespoke mentoring.

Low Income Family Tracker – LIFT. Cabinet has agreed the implementation of the Low Income Family Tracker. LIFT is a product developed by the organisation Policy in Practice. LIFT will provide us with insight into low income families/households by aggregating local authority and some publicly available datasets. These aggregated datasets will provide valuable data at ward and street level so that we can identify and better understand the vulnerabilities of low income households. This will inform strategic planning and enable us to better target and support those in need.

T&P council meetings – Series of Town and Parish Council meetings. To consult T&P councils about how the district council can support them better, improve communications and potential ‘clustering’. Developing ‘central cluster’ with Cinderford TC taking the lead and offering their support to surrounding parish councils e.g contracts with land maintenance, EDI policy development. Two Northern Cluster meetings have also been very positive with a cluster forming around Newent TC. As you’d expect there’s been much debate about the Govt DEVO and LGR and what this might mean for T&P councils.

Arts Culture Heritage meetings – Three productive meetings with key organisations have been facilitated by FoDDC. A mission statement has emerged and the beginnings of a framework/strategy.

Community Safety Partnership – key points:

District will be getting 8 ANPR cameras installed. Locations TBC.

Neighbourhood policing – rise in mental health related incidents.

20% rise in burglaries – shed break in and garages

Recycling bins in Newent – several incidents last year where youths were removing cardboard and setting fire to wooden tables and benches. District Council temporarily removed the bins and paid for security lights to be installed by the lake and in the Town Centre by the Market Hall. The recycling bins have been reinstated.

DASV – domestic abuse training is being organised for officers and members. 16 days of action resulted in 202 posters being displayed in 67 businesses around the Forest. 25 of the businesses have requested training for their staff.

VIA – GDASS going into VIA. Recognised trauma behind addiction.

Staff receiving Naloxone training in April

Outreach team drop-in sessions in Cinderford and Coleford.

Member Champions update – We now have 7 Councillors who have undertaken Member Champion roles:

Armed Forces champion – Cllr Alan Priest

River Quality champion – Cllr Andrew McDermid

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion champion – Cllr Trevor Roach

Live Longer Better champion – Cllr Beth Llewelyn

Financial Inclusion and Advice Services champion – Cllr Di Martin

Retrofit champion – Cllr Alison Bruce

Active Travel champion – Cllr Richard Burton

Next drop-in 1st March 11 – 1.00 at Yorkley Community Centre and will continue bi-monthly, alternating between WDC and Yorkley Community Centre.

Beth Llewelyn, Alison Bruce and Jackie Dale