



## **Chief Executive's Report to Council Herefordshire Council – 22 May 2026**

On behalf of council officers, I would like to reiterate our sincere condolences to the family, friends and former colleagues of Tony Johnson, former Councillor and Leader of Herefordshire Council, who passed away on 2 May 2026. Councillor Johnson served the county with great distinction from 2013 to 2018, overseeing major regeneration and economic development programmes. His contribution to Herefordshire and its communities was considerable and will be enduring.

I would now like to update members on key developments in delivery, investment and engagement since Council last met in March, alongside progress against our strategic priorities and the ongoing challenges facing the organisation.

Since that time, Council has approved the appointment of Paul Satoor as Herefordshire's new Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service, following a comprehensive national recruitment process. Paul is expected to take up the role at the end of June, bringing significant experience from both local and central government. He will play a key role in driving delivery of the Council Plan and supporting residents and businesses across the county. I look forward to working closely over the next few weeks with Paul to ensure a smooth transition.

Members will see that we have delivered a balanced budget for 2025/26, despite significant financial and demand pressures. The final outturn report, due to be presented to Cabinet on 21 May, shows the council ended the year with income and expenditure matched, reflecting strong financial management and the hard work of services to control spending. As a result, we have delivered £13.2 million in savings while actively managing cost pressures, particularly in adult social care, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), home-to-school transport and temporary accommodation.

Looking forward, the paper sets out proposals to secure significant government support for SEND pressures, with potential funding covering around 90% of historic deficits. This will reduce borrowing pressures and support longer-term financial sustainability if approved.

Turning to capital expenditure, the council delivered £86.0 million of investment in key priorities during 2025/26. This includes significant programmes such as highways and local transport grants, which were fully utilised, ensuring maximum benefit for residents.

This has been a collective effort, and I am particularly grateful to Rachael Sanders, Director of Finance, for her continued financial stewardship, and to Cllr Pete Stoddart for his focus on securing value for money for residents.

In March, Cabinet approved the Delivery Plan for 2026/27, setting out an ambitious programme across all service areas. There has been continued progress in supporting children, young people and families. The council is investing £4.1 million over three years to support care leavers and families, including innovative housing solutions to provide safe and stable accommodation for some of our most vulnerable residents.

We have also launched grant funding for SEND activities, enabling local organisations to offer inclusive opportunities for children and young people with additional needs. Alongside this, we have celebrated the achievements of care-experienced children and young people through

special awards recognising resilience and success. The continued development of Child Friendly Herefordshire, formally launched in March, reinforces our commitment to placing children and young people at the heart of decision-making and ensuring the county is a place where they can thrive.

The council continues to strengthen support for adults and communities. A new community activities consultation has been launched to shape future provision for adults with care and support needs, ensuring services reflect the preferences and lived experience of residents. We have also introduced a five-year plan to reduce homelessness, supported by investment in new accommodation and innovative services to tackle rough sleeping and improve housing stability. This work continues against a backdrop of sustained financial pressure, particularly for rural authorities, and demonstrates how the council is prioritising services while responding to growing demand.

Significant progress is also being made in infrastructure investment to unlock growth and keep Herefordshire moving. This includes more than £37 million for road improvements and £1 million to enhance public rights of way and footbridges. We are also progressing a multi-million-pound programme to improve transport, expand active travel and deliver safer routes to schools. Works to enhance Great Western Way have recently been completed, and members may have seen the Hereford Transport Hub taking shape, alongside wider ambitions to improve walking, cycling and wheeling across the county.

Delivery of the Hereford Bypass continues to progress. The council has appointed a contractor to begin Phase One, marking a significant milestone in this priority project. Alongside this, the “Back the Bypass” campaign has been launched, bringing together residents, businesses and partners to build support and communicate the scheme’s economic, environmental and connectivity benefits.

The council continues to deliver a broad programme of economic development and regeneration. The Ross-on-Wye Enterprise Park has been formally launched, creating new opportunities for business growth, inward investment and job creation.

In Hereford, a new Community Board Chair has been appointed to help guide the £20 million “Pride in Place” investment in South Wye, ensuring local priorities and community input shape delivery.

To support residents, seasonal garden waste collections have resumed, and we have introduced free 30-minute “pop and shop” parking across our car parks to support local high streets and improve access to services.

Additional support is being promoted for residents, including financial assistance for low-income households reliant on oil and LPG heating, helping to address cost of living pressures in rural communities amid ongoing global energy pressures.

I was pleased to see NMITE successfully hold its second graduation ceremony this month, building on the momentum of last year’s inaugural event. As NMITE continues to establish itself as a key partner in skills and economic growth, the ceremony provided an important opportunity to celebrate student success and reaffirm the council’s commitment to opportunity and world-class education in Herefordshire.

We were also honoured to receive a gold award under the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme—the highest accolade for supporting the Armed Forces community. This reflects our long-standing commitment to supporting service personnel and encouraging employers across the county to do the same.

The public consultation on the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's draft recommendations for future electoral arrangements is now open. Members and residents are encouraged to share their views on proposals, including the retention of 53 councillors across 53 single-member wards and changes to 22 ward boundaries, before final recommendations are confirmed later this year.

At the time of writing, we are awaiting the outcome of the Care Quality Commission's inspection of adult social care services. We are also preparing for the return visit from the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge team. Members will recall their assessment of Herefordshire as a "good council, striving to improve further." The return visit is an important opportunity to review progress against those findings.

To support continued improvement, we will be undertaking a staff survey in June. This will provide valuable insight to help shape future service delivery and ensure we continue to support staff effectively. Previous surveys have informed meaningful improvements in training, retention and service delivery.

We also continue to recognise the contribution of our workforce, including initiatives highlighting the professionalism and dedication of social care staff across Herefordshire.

In summary, since my last report we have made continued progress across a wide range of priorities, including infrastructure investment, strengthened support for vulnerable residents, and advances in economic development. This has been achieved in a challenging financial and national context, and I thank members, staff and partners for their continued commitment. I ask members to note these updates and the positive momentum they represent. Please contact me for any further information.

Finally, as this is my last meeting of Council as Chief Executive, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all members, across all political groups, for the professionalism, commitment and integrity you bring to your roles.

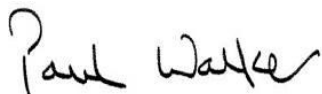
In particular, I would like to thank the Chair of the Council, Cllr Roger Phillips and his predecessor, Cllr Sebastian Bowen, and to the Leader, Cllr Jonathan Lester, and his predecessor Cllr David Hitchiner, for their support, encouragement and advice during my time as chief executive.

It has been a privilege to serve this Council and the people of Herefordshire. Over recent years, across two administrations, I have consistently seen members place the interests of residents first, often in the face of significant challenges.

Local government is not always easy. The decisions taken in this chamber matter deeply to our communities, and I recognise the time, effort and personal commitment each of you brings.

My decision to step down was an incredibly difficult one, particularly given the progress we have made together. However, I believe I leave the Council in a strong position, with firm foundations and a clear sense of direction.

That progress is a testament not only to officers, but to the collective leadership shown by members—constructive, thoughtful and focused on delivering for Herefordshire. I thank you for your support, your challenge and your shared commitment to public service. It has been a genuine privilege to work alongside you, and I wish you every success for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Paul Walker**  
**Chief Executive**