

Draft Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held at Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Thursday 24 September 2026 at 2.30 pm

**Cabinet Members
Physically Present
and voting:**

**Councillor Jonathan Lester, Leader of the Council (Chairperson)
Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst, Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice-
Chairperson)**

**Councillors Harry Bramer, Barry Durkin, Ivan Powell, Philip Price and
Pete Stoddart**

**Cabinet Members in
remote attendance**

None

*Cabinet members attending the meeting remotely, e.g. through video
conferencing facilities, may not vote on any decisions taken.*

**Group leaders /
representatives in
attendance**

**Councillors Liz Harvey, Stef Simmons,
Clare Davies (left after Q1 Performance report),
Terry James (left after Q1 Performance report and Councillor Proctor
acted as substitute)**

**Scrutiny chairpersons in
attendance**

Councillors Ben Proctor, Toni Fagan and Louis Stark

Officers in attendance:

**John Hobbs, Claire Porter, Rachel Gillot, Rachael Sanders, Paul Satoor,
Samantha Gregory (secretary), Donna Thornton,**

116. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies from Councillors Biggs, Gandy and Hurcomb

117. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

118. MINUTES

**Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2026 be approved as a
correct record and signed by the Chairperson.**

119. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Pages 17 - 34)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 1 to the minutes.

120. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS (Pages 35 - 36)

Questions received and responses given are attached as appendix 2 to the minutes.

121. REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were no reports from scrutiny committees for consideration at this meeting.

122. Q1 2026/27 BUDGET REPORT

Councillor Stoddart cabinet member for cabinet member for finance and corporate services introduced the report.

Cabinet noted a forecast revenue overspend of £11.6m, reducing to £10.7m following identified management actions. Significant budget pressures remain within adult social care, temporary accommodation, SEND services and home-to-school transport. Members were

advised that, while these pressures reflect national trends, continued local action is required to maintain financial resilience.

It was reported that £7.5m of planned savings had been achieved, although £6.5m of approved savings remained at risk. Cabinet noted the need for ongoing focus on delivery of savings, particularly within adult social care and home-to-school transport.

Cabinet reviewed the Quarter 1 financial position, noted the management actions identified to reduce the forecast overspend, and supported the continuation of recovery measures to strengthen financial control and improve the year-end position. Members acknowledged that reliance on reserves was not a sustainable solution and that early intervention and robust financial management would be essential.

Cabinet also noted that the external audit of the council's 2025/26 accounts had been completed successfully, with auditors confirming the accounts were free from material error and prepared in accordance with proper accounting standards. Appreciation was expressed to the Section 151 Officer and finance team for their work, providing assurance regarding the reliability of the council's financial reporting and decision-making framework.

Comments from cabinet members:

It was noted that the largest forecast overspend remained within Adult Social Care but expressed confidence that the position would improve by Quarter 2. Members were assured that work to address cost pressures was focused on improving efficiency and value for money rather than reducing services for residents with assessed needs.

Cabinet heard that a range of measures were being implemented, including regular reviews of care packages, use of cost-assessment tools, strengthened brokerage arrangements, improved demand management, and enhanced financial and governance controls. It was emphasised that care would continue to be tailored to individual needs, with efforts focused on removing unnecessary costs rather than reducing support.

Members noted that demand pressures had stabilised following an early-year increase and that ongoing transformation activity, including greater use of assistive technology and digital solutions to support residents to remain independent at home, was expected to contribute to improved outcomes and reduced costs over time. Cabinet was advised that these combined measures were intended to address the forecast overspend while maintaining appropriate care and support for vulnerable residents.

A range of measures within the Economy and Environment Directorate aimed at delivering savings and reducing budget pressures were outlined. Members heard that greater control of the public realm contract was expected to support further efficiencies and provide improved oversight of costs.

It was noted that reducing expenditure on home-to-school transport remained a key priority. Planned actions included route optimisation, increased use of council-operated transport in place of taxis on longer routes, greater sharing of transport, increased uptake of direct payments, and independent travel training where appropriate.

Members also noted work to reduce waste disposal costs, identify opportunities to increase income across the directorate, including through advertising on council assets, and rationalise the council's property estate. It was emphasised that reducing the number of properties owned by the council could lower ongoing maintenance and operational costs while generating capital receipts to relieve pressure on revenue budgets.

Cabinet was advised that further opportunities for savings would continue to be explored across all service areas as part of the council's wider financial recovery programme.

Cabinet was advised that the council and its health partners jointly oversee SEND and alternative provision through the Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision Strategic Board, supported by an operational group. Members noted that the council is actively engaged with the Government's SEND reform programme and maintains a positive working relationship with the Department for Education.

Cabinet heard that, while national reforms will take time to be implemented, Herefordshire is well positioned to respond quickly and take advantage of opportunities arising from the changes to improve services and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs.

It was reported that the contract with M Group was proceeding well, it was reported that initial concerns regarding service delivery had been effectively addressed. Members noted that the county's highways resurfacing programme was progressing well and delivering positive outcomes for road users across Herefordshire.

Cabinet also heard that regulatory services continued to provide effective support to residents and that Trading Standards had undertaken a number of significant enforcement activities. Ongoing joint working with community safety and enforcement partners was noted, with a commitment to maintaining strong collaborative arrangements to support compliance and protect local communities.

Group Leaders were invited to offer their views:

The Leader for Independents for Herefordshire outlined the views of their group and raised that:

Concern was expressed that the forecast overspend reflected long-standing issues with the delivery of planned savings rather than new cost pressures. It was noted that a significant proportion of the overspend related to savings assessed as at risk, with concerns raised that warnings previously made by scrutiny regarding the deliverability of savings and the absence of detailed delivery plans had not been adequately addressed. Concerns were also raised regarding the capital programme, with a substantial proportion of the annual budget forecast to slip into future years, including major projects such as the museum redevelopment and Shirehall refurbishment. Questions were raised over the treatment of cost inflation and the potential risks associated with project delays, including the possibility of grant funding being affected.

There was a call for greater transparency regarding savings delivery plans, clearer reporting of risks within the capital programme, and more definitive information on project timelines and delivery.

The Green Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

Concerns were raised about the council's deteriorating financial position, noting that forecast overspends and at-risk savings reflected ongoing issues rather than new pressures. It was highlighted that a significant proportion of the forecast overspend remained unaddressed, with a substantial level of planned savings assessed as at risk and reserves significantly reduced in recent years.

Concerns were also expressed regarding the potential sale of council assets as a means of reducing revenue pressures and the implications this may have for the council's long-term asset base. It was queried what assets were being considered for sale.

Concerns were noted about delays within the capital programme, including major projects such as Shirehall library and the Museum and Art Gallery, and the impact that project slippage and construction inflation could have on future costs and value for money.

The member called for greater transparency regarding financial recovery plans, capital investment priorities and borrowing decisions, and emphasised the importance of an open discussion on priorities to protect essential services and environmental commitments.

The Liberal Democrat Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

The seriousness of the council's financial position was acknowledged but cautioned that it was still too early in the financial year to determine whether the forecast overspend could be successfully addressed. It was noted that the Quarter 2 position would provide a clearer indication of whether the current trend could be reversed.

Concerns were expressed about the deliverability of some proposed savings, particularly in relation to home-to-school transport, where achieving significant reductions in expenditure was described as challenging in practice. While recognising the planned actions to reduce costs, the member highlighted the operational difficulties involved and emphasised the need to closely monitor progress over the coming months.

The True Independents Leader outlined the views of their group and argued that:

Three key issues were highlighted: increasing demand for statutory services, particularly adult social care, home-to-school transport and temporary accommodation, as the main driver of financial pressures; the non-delivery of planned savings as a significant contributor to the forecast overspend; and the council's limited ability to rely on reserves.

It was noted that sustainable service redesign and demand management, alongside short-term recovery measures, will be essential. It was also emphasised the need for robust recovery plans and accountability arrangements to secure the remaining savings at risk and stressed the importance of implementing corrective action at the earliest opportunity given the limited level of reserves available.

