

Independents *for* Herefordshire



Date: 25 March 2026

Political Group Consultation Response on behalf of Independents for Herefordshire regarding Herefordshire Council's 2026-27 Delivery Plan

1. Overview

The Draft Delivery Plan 2026–27 is intended to operationalise the third year of the *Herefordshire Council Plan 2024–2028*. It outlines actions under four themes – **People, Place, Growth and Transformation** – and claims to connect these to measurable outcomes.

The document's structure is clear and visually consistent, but its content is largely procedural. It lists activities rather than specifying *performance improvement or resident impact*.

In short: it describes tasks, not transformation.

2. Format and Structure

Strengths

- **Clarity and consistency:** The table format and colour-coded RAG ratings make the document easy to navigate.
- **Continuity:** Actions carried forward from 2025–26 are tagged, which helps trace ongoing commitments.
- **Alignment:** It systematically follows the four pillars of the Council Plan, ensuring policy coherence.

Weaknesses

1. Lack of measurable outcomes.

Most milestones use verbs such as *develop, launch, review, or commence*, leaving no quantifiable result against which success can be assessed. There are almost no numeric targets, and baselines are absent.

2. Process bias over results.

The plan effectively measures *activity completion* (“develop a strategy”) instead of *impact* (“improve X% of children achieving a good level of development”).

3. Limited accountability.

No individual officers, service leads, or portfolio holders are listed as responsible for delivery. Without ownership there can be little assurance.

4. Unclear sequencing and dependency management.

Milestones are described in isolation; dependencies and timelines are not shown, so it is impossible to judge deliverability or cumulative impact.

Conclusion: Structurally tidy but strategically superficial – the plan looks organised yet offers *limited assurance on performance outcomes*.

3. Thematic Examination

3.1 People

Positive aspects:

- Continuity of work on Family Help reforms and restorative practice.
- Focus on SEN sufficiency and support for carers.

Concerns:

- Actions overwhelmingly describe “reviews”, “plans”, and “evaluations” rather than specifying measurable service improvement.
- Absent data on social-care waiting times, foster-care recruitment targets, or reductions in out-of-county placements.

Verdict: *Still in planning mode, not delivery mode*. The People section is well-intentioned but fails to show how residents’ lives will be better by March 2027.

3.2 Place

Positive aspects:

- Strong continuity on capital projects: Transport Hub, roads investment, flood-mitigation wetlands, Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Collaboration with statutory partners—theoretically sound governance.

Concerns:

- “Delivery” statements lack quantification: no targets for kilometres resurfaced, CO₂ reduction, biodiversity gain, or improved public-transport use.
- Climate-adaptation and behavioural-change interventions (e.g., retrofit education, active-travel promotion) are missing.

Verdict: An infrastructure plan, not a *sustainability or outcomes plan*. Residents will find it hard to see how physical investment translates into environmental improvement.

3.3 Growth

Positive aspects:

- Mentions partnerships with NMITE and continuation of Shared Prosperity Fund projects.

Concerns:

- No figures for job creation, business start-ups, housing completions, or local-procurement increases.
- Relies on phrases such as “continue engagement”, “explore options”, “develop partnerships”.
- Fails to address county productivity gap or low wage levels.

Verdict: Weakest section—reads more as a grant-administration log than an economic-development strategy. Residents cannot trace how growth activities will raise incomes or cut deprivation.

3.4 Transformation

Positive aspects:

- Delivery of Microsoft 365, revised Customer-Service model, and workforce programme continues.
- Structure shows some maturity compared to earlier years.

Concerns:

- Lacks measure of efficiency improvement (e.g., savings, satisfaction, or speed).
- No external assurance mechanism or audit track on claimed digital benefits.

Verdict: Organisational development well underway, but progress remains internally assessed. Outcomes for residents—notably faster response times or simplified transactions—are not evidenced.

4. Understandability and Public Accessibility

Language and tone:

- The document is internally oriented and bureaucratic. Sentences are dense with managerial verbs and acronyms. Phrases such as *“Develop options appraisal for future delivery models”* or *“align cross-directorate dependencies to assure transformation coherence”* are not easily understood by the general public.
- There is minimal use of plain English or examples that illustrate real impact (“what this means for you”).
- The absence of visual summaries or infographics makes it inaccessible to non-specialists.

Readability metrics:

Applying standard readability tests (Flesch-Kincaid) to sample sections returns a reading grade of roughly **college-level**, far above the “Year 9 or below” best practice recommended for public-sector documents.

Implications:

Residents reading the Plan would struggle to understand what will actually change and when. Accessibility regulations under the Public Sector Bodies (Website and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 expect councils to make strategic documents understandable for all users, but this plan falls short.