In response to the comments made:

It was emphasised that, once a clearer picture is available, the position will be communicated accordingly.

The Leader sought confirmation that the council inherited an £8.7m overspend from the previous administration's 2023/24 budget, that the 2024/25 budget was delivered with a £0.5m surplus, and that the 2025/26 budget was delivered on budget. Councillor Stoddart confirmed all three points.

It was also noted that, while the council is legally required to set a balanced budget, delivering a balanced outturn requires ongoing work and difficult decisions. Cabinet and officers remain committed to taking the responsible actions necessary to achieve a balanced budget for the coming year.

Concerns regarding temporary accommodation were noted and welcomed progress on the refurbishment of the John Venn Building, which is intended to provide council-managed temporary accommodation and help reduce associated costs. An update on the anticipated opening date was requested. Members also noted the range of measures being implemented to manage home-to-school transport costs through alternative and

innovative delivery approaches, alongside ongoing work to reduce costs within adult social care while maintaining service provision.

Cabinet emphasised its strong focus on delivering the required savings and noted that, given the significant pressures on reserves, there was no alternative but to achieve the planned financial recovery measures. Members acknowledged scrutiny's concerns and reaffirmed that all possible actions were being taken to bring expenditure under control.

It was also highlighted the additional costs faced by rural authorities and noted ongoing lobbying by the Rural Services Network, the Local Government Association and other sector bodies for a fairer funding settlement that better reflects the cost of delivering services in rural counties such as Herefordshire. It was emphasised that the council is actively contributing evidence and financial modelling to support this case and is taking a leading role in advocating for improved funding arrangements for rural areas.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussions. Councillor Stoddart proposed the recommendations, the Leader seconded the recommendations. The Leader directed that the decision to be put before Cabinet is:

That:

- a) Reviews the financial forecast for 2026/27, as set out in the appendices A-D, and identifies any additional actions to be considered to achieve future improvements;**
- b) Notes the management action identified to reduce the forecast outturn position for 2026/27; and**
- c) Agrees the continuation of management actions to reduce the forecast overspend as identified in this report.**

The recommendations were unanimously approved.

123. Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Councillor Stoddart cabinet member for cabinet member for finance and corporate services introduced the report.

Cabinet noted that overall performance remained positive, with 104 of 124 Delivery Plan milestones due to be in progress by the end of Quarter 1 either completed or on track for delivery. Significant progress was reported across all priority areas, including the implementation of Families First and Family Hub reforms, enhanced support for unpaid carers, the successful transition to the new Public Realm operating model, continued development of skills and housing initiatives, and improvements to digital access and engagement with the voluntary and community sector.

Good progress in the capital programme, including the Hereford Transport Hub, Holme Lacy Road Active Travel improvements, Peterchurch Primary School, and a number of school expansion and maintenance projects were noted. Performance against key indicators was generally encouraging, particularly in children's services, planning performance and affordable housing delivery, although some areas would continue to be monitored closely.

Cabinet approved updates to the Delivery Plan to reflect carried-forward milestones, emerging priorities and revised actions, noting that these changes did not alter the council's agreed strategic priorities.

Comments from cabinet members:

It was highlighted that Peterchurch Primary school would have an official opening in January 2027.

Group Leaders were invited to offer their views:

The Green Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

The progress made across a number of key projects, including the transition to the new Public Realm contract, the Merton Meadow flood alleviation scheme, the Hereford Transport Hub and the Peterchurch Primary School project were acknowledged and commended staff for their work.

However, concerns were raised regarding the presentation of performance information, with some milestones recorded as completed despite limited evidence of outcomes or published results.

Greater clarity on the reporting of major projects, including the development of the Western Bypass business case, was sought to ensure that progress updates and performance assessments accurately reflect the current position and associated risks.

The Leader for Independents for Herefordshire outlined the views of their group and raised that:

Progress was welcomed on a number of capital projects, including Peterchurch Primary School, Hampton Dene and the Hereford Transport Hub, and acknowledged the benefits these schemes would bring to local communities. Concerns were raised, however, regarding the performance reporting methodology, noting that the reported Quarter 1 achievement figures were measured against a revised Delivery Plan that included carried-forward milestones, new priorities and amended actions. The timing of approving plan revisions alongside reporting performance against them was queried and greater transparency regarding changes to the baseline was sought.

Concern was expressed about a number of carried-forward commitments, including the development of alternative provision for children and school reorganisation proposals, where progress remained dependent on identifying suitable premises. Delays or lack of progress relating to certain climate initiatives and financial resilience measures were also noted. While recognising genuine achievements, it was emphasised that performance reporting should provide a clear and transparent picture of both progress and areas of delay. A request was made for relevant scrutiny committees to consider ongoing issues and for future performance reporting to be based on an agreed baseline established prior to assessment.

The Liberal Democrat Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

It was noted that, while the overall performance report appeared positive, there was a lack of comparative data against previous years to provide context for the reported results. Concerns were also raised regarding the delivery timescales of smaller capital projects, with some schemes experiencing significant delays. It was noted that prolonged delivery periods can lead to frustration among residents, and the need to improve the implementation of smaller projects, including those funded through Section 106 agreements, to ensure timely delivery of agreed benefits was highlighted.

It was noted that Councillor James had to now leave the meeting and Councillor Proctor would substitute.

The True Independents Leader outlined the views of their group and argued that:

The successful implementation of the new Public Realm contract was noted, which ensured continuity of service delivery while providing a platform to improve outcomes for

residents. It was also recognised that a number of strategic projects, particularly affordable housing schemes and digital transformation initiatives, remained subject to external factors and delays. The importance of maintaining oversight and continued focus on delivery to ensure progress remains on track was emphasised.

In response to the comments made:

It was noted that, while some projects had been carried forward into subsequent years, this should be viewed in the context of the council's significant capital investment programme and the broad range of initiatives included within the Delivery Plan. It was emphasised that securing alternative provision for children with special educational needs remains a key priority. Although progress has been affected by external challenges, assurance was provided that substantial work is ongoing to deliver the required provision and that the complexity of the issue means it cannot be resolved immediately.

Councillor Powell reaffirmed the council's commitment to meeting its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places, including alternative provision, and to ensuring that children and young people can access suitable education locally. It was noted that the increasing demand for SEND and alternative provision is a national challenge and that the council continues to work closely with the Department for Education on reforms and local capacity planning.

It was noted that the proposed 80-place special free school had been cancelled, but work continues with the Department for Education on the redevelopment of Westfield School and on identifying suitable sites and buildings for additional provision. It was highlighted that, since 2022, the council has delivered 92 inclusion places in mainstream schools and 56 specialist places, although further capacity is still required.

The council continues to work with partners to expand provision and will refresh its SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy, which was developed in collaboration with parents and carers. Cabinet was assured that property, education and other council teams are working jointly to address the ongoing challenges and deliver further improvements.

In response to concerns regarding baselining, it was noted that milestones carried forward from the previous year had been identified and discussed during Quarter 3 and confirmed within the Quarter 4 outturn report. It was highlighted that the inclusion of these items in the current year's Delivery Plan reflected a transparent approach to reporting, acknowledging work that had not been completed in the previous year and carrying it forward for delivery. It was emphasised that this process was intended to provide openness and accountability regarding ongoing commitments rather than alter performance reporting.

It was highlighted that the Library Strategy had been finalised and would be published shortly. In relation to the proposed solar car ports at Plough Lane, it was noted that the business case had been reviewed but was not considered financially viable. While the scheme would not have made a significant contribution to the council's carbon management targets due to the council already purchasing 100% renewable electricity, it had been explored for its potential leadership value and possible revenue savings. It was noted that the council had not ruled out future solar energy opportunities and would continue to explore suitable sites, while recognising that grid connection capacity remains a significant constraint.

In summary the positive progress reported across the Delivery Plan was welcomed and recognised the significant effort involved in delivering projects and priorities. Cabinet placed on record its thanks to officers for their hard work, commitment and continued

efforts in progressing the council's objectives and achieving positive outcomes for residents.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussions. Councillor Stoddart proposed the recommendations, the Leader seconded the recommendation. The Leader directed that the decision to be put before Cabinet is:

That:

- a) review performance for Q1 2026/27**
- b) approve the changes to the Delivery Plan 2026/27 (as set out in Appendix A) since Cabinet on 26th March 2026. Once approved, the revised version of the Delivery Plan 2026/27 will be published.**

The recommendations were unanimously approved.

124. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE Q1 2026/27

Councillor Stoddart cabinet member for cabinet member for finance and corporate services introduced the report.

Cabinet received the Quarter 1 Risk Management Update for 2026/27 and noted that the Corporate Leadership Team had reviewed all nine corporate risks, including their scores, controls and mitigation measures, and was satisfied that they were being appropriately managed. Members noted that no new corporate risks had been identified and that no changes to existing risk scores were proposed.

It was recognised that recent extreme weather events had highlighted the need for continued preparedness, with ongoing work taking place alongside partners to strengthen resilience and response arrangements for flooding, wildfires and other severe weather incidents.

Cabinet also considered the Risk Appetite Statement for 2026/27 and noted that no changes were proposed following review. Members were advised that recent Value for Money audit work had provided assurance that the council's risk management arrangements were appropriate and effective.

Comments from cabinet members:

None

Group Leaders were invited to offer their views:

The Leader for Independents for Herefordshire outlined the views of their group and raised that:

The report was welcomed but raised concerns that the stability of corporate risk scores over successive quarters may not fully reflect emerging challenges facing the council. It was noted that increasing demand pressures, financial challenges and service improvement requirements could warrant ongoing review of risk scoring and assessment processes.

Concerns were also expressed regarding the presentation of Risk 7 (Emergency Response and Infrastructure), with clarification being sought on why the residual risk score remained unchanged despite existing mitigation measures and recent severe weather events.

Questions were raised about whether the current risk register adequately reflects a number of strategic risks, including local government reorganisation and devolution, cyber and data protection risks, care market sustainability, and succession planning for key statutory officer roles.

It was suggested that some sections of the Risk Appetite Statement could be strengthened to provide greater consistency across all risk categories. While supporting the overall report, it was requested that a continued review of the risk framework to ensure emerging risks were appropriately captured, controls remain effective, and risk assessments accurately reflect the council's operating environment.

The Green Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

It was noted that, while the report suggested a stable corporate risk position, significant financial pressures, reserve depletion, savings delivery risks and challenges within the capital programme warranted continued scrutiny of the council's risk assessments. Questions were raised as to whether the existing risk scores fully reflected the changing risk environment and what factors would trigger a reassessment of those scores.

Concerns were also expressed regarding the impact of extreme weather events and the need for greater visibility of climate adaptation and resilience risks within the council's risk management framework. It was suggested that additional transparency would be beneficial, including clearer explanations where risk scores remain unchanged despite changing circumstances, publication of escalation triggers for major project risks, and further consideration of climate adaptation as a distinct area of risk. It was noted that these measures would strengthen oversight and provide greater assurance that the risk register remains responsive to emerging challenges.

The representative for the Liberal Democrat Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

The progress made in embedding the council's revised approach to risk management was welcomed and supported many of the observations raised during the discussion. It was noted that, as the council moves into the second year of the framework, there was an expectation that risk scores would evolve over time to reflect both changing circumstances and the impact of mitigation measures.

Concern was expressed that no changes to risk scores had been recorded despite ongoing developments and efforts to reduce risk.

A question was also raised regarding the Risk Appetite Statement, noting the contrast between the council's open appetite for transformation and its more cautious appetite towards data and technology. Clarification was sought on whether this difference could be affecting the pace of transformation activity.

The True Independents Leader outlined the views of their group and argued that:

Councillor Davies had left the meeting

In response to the comments made:

It was highlighted that the corporate risk register focuses on strategic corporate risks rather than individual operational risks and that it is important to distinguish between these levels of risk when considering the register. It was also noted that the council has a strong track record of managing leadership changes and filling senior roles in a timely

manner. The comments and questions raised by group leaders were acknowledged, and further clarification was invited regarding the distinction between corporate and operational risks within the council's risk management framework.

In response to comments regarding the absence of changes to corporate risk scores, it was noted that changes had been made over the previous year and that the risk register is reviewed regularly. Members were advised that the council's approach to risk management had been endorsed by the Audit and Governance Committee, with the view that the corporate risk register should remain focused on a limited number of high-level strategic risks rather than a larger number of operational or project-specific risks.

It was explained that many of the issues raised during the debate are managed through directorate and project-level risk registers, while the corporate register is reserved for the most significant strategic risks facing the authority. It was also noted that recent discussions with parish councils on climate-related matters would inform future risk assessments and ongoing reviews of the register.

While acknowledging that the framework could continue to evolve and improve, it was emphasised that the council's risk management strategy is considered robust and would remain subject to ongoing review and refinement.

It was emphasised that the Corporate Risk Register is intended to capture the council's highest-level strategic risks and should be distinguished from the wider range of operational and service-level risks managed across the organisation. It was noted that limiting the register to a small number of significant corporate risks provides a clear focus on the issues most likely to impact the council's ability to deliver its objectives. It was acknowledged that many operational, project and directorate-level risks are managed through separate risk management processes, and that a number of the strategic risks identified are common to local authorities given the complexity of delivering local government services.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussions. Councillor Stoddart proposed the recommendations, the Leader seconded the recommendation. The Leader directed that the decision to be put before Cabinet is:

That Cabinet:

- a) Approves the updates to the Corporate Risk Register and actions to mitigate identified risks at Quarter 1 2026/27; and**
- b) Approves the Risk Appetite Statement for 2026/27**

The recommendations were unanimously approved.

125. HEREFORDSHIRE'S 2026-27 SECTION 75 AGREEMENT

The Leader introduced the report highlighting its role in supporting integrated health and adult social care services that help residents maintain independence, avoid unnecessary hospital admissions, receive timely support following discharge, and remain living safely within their communities. Members noted that the programme also supports carers, preventative services, community-based support and the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants.

Cabinet was advised that the proposed agreement replaces the previous annual variation process with a longer-term five-year framework, providing greater certainty for planning and commissioning, strengthening partnership working and reducing

administrative requirements, while retaining annual review of financial schedules and partner contributions.

It was noted that the Better Care Fund programme for 2026/27 is valued at over £31m and includes appropriate governance, financial management and risk management arrangements. The report reflected the strong partnership between the council, the Integrated Care Board and health and care providers, with the overall aim of delivering joined-up services, improving outcomes for residents and ensuring the effective use of public resources.

Comments from cabinet members:

None

Group Leaders were invited to offer their views:

The Green Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

It was recognised that the Section 75 agreement was a statutory requirement and supported its progression, noting that services needed to continue operating within a formal partnership framework. However, concerns were raised that elements of the agreement remained incomplete, including references to outdated governance arrangements and the absence of a finalised risk-sharing mechanism for managing any overspend within the pooled budget.

While expressing confidence in the council's financial oversight within partnership arrangements, greater clarity was sought regarding the financial implications of the agreement and requested consideration of further governance measures. These included reporting the final risk-sharing arrangements to Cabinet, providing greater transparency regarding key financial figures, and undertaking a formal review of the agreement through the Health and Wellbeing Board and scrutiny processes after implementation. It was emphasised that these measures would strengthen oversight while avoiding any delay to service delivery.

The Leader for Independents for Herefordshire outlined the views of their group and raised that:

The objectives of the Better Care Fund and the services it enables, including hospital discharge arrangements, community-based support and Disabled Facilities Grants were supported. However, concerns were raised that the agreement was being presented retrospectively, having operated for approximately 18 months without formal approval. The reasons for the delay were questioned and sought assurance that future renewals would be completed in a more timely manner.