Recommendation:

Each deliverable should include a short plain-English summary such as:

“We will provide 200 additional special-school places by July 2027 so that more children can attend school close to home.”

This type of phrasing would make the plan meaningful to residents and measurable to scrutiny committees.

5. Assurance and Deliverability

Criterion	Finding
Ownership	Absent—no named officers or portfolio leads per objective.
Financial linkage	No reference to budgets or funding sources.
Outcome measurability	Weak—virtually no quantified indicators.
Dependency management	Minimal evidence; risk management not integrated.
External validation/audit	None stated.
Public intelligibility	Low—language complex, lacking clear purpose statements.

Overall assurance level: Low.

6. Comparative Examples of Best Practice

The plan’s shortcomings stand out when contrasted with more advanced delivery plans from other unitary authorities:

Council	Example Document	Why It Excels	Lessons for Herefordshire
Wiltshire Council – <i>Business Plan 2022–27 Delivery Framework</i>	Presents 10 headline missions, each with quantifiable KPIs (e.g., number of new homes, reduction in carbon tonnes). Progress dashboards published quarterly for scrutiny.	Links each action to metrics and budget lines; easy for public to follow.	Integrate headline KPI dashboards with quarterly reporting.
Cornwall Council – <i>Council Plan Delivery Plan 2025–26</i>	Includes outcome measures such as “Households in temporary accommodation – target < 500”; uses plain English and accessible infographics.	Combines clarity of language with measurable goals and responsible Cabinet members.	Adopt numerical targets and plain-English sidebars.
Nottingham City Council – <i>One Nottingham Performance Framework</i>	Built around thematic KPIs tied to wider civic partnerships;	Residents can see how city-wide goals	Convert themes into measurable

Council	Example Document	Why It Excels	Lessons for Herefordshire
	community-friendly summaries for each theme.	(jobs, emissions, child health) link to council actions.	partnership outcomes.
Leeds City Council – Best Council Plan Delivery Plan (2025/26)	Integrates equality impact, risk, and performance indicators for every workstream; formally reviewed by Scrutiny Boards quarterly.	Clear accountability and published metrics with historic trend data.	Add risk and equality columns to strengthen assurance.
Plymouth City Council – Corporate Plan Performance Report (2024)	Combines text narrative with visual trend graphs for every KPI; uses simple “you said – we did – outcome” format.	Extremely readable; shows tangible results.	Simplify tone and use “what this means for you” summaries.

These councils translate strategic aims into **quantifiable, time-bound public deliverables**, often featured on live dashboards. That level of clarity and accessibility is missing from Herefordshire’s draft.

7. Recommendations for Improvement

1. Embed clear KPIs and baselines.

Every objective should be paired with a quantifiable measure and a baseline year, e.g., *“Reduce average pothole repair time from 15 to 10 days.”*

2. Name accountable officers and portfolio leads.

Responsibility should be visible; residents and scrutiny committees must know who holds delivery power.

3. Link to budgets and funding streams.

Present each deliverable with an indicative cost or capital line from the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

4. Simplify and humanise language.

Use plain English, active verbs, and explain impact on everyday life. Include at least one sentence per objective starting “This means...”.

5. **Publish quarterly scorecards.**

Replace static RAG boxes with measurable trend data published online.

6. **Introduce independent validation.**

Adopt external review by peer councils or local audit/network partnerships, to verify progress claims.

7. **Connect to the county's evidence base.**

Align indicators with those on *Understanding Herefordshire* and ONS datasets to demonstrate real-world change.

8. Conclusion

The **Draft Delivery Plan 2026–27** presents a set of intentions aligned with the Council Plan but **does not yet operate as a credible delivery framework**.

It lacks:

- quantitative performance targets,
- explicit accountability,
- financial transparency, and
- accessible public language.

As a result, there is **low assurance** that these actions will produce measurable improvements for residents within the next twelve months.

Other unitary authorities demonstrate that effective delivery plans can be plain, measurable, resident-focused, and transparent. If Herefordshire's plan adopted those principles, it could progress from *a comfortable management list* to a *genuine instrument of public accountability and change*.

Independents for Herefordshire Group Assessment

The draft plan captures intentions but not outcomes. It is organisationally tidy but democratically opaque. Without quantified targets, clear ownership, and resident-friendly language, the administration cannot credibly claim that this document assures progress toward the Council Plan 2024-28. Scrutiny members and residents deserve a plan that tells them, in plain English, what will be achieved, by whom, by when — and how success will be proved.

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Date: 25 March 2026

Submitted on behalf of the Independents for Herefordshire