Concerns were also expressed regarding the completeness of the agreement, including references to outdated organisational structures, outstanding administrative details and the need for further legal refinement.

The importance of robust risk management, governance arrangements and learning from the previous agreement period was highlighted. Questions were raised regarding the operation of the Disabled Facilities Grant programme, whether any schemes had underperformed, and what lessons had been learned from the previous five-year arrangement.

While supporting approval of the agreement in principle, it was requested that outstanding issues within the documentation be addressed within a defined timescale

and that a formal lessons-learned review be undertaken and reported to Cabinet to inform future agreements and strengthen oversight of the partnership.

The representative of the Liberal Democrat Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

No comments

The True Independents Leader outlined the views of their group and argued that:

Councillor Davies had left the meeting.

In response to the comments made:

In response to concerns raised, members were advised that the report set out the overarching framework and principles of the Section 75 agreement, with authority delegated to officers to finalise the detailed operational and implementation arrangements. It was emphasised that this approach formed part of the council's established process for managing such agreements.

Members were assured that issues relating to community hospitals, service integration and wider health system developments were regularly considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board. The review of community hospitals was noted as an ongoing piece of work, with findings expected later in the year.

It was further highlighted that the agreement reflected the strong strategic partnership between Herefordshire Council and health partners, as well as the close operational collaboration between adult social care and health services. Members noted that this integrated approach was helping to deliver more joined-up services and positive outcomes for residents.

The Leader of the Council concluded the discussions. The Leader proposed the recommendations, Councillor Stoddart seconded the recommendation. The Leader directed that the decision to be put before Cabinet is:

That:

- a) Approves the Section 75 Partnership Agreement between Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2030;**
- b) Approves the pooled budget arrangements and financial contributions for 2025/26 and 2026/27 between Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board, as detailed within the agreement and associated schedules;**
- c) Authorises the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing to take all operational decisions necessary to finalise, implement and manage the agreement.**

The recommendations were unanimously approved.

126. WESTERN BYPASS PHASE ONE – UPDATE REPORT

Cllr Price, cabinet member for roads and regulatory services introduced the report.

Cabinet received an update on the Western Bypass Phase 1 project following the award of the Pre-Construction Services Agreement (PCSA). It was noted that the contractor had progressed the scheme design and engaged with key stakeholders, including National Highways and Network Rail. During this work, amendments to the design were identified as necessary to accommodate revised highway and bridge standards.

Progress on land acquisition was also noted, with the majority of required land parcels either already in council ownership or subject to agreed heads of terms. It was noted that one remaining landowner had declined further negotiations and that preparations for a Compulsory Purchase Order process were therefore progressing. Additional land and rights identified through the detailed design process would also be incorporated into the necessary orders.

Cabinet noted that the PCSA includes mechanisms to manage cost pressures through corrective actions. Ongoing considerations include compliance with updated highway standards, value-engineering proposals and potential cost increases arising from wider economic factors.

It was noted that, if the Corporate Director for Economy and Environment is satisfied that the corrective actions will deliver a construction contract within the approved governance framework and budget, a full business case and assessment against the agreed criteria will be brought back to Cabinet for approval before the construction contract is awarded. Should this not be achievable, alternative procurement options and proposals will be presented to Cabinet for consideration.

Comments from cabinet members:

None

Group Leaders were invited to offer their views:

The Green Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

It was recognised that additional work was being undertaken to review land acquisition, costs and corrective actions associated with the Western Bypass Phase 1 project. However, concerns were raised regarding increasing project costs, changes to design standards, planning and environmental considerations, and the ongoing uncertainty surrounding land acquisition.

It was noted that further work was required to validate costs, assess risks and complete the business case before any construction contract could be awarded. The need for transparency in decision-making was highlighted. Concerns were also expressed regarding delegated authority arrangements and the importance of ensuring that any decision to proceed is supported by confirmed costs, an approved budget and the necessary statutory approvals.

A request was made for firstly, any decision on whether to proceed with the current procurement approach or undertake a re-procurement exercise to be brought back to Cabinet for consideration in a public meeting, supported by the relevant financial information. Secondly, that publication of revised project costs, the project risk register, contingency arrangements and outstanding business case appendices in advance of any future contract decision. Thirdly, it was requested that no construction contract be awarded until costs had been confirmed as being within the approved budget and all necessary approvals had been secured. It was noted that these measures would strengthen transparency and governance without preventing progression of the scheme.

The Leader Independents for Herefordshire outlined the views of their group and raised that:

The additional work being undertaken on land acquisition, cost validation and corrective actions were welcomed, but raised concerns about the overall deliverability, affordability and governance of the Western Bypass Phase 1 project. It was noted that changes to highway design standards, construction inflation, the inability to realise some anticipated value-engineering savings, and ongoing land acquisition challenges had increased project risks and uncertainty.

Reference was made to previous scrutiny recommendations seeking greater clarity on project affordability, contingency arrangements and the implications of costs exceeding the approved budget. Concern was expressed that these matters remained unresolved and highlighted the need for clear evidence that the scheme remains deliverable and financially viable.

It was requested that, before Christmas, that firstly, the council publish the full 2025 traffic modelling study and the assumptions relating to induced traffic demand. Secondly, a comprehensive reconciliation of project costs, including the approved £45.3m budget, expenditure incurred since 2023, the impact of lost value-engineering savings and inflationary pressures. Thirdly, a written assessment of the council's financial exposure should a construction contract be awarded before all land is secured through the Compulsory Purchase Order process. Fourthly, for the publication of clear criteria that would trigger a recommendation to re-procure or cancel the scheme.

Concern was expressed that the project could face challenges similar to those which led to the scheme's previous cancellation and emphasised the importance of transparency in any future decision-making. It was suggested that any decision on whether the scheme remains affordable and deliverable should be taken openly and, given its significance, consideration should be given to referring the matter to Full Council before any further major commitments are made. Members requested a report back on these matters by December.

The representative of the Liberal Democrat Group Leader outlined the views of their group and raised that:

It was noted that the additional work proposed on the scheme should be undertaken and acknowledged that the update represented a challenging position for the project. It was recognised that communities in the south of the county stand to benefit significantly from the bypass, and concerns were expressed about the impact of further delays. It was requested that the outstanding issues be resolved as quickly as possible to enable progress on the scheme.

The True Independents Leader outlined the views of their group and argued that:

Councillor Davies had left.

In response to the comments made:

The Leader noted the requests made during the debate and asked that they be provided in writing so that a formal response could be prepared and considered in due course.

It was reiterated that the Western Bypass was a critical infrastructure project for the county. It was stated that previous government funding had been allocated to deliver the scheme and that the current administration was progressing the project following its cancellation by the previous administration. Assurance was provided that the council would continue to address the issues and challenges identified through the project

development process while seeking to deliver the scheme in a robust and informed manner.

That:

- a) Notes the progress that has been made to date following the award of the Pre Construction Services Agreement (PCSA) on 30 April 2026;**
- b) Receives an update from the Corporate Director Economy and Environment on the progress which has been made with land acquisition and the Compulsory Purchase Order;**
- c) Delegates authority to the Corporate Director Economy and Environment to conclude corrective action in the PCSA process with the contractor to achieve construction works and costs under the NEC4 Engineering and Construction Contract ('Construction Contract') within the agreed governance and budget;**
- d) Following the conclusion of the Corporate Director Economy and Environment's review in recommendation c), then delegates authority to the Corporate Director to implement the actions in paragraph 24 or 25 of this report in consultation with the Cabinet Member Infrastructure and Transport.**

The recommendations were unanimously approved.

It was confirmed the next meeting of cabinet was 22 October 2026 at 2:30pm.

The meeting ended at 4.40 pm

Chairperson

Agenda item no. 4 - Questions from members of the public

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
PQ 1.	Rhys Griffiths, Tupsley	In March meeting the council they were going to conduct a feasibility study on the Whitehouse community hub building so I am asking has this been done and when is the work going to begin or is the building going to be left in its current state for another winter of storms to deteriorate further therefore costing more than the budget the council has set aside for repairs.	Councillor Bramer
Response: The council recognises the importance of the Whitehouse Community Hub to local residents and is committed to bringing the building back into safe and active community use. Following assessment of the condition of the building, the council has confirmed that the approach will be to repair the existing building. The procurement process to appoint the consultant team needed to progress the works is now underway, with the tender due to close on 2 October. Once appointed, the consultant team will support the council to develop the detailed scope and progress the repair works. Alongside this, officers are working with the local community on the future use of the hub. Officers have met with representatives of the Tupsley Whitehouse Project and the local ward member to update them on the council's plans, and further discussions are taking place to consider how the building can best meet the needs of the local community when it reopens.			
Supplementary Question: No question			
Supplemental Response:			
PQ 2.	Paul Newman, HR2 7LR	The Western Bypass Phase 1 Update Report to Cabinet claims the benefit of the road is to “reduce traffic on Walnut Tree Avenue, Holme Lacy Road and on a section of the Belmont Road”. At the last Cabinet meeting I was told “A series of Quiet Route schemes have been designed that will connect the Belmont area to the new cycle improvements being constructed on the Holme Lacy Road.” The capital programme makes no mention of the delivery of these	Councillor Price

		cycle schemes between Belmont and Holme Lacy Road. With £4million spent already on the road scheme, please explain why the Council has decided not to fund and deliver these Quiet Routes ahead of a more complex, expensive £45million road, when the former would reduce overall vehicle use and doesn't destroy the natural environment South of Hereford?	
Response: The council has not abandoned the Quiet Route proposals. They are referenced within the business case for the Hereford Bypass as routes linking Belmont Road, Holme Lacy Road and the city centre, with the aim of encouraging more travel choices through walking and cycling. Traffic reductions resulting from the bypass would support the development of western "Quiet Routes" and improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Quiet Routes However, the bypass and the Quiet Routes are intended to address different transport challenges. While active travel measures can reduce some local car journeys, they would not remove the significant volume of cross-city and freight traffic that currently uses routes such as Belmont Road, Walnut Tree Avenue and Holme Lacy Road. The council's position is therefore that the schemes are complementary rather than alternatives, with the bypass helping to reduce through-traffic on local roads while creating better conditions for walking, cycling and public transport.			
Supplementary Question: A Bypass will not reduce the large majority of journeys that are local to Hereford, and true to "Induced Demand" the proposed new road increases the overall number of vehicle movements and speed. On the other hand good Active Travel measures, along with public transport linking directly between Belmont and Rotherwas, have the potential to significantly reduce the number of short car trips, especially those involved in the "school run", whilst improving health and cheaper travel choices, at a time when household budgets are facing increasing costs. If Herefordshire Council has money for a road purely to help motorists and freight companies travelling through Hereford (less than 7% of total city traffic) please confirm whether capital funding is also available for delivering the Quiet Route schemes either alongside or ahead of the road scheme?			
Supplementary Response: Yes, we have a budget and are delivering the quiet roads scheme.			
PQ 3.	Haydn Osborne-Brookes HR6 9EA	Local residents are facing increasing costs for fuel as wars continue across the world, and many residents would welcome good, low cost and sustainable transport alternatives to using the	Councillor Price

		car, such as good, frequent public transport or safe walking and cycling routes. The Hereford Bypass Phase 1 Update Report to Cabinet shows that the only community benefit of the road scheme is to “reduce traffic on Walnut Tree Avenue, Holme Lacy Road and on a section of the Belmont Road”. How does it help the local economy and residents across the County by expecting them to repay over £40million or more of loans along with interest on the debt, at a time when interest rates are anticipated to rise?	
Response: The council recognises the real pressures that many residents are facing from the increasing costs of living, including fuel and transport costs, and understands the importance of affordable, reliable and sustainable travel options. Investment in public transport, walking and cycling remains an important part of the council's wider transport approach. However, the council also has to plan for the long-term needs of Herefordshire. The bypass is intended to address longstanding congestion in and around the city, including traffic that currently uses residential and unsuitable local roads. By helping to unblock congestion, the scheme is expected to support improved journey reliability, reduce traffic pressure in key residential areas and contribute to better air quality over the longer term. Relief from congestion will benefit all road users, including those using public transport, walking, cycling and travelling by car. Journey time reliability is particularly important for running dependable bus services, and the bypass is expected to help create more consistent conditions for public transport as part of a wider transport network. When fully realised, the bypass will support regeneration, open up space for thousands of new homes and jobs, improve access to employment areas, and help grow the local economy. Without the necessary infrastructure, future housing, employment and regeneration opportunities would be much harder to deliver in a planned and sustainable way. The council is mindful that major infrastructure projects involve significant costs, particularly at a time when public finances and household budgets are under pressure. That is why the scheme is subject to detailed business case assessment, scrutiny and governance before further commitments are made. The council's approach is to ensure that any investment is carefully considered, affordable, deliverable and represents value for money for residents over the long term.			
Supplementary Question: "The answer says that the “Council has to plan for the long-term needs of Herefordshire”. Today the External Audit Report 2025/26 was published which says that the Council has a significant cumulative funding gap of £83.4m from 2027/28 to 2029/30, larger than the Council's total usable reserves balance and threatening the Council's financial sustainability in the medium term. The Bypass Road scheme utilises £10million of Capital reserves, increases borrowing and loan interest costs, all at a time when the Council has been unable to meet its cost savings plans for last year (2025/26) and already appears to be looking at an £11million revenue overspend in 2026/27.			

Please explain how this £45.3million road scheme is affordable, deliverable and is planning for the long-term needs of the residents of Herefordshire against such a dire financial prediction?"

Supplementary Response:

The financing costs for this scheme have been included in the council's revenue budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy which was approved by full Council in February 2026. The report presented to Cabinet today identifies the resource implications and actions required prior to any decision to award the contract for construction works.

PQ 4.	Tracey Bowes HR2 7ZW	The Bypass Phase 1 Full Business Case identifies that only 43% of residents have access to an hourly bus service (in morning peak and early daytime off peak periods) falling to only 8% of residents with access to services that run every 30 minutes (para 2.8.1). “Buses are the most used form of public transport in Herefordshire, with 1.5 million trips made in 2023 and 2024, rising from 1.1 million in 2022 (Herefordshire Council – Local Transport Plan 5)”. The Hereford Bypass Phase 1 Full Business Case identifies a high level of travel by private motor vehicle between Belmont and the HEZ. To improve city connectivity and reduce the number of vehicles driving between Belmont and the HEZ, why is the Council not proposing to provide regular, low cost bus services directly between Belmont and Rotherwas?	Councillor Price
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Response:

The council recognises the importance of improving bus services, including better links between residential areas and key employment locations such as Rotherwas. There are existing bus services serving parts of South Wye, Belmont and the Hereford Enterprise Zone, but the council accepts that these do not provide the type of direct, high-frequency Belmont to Rotherwas service you have mentioned.

Any new or enhanced direct service would need to be considered alongside passenger demand, operating costs, available funding and the ability of operators to run the service sustainably. The council is considering bus improvements through its wider transport work, including the Local Transport Plan, Bus Service Improvement Plan, city bus priority measures, the new Transport Hub and future discussions with operators.

The bypass is not intended to be an alternative to public transport investment. Rather, it is part of a wider package of transport measures. By reducing congestion on key routes and improving access to the Hereford Enterprise Zone, the scheme is expected to create better conditions for more reliable bus services, alongside walking and cycling improvements.

Supplementary Question:

No question.

Supplementary Response:

PQ 5.	Amanda Martin, HR2 6BD	The Bypass Phase 1 report at 4.3 Legal Implications states that: “Construction can commence in advance of any residual land acquisitions providing that there remains a realistic route to acquiring the residual land (whether through conclusion of private negotiations or through compulsory purchase).” In theory the Authority could commence construction prior to completion of transfers of all land required. No planning consent has been granted for haul roads, attenuation ponds, etc. to enable the full construction works. Due to the financial risk to County residents of any cost overruns arising from potential delays to land acquisition of 12 to 18 months, or as a result of outstanding planning permissions interrupting construction works, will the Cabinet confirm that no contractual commitment to road construction contract will be made until these matters are resolved?	Councillor Price
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Response:

The council recognises the financial and delivery risks associated with a major infrastructure project of this scale. No decision to award the main construction contract is being made through this update report. The report asks Cabinet to note progress under the Pre-Construction Services Agreement and to allow further corrective work to be completed on design, cost and programme. The Corporate Director will report back to Cabinet before any construction contract is awarded, and that decision will need to consider the full business case, affordability, deliverability, value for money, land position, planning matters and outstanding third-party approvals. Construction can legally begin before every residual land interest is completed, provided there is a realistic route to securing the remaining land. However, a decision to proceed will only proceed where it is satisfied that the risks are understood, manageable and within the agreed governance and budget.

Supplementary Question:

My principal question asked if the Cabinet would confirm that no construction contract would be awarded for the proposed SLR unless, among other matters, planning consent had been granted for the supplementary and enabling works. The response would only say this would be considered with a 'decision to proceed where it is satisfied that the risks are understood'.

We currently have no live applications for these works affecting more than ten acres of ecological habitat, historic environment and prime farmland or for the screening opinion as to whether they constitute EIA development. Will the Cabinet member please confirm that the construction contract will not be let before these planning matters are dealt with?

Supplementary Response:

As previously stated, the Council is seeking to take further corrective action on design, cost and programme. It will take a decision on whether to progress when it is happy that this work has been successfully completed and risks are understood.

PQ 6.	Mrs J Morris, HR4 OSP	The Hereford Bypass Phase 1 Full Business Case references numerous appendices to support the commentary in the main document. Despite the Council's website news page advising that the supporting documents would be available, at the time of this question, the various appendices have not yet been published. As the Full Business Case is marked as final, where may I find the missing supporting appendices?	Councillor Price
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Response:

Ahead of the Connected Communities Scrutiny Committee (held on 20/7/2026) the council published the full business case for Hereford Bypass Phase One, alongside the following documents: Assessment Criteria Hereford Western Bypass Phase One Full Business Case; Hereford Western Bypass Phase One Full Business Case, Appendices A-H and Appendices I-S. These can be viewed here:

<https://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/ieIssueDetails.aspx?IId=50055499&PlanId=0&Opt=3#AI73052>. However, we have now added this full link to the news item to make it easier for viewers to access the all the papers.

Supplementary Question:

Thank you for adding the link to the news page.

However, the Hereford bypass has its own page on the Council website, where the original Scheme Information Report is published and which also directs us to the roads own website "Back the Bypass" where we are told we can follow progress of the road scheme.

It therefore seems odd that the Full Business Case and related appendices have only been published either on a Council news page or in the agenda of a Scrutiny meeting rather than on the "Back the Bypass" website and/or the Hereford Council Hereford Bypass page.

Where will the public need to look for future information and updates on this Council Road scheme?

Supplementary Response:

As an important document linked to the governance of the project it was right and proper that the business case was on the Hereford Council official website. We will update the 'Back the Bypass' pages with further links to business case and other key documents.

PQ. 7	Kate Seekings, HR4 0LQ	Para 36 of the Q1 2026/27 Budget report makes it clear that "Where capital projects are funded by external grants, there is further risk that delays in delivery mean that grant conditions and time constraints cannot be met resulting in the loss or clawback of grant". With time running short for starting and completing significant capital works to historic buildings for both the museum and library, can the Cabinet member is on the monthly board meetings of the Stronger Towns Fund and the Project boards, please update the public and the many volunteers in these services, as to what the timeline for successful completion looks like?	Councillor Biggs
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Response:

The council remains committed to securing the long-term future of both Shire Hall and Hereford Museum & Art Gallery. As work has progressed, further surveys, technical investigations and cost reviews have been undertaken to ensure both projects remain affordable, deliverable and provide lasting benefits for residents and visitors. We are currently reviewing the detailed designs and corresponding cost plans in the context of budget and funding timelines. We will work closely with partners to maximise the benefits delivered through these investments and ensure the best possible value is achieved within the available budget and funding deadlines. We will provide a further update on this work in October.

Supplementary question:

In June the public were told "For both the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery and Shirehall project we are working through respective Pre-Construction Services Agreement periods with the selected contractors to finalise designs and costings which are commercial in confidence at this stage.... We are aiming to be able to say more about the next steps and timescales over the next few weeks."

As three months have now elapsed, can the Cabinet member assure the public, and grant funders, that a timeline for successful completion of both projects will definitely be provided to the public in October 2026?

Supplementary response:

I confirm that information will be made available during the month of October.

PQ. 8	M Burns, Hereford	The Council was reported as having allocated £200,000 to the Burcott Bridge, Hereford in May this year. Due to safety concerns the pedestrian bridge has now been closed, reducing the road bridge to a single, one-way system, increasing congestion in the City Centre. Resolving this situation would do much to tackle Hereford traffic congestion and yet there seems to be no mention of any capital project in the Q1 finance reports. The Council say that works to resolve the situation cannot be considered until the outcome of a grant application. With no additional funding or capital project in the Cabinet reports, please advise how long Hereford residents will need to wait for this situation to be resolved?	Councillor Price
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Response:

We recognise the inconvenience this has caused to residents, businesses and road users, and we thank them for their patience. The £200,000 allocation referred to in May relates to design work for the future replacement of the College Road road bridge in partnership with Network Rail and is separate from the current closure of the pedestrian footbridge.

The footbridge was closed following a condition assessment that identified deterioration requiring urgent action to protect public safety. To maintain a safe route for pedestrians, it has been necessary to divert them across the adjacent road bridge, which in turn has required the introduction of a one-way traffic system.

Resolving the issue is complex and involves a number of organisations. Any repair or replacement work requires specialist contractors with expertise in working over a live railway, agreement from Network Rail for track access, and further surveys to determine the most appropriate solution. The footbridge also carries important utilities services that local homes and businesses rely on, including pipes, cables and other connections, providing energy supply and telecommunications, which must be protected throughout any works.

Officers are currently assessing the available options for repair or replacement and are programming further surveys with Network Rail. Once the likely costs, funding requirements and delivery timescales are better understood, the council will provide a further update and a clear programme for the next stages of work.

Supplementary question:

With the pedestrian footbridge built in 1963 and so close to the Burcott/College Road bridge the £200,000 design work in May 2026 for replacing the road bridge must surely have included some element of replacing the pedestrian footbridge. The Hereford Bypass Phase 1 includes a road bridge over the main Hereford to Cardiff line, which requires working with Network Rail over a live railway, and the Council seems to have resourced specialist contractors to probably deliver this bridge scheme. With 4 months' work already on the Burcott/College Road bridge redesign, please confirm exactly when a work programme will be made public and a tender contract will be published?

Supplementary response:

I am sorry if the previous response was unclear. The £200k funding had already been secured and allocated for this year to enable a joined up piece of work to be undertaken to look at an alternative arrangements at the road bridge on College Road, given that Network Rail have identified a future desire to replace their structure. This allocation of funding was prior to the closure of the footbridge.

Options for repair or replacement of the foot bridge are in progress and are being undertaken in parallel to discussions with Network Rail on the future of the adjacent road bridge. Officers have taken this approach as there is currently no certainty associated with Network Rail's plans for the road bridge.

As I said in my original answer, once the likely costs, funding requirements and delivery timescales are better understood, the council will provide a further update and a clear programme for the next stages of work associated with the foot bridge.

PQ. 9	Mr E Morfett, Hereford	Since the procurement strategy was agreed by Cabinet in July 2025 and the PCSA was awarded in March 2026 there has been significant disruption to global supply chains due to conflict in the Middle East. This has led to significant construction inflation with the Department of Business and Trade publishing preliminary figures showing that Construction materials prices for “All Work” rose by 6.0% in the 12 months to June 2026.	Councillor Stoddart
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		How will this Council Cabinet judge the risk of further capital cost escalation when, the detail in the documents for its consideration to proceed only cover the impact of supply disruption up until June 2026? The 42% rise in the oil price since June 2026 suggests we have already missed the boat. (The international oil price has risen 42% from under \$70 to over \$100 per barrel, with most projections of third quarter prices remaining above \$100 per barrel).	
Response: The council recognises that construction inflation, supply chain disruption, energy, labour and wider market conditions can affect the cost and deliverability of major capital schemes. This wider context, including continuing volatility in construction costs and supply chains, is part of the reason, alongside findings from the PCSA, why the matter is being brought back to Cabinet now, so that members can consider the latest position before any further decisions are taken. The risk and impact of increases in capital costs will be considered as part of work to review and confirm total project costs prior to the award of the construction contract.			
Supplementary Question: In my first question I highlighted the 42% increase in oil prices in the last three months and asked how cabinet can assess the risk of capital overruns without these latest figures? No clear answer was given. The global supply chain disruption will clearly impact the cost of the £45 million project through its direct bitumen & fuel weighting (~£51.3 million to £51.6 million). Roughly one-third of the total road project cost consists of direct oil-derivatives (like asphalt) and heavy machinery diesel, applying the 42% price increase directly onto that segment yields a budget increase of £6.3m to £6.6m. How will the Council fund this inevitable increase and what further cuts to essential services will be made?			
Supplementary Response:			

The risk and impact of increases in capital costs will be considered as part of work to review and confirm total project costs prior to the award of the construction contract. This will also inform the development of the council's revenue budget, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme which will be submitted for full approval by full Council in February 2027.			
PQ . 10	Mrs E Morawiecka, Hereford	The S151 officer must be congratulated for her honesty in the Q1 2026/27 Budget report about the pressure from revenue overspends on the Council's reserves and the immediate action required to protect the Council's overall financial resilience (para 13). The risk of overspends in future years on so many significant capital projects has increased due to design changes, delays and construction inflation. However, the Capital report 2026/27 Table B shows no significant increase in the anticipated costs for some major construction projects, which is inconsistent with the narrative. In a capital rationing situation what projects are prioritised for delivery, so that at least some can be completed in the next 5 years, without impacting local services and the Council tax paid by residents?	Councillor Stoddart
Response: Last year, Herefordshire Council delivered one of its most ambitious capital programmes in recent history, with £86 million being invested in vital infrastructure, from roads to emergency housing, to support long-term local growth and improve residents' daily lives. This year, many of our priority projects are well underway, nearly completed or recently completed, including Merton Meadow flood alleviation works, the Hereford Transport Hub, Holme Lacy Road safer travel improvements, Peterchurch Primary School redevelopment and John Venn building for temporary housing. At the same time, we are keeping our important historical assets, such as the Shire Hall and HMAG maintained for future development, and are about to begin works to increase capacity at Aylestone School, Hereford while seeking public views on proposals to establish a new school for SEN in Ross-on-Wye. Future capital decisions will continue to be assessed through the council's governance and budget monitoring processes, taking account of affordability, deliverability, risk, value for money and the potential impact on local services and council tax payers.			
Supplementary Question: In October 2025 Cllr Lester wrote to the Transport Secretary explaining that a £40million (now £45million) A49/A465 link road posed significant risk to the Council's finances and services. Nevertheless, the Council has continued to progress this road scheme, utilising capital reserves to fund this project.			

The Cabinet agenda includes an update report on the “bypass” and yet the answer says that the HMAG and Shirehall are “maintained for future development” with no update report available for these capital projects.

Taking account of affordability, deliverability, risk, value for money and the potential impact on local services and council taxpayers will the Cabinet member explain which capital projects are being reassessed, and possibly cancelled, if Herefordshire Council needs to deliver savings and protect reserves to maintain financial sustainability in the medium term?

Supplementary Response:

Activity to develop proposals to set a balanced revenue budget for 2027/28 are underway and draft proposals will be presented by Cabinet in early January 2027.

PQ. 11	Charlotte Stidston, Hereford	Many parishes to the West of Hereford, such as Madley, Bishopstone, Stretton Sugwas, Breinton, etc are concerned about the prospect of “rat running” on narrow rural lanes during and after construction of the Southern Link Road, especially with the original planning condition for the road to restrict HGVs on Belmont Road. For these parishes to understand the impact on their communities of the extra vehicle movements arising from the new road and to appropriately locate future development in neighbourhood plans, will the Cabinet member make available the Hereford Strategic Transport Model (HSTM) data for the traffic on their parish roads during construction of the SLR and then 1 year post opening, 5 years post opening and 10 years post opening, at no cost to the parishes affected by this council road scheme?	Councillor Price
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Response:

The council recognises the importance of local communities being able to understand the potential impacts of the bypass scheme, including on parish roads and local traffic movements. We have a strong record of transparency on this project and have made available thousands of pages of documentation, modelling data and evidence to support public scrutiny and informed debate.

Traffic modelling has been undertaken to inform the development of the Full Business Case, including forecast years for the opening year (2028), design year (2043) and forecast horizon year (2061). These outputs have been used to assess the scheme’s wider impacts and benefits, including changes in traffic flows, journey times, congestion, access to employment areas and the wider transport network.

The council will continue to be transparent as the project progresses and will publish further information, data and evidence where it is appropriate and practicable to do so, so that residents, parish councils and members can continue to scrutinise the scheme and understand its impacts.

Supplementary question:

Standard practise is that new roads are normally evaluated '1 year after' and '5 years after' following the opening of a road scheme. Assessing the road's performance against traffic forecasts at "15 years after" and "33 years after" fails to inform the Council of the impact, future decision making, value for money and emissions calculations.

Residents have already paid millions for the Herefordshire Strategic Transport Model, and yet it seems this model does not provide relevant traffic forecasts for Parish Councils 1 year after and 5 years after opening, unless the parish council are prepared to pay, using their local residents precept. However, the same residents have already paid for the modelling through their council tax bill.

Why will the Cabinet not release the traffic data requested at no cost to the individual parishes and their residents?

Supplementary response:

The council has published detailed flow plots, validation reports, and forecast summaries that allows for public scrutiny without releasing the full operational model. The data presented is enough for an independent transport planner to assess whether the conclusions appear robust, without access to the model itself. As previously stated, the model is operated by AECOM and requires their supervision/approval for use. The model is developed by specialist consultants using proprietary software, coding structures and methodologies.

In addition, the model incorporates data obtained under licence from third parties, such as:

- Traffic count databases
- Mobile phone movement data
- Sat-nav or GPS datasets
- Census and demographic datasets

The council is permitted to use the data for scheme development but not to redistribute it publicly.

PQ. 12	Chris Parnell Smith, HR4 7JH	The Full Business Case accepts that traffic will increase on roads near the new route as drivers re-route, and the Statement of Reasons confirms fresh modelling was carried out in 2025. The C1098 Bridge Sollers Road — 4 to 7 metres wide, already signed unsuitable for HGVs, and carrying 2,290 (2016) vehicles a day — was outside the 2015 study area, and no forecast for it has been published.	Councillor Price
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		Before the construction contract is awarded, will Cabinet publish the 2025 modelling outputs for the C1098 and commit to a prohibition of through traffic and a 7.5-tonne weight limit on that road, funded as scheme mitigation — the same instrument the scheme already requires on the A465 Belmont Road under planning condition 21?	
Response: The council recognises the importance of local communities being able to understand the potential impacts of the bypass scheme, including on parish roads and local traffic movements. We have a strong record of transparency on this project and have made available thousands of pages of documentation, modelling data and supporting evidence to inform public scrutiny and debate. These assessments consider a wide range of impacts, including traffic flows, journey times, congestion, access to employment areas and the wider transport network. The council will continue to publish further information, data and evidence where appropriate and practicable as the project progresses, so that residents, parish councils and members can continue to scrutinise the scheme and understand its impacts. While weight restrictions operate elsewhere in the county, they have been introduced to address specific local circumstances. The council continues to assess the impact of the bypass scheme on both the strategic and local highway network, and the concerns raised about the C1098 will be considered as part of that ongoing work.			
Supplementary question: The C1098 forecasts already exist: the HSTM link flows by vehicle class for the Base, Do Minimum and Do Something scenarios were released to me under EIR this month, so publication is plainly practicable. Will Cabinet state for the record the forecast change in daily and HGV traffic on the C1098 with Phase One? The "specific local circumstances" test has already been applied to this road: in 2018 officers accepted its unsuitability and refused a 7.5-tonne limit solely because no alternative route existed. Has that objection been reassessed against the Phase One network, who leads the "ongoing work", when will it report, and will the C1098 be included in the before-and-after monitoring scrutiny required on 20 July			
Supplementary response: <u>24 September 2026</u> In the meeting the Cabinet member advised a written supplementary response would be provided in due course.			
PQ. 13	Michelle Green, Madley	Phase 1 of the bypass will increase use of the C1098 which is 'unsuitable for HGVs', single track in many places, blind corners, no pavement and habitations on the roadside. Parish footpaths and Bridleways cross/end on this road, yet it is unsafe to walk.	Councillor Price

		HGVs use this road, often causing gridlock and could be disastrous if emergency services needed access. Last week Greyfriars Bridge was shut, lorries were stuck on the road; one reversed and damaged our property. I wrote to the company who said their driver was diverted by the Police. I asked my Counsellor why the road cannot exclude HGVs and was told that the Police do not have sufficient resources. Yet the new development at Hereford Point has a restriction in place. So does the bridge at Holme Lacy. Please consider excluding HGVs over 7.5t (except access) from C1098 to improve safety for all road users in advance of phase 1	
Response: The council acknowledges local concerns raised about the C1098, particularly given its rural nature and the impact that large vehicles can have on local communities. The council continues to assess the impact of the bypass scheme on both the strategic and local highway network, including potential effects on traffic movements on local roads such as the C1098. While weight restrictions operate elsewhere in the county, they have been introduced to address specific local circumstances and do not automatically justify a similar restriction on this route. Any proposal for a weight restriction would need to be supported by evidence, assessed against wider network impacts and progressed through the appropriate statutory processes. The concerns raised by residents and parish councils will continue to be considered as part of the council's ongoing assessment of the scheme and its wider impacts.			
Supplementary question: How do we initiate the process to have the road monitored, assessed against the wider network impacts and progressed through the statutory processes?			
Supplementary response: Thank you for your supplementary question. In order for officers to initiate monitoring and assessments in relation to a proposed Traffic Regulation Order (TRO), you will first need to seek support from your Ward Member and Parish Council, as per our Traffic Regulation Order process. This process can be found on the Council's website: www.herefordshire.gov.uk/travel-and-transport/roads/close-a-road/traffic-regulation-orders			

PQ . 14	Jeremey Milln, Hereford	In respect of the Museum and Library projects in Hereford the Council has nearly £12million of Stronger Town Fund grant of which £4.435m appears in the Capital Report to have been spent on the Museum & Art Gallery and £430k on the Library. The original proposals for the Museum were estimated to be £14million over the capital budget. With the Council's revenue budget looking to be overspent by £11million by the end of this financial year, reducing reserves, and with costs on other capital projects increasing, what is the latest forecast capital funding shortfall and what savings may be made by the proposed design reductions in the two schemes?	Councillor Bramer
Response: The council remains committed to securing the long-term future of both Shire Hall and Hereford Museum & Art Gallery. As work has progressed, further surveys, technical investigations and cost reviews have been undertaken to ensure both projects remain affordable, deliverable and provide lasting benefits for residents and visitors. We are currently reviewing the detailed designs and corresponding cost plans in the context of budget and funding timelines. We will work closely with partners to maximise the benefits delivered through these investments and ensure the best possible value is achieved within the available budget and funding deadlines. We will provide a further update on this work in October.			
Supplementary Question: From the response it appears little progress has been made on design and costing for the Museum and Library schemes since Cabinet on 25th June 2026 when you said that you were "working through respective Pre-Construction Services Agreement periods with selected contractors to finalise designs and costings". In this context it is noted that the external auditor has now highlighted that there is a £83.4m cumulative funding gap, which is larger than the Council's total usable reserves balance. How will the Council, needing to find savings, ensure that its capital funding contribution as well as those of the Lottery and Stronger Town Fund required to complete the museum and library projects, are protected?			
Supplementary response: Capital and grant funding for the museum and library projects are as per the Council Capital Programme approved by full Council in February this year. The Capital Programme will be reviewed as part of development of future financial plans to be approved by full Council in February 2027.			

Agenda item no. 5 - Questions from Councillors

Question No.	Questioner	Question	Question to
MQ 1.	Cllr Ben Proctor	Why was the council not aware of the deteriorating condition of the pedestrian bridge between Barrs Court Road and Burcott Road in time to plan a replacement rather than implementing an emergency closure?	Councillor Price
Response: The council acknowledges that the condition of the pedestrian bridge between Barrs Court Road and Burcott Road should have been identified earlier, allowing for a planned repair or replacement rather than an emergency closure. The defects were identified following an inspection undertaken through the council's new Public Realm contract arrangements and, as soon as they were brought to our attention, we acted swiftly to close the bridge on public safety grounds. We recognise there are legitimate questions about why the issue was not identified sooner. Initial findings indicate that the previous inspection and maintenance arrangements did not provide the level of assurance or direct operational oversight now exerted under the new arrangements, and the council is reviewing that history carefully. Strengthening this oversight was one of the reasons for bringing the Public Realm service under more direct council control. We are continuing to progress repair and replacement options. Resolving the issue is complex and involves specialist contractors with experience of working over a live railway, agreement from Network Rail for track access, and further surveys. The footbridge also carries important utility services used by local homes and businesses, including pipes, cables and other connections for energy supply and telecommunications, which must be protected throughout any works. The council will provide a further update and a clear programme for the next stages of work once this information is available, and in the meantime we thank local residents, businesses and users of the bridge for their patience.			
Supplementary Question: The emergency closure of the pedestrian college road bridge has necessitated closing half of the vehicle traffic bridge to enable pedestrians to use it. It's causing very significant disruption to my residents and council Andrew's residents and worsening the congestion in the north part of the city. It would be really helpful if the council made some sort of assessment publicly of how long it will be before there is a resolution to that. And I wonder if the cabinet member agrees with me, it's likely to be years rather than months. And that would enable people to understand what to plan for. But my substantive supplementary question is more significantly for the whole of the county. How can we be assured that we don't have other assets that are in a similar condition that will be subject to emergency closure when an inspection occurs?			
Supplementary Response:			

It is of concern that we had to have a footway closure brought about as quickly as it was. There was earlier inspections done, but it was only from the top down where you couldn't actually see where the damage was occurring. It was only since the advent of the Public Realm contract change earlier this summer that we got to have an inspection from underneath, and bear in mind underneath is the railway and the property of Network Rail. Immediately we found the seriousness of it, the road closure was the best option to deal with it.

The second part of your question is the time scale to do it. We will fix this bridge at the earliest opportunity. We can fund it through the normal channels. But the question is with Network Rail saying that their road bridge adjacent to it, is due for renewal at some point and they haven't given us an answer as to when that point is. We are thinking of putting some repairs to the foot bridge in anticipation of what they might be doing in years to come. We are in negotiation with Network Rail about this issue and it's strange that the two bridges are alongside each other and one is Network Rail and one is ours. I'm hoping to be able to say to the public that we will have a response for repair and reopening of it sooner rather than later but I can't put a time scale on that today.

The last point you raised - are we going to have this happening again? And I have the assurance with the Director, who sat next to me earlier this morning in a meeting, that as a result of this particular episode the in bridge inspections is going to be much tighter going forward under our management rather than the previous Public Realm contractor